



Institute of Education Sciences

ROMANIA

National Report on the Implementation of the ERASMUS+ programme between 2007-2017 and its predecessors (Lifelong Learning, Youth in Action) 2007-2013

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ROMANIA - National Report on the Implementation of the ERASMUS+ programme between 2007-2017 and its predecessors (Lifelong Learning, Youth in Action) 2007-2013

Coordinators:

Magdalena BALICA, Ciprian FARTUSNIC

Authors:

Otilia APOSTU, Alexandra ARAMA, Oana GHEORGHE, Irina HORGA, Sorin MITULESCU, Andreea SCODA, Adela TARANU, Simona VELEA, Lucian VOINEA

Statistic data analysis:

Cornelia NOVAK, Irina BOERU

Support in applying the reasearch instruments:

Ancuta PLAESU, Manuela MANU, Corina NEACSU-DALU, Petre BOTNARIUC

Contact data:

Institute of Educational Sciences

37 Stirbei Voda

010102 Bucharest, Romania

Phone? +4 021-314.27.82 / 85; +4 021-313.64.91

Fax: +4 021-312.14.47

E-mail: info@ise.ro; magda.balica@ise.ro; cipf@ise.ro

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1. Executive summary

The mid-term evaluation of the ERASMUS+ programme was conducted between June 2016 - June 2017 by the Institute of Education Sciences, the body that the Ministry of National Education appointed to coordinate this study. The evaluation started in June 2016 with the analysis of the European Commission recommendations and with drafting the evaluation methodology and tools. Between September 2016-February 2017, the documents and reports provided by the National Agency (further on, NA) were analyzed and primary data were collected. The evaluation methodology focused on collecting qualitative and quantitative data, by using surveys for the programme beneficiaries and individual and group interviews with the programme beneficiaries and key stakeholders. Additionally, several best practice examples of project implementation have been collected.

EFFECTIVENESS

The National Agency successfully managed the transition period between the two programmes, making appropriate changes in the staff organization chart and in the institutional organization. The success of the former program, *The Lifelong Learning Programme*, created a significant image leverage for the ERASMUS+ Programme. The development of the support networks at the level of territorial institutions was an advantage for a more efficient program management.

The success and experience of some projects under the LLP seem to be, in many cases, enablers for successful projects under the ERASMUS+ programme as well. Data shows a high share of applications received from organisations that have already received funding. In contrast, schools from the most disadvantaged areas either not apply, or do not receive funding. Things might get better as *The Inclusion Strategy*, launched by the Agency in 2016, is implemented.

The implementation of the ERASMUS+ Programmes and of the previous ones also stimulated the organizational development of NGOs, with diversified expertise. The implementation of the ERASMUS+ Programme gave NGOs the possibility to operate and act for the benefit of the target groups, at the same time with their organizational development and with developing national and international networks. The ERASMUS Programme has contributed to the education in project writing and project management in Romania.

The projects submitted for funding are still lacking when it comes to describing the expected impact. The applications submitted are still fragmented and lacking in the impact section, as a result of not having clear indicators and clear descriptions of the effects on direct and indirect beneficiaries. One thing that should be mentioned is the need for more support to beneficiaries, in view of better formulating the expected impact.

The IT infrastructure backing the ERASMUS+ Programme raised many problems during its utilization, which is known by all National Agencies. Many users had the feeling that, many times, trying to fix some problems generated additional ones. The expectations are for the next programme to have a more stable e-infrastructure.

EFFICIENCY

In terms of efficiency, the outcomes justify or even exceed the budget allocations, deemed, in many cases, to be insufficient. Overall, the financial allocations are not enough, and the breakdown by fields and key actions could be reviewed. There is an unbalance between the global financial allocations under the ERASMUS+ Programme, with a higher share given for mobility. There is a need to balance this out, through more significant allocations for strategic partnerships, that could generate system impact if they were to have better funding. Additional funding needs have been identified in fields such as youth structured dialogue and adult education. According to the data provided by the NA, the increase in the ERASMUS+ budget, announced back in 2014, will be noticeable only as of 2017 and will continue until 2020.

RELEVANCE

The Programme and the National Agency are constantly concerned with encouraging applications from all geographic areas and from the underrepresented groups of (potential) beneficiaries. This has always been a top priority for the Agency. However, there are still some categories of beneficiaries or types of

mobilities that are underrepresented: early education, job shadowing mobility, low demand for volunteers that would undergo mobility in Romania.

It is necessary to better identify the training needs of direct beneficiaries and applicant organizations. Projects in the school education field are seen as being extremely relevant in respect to the school, teacher and student needs, although it is admitted that for some projects the needs stated are more “supply driven”.

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL COHERENCE AND COMPLEMENTARITY

All in all, the ERASMUS+ actions have a good internal coherence, and the NA and beneficiaries agree on the improvements introduced by the new framework, compared to the Lifelong Learning Program. The financial allocations are not always compliant with the size of goals under several actions, which could affect their coherence and puts their relevance in the current context of Romania under limelight, asking one to ponder on how to better articulate them.

Although they share the same beneficiaries, no areas of competition between ERASMUS+ and other national and international programmes have been identified. There is complementarity and interaction between the elements comprising the ERASMUS+ Programme and other national and international programmes. ERASMUS+ has a clear identify among the funding available for education and training, not vying with any other initiative. This is mostly because of the way in which it integrates and capitalizes on the cross-border component. In some cases there is even mutual support between the ERASMUS+ Programme and other financial backers.

The Agency responsible with the ERASMUS+ implementation is involved, at the management and action coordinators level, in defining the education public policies in Romania. Along the way, its representatives have been consulted when drafting strategies and pieces of legislation, which contributed to the coherence of public policies on education funding.

EUROPEAN ADDED VALUE AND SUSTAINABILITY

The ERASMUS+ projects are more efficient and effective, from all perspectives, than other projects implemented from other funding sources: they have clearer, more tangible and identifiable outcomes, lower level of formalism and red-tape than those from other funding sources. Compared to other programmes, the ERASMUS+ implementation enjoys a very good and experienced coordination, ensured by the NA. The rules in place for the programmes are clearer than those under other programmes, and the project development is more predictable.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The data resulting from the evaluation of the ERASMUS+ impact clearly supports the need to continue and expand the programme with additional financial allocations for K2 (strategic partnerships, in all sectors), but also for projects involving mobility of students and adults from the *learners* category. These projects proved their value and it's time to roll them out.

In order to expand the programme, in the following years it is necessary to strengthen support systems for schools and management teams in disadvantaged areas or for entities and organisations working with children at-risk of school and social exclusion. More attention could be given to providing a more diverse support to education institutions or other organizations that have constantly been rejected during the application process, that haven't had any project funded so far. The support could also include tailored training for technicians, administrative and accounting staff involved in project implementation.

In view of increasing the programme impact, a mechanism to capitalize on and disseminate best practices arising from the implementation of ERASMUS+ projects should be identified, as to roll them out under national strategic projects. The involvement of key stakeholders and policy makers in the promotion could be an added value.

In view of collecting unbiased data on programme impact, the Agency's research capacity should be strengthened, including by forging partnerships with specialized institutions.

2. Methodology

The mid-term evaluation of the ERASMUS+ programme was conducted between June 2016 - June 2017 by the Institute of Education Sciences, the body that the Ministry of National Education appointed to coordinate this study. Throughout the evaluation the NA constantly supported the evaluation team, providing evaluators with reports, databases and intermediating interaction with the beneficiaries covered by the evaluation. The Ministry of National Education, through the Directorate for Foreign Relations and European Affairs, provided the evaluation team with ongoing support, by actively participating in the interviews and focus groups organized under the evaluation.

The following tools and methods have been used for the evaluation:

- a) **Desk review** - NA's reports, strategic documents, databases, websites, European Commission documents
- b) **Survey through individual interviews, focus groups** and questionnaires for beneficiaries
- c) **Case studies** - examples of success projects

Types of stakeholders covered by the evaluation:

- Individual interviews with the NA representatives (Agency director, economic director, studies/research department director, people in charge of actions,
- Focused group interviews, with decision-makers (MNE representatives: 1 representative of the programmes and projects directorate; 1 representatives from HEI international relations department; school inspectorates representatives)
- Focused group interviews, with ERASMUS trainers and evaluators
- Questionnaire for beneficiary organizations
- Questionnaire for beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries

The list of research tools used as well as the types of target groups investigated can be found in the Annex.

3. Evaluation outcomes

3.1. Effectiveness

Q1 - To what extent have ERASMUS+ and its predecessor programmes contributed to the realisation of the ERASMUS+ specific objectives (as listed in point B.2 in annex 3) in your country? Are there differences across fields? Please provide, where relevant, your assessment for each of the specific objectives and provide evidence and examples where possible.

According to the beneficiary satisfaction surveys, in 2014¹ and 2015², there is a pretty high satisfaction level, which was kept when moving from one generation of programs to another. Over 85-90% of the ERASMUS+ beneficiaries expressed their satisfaction both in terms of acquiring professional skills and for personal development³. The 2015 data shows a slight decrease in the satisfaction level for most fields; this can be due to switching from the *Lifelong Learning Programme* to the *ERASMUS+ Programme*, which required beneficiaries to get acquainted with/face new rules and approaches. However, the report in 2016 shows an increased satisfactory level up to 95%.

¹ http://www.anpcdefp.ro/userfiles/Raport_satisfactie_externa_2014.pdf

² http://www.anpcdefp.ro/userfiles/Satisfactie_externa_2015_public.pdf

³ This data is also included in the NA 2015 Report. At the same time, 89.5 % of respondents declared that the mobility projects they were involved in corresponded to their professional training needs to a large extent and from a personal development perspective, 90,34% declared that the mobility projects they were involved in corresponded to their personal needs to a large extent (p. 8)

Table 1 Share (%) of beneficiaries satisfied to a large and very high extent

Action name	2014		Field (according to the new ERASMUS+ programme)	2015	
	Beneficiary satisfaction in respect to the needs for:			Beneficiary satisfaction in respect to the needs for:	
	Professional development	Personal development		Professional development	Personal development
Comenius	97.9	99.5	School education	89	89
ERASMUS	90.1	91.4	Higher education	86.3	79.2
Grundtwig	94.8	94.3			
Leonardo da Vinci	93.4	90.1	VET	96.3	97.7
Youth in Action	84.2	91.6	Youth	71.8	75

Some of the things mentioned during the focus groups were the relevance of the ERASMUS+ internships for the labour market, with higher employment opportunities after participation: many employers see the reference to the ERASMUS+ internships in the Resume as an advantage, whereas many ERASMUS+ fellowship holders referred to their later success in being employed in foreign companies (French, German). moreover, these students praised their participation in mobilities, using phrases like:

“Unbelievable experience! It helped me see the world in a different light, to get by on my own.”
“Yes, ERASMUS changes lives.”

The data gathered from surveys for schools inspectors in charge of European projects shows a high appreciation for the achievement of the ERASMUS+ general objectives. The average score for program objectives achievement is 4.57, on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 is the maximum positive appreciation. It should be mentioned that this average is the result of scores of 4 and 5, as none of the school inspectors involved did not deem that the program objectives have not been met or have been achieved only to a small or medium extent.

At county level, the implemented ERASMUS+ projects contributed to achieving **cross-cutting objectives**, such as the one in the table below.

Table 2 Average scores for beneficiary satisfaction in respect to the achievement of the ERASMUS+ objectives

	Average score on a 1 to 5 scale, 5 = maximum positive
Mobility of those learning	4.48
Cooperation and exchange of best practices	4.57
Use of digital knowledge/ITC	4.22
Multilingualism	4.17
Inclusion	3.91
Creating flexible learning paths	3.87
Equity	3.83

The higher education records significant gains for mobility participants, such as: **language skills; problem-solving capacity; critical spirit; students` and teachers` interest** in other countries, other education systems.

“I saw directly a European education system”
“There I saw a different education system...; I think everyone should try to do this, get to know another education system apart from the Romanian one, to see the differences (FG, students)”
“”You develop the ability to find solutions...now it`s much easier to find solutions than before ERASMUS” (FG, students)
 - *“We became more demanding, more critical when assessing our own education system” (FG, students)*

Beneficiaries feel that, from all perspectives, **the ERASMUS+ projects are more efficient, more effective and easier to manage. The rules in place for the programmes are clearer and the project development is more predictable.** The beneficiaries are trained, the rules don't change as we go. The lack of coordination at central level that can be seen in some programmes or projects is also transferred to the grassroots level.

The project outcomes are directly correlated with the European priorities and the specific objectives of their fields of implementation, but also with the institutional development goals of the participating organisations. Key words to describe the main ideas associated to the projects implemented: work, involvement, experience, innovation, creativity, empowerment, inclusion, interculturalism, cultural diversity, team work. The topics selected were usually in line with the organizational development plans of the applicant institutions. Moreover, some project ideas arose during previous cooperations between institutions, under other projects.

Conducting needs assessment is mentioned, but the organizations recognize that quite often they are faced with difficulties or that rely more on their own experience than on conducting distinct needs assessments.

“ Out of the many needs we have in our special school, we selected the one that we find extremely necessary, namely increase the quality of education. Under ERASMUS+ we even found a solution that will help us with the implementation, application and training. We addressed some needs at the level of the international level, which were common, and we found 3 common elements at European level, and we awaited for the opportunity to have funding, because the legal amendments were of interest for all of us. We usually tailor our approach to the mission and objectives of our organisation(s).”

School and VET education fields generated different effects among beneficiaries When detailing the outcomes, the school inspectors for European projects feel that these contributed to: the participants' personal development and improving their self-esteem (average score, 4.52 on a 1 to 5 scale, where 5 is the highest positive score), openness to diversity (4.52), higher personal development in developing the school organization (4.26), increasing the capacity to innovate didactic practices and to improve teaching and appraising skills (4.17), developing integration and support mechanisms for at-risk SEN children or from disadvantaged areas (3.96). At the same time, the students feel that the Programme contributed to: Increase learning motivation (4.61), develop diverse skills, which are less promoted in the school curricula (4.52), improve school results (4.00). In the communities that foster the participating education institutions, the Programme strengthened the school- community relations (4.00) and lead to the parents' more active involvement in the school life (3.87).

The objectives and priorities of every action are clear reference points that guide potential applicants towards the action/field for which they are applying. However, sometimes there might be difficulties in terms of assigning a certain project to a specific field (for instance, VET and school education).

“For the associative environment, apart from the youth projects, which are in a higher number, have more actions and a consistent budget, adult education projects are more disadvantaged in the current context. There's just a few of them, adult education is marginalized, the road is really restrictive.”

Q2 To what extent has the progress on the realisation of the specific objectives contributed to the realisation of the ERASMUS+ general objectives (as listed in point B.2 in annex 3) in your country?

For the time being there is no research data showing to what extent the ERASMUS Programme contributed to the Europe2020 strategic objectives or to the youth and sports European framework. However, beneficiaries involved in the evaluation research highlighted the added value of projects developed in partnership at European level that fostered an exchange of best practices, cooperation and changing some school practices. At least for higher education the Programme had a significant contribution towards achieving the objectives of some European strategies in this field, such as the implementation of the Bologna principles at national level, increasing quality and attractiveness of education, as well as the convergence of European higher education systems. Several elements related to an increase in the quality of higher education, as a result of the cooperation that took place under the ERASMUS+ Programme, have been mentioned.

- **stimulate cooperation between university research teams** - the ERASMUS+ Programme brought valuable teaching staff in some higher education institutions (for instance, University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine, Faculty of Agronomy, according to the focus group data: “through ERASMUS+ we got a renowned foreign teacher that got us involved in the Life+ research project”
- **and increase the prestige and value of research activities** (the West University of Timisoara offered a best practice example);
- **develop double-degree programs** (dual degree) taught in a foreign language, programs resulting from an exchange of teaching staff (examples given during the interviews with the representatives of the ERASMUS+ university offices);
- create an **inter-cultural learning environment**, which also has an impact on **increasing learning performance** - “foreign students` participation improves classroom teaching; the inter-cultural context is beneficial” (according to the interviews with the representatives of the ERASMUS+ university offices);
- Setting common landmarks for the teaching activity for some subjects: “What we do is a knowledge transfer, not only an exchange of best practices; I think this is also one of the Programme goals - to have a common handbook.” (according to the interviews with the representatives of the ERASMUS+ university offices).

Q3 To what extent have ERASMUS+ actions influenced policy developments in the domains of education and training, youth and sport in your country? Which actions were most effective in doing so? Are there marked differences between different fields?

The decision-makers consulted and the survey participants feel that the ERASMUS+ priorities and objectives are highly relevant for the priorities of the Romanian education and training system. First of all, they feel that in Romania the needs to support the education and training activities are very wide, and any ERASMUS+ project has a potential contribution to this end.

For instance, for the school education and VET fields it was mentioned - during the group interviews and beneficiary surveys - the ERASMUS+ contribution to national priorities, such as: accepting diversity, tolerance, interculturalism, multilingualism, mobility of those studying. It has also been noticed a lower synergy with policies focused on access to education and flexible paths. School and social inclusion has been a common topic for projects funded from several funding sources; similar to the education of Roma children, children from minority groups, reducing school violence, drop-out and absenteeism.

In the higher education, the ERASMUS+ Programme contributed to the international exposure, increased international mobility and attractiveness for foreign students. Some examples: many universities increased the number of courses in foreign languages; several fields of specialization became more demanded by foreign students (statistical data shows a significant increase in the number of foreign students during the past years, from 16,138 in 2010 to 22,587 for the 2015-2016 university year, according to the National Institute of Statistics); the practice of international professors teaching in Romanian universities increased. The internationalization of the Romanian higher education system is also reflected in recent regulations issued by the Ministry of Education (*Order no 3855/2016 on the methodology for accepting foreign citizens to study*).

Program priorities in the fields of gender equality and inclusion are directly correlated with the specific national policies. The beneficiaries feel that the Programme managed to ensure a balanced participation in terms of gender, access of disadvantaged categories and different European/national geographic areas.

On a different level, the survey among beneficiaries revealed **the need to adjust some legal provisions regulating the education and training system in Romania, in order to link it better with the specificity of the ERASMUS+ Programme.**

“An example: the pre-university teachers` participation in the ERASMUS+ mobility is recognized by the Romanian system for the evaluation and certification of professional competences through the credits system. For the higher education there is the need to put more value on teacher mobilities, like ERASMUS+, in the professional promotion criteria. That is why we feel that the entire Romanian legal framework needs more flexibility.”

Last but not least, an important element mentioned is the possibility to select, as of 2017, **the European priorities that serve the national ones**. Thus, the relevance of the ERASMUS+ Programme for the national context will increase, as well as the possibility for the Programme to have a significant impact on national policies.

Q4 What specific approaches (such as co-financing, promotion or others) have you taken in order to try to enhance the effects of ERASMUS+ in your country? To what extent have these approaches been effective? Can any particular points for improvement be identified?

The National Agency made efforts to increase the funding possibilities, both in terms of number of projects funded and in respect to the individual grants for student mobility, under the LLP. During the first years of LLP implementation there was the impression that the number of mobilities for school staff decreased, which is explained by the fact that the number of mobilities had been supplemented under SOPHRD. Had they considered only the number of mobilities financed under the LLP, then they would have been about 300 per year. Through SOPHRD, the number of mobilities increased to over 1000 per year. In ERASMUS+, for comparison, from the KA 1 budget - school education, about 750 mobilities are financed per year. An average of 1-2 projects are funded every year, per county, which is little compared to the size of the school network and the training needs.

Currently, there is no co-financing provided for ERASMUS+, neither at national level, nor at regional level for any of the component of the Programme. The promotion strategy put in place by the NA even starting with 2013, proved to be very effective in enhancing the effects of ERASMUS+ in Romania.

Q5 Do you consider that certain actions of the programme are more effective than others? Are there differences across fields? What are the determining factors for making these actions of the programme more effective?

In the field of school education projects proved their effectiveness, with some differences between actions and types of projects. Thus, partnerships are deemed to be more effective than mobilities, because: they involved several categories of people, more participants, include more diverse activities and also include the students, directly. According to the respondents, partnerships entailing student mobilities are seen as having a higher impact. Students benefit a lot from mobilities - their self-esteem and openness to novelty are increased, behavioral changes take place. The impact of student mobilities can also be noticed on the parents (they get closer to school, show more interest in the school life) and on the school (more openness to novelty, tendency to innovate, to share).

As for KA1, we notice a high share of applications submitted by schools that already benefited from the funding, that already have experience and competences to draft coherent projects, with a change for success. In contrast, schools from the most disadvantaged areas either not apply, or do not receive funding. The main reasons for them not applying are: lack of project writing skills, poor communication skills in foreign languages, fear of project management, high staff turnover, overloading teachers and principals with too much work, etc.

“Based on the best practice examples presented during the events organized by the County School Inspectorate, we could say that very good educational resources were created, that school teams have been created, that there are behavioral changes (openness, trust, become more involved, want to share with the others). Thanks to the projects there is team work, interdisciplinary work. Self-esteem is improved, confidence in the education system increases - by comparing different systems or meeting teachers from other countries, they realize that the Romanian school, although blamed a lot, also has its strengths, not only weaknesses.”

Based on the data in Table 1 we could state that the most efficient Programme action is VET, with a beneficiary satisfaction rate of over 95%. At the other end we have the actions under Youth, with a beneficiary satisfaction level ranging between 70-75%. **For VET, the KA1 effectiveness is higher than that of KA2**, according to the group interviews conducted with school inspectors for European projects in Sinaia, on Sept 16th. 2016).

Q6 - To what extent has the integration of several programmes into ERASMUS+ made the programme more effective in your country? Do you see scope for changes to the structure of ERASMUS+ or its successor programme that could increase effectiveness?

Overall, it is assessed that **the integrated approach of predecessor programmes under ERASMUS+ increased the quality and influenced effectiveness.** First of all, we could mention a significant impact at institutional and management level. In Romania, the NA has been operating since 2007 with integrated programmes (Socrates, Leonardo, Youth) and transposing an already in-place institutional approach into policies, with ERASMUS+, was a positive thing, which contributed to a more efficient use of resources and to a broader dissemination. “In other countries the agencies remained separated, even when switching to ERASMUS+, and the Youth sector is the biggest opponent to this integrated ERASMUS+. In Romania, the policy approach certified a practice we had been using for seven years. This is one of the positive things, in terms of institutional life and programme effectiveness” (interview with NA representatives) **Secondly, it is deemed that an integrated approach allows for a correlation between priorities and fields of intervention.** That is why support is given to develop projects highly relevant both in their field of application, but also for other associated fields - both in terms of activities suggested and outputs and outcomes delivered.

Moreover, the integrated approach allowed for a significant focus put on the institutional development of Romanian organizations. At the same time, beneficiaries feel that the current template of the mobility projects has the advantage of approaching them from the institutional development perspective, but also major disadvantages. For instance, there are major difficulties in developing and implementing mobility projects in schools with high staff turnover (such as many of the schools in rural area). Another example: in some schools there might be difficulties when it comes to identifying common elements among the teachers` professional interests, or between these and the school priorities.

In terms of implementation, it is deemed that **organizing several rounds of applications, every year, for every ERASMUS+ field, as it used to be under the LLP (for individual mobilities), was a better option.** One call for applications for year means a long waiting time for those that did not receive funding and who would like to re-submit projects, or for those that did not send applications but would be interested in these projects.

Q7: Budget: adequacy to the envisaged objectives/expected outcomes (overall, and by field and actions)

The unit cost funding approach is perceived as a key innovation. In this respect, ERASMUS+ is seen as a model for everything that is small-grant scheme. This is the opinion both of the NA management team and of the beneficiaries.

The financial allocations by types of projects and ERASMUS+ fields are different. The impression is that there are fields at a disadvantage. Below you will find some examples.

- **The financial allocation for adult education is very small,** compared to the former Grundvig programme. Thus, the budget for this field is very small, with negative effects on the effectiveness of interventions. This is an important issue, especially since in Romania, overall, the adult education field requires significant interventions. In this context, the associative environment/NGOs, with priority interests in this field, is the most disadvantaged.
- **The school education mobilities** have a very low success rate, of only 12%. The allocated budget is extremely small compared to the sector needs. Consequently, although the project proposals submitted annually are good from a qualitative perspective, they cannot be funded because the budget is too small. This issue was highlighted both by the NA management team and by the direct beneficiaries, who feel that the individual mobility system under the LLP offered more chances for participation than the organizational approach of the mobility projects. Thus, it is felt that **additional financial allocations are needed for all program lines that involve staff mobility.**
- **The financial allocations for actions under KA1 (mobility projects)/KA2 (strategic projects) are not proportional with the needs of the Romanian education and training system.** The budget distribution between KA1 and KA2 is not a determinant for a significant impact on the Romanian education and training system. NA`s proposals refer to changing the budget allocation between mobilities and strategic partnerships, following the 50%-50% model.

“In a country like Romania, where the education system has many needs, funding only six partnerships per year in higher education cannot have an impact on the system, as ERASMUS+ wants to ensure through its objectives.” (interview NA Romania)

Given the education and training needs in Romania and the slim chances of funding them from additional sources, the demand, in all fields, is extremely high. **The ERASMUS+ has the flexibility to reshuffle funds between fields but, in Romania, there are no extra-funds left under any of the fields.**

Q8 - What challenges and difficulties do you encounter while implementing the various actions of ERASMUS+? What changes would need to be introduced in ERASMUS+ or its successor programme to remedy these?

The project success factors are: prior project experience, how the partnership works (all partners are serious, involved), the coordinator’s capacities and management style (does he/she know how to manage the project, set clear objectives and tasks). Outside the school, other stakeholders that can have a positive influence are the school authorities, who can provide the 20% necessary for project completion, or the parents’ associations. Finding partners is no longer an obstacle, but there are some collaboration difficulties - the partners take long to answer requests, they are not organized, etc.

The factors that have a negative impact on the project quality and effectiveness are linked to: inexperienced project team, partnership disfunctionalities, lack of support from the people responsible for finances. In particular, in rural schools a large number of accountants work only 1/4 time and have no experience in public accounting. When they have to do many bank operations and the bank is located in the town, at a significant distance from the locality where the school is located, it is very difficult for 1/4 time accountants to manage a project. Other obstacles are related to the principals’ fear of endorsing mobilities, given the difficulties in substituting the classes of teachers involved in the trainings.

Among the factors that limit **applying in the classroom/in schools what the participants learned** from the ERASMUS+ projects, they mentioned: lack of material conditions in schools (average score 3.91 on a 1 to 5 scale, where 5 is a major negative influence), lack of managerial support (3.78), low student interest for learning (3.26) and low motivation among the teaching staff (3.17). Other factors are related to the insufficient material and financial resources.

For higher education, the participants referred to difficulties in the recognition of degrees and acquired skills: “There is still a long way to go before achieving the goal of *full recognition* and full compatibility between similar specializations; the problem is valid especially for bachelor degrees where the ARACIS regulations (Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) make the Romanian system a rigid one - no other subjects can be introduced or equivalated” (FG, ERASMUS+ office representatives) One of the universities represented in the interview stated that the current recognition percentage is assessed at about 47-55%. Students referred to these non-recognition cases as difficulties in the communication between partner universities, inaccuracies when drafting the Learning agreement, inconsistencies that can be noticed when getting to the new university or could have consequences later on, for the equivalence.

The administrative barriers for the mobility and recognition arise from:

- **Costs** (sometimes, the grants are too small, and students are encouraged to select countries where the costs are not that high - e.g., Slovenia, Poland, instead of countries in the North/West of Europe);
- **Language barriers:** there are situations in which no foreign languages are spoken in the ERASMUS+ offices in some countries, and the students have major communication difficulties (“*Only Turkish was spoken in the ERASMUS office; there was no one to whom you could speak in English*”- FG students, told by a student involved in a mobility in Turkey);
- **Recognizing** the courses studied;
- Others reservations of the students who are potential participants: separation from the close one, for a longer period; students who work and could lose their job if they discontinue it for a semester.

“71% of the students beneficiaries from mobility had to change along the way the subjects in the Learning Agreement, in most cases at the host institution’s request (42) or after noticing, on arrival, that the courses they had initially selected were not available (39%) - according to the 2014 final report (the Agency’s database).

As for recognition of the subjects studied during the mobility period, **only 5%** of the beneficiaries enjoyed full recognition, whereas **most of them (70%)** stated that **the courses** studied have been partially recognized when they came back (according to the 2014 mobility reports - the Agency’s database).

Some foreign universities do not ensure optimal conditions for mobility. For instance in Poland, where no English courses were provided. Or Italy: there were problems with providing courses in English.

“The fact that the courses selected in the learning agreement did not actually exist in reality, which meant that they had to be changed and others selected” (student)

The institutions involved in the focus groups stated that they achieved the envisaged goals, given that they were successful examples. When difficulties arose, they were generated by external causes, by the national contexts (national legislation, issues related to the political context, etc.) of the partners’ origin countries. There are many situations in which the implementation of the national legislation generates difficulties in applying the E+-specific rules.

Usually, the difficulties are exterior. They are not things under our control; they are linked to the international context.

There is a risk management and there are some risks we envisage even from the application phase and, consequently, when certain things happen we find solutions. Let’s say one of the partners gives up...the project continues, all other activities will be redistributed.

Beneficiaries` recommendations

- Higher financial allocations for student mobility projects - these projects proved their value and they should be multiplied; equal amounts for the participants to the project reunions and to those participating in the teaching - learning - training activities under the KA2 partnerships;
- The accountants of the beneficiary schools should comply with the programme financial rules; issuing financial-administrative rules that schools abode by (e.g. Payment of replacement teachers during mobilities); NA training the accountants when signing the contracts;
- Study visits for people holding guidance and control positions, special programmes for principals/County School Inspectorate (CSI) eligibility for mobilities;
- Simplifying the application forms (the ERASMUS+ forms seem easier, but they are sophisticated and have hard-to-manage nuances; they are discouraging and lead to abandoning the intention to submit a project);
- Simplifying and improving the online reporting system (final reporting)
- Measures to stimulate rural beneficiaries participation - information activities targeting especially rural schools or other beneficiaries, trainings for rural schools.
- A set amount for procurements, to capitalize on projects.
- Higher grants for students (VET mobilities). Country financial allocation proportional with the number of projects submitted on the previous year.

Based on the information provided by project evaluators, the applications submitted are still fragmented and lacking in the impact section, as a result of not having clear indicators and clear indications related to the effects on direct and indirect project beneficiaries. The need to support beneficiaries to better formulate the expected impact, in terms of indicators, and correlate them with the Programme expected impact should also be mentioned.

Q9 - To what extent are the approaches and tools that are used for disseminating and exploiting the results of ERASMUS+ and its predecessor programmes in your country effective? Where can you see the possibilities for improvements?

According to the results of an evaluation report of the NA's information, communication and dissemination strategy, conducted in 2015, over 10,000 participated, in 2014, to information and dissemination events organized by the NA. At the same time, political decision-makers and other key stakeholders in the education, training or employment were involved, either by organizing special events (for County Councils or CSIs) or by inviting them to the NA events, such as the Opening Conference (European Commissioner, Ministers, State Secretaries, etc.)

According to the data in the evaluation report, participants used the information acquired during the training/information sessions in various contexts. Most of them (86%) presented this information to peers, during professional meetings, and less than half of those capitalizing the information (45.4%) presented it to friends and other actors outside the organization. An overwhelming majority of respondents answered that it is extremely important to have access to successfully implemented ERASMUS+ projects, in order to have a more efficient application submission.

3.2. Efficiency

Q10 To what extent is the system of cooperation and division of tasks between the Commission, Executive Agency, National Agencies, European Investment Fund, National Authorities, Independent Audit Bodies, and ERASMUS+ Committee efficient and well-functioning from the point of view of your country? What are the areas for possible improvement or simplification in the implementation of ERASMUS+ or a successor programme?)

NA can contribute to decision-making, to developing strategies or policy documents at national level In virtue of its experience, the tools developed and the status of public institution "supporting the national project of improving communities and individuals' attitudes and mentalities" (according to the NA mission), the Agency can be involved in making decisions, in changing some rules in the education and training policies. Many of the projects implemented focus on developing skills and innovation in various fields, but they cannot contribute directly and immediately to the development of official documents, capitalized at national level (as policies, strategies, etc.) However, it is clear the value of all the tools and practices experimented, as well as the usefulness of having a forum with responsibilities for collecting successful elements and using them in the national policies or strategies.

"The problem is that the best practice examples and the wonderful outcomes stay as mere examples; rolling them out in the entire system is still a well-known problem in the educational research, in the social action." (Individual interview with external evaluator, NA).

NA contributes to achieving its mission by influencing certain policies, based on the tools it developed, on the audit reports and actions carried out by experts from different departments, but it cannot impose changes in different institutions and organizations. "This is what happens and, for sure, things have evolved ever since the programme started to be implemented in universities" (individual interview NA staff)

For NA the administrative simplification is lower than that at the Commission or beneficiary level. The Programme and, consequently, the NA reorganization were done in virtue of the simplification, which entailed simplifying the administrative procedures both in respect to the higher forum (European Commission) and to the beneficiaries (organizations implementing projects). The simplification was determined both by redesigning the bureaucratic procedures and by the endeavours taken by stakeholders involved in Programme implementation (Commission, NA, beneficiary organizations). NA, as Intermediary Body between the Commission and beneficiary, did not feel the full effects of this simplification, or they targeted only some components.

" You can see this simplification for the Beneficiary, maybe even for the Commission, but us, in the implementing agencies, I cannot say that we noticed it, maybe only from a bureaucratic perspective. Almost everything is electronic. In terms of the procedures tht we have to follows, I can't say that there is a simplification." (individual interview NA management)

The institutional approach of mobility is an innovative element of the ERASMUS+ Programme, with positive effects. The financial restructuring did not necessarily lead to a higher number of beneficiaries, but to a more diverse impact, focusing on the impact on organizational development. The relationship with the beneficiaries changed after implementing the new forms of Programme organization and management. If prior the individual approach was used, now an organizational approach is in place, with consequences on its development. The interaction with NA is carried out through the umbrella organization, not through the participants to the actions implemented under the Programme. The effects were felt by the NA, that manages a smaller number of contracts, without reducing the number of participants in the Programme actions, but also by beneficiaries, where there was an overall organisation development and the possibility to use the results in the relation with multiple individual beneficiaries.

“We used to have over a thousand contracts with individuals, per year, whereas now we have under a hundred institutional contracts for the same number of trainees or potential trainees, because we conclude the contract with the institution. It’s in our advantage, it’s also good for the system, by linking individual mobility to the institution’s European Development Plan. (Interview with the NA management team)

Among the Programme participants from the period prior to implementing this integrated approach, the changes were not perceived in the same positive manner. And this was because of the significant change in the mobility projects, that no longer supported individual mobilities, but institutional ones. In the Youth sector the change was easier, but for the other reasons candidates found it more difficult to get used to this new approach. For candidates it was difficult to connect with the institution needs, and this was reflected in the quality of the applications. Later on, through the trainings organized for beneficiaries, but also based on the feedback received for the projects submitted, the applicants started to adapt better to the Programme requirements and, consequently, the quality of applications increased.

Q11 – To what extent has the integration of several programmes into ERASMUS+ resulted in efficiency gains or losses for the implementation of the programme in your country, both at the level of the National Agency/ies and on the beneficiaries' and participants' level? Do you see scope for changes to the structure of ERASMUS+ or its successor programme that could increase Efficiency?

The integrated approach of the previous programmes increased the quality of the ERASMUS+ Programme. The Romanian NA operated since 2007 with both integrated programmes (Socrates and Leonardo, merged in 2005, and Youth in 2007). Transposing an already existing institutional approach into policies was a positive element that contributed to a more efficient allocation of resources and a broader dissemination. This merger is deemed to be a positive element of the NA institutional life, because the policy change overlapped with an institutional practice already in place within the Agency. This is a best practice example that already proved its efficiency compared to other Agencies where the fields were not approached in an integrated way at institutional level.

”In other countries the agencies remained separated, even after switching to ERASMUS+, and the Youth sector is the biggest opponent to this integrated ERASMUS+. For us, the policy approach came to certify a practice we had been using for 7 years (...) This is one of the positive things in terms of the institutional life.” (interview with the NA management team)

Fields unification contributed to approaching the envisaged objectives in a unitary way. Prior to 2014 the Programme was divided into 5 fields of education which are now tackled in a unitary, convergent and coherent way. Approaching the fields in a unitary way contributed to defining, unitarily, the objectives envisaged for education and training. Moreover, this unitary approach allows for setting national priorities promoted by each of the integrated fields, thus contributing to NA achieving its national mission, that of playing a part in changing communities, attitudes and mentalities.

”The Programme was previously split into five fields of education. Now there is harmonization, there is a unitary approach, in order to converge towards the same objectives. Previously the programs were complementary, but they were still quite independent, they followed somehow different objectives... Everything we do is linked to harmonization. Now we have an overarching vision. The work plans, the current procedure are unitary.” (Individual interview, NA staff)

The unification of the ERASMUS+ field contributed to increasing the efficiency and interchangeability of the NA staff's actions. The operation of the ERASMUS+ Programme, in its current state, meant bringing together, under the same department, human resources from different Agencies involved in education and training. The field of activity did not change too much; only the approach is new, and tailored to the specific features of the ERASMUS+ Programme.

"But at the end of the day they do the same thing." (individual interview NA staff)

The new organization manner represents an advantage for the NA functioning and allocation of human resources, especially in virtue of ensuring continuity with the activity performed prior to this type of organization. Although the education and training fields comprising the Programme are diverse, the staff can easily switch from one field to another. Organizing the human resource by actions allows the NA to capitalize on them, where needed. Switching from one field to another can be easily done, if the real situation requires this.

"The best word is interchangeability. Even if they work by fields of education, replacing a person would not be a problem. We can allocate resources where the need is higher. From an administrative perspective, this is very good." (Individual interview, NA staff)

The positive effects of concentrating human resources by Actions, which include several fields of education, are also felt by the beneficiaries. They have direct access to any information related to the Action under which they are applying, from any Agency expert. The integrated approach eliminated all the steps that potential beneficiaries had to take, prior to the ERASMUS+ Programme, to get the information. "Access to information is a plus. The core information can be provided by anyone in the Agency; you no longer have to make 10 phone calls before coming across the right person". (individual interview, NA staff)

Simplifying the procedure by which information on the submission of applications can be obtained also had an impact on increasing the number of applications submitted, but also the beneficiaries' success rate. Even if currently there is no comparative analysis against the previous Programme, an maybe this would not be fair, it is said that, overall, there is an increase in the number of applications, share of approved projects and the grant received.

The ERASMUS+ Programme, through its support tools and the operation model, can be taken as a best practice example and rolled out nationally. It benefits from the acquis of the previous programme (LLP), which facilitated the development of a set of working tools for beneficiaries that are useful, clear, coherent, accessible. ERASMUS+ capitalizes on the past year experience, facilitating project submission through the information and technical support provided. The operating procedures, the working tools, the guidelines and the platform are all supporting elements that could be put to good use under national projects funding systems or under funding systems correlated with the ERASMUS+ Programme.

"ERASMUS+ continues and logically builds on what was before, for all types of projects (...) It is an accessible programme, it is very clear, the guideline is very clear, the requirements are very clear compared to other programmes" (interview with NA external evaluators).

We already have 30 years of community programmes on vocational education and training, with the best practice examples, with the possibility of disseminating, at European level, the outputs, projects with the database, with the resources" (interview with NA external evaluators).

Q12 Do you consider that the implementation of certain actions of the programme is more efficient than others? Are there differences across fields? What good practices of these more efficient actions of the programme could be transferred to others?)

- **The financial allocation for the ERASMUS+ fields is different. There are some disadvantaged fields.**

The financial allocation within the programme is different, with some field more disadvantaged than others, or than the funding they would get during the previous funding period. For instance, the financial allocation for adult education is insufficient compared to Grundvig. It is very small, and the adult education field suffered under the ERASMUS+ Programme.

The school education mobilities have a very low success rate, of only 12%. However, the financial allocation is still insufficient compared to the needs in the sector. The projects are good, but they cannot be financed into the current budget.

The demand in all sectors is extremely high. **The ERASMUS+ has the flexibility to reshuffle financial between sectors but, in Romania, there are no extra-funds left under any of the fields.** Moreover, budgetary adjustments are made when approving the applications, in order to ensure that the funds are realistically used and in order to fund more projects.

The financial allocations for actions under KA1 /KA2 are not proportional with the needs of the Romanian education and training system. The way in which funding is allotted, shared between mobility and strategic partnerships, cannot generate system impact. Financial allocations should take into consideration the system needs and should be correlated with the project capacity to have an impact on participants, organizations and communities. An example in this sense is the university field, where the Commission allocated 66% of funds for mobilities and much less for strategic partnerships. However, it is estimated that the real and relevant impact is generated by the teaching staff's mobility and the strategic partnership projects. During every selection phase, an insignificant number of projects receive funding, and the impact expected at system-level cannot be achieved.

“The impact on the system arises from teacher mobility and from the strategic partnership projects. (...) It's very clear that the paradigm should be changed, There should be at least 50%-50%... The thing is that the way in which funding is allotted, shared between mobility and strategic partnerships, cannot generate system impact.”... (representatives of the NA management team)

The school field also gets attention because of the different allocations for KA1 and KA2, and also due to its attractiveness and impact on participants. Strategic partnership share deemed to be more effective than mobilities, because they involved several categories of people, more participants, include more diverse activities and also include the students, directly. According to the respondents, partnerships entailing student mobilities are seen as having a higher impact. Additional financial allocations would be needed for those projects and programme lines involving student mobility.

Overall, the targets set by the Commission for the entire Key Action 2, related to strategic partnership projects, are ambitious compared to the amounts allocated for the projects. The number of projects funded is small, so the expected impact, at national or international level, cannot be spectacular. There is a small number of projects funded because of the limited financial resources, together with the significant grant allocated to multiple-partner projects, which use up large amounts of money, given the flat rates for project management. Moreover: “The method used for applying for funding does not allow you to fund several projects under the lump sum allotted for KA2 (adults or VET); there are some projects with a good likelihood of generating interesting things, but we cannot fund them because there are no funds” (representatives of the Department for Strategic Partnership Projects, NA).

Underfunding is mentioned also in respect to mobility projects, and adult education, again, is front-listed because of the small number of projects funded, due to the limited financial allocations. Apart from the low impact that these projects can have, the underfunding can also affect *the application rate and the quality of applications, since many potential beneficiaries are discouraged* (Representatives of the Department for Mobility Projects, NA). NA has made efforts to support and motivate beneficiaries to implement mobilities, by recurring to sponsors and local public authorities, etc.

The new organization of the ERASMUS+ Programme capitalizes some specific elements from the previous programmes, in the beneficiaries' advantage, as measures to adapt to the specific features of the targeted fields and participants' profiles. Strategic partnership projects promote and facilitate cooperation, being an essential element for organization development and introducing chances among

participants and in the communities they belong to. The strategic partnership projects promote cooperation and innovation, in view of developing intellectual property products specific for the field in which they are produced. But some confusion related to partnership - learning activities - intellectual products (represented at a small scale) have arisen in schools, and creating new actions that would facilitate an exchange of best practices proved to be necessary. For instance, in the school field there is just the possibility to carry out learning activities, which is nothing less than *going back to the old Comenius partnership projects* (representatives of the Department for Strategic Projects, NA). The exchange of experience between teachers and students fosters school cooperation and can be rapidly measured.

Q13 – Consequences of simplifying the financing system; administrative issues (To what extent has the system of simplified grants resulted in a reduction of the administrative burden for National Agencies and programme beneficiaries and participants? Are there differences across actions or fields? What elements of the programme could be changed to further reduce the administrative burden, without unduly compromising its results and impact?)

The simplification of the funding system and the unit cost approach are deemed as a significant positive element. This is the opinion both of the National Agency and of beneficiaries and programme participants. It is deemed that this approach simplifies the **financial management** of the programme, at national level, and of projects, at beneficiary level.

“First of all, it’s a bin win for the beneficiaries, but also for us, for the Agency, because we no longer have to take care of all the small financial management things. People are no longer stressed to gather documents as proof of the expenditures, nor is the Agency, to check them. This approach allows us to focus on the implementation, on the impact, not only on administrative things.” (interview with NA management representatives)

On the other hand, it is deemed that the new approach allows for more **financial management flexibility** than the previous LLP programme. Last but not least, the new funding model gives more **predictability** for the financial management. This provides for operativeness, giving a chance to implement projects even to organizations that do not have experience in writing and managing these kind of actions.

“The budget is distributed based on clear and transparent criteria. Every beneficiary organization knows, from the beginning, what are the resources available. You know that the money will come if you do what you committed to do, in line with the contract; from this perspective, everything is clear and predictable.” (group interview with the ERASMUS+ project evaluators).

NA supported the implementation of the simplified funding system through specific actions. Thus, NA organized information and training sessions, webinars with the staff in the beneficiary organizations (project coordinators, accountants), for the purpose of explaining and promoting the new ERASMUS+-specific funding rules. Moreover, the NA website provides detailed information (guidelines) on the simplified financial procedures.

The financial management faces some difficulties at the level of organizations. Some beneficiaries find the financial allocations as being limited, insufficient, difficult to manage from a bureaucratic perspective. Some difficulties are generated by the **co-funding need**, under some actions. The co-funding, although under ERASMUS+ it no longer needs to be backed by documents, as it used to be the case under LLP, is still a problem. It covers non-eligible expenditures incurred under the programme, necessary for the project to be implemented in optimal conditions. Some categories of beneficiaries or organizations (some public institutions, NGOs, etc.) have difficulties in providing these amounts for co-funding.

“There are some limitations. It is said that the ERASMUS funding is just a support. Consequently, we are asked to come with a co-funding that the budgets of some organizations or some local budgets cannot cover... For us, who are implementing the projects, this generates countless problems”. (group interview, representatives of beneficiary organizations)

Other difficulties are related to **the national financial regulations**. Thus, sometimes there is a clash between the programme financial flexibility and the national regulations in place, and beneficiaries cannot take advantage of the programme financial flexibility. The high bureaucracy in the financial field, at national level, does not allow one to take advantage of the programme framework rules.

- NA states that these difficulties are caused by the accountants in the applicant organizations, who are stubborn to follow the national rules, although ERASMUS+ operates under a European financial regulation.
- Some organizations applying for funding (especially public ones) state that the relation with local/national budget holders is difficult and lacks transparency, and that they ask for the national regulations to take priority over the European ones.

For other categories of beneficiary organizations (e.g., small organizations, that don't have significant own financial resources), **the way in which the budget installments are allocated** is a problem in itself, because it puts pressure on mobility participants. **Several recommendations have been made, in view of overcoming these obstacles in the implementation of financial regulations**. One of them relates to the need for the Programme/NA to **state in a more detailed and accurate way** how the financial resources are to be used.

“It's not very clear what you can do with the money. After asking for a legal opinion, we realized things are not that simple. It should be stated very clearly what you can do with the money. If you were to be audited, you wouldn't know what are the backing documents. This is a question mark we all have whenever we are subject to various controls.” (group interview, representatives of the beneficiary organizations)

Other proposals referred to more frequent **trainings** on the financial management of the ERASMUS+ programmes, for potential beneficiaries, because a project coordinator is not always aware of these issues before writing an application.

Q14 – To what extent are the IT tools provided by the Commission adequate for the efficient management and implementation of the programme in your country? Do they answer your needs? Give specific examples where they can be improved. Is the set of IT tools appropriate or should it cover more/less elements of the programme implementation?)

NA feels that the European IT tools were a challenge when implementing the ERASMUS+ programme. One of the things highlighted during the interviews with the NA was that the ERASMUS+ programme came with many IT tools that were all implemented at the same time, without prior testing. Many of them had been developed independent from the Commission, on several other platforms that were in place (taken over from the executive Agency, etc.) That's why, in practice, there have been some **difficulties** in using them. Thus, although the **added value** of the IT tools has been acknowledged when it comes to managing the ERASMUS+ programme at national level, quite a few **risks** have been identified. Consequently, it is deemed that the exclusive e-management of the programme requires future mitigation interventions.

“ It's one thing to have a single application with all the information; in the end, they interact, one database is moved into another one, the information is multiplied down to where you need it. And it's something else to develop 5-6 softwares and IT tools and have automated data exports or imports, what we actually still have in place.” (Individual interview, NA staff)

“Whenever you update a tool you expect a downfall, to lose some data, to complicate a procedure”... (individual interview, NA staff)

Overall, the beneficiaries feel that the IT tools provided by the Commission are suitable. The beneficiaries assess the use of IT tools as being easier from one year to another. Many of the beneficiaries investigated appreciate the programme IT tools for the following advantages:

- provide support for **finding partners** - this was appreciated more by small NGOs, that traditionally don't have access to European communication and collaboration networks; make the **project administrative management easier**, giving coherence and transparency to this process;

- Allow for an easier **monitoring of project outcomes and impact**, in general and at the level of each beneficiary; in this sense, the simplification of the reporting procedures and tools for participants (beneficiary survey) was appreciated, as well as the usefulness of the YouthPass and Mobility Tool platforms, as useful and easy-to-use tools for recognizing learning outcomes.

“The management of the wide change implemented through ERASMUS+ initially had some critical issues, but meanwhile things have improved considerably. More and more things seem to be easier for beneficiaries, and everything is simplified.” (group interview with beneficiaries).

“For us, the Salto Youth platform is the most useful so far, because it allows one to find partners. Otherwise, it is very difficult when you start to submit projects, but you don’t know other institutions with similar concerns” (group interview, NGOs).

“An ERASMUS+ project is easier to manage, with less bureaucracy). Gradually, the pile of documents was reduced, work became easier” (group interview, member of a university ERASMUS+ office)

For some categories of target groups, the current system of IT tools generates difficulties. The use of IT tools is still a challenge for some categories of beneficiaries with low possibilities. For instance, people from the rural area, with disabilities, poor people, etc. have limited access to the Internet and IT tools. With the support of organizations promoting the ERASMUS+ projects, they had to learn how to use the new technologies, which they are not using on their day-to-day life (email, Internet, fill out online surveys, use online platforms, etc.)

Some beneficiaries feel that ERASMUS+ lead to an excessive use of IT tools. thus, they feel that ERASMUS+ proposes too many IT tools and using them often hinders direct communication between partners/beneficiaries etc., which European programmes should promote. At the same time, uploading documents (reports, etc.) is a time-consuming process. That is why beneficiary organizations suggested to have access to the IT reporting system from the moment when the contracts are signed, in order to get used to the tools and progressively upload the reports.

Q15 – Efficiency and adequacy of the financial and human resources allocated (To what extent is the level of human and financial resources that is available for the implementation of the programme in your country adequate? What steps did you take to optimise the efficiency of the resources deployed for the ERASMUS+ implementation in your country?)

ERASMUS+ increased the efficiency of the HR system at NA level From a management perspective, this raised a challenge, because NA had to redesign the reorganization strategy. ERASMUS+ lead to a new approach in managing the programme financial and human resources. Previously, the internal approach of human resources was one based on fields (financial, implementation, etc.) which sometimes lead to inconsistencies, etc. With ERASMUS+, the approach became a project-based one. Last but not least, the reorganization of the HR structure within NA created an **environment for professional and personal development.**

Positive effects:

- Increase efficiency of the NA staff’s work;
- More coherence and efficiency in project monitoring. When monitoring an entire project, from start to end, an NA employee knows the overall picture, knows the project better and can provide tailored support.
- coherence when communicating with beneficiaries; the reorganization generated more time for the NA staff to interact with the beneficiaries. At the same time, implementing standardized procedures for communicating and collaborating with beneficiaries - through direct communications, NA’s monthly newsletters, promotion of best practices, valorisation conferences presenting printed materials.

“Had the same organization system been kept, the NA would have needed much more human resources to manage the funds which increased a lot for ERASMUS+ compared to what we had in the past. With the same staff expenditure, we currently manage a budget three times higher. This is, actually, the programme efficiency.” (interview with NA managers)

“We feel that we are managing to complete the annual tasks, which entail an increase, from one year to another, of the number of events to organize, apart from other activities, such as: produce leaflets, flyers, promotional materials, organize courses, manage the online networks, the websites, the social media”. (individual interview, NA staff)

“Implementing a new programme, with new rules, was a challenge. It made us think differently, learn from scratch new things, new roles and new responsibilities.” (Individual interview, NA staff)

As for the adequacy of financial resources, the institutional approach of mobility is deemed as another innovative element of the ERASMUS+ programme, with positive effects. The financial restructuring did not necessarily lead to a higher number of beneficiaries, but to a more diverse impact, focusing on the impact on organizational development.

“We used to have over a thousand contracts with individuals involved in mobilities, per year, whereas now we have under a hundred institutional contracts for the same number of trainees or potential trainees, because we ca direct relation with the institution. Basically, the number of contracts was reduced. It’s in our advantage, it’s also good for the system, by linking individual mobility to the institution’s European Development Plan. (Individual interview, NA staff)

At the level of beneficiaries, the adequacy of financial resources is a critical thing, compared to the national demand. When asked whether the ERASMUS+ budget is enough for Romania, almost 60% of beneficiaries answered that a larger budget, that could fund more projects, is needed. Consequently, although the project proposals submitted annually are good from a qualitative perspective, they cannot be funded because the budget is too small.

Funds adequacy is deemed as a **critical element especially in fields** such as adult education and school education mobilities - compared to the needs of these fields. At the same time, the impression is that **the financial allocations per project are often not enough**, and the project outcomes justify if not exceed the budget allocations. The issue of insufficient financial resources is highlighted especially in respect to strategic projects, that could have a significant impact on the Romanian education and training system. Thus, some universities are forced to add to the project budgets from their own funds, in order to meet the students` requests for mobility. Moreover, it is deemed that the mobility grants are not enough and not adapted to the real costs, hence the need to add up to the amounts allocated for the administrative elements of mobility. But this is difficult for organizations that do not have their own funds (such as, for instance, public schools in Romania).

3.3. Relevance

16. To what extent do the ERASMUS+ Programme objectives target the needs or problems they have to solve? Are these needs/problems (still) relevant in the national context? Have the problems/needs changed so that it is necessary to adjust the objectives of the ERASMUS+ Programme or its predecessor?

Projects in the school education field are seen as being extremely relevant in respect to the school, teacher and student needs, although it is admitted that for some projects the needs stated as a starting point are more “pretenses”. Schools need these projects and are very interested in developing their project management skills, in order to be able to take advantage of the ERASMUS+ opportunities (there are many requests for training on project preparation received from schools). The applications are quite complex and demotivate those that do not have too much experience in writing projects.

“Managing a partnership can be scary at some point. I even recommended those with no experience to take a first step for KA2 as partners. And only after 1-2 projects to move towards project coordination.” (Extract, group interview, school inspector for European projects, September 16th 2016)

Part of the projects are prepared for reasons outside the Programme: desire to hold on to previous partnerships that worked very well and brought the participating institutions added value; interest in getting to know other institutions or other colleagues from other countries - when a school is invited as partner, the needs based on which the project starts are usually identified by the coordinator - the school from another country. The national priorities set in the LLP had a very important role of guiding and mobilizing school teams - for instance, rural school were encouraged by project inspectors to analyze the opportunity of getting involved in a project.

“Many times school teams do not conduct a rigorous needs assessment, they are not necessarily concerned with an overall vision; they just wonder what else could we do? Many projects stem from the desire to get involved, to explore. Others are the result of a previous partnership, under which they worked together very well. And since they want to keep the partners or take the previous project to the next level, they come up with a new proposal.” (Extract, group interview, school inspector for European projects, September 16th 2016)

17. To what extent do the objectives of the ERASMUS+ Programme tackle the needs of different stakeholders and sectors? How relevant is the programme in attracting target groups from different programme fields? Is the ERASMUS+ is well known by those in the education and training, youth and sports fields? If some target groups are not well covered, what factors limit their access and what could be done to mitigate this?

It is deemed that ERASMUS+ does not address all target group categories, like the previous programmes. Thus, the National Agency representatives mentioned two categories that were no longer taken into consideration: the *People on the Label Market* (Leonardo), from mobilities, and the category related to school students mobility. The latter has been incorporated in Key Action 2, but it no longer includes all elements initially considered.

Even the ERASMUS + project evaluators feel that **in the programme there are some categories of beneficiaries or types of mobilities that are under-represented**. The projects submitted by kindergartens represent a very small number of all applications and, the same goes for *job shadowing* mobilities, which are very poorly represented. Some possible explanations for this are the limited information provided to potential beneficiaries, lack of “courage to take that step” (focus-group evaluators), option to stay within the comfort area, by accessing courses which other colleagues are also attending, although they might not meet the trainee’s development needs.

The insufficient use of the training possibilities provided by the Programme is also reflected in the number of requests for volunteers to undergo mobilities in Romania. In the project evaluators` opinion, the possibility of using native speakers of languages taught in Romanian schools who would undergo a volunteering internship is not too capitalized. At the same time, **the level of interest of schools is different**: national colleges have more financial resources, so they are not so interested in the funding; schools with a high share of kids from minority groups have direct partnerships with schools from the countries of those minorities and don’t apply for ERASMUS+ too much, whereas schools in rural areas don’t have enough resources or experience and are afraid to apply.

“The minimum prerequisite is to have someone that speaks foreign languages and also has the capacity to write and implement a project.” (Extract, group interview, school inspector for European projects, September 16th 2016)

“Those that write a project and don’t get funding become discouraged, especially since they have to wait for another year before resubmitting it. It is very difficult to convince them to resubmit them. It would be better to have 2 rounds per year - in spring and in autumn.” (Extract, group interview, school inspector for European projects, September 16th 2016)

Another discouraging element for candidates is represented by the *“difficult, complex forms, that don't support writing a project in a logical way”*. The National Agency representatives feel that the target group is **highly motivated**, whereas the programme beneficiaries feel the need to make a clear distinction between **interests** and **involvement**.

In view of **informing potential beneficiaries**, the National Agency uses mainly the ERASMUS+ website and the FB page which are constantly updated and structured,. The National Agency representatives draw attention on the problems arising when using the specific softwares provided by the European Commission, which sometimes generate errors or freeze.

Access to programme-related information is open for all fields. Some steps ahead were taken under ERASMUS+, at least in terms of collaboration; if under LLP the collaboration used to be with the ERASMUS (LLP) offices and inspectors, under ERASMUS+ it involves six networks of support structures: School inspectors within the county school inspectorates, ERASMUS+ HEIs offices, trainers` network, ESN promoters (promotion only for students), the network of county council representatives and the Eurodesk multipliers,

*“We are trying to reach out to each part of the public in a tailored way. I have 6 networks available. The county councils...we inform them from time to time, **there wasn't a training organized for them, but we keep them in the loop”** (interview with NA representatives)*

In view of covering as many categories of beneficiaries possible, the Agency collaborates with the Departments for minorities (inter-ethnic relations), with the National Agency for Roma to disseminate the ERASMUS+ programme, and organizes trainings for the institutions that have these categories among their target groups. At the same time, the conferences organized under the projects are a good way of disseminating the ERASMUS+ Programme among community members and parents. It has been noticed that the representatives of municipalities and local councils are interested to get involved in the projects: *“We haven't conducted a survey to see which are the expectations of local representatives, but we noticed that they are open to mobilities and international partnerships.”* (Interview with NA representatives) Most beneficiaries say they have access to enough information on programme opportunities and that they received support in writing the project.

The NA representatives feel that they collaborate efficiently with the schools (*“it's the most consistent participation”*), but also with cultural institutions *“Museums fall within the scope of the Agency, because they develop programmes for youth, for adult education, for every age group, in the end.”*(interview with NA representatives), with school inspectorates, libraries, Research and Development Centers, with the Penitentiary Directorate, with the university environment, etc. The same opinion is expressed by the beneficiary organizations from the pre-university education, who state that school inspectorates and the Agency supported them on punctual requests they had, assessing the communication with the National Agency as a positive one.

Things are different for NGOs; they don't have contact persons at county/local level, so they can only contact the NA experts .

Weaknesses/ vulnerabilities. Difficulties in accessing flexible mechanisms have been raised by NGOs. The FDSC databases (Foundation for the Development of the Civil Society) are outdated; the Bucharest Directorate for Youth and Sports did a mapping/developed an application which would be necessary at national level too. It was noticed that the **collaboration with the private sector was weaker**, but this is something we see in all countries. At the same time, Agency representatives claim that the target group of people with disabilities is covered in a limited way.

There isn't a wide collaboration with the national media, although meetings with those groups are organized yearly. However, there are established 2 institutional partnerships between the NA and Radio Romania Cultural (national radio channel) and Market Watch (business magazine). It has been noticed that there is a better collaboration with regional journalists focusing on education, the monthly media survey used by the NA showing at least 6000 articles referring to ERASMUS+ in written, radio or online media. **Measures/ steps to be taken** Trainings for potential beneficiaries, **workshops** and/or **exchanges of best**

practices have been organized, both at the NA's initiative and following the County School Inspectorates' requests. Some are not interested in these trainings, because they don't receive attendance certificates they can use in their personal files. This decision, of not granting certificates, relied on the (self) selection of participants based on their real interest in preparing and implementing projects. The envisaged consequences of this decision have already been confirmed in some counties.

It is necessary to better identify the training needs of direct beneficiaries and applicant organizations. The target group's development needs and, consequently, the project necessity are substantiated, sometimes, based on the training provider, on the partners' competences, which has consequences for project impact and sustainability.

"Needs should be better identified, in order to increase the added value" (focus group project evaluators).

Strategies better targeting certain categories are necessary, such as: those from the rural areas (for instance, "there are rural areas where there is no access through platforms or social media"); **strategies for people with special needs from the university field, etc. An inclusion strategy was launched**, during the 2016 valorisation conference, **targeting the rural area, people with disabilities, and good results could be noticed already starting with the 2016 selection rounds**

3.4. Internal and external coherence and complementarity

Q18. To what extent are the different actions aggregated under ERASMUS+ coherent? Are there existing or potential synergies between the ERASMUS+ actions? Are there tensions, inconsistencies or overlappings between the ERASMUS+ actions?

All in all, the ERASMUS+ actions have a good internal coherence, and the implementing agency and beneficiaries agree on the improvements introduced by the new framework, compared to the Lifelong Learning and Youth in Action Programmes. In the ANPCDEF's opinion, ERASMUS+ created a new synergy: *"The previous Programme, LLL (and Youth in Action), was divided into 5 fields of education. Now there is harmonization, there is a unitary approach to converge towards the same objectives. Previously the programmes were complementary, but they were still quite independent, they followed somehow different objectives"* (KA1 representative)

Compared to other programmes, the ERASMUS+ implementation enjoys a very good and experienced coordination, ensured by the NA. According to the research data collected from beneficiaries, the rules in place for the programmes are clearer than those under other programmes, and the project development is more predictable. The beneficiaries are informed, trained, and the rules don't change as we go.

After applying the survey among the people responsible with the ERASMUS+ programme in universities, over half of those questioned feel that, to a large extent, there is complementarity between the different actions of the ERASMUS+ Programme implemented in their universities. But the financial allocations are not always alligned to the objectives of different actions, which could affect the coherence. Under the higher education component, the allocations for individual scholarships cover about 2/3 of the budget, although what it envisages is to generate especially changes at system level. Similarly, with a very small budget (e.g., the adult learning component) it is extremely difficult to have an impact that exceeds the direct beneficiaries.

There are some components that are not too much used by potential beneficiaries which puts their relevance in the current context of Romania under limelight, asking one to ponder on how to better articulate them.

Q19. To what extent is ERASMUS+ complementary to other national or international programmes available in Romania? Are there tensions, inconsistencies or overlappings with other programmes?

Although they share the same beneficiaries, no areas of competition between ERASMUS+ and other national and international programmes have been identified. In some cases there is even mutual support between the ERASMUS+ Programme and other financial backers (e.g. the NGO Fund, managed by FDSC).

ERASMUS+ holds good positions in respect to other funding sources, based on its efficiency and effectiveness, with clearer, more tangible and identifiable outcomes and a lower level of formalism and bureaucratic burden than other projects (for instance ESF). The Agency responsible with the ERASMUS+ implementation is involved, at the management and action coordinators level, in defining the education public policies in Romania. Along the way, its representatives have been consulted when drafting strategies and pieces of legislation, which contributed to the coherence of public policies on education funding.

The focus groups organized with the people responsible for ERASMUS+ in universities revealed that they feel that the objectives of the ERASMUS+ Programme are complementary with those of other programmes from national or international funds (bilateral study agreements, SOPHRD, OPHC, EEA grants, etc.), but *“what we (the ERASMUS+ offices) are offering, in terms of opportunity, is something completely different. Basically, there is no competition for us on the market.”*

There were fears about a possible repletion of the training market due to trainings with many beneficiaries from the education sector, funded under SOPHRD/OPHC, but this was not the case. The ERASMUS+ kept their relevance, and proof of this is the competition we see whenever there is a call for projects.

The Ministry of Education is promoting the ERASMUS+ Programme and acknowledges the results achieved hereunder through several own initiatives (e.g., “European School”) or in partnership with national institutions (“Made for Europe) and European institutions (“Euroscola”) The ANPCDEF considers that the similar type of synergy is created by participating in events such as the “National Volunteers` Gala” or “Gala of the Public Participation Awards”.

Our research activity shows that there is complementarity and interaction between the elements comprising the ERASMUS+ Programme and other national and international programmes, but ERASMUS+ has a clear identify among the funding available for education and training, not vying with any other initiative. This is mostly because of the way in which it integrates and capitalizes on the cross-border component.

3.5. European added value and sustainability

Q 20 A. The extent in which ERASMUS+ and other previous programmes generate effects that can be added to the results of similar actions initiated/implemented at national or regional level.

For the formal education, both for the university and pre-university field, **the ERASMUS+ projects are more efficient and more effective than those from other funding sources** (e.g., SOPHRD, EEA). It is deemed that they have clearer and more tangible results: “Maximum effects with minimum efforts, that is recognition, presence on the European market, possibility to sign collaborations after the teachers or students get to know each other, participation in research or other joint professional projects”. (university teacher, ERASMUS mobility)

Moreover, the fact that there is ongoing support for beginners leads to constantly generating program entry experiences, which keeps the high participation rate.

In terms of the perception of those managing the programme and of the beneficiaries covered by our study, there is an unanimous agreement that the programme changes/ impact on the communities and institutions with responsibilities for education is, undoubtedly, superior to those of other regional/national programmes focusing on internationalization, especially due to the **high volume of mobility flows** generated by ERASMUS+ and its predecessor (LLP).

As for the implementation of the ERASMUS+ Programme in higher education, it has been noticed that **the effects of the abroad internationalization** (higher mobilities of students and teaching, administrative and research staff, cross-boarded projects, etc.) **are obvious compared to those of the at home internationalization** (adapting the curricula, developing the institutional transparency procedures and recognizing the studies/trainings done abroad, facilitating the integration of foreign students and teachers, etc.)

All study participants referred to the development of cross-cutting/soft skills, especially language skills, an inter-cultural attitude (language and cultural contribution), of the European citizenship and inter-personal cooperation, **which increase employment chances**.

“I also learned Spanish, apart from English and German, because all my colleagues were Spanish, they didn't speak English, and I knew a little Spanish from back home, so I had to improve it. With three foreign languages in my Resume and an experience abroad I was able to find a job in a multinational company.” (ERASMUS student)

“...SEV offers young people the unique opportunity of going to another country, where they can have professional orientation or reorientation.” (Representative of a beneficiary organization)

On the other hand, the self-knowledge and personal development experienced in another culture changed mentalities, destinies, helped with the inter-personal knowledge and eliminated some stereotypes of false images about oneself: “The experience of making comparisons is enriching.” (ERASMUS student)

The possibility of getting know know directly how other system work, some of them very good, changed the teacher- students relationship and generated new perspectives for the learning fields and practices in school.

“I applied for the ERASMUS + mobility after meeting an ERASMUS student that had come to our university; I wanted to see what I can do so that my students are as motivated and have the same skills as those I admired in this student.” (university teacher)

“What I appreciated there a lot was that we had a lot of practical applications, that allowed me to learn and discover new things, to see that the field is not that boring as I was starting to believe. The experience gave me different perspectives.” (ERASMUS + grant beneficiary)

Regulatory stability - the programme works by clear rules and projects evolve in a more predictable way. Most beneficiaries interviewed see the way in which they are trained and the fact that the rules don't change along the way as some of the programme strengths, in the project evaluators' opinion, ERASMUS + is coherent, constnt and predictable:

“The procedures are simple, the acceptance mechanisms are easy, very transparent, they focus a lot on meritocracy. Even our selection was a clear, beautiful and transparent process, and I think that this should be continued.”

“ ERASMUS + contributes to educating people in project writing, management and implementation, which is something.”

The fact that the inspectors for European programmes and projects from the territorial school inspectorates oversee from the beginning how the application is written and assist in the project implementation ensures the coherence of practices, as they can promote and implement well-substantiated local policy decisions.

Components such as cooperation, learning by doing, leadership and the existence of a common space for project participants facilitate finding various ways of ensuring the sustainability of the interventions carried out under the projects: consortia, networks, platforms, outputs, skills, etc. The representatives of the beneficiary organizations highlight some of these effects:

“We have the experience of web platforms launched through implementation consortia 8 years ago, which are still working. It is not the case for the platform to die once the project ends.”

“...If we speak of sustainability, there is a big difference between KA1 and KA2. If under KA2 you generate some outputs that you hope would be sustainable, under KA1 it's very difficult to ensure project sustainability. In my opinion, the sustainability of KA1 projects relates more to the individual learning side and less on outputs.”

“We created a school-based curriculum where we apply what we learned during the trainings, and it was approved by the inspector. It was actually KA1 and we hadn’t planned on writing a guide, but we felt the need to do so, because they asked so many information that eventually we found it easier to just write it.”

All participants acknowledge the added value of the ERASMUS+ Programme, focusing on the flexibility of approaches, strengthening the organizational development and recognizing the non-formal learning experiences In the school inspectors` opinion, “the added value of ERASMUS+ is the easier integration of students on the labour market and the compatibility ensured at the level of education/training systems.” Projects based on European partnerships **can create more chances for equal participation to studies abroad, including for students with disabilities**, and the experience is positive, because “it generates confidence, optimism and recognition of the personal worth” (representative of a beneficiary school organization).

“It really helped our deaf students who benefited from the training internships, in finding a job. Usually funding entities ask for experience and the organization CV, whereas in ERASMUS priority is given to new organizations.” (Representative of a beneficiary organization).

In the school field, the increased visibility and institutional prestige in the community are grounds for development opportunities, for instance for vocational schools that are faced with association issues (vocational school principle). At the same time, valorisation conferences are a good setting to promote best practice examples, that contribute to **improving and enriching institutional practices**.

“Lower level of formalism and bureaucracy” (representative of university ERASMUS office) compared to that of other projects, represents a factor that determines, for instance, a change in the financial management practices from schools/universities and that is why this programme is better preferred than others. At the same time, the experience of writing and managing projects lead to and requires a better allocation of responsibilities among partners during all project stages, including for the reporting period.

Compared to other programme components, the existence of ERASMUS+ offices in universities is a clear effect of the programme, generated at institutional structural level, and a factor ensuring stability of changes/sustainability, through the **routine of the internationalization activities** such as mobilities. Most beneficiaries feel that the **implementation of the ERASMUS+ Programme is better coordinated by ANPCDEFP**, compared to the experience of interacting with other agencies or intermediary bodies.

Despite the benefits perceived, the absence of statistical data to assess the impact of the ERASMUS+ programme on beneficiaries and the system represents a limitation when issuing conclusions on the added value and sustainability of this European intervention. Most beneficiaries interviewed state that they are happy with the results of the projects implemented and are motivated to multiply this experience both personally and institutionally, in the future. Despite the obvious benefits, the authorities refrain/cannot yet provide data that supports the added value brought at European level. For instance, impact assessment is still too early for the KA1 responsibilities: *“...In the absence of an analysis, we only have impressions. We still another year to see what happens to those that applied in 2014.”*

Q 20 B. Possibilities for adjustment of the ERASMUS programme + its successor, in order to boost its European added value

Evidence-based decisions and analysis of the needs. According to those in charge of the programme, it is necessary to have a **set of studies and analyses** related to the effects of the implementation of European programmes in Romania, in order to be able to put the results of the ERASMUS + programme into context.

„Also, in the follow up „it would be worth seeing what happens. There are, for instance, very large programmes, financed as part of Lingua (Socrates 1 and 2 projects) that are still operational. I’ve learnt about them by accident, because they relate to multilingualism and European language label. Maybe there are others, I don’t know.” (member of the Communication Department of ANPCDEFP)

„We’re missing a global image of what happened with these programmes, which would “then allow a reallocation per domains. The Agency should be multiplied in the 8 development regions or at county level, by 41. It is very good that there are good practices and that work has been carried out with the inspectors

within projects at the level of each county, but it is not enough, because training the beneficiaries is vital, and you can't train them all. In that case, **identifying more efficient ways to train the agents, who can contact or mobilise the beneficiaries** I believe could be a useful strategy. And this is the strength of the Agency, that it always managed to convey emulation, which is essential. But it should be taken further, at grass-root level - in the rural areas and in areas where access is very difficult but with a stake in education.” (ERASMUS+ project evaluator)

Supporting language education/ multilingualism. Most beneficiaries identify language education both as a resource, therefore as limitation, and as a result of the participation to the ERASMUS+ programme. **Multilingualism should have its own action or there should be a clearer and more consistent delimitation of the actions dedicated to it.** According to the perception of the respondents, supporting multilingualism is more than learning a language, it's developing the intercultural skills, the tools to help interaction with other cultures, and developing tolerance. In this sense, the tool made available by the Commission for the academia and for VET is restrictive and limited, compared to the needs. “Language education has the great power to create a link between education and the labour market”. (member of the Communication Department). It is one of those *soft skills* with great impact, but the data on this matter is insufficiently documented or exploited.

Taking the programme to disadvantaged areas

“It needs to reach further, in the rural area and in social/ cultural areas where access is very difficult, but with a stake in education.” This is one of the challenges mentioned both by the beneficiaries and the authorities.

“If we look at the number of projects submitted by the NGOs or the schools, there are few serving the interests of rural areas or submitted from the rural area. And this is a big problem because the gap between the urban and the rural is a national problem. This is a dimension that should be tackled - I don't know whether it should necessarily be done through setting priorities ... but through a different type of encouragement of those in charge of the problems in the rural area.” (ERASMUS+ programme evaluator)

With reference to school education, a solution – according to a KA1 officer, would be to take over the model from the VET programmes which included student mobility.

Developing complementary mechanism, including financing mechanisms. According to most beneficiaries, ERASMUS+ is a functional system model that should be promoted at governmental level and that should be supported through a fund meant to increase participation. The aim is increasing the flexibility of the relations between the components of the programme, to provide more unity.

“The mechanism is in place, there's a procedure, there's a scheme, there are examples, so a new programme does not need to be invented”. (ERASMUS + office representative)

“A VET high school can send teachers for school education and vocational education. Also, students can be sent for vocational education. Unfortunately, we don't know whether these projects are complementary. In 2021, I'd like to see a programme aimed at the entire entity, which would cover all components.” (KA1 officer, ANPCDEFP)

Ensuring stability and coherence in the medium and long term

“The message is – **leave the programme as it is, don't stop it, don't make it more complicated!** (...) There are intentions by the committee to correct certain areas, losses, lack of funding with certain specificities (distances that aren't too great not covered by these amounts) and introduces new regulations and new allocation systems almost annually, and although they might be specific, they are not backed up by clear methodology. This creates discomfort for larger areas, although it is intended to please the beneficiaries (...) The feeling is that each year brings some sort of novelty, with the intention of facilitating certain aspects, but it is not well thought out and therefore corrections are attempted along the way.” (KA2 representative, ANPCDEFP)

ERASMUS+ Office Representatives in universities are making the following recommendations related to programme management: organising periodical trainings for new staff with ERASMUS + duties (the bi-annual seminars are insufficient), organising contact seminars with representatives of foreign companies to organise placements, flexibility of the Past-Performance criterion for universities to take into account the institution's request for mobility, clearer spending rules for the OM funds (Organisational Support for Mobility), a improvement, per categories, of the destination countries, after a more rigorous evaluation of the living cost (examples of groups of countries were mentioned in the same category – Germany and Bulgaria).

Q21. The extent to which ERASMUS + is capable of efficient absorption of the budget increase provided for the following years (up to 2020) in your country. Possibility of using larger budgets more efficiently. Challenges in using more money.

Romania has a very high absorption capacity. The needs of all domains are significant, they are not covered by the current funds, according to a representative of the Management Department. Programme predictability, in relation to other programmes (in the opinion of the county school inspectorate representatives - school education and the opinion of the representatives of the higher education establishments), and unit cost financing system is a strength. All programmes required more money, since the ration between the number of applications and projects financed results in a drastic selection (in the opinions of the representatives of the Communication Department – Eurydice; county school inspectorate staff; KA1 officer). *“Each programme has its needs, not necessarily other opportunities”*, according to representatives of the Communication Department – Eurydice. The budget adsorption rate is of 98.5%, and the budget increases every year, according to the representatives of the Communication Department. In the opinion of the E+ officers, there are no difficulties in fund adsorption in higher education. Larger financial allocations are required for projects involving student mobility, according to county school inspectorate inspectors. At European level, there are budget imbalances: *“some countries have a larger budget that isn't used”* (county school inspectorate inspectors). 59.1% of the respondents in institutions that had not received LLP/ETASMUS+ financing consider that important modification would be required to the programme to allow for the possibility of participation for more organisations/ schools.

“These projects have proved their worth and they need to be multiplied”. “There should be an equalisation of the amounts allotted to the participants in different projects meetings and those allotted to participants teaching-learning-training activities within the KA2 partnerships”.

Possibility of using larger budgets in a more efficient manner could be fostered by rebalancing the budget for strategic partnerships (management unit). *“ERASMUS+ programme have no funding alternatives,”*, according to the representatives of the Communication Department - Eurydice. It would be necessary to create a national fund to finance mobility, like in other member states, according to the Evaluation Department representatives (*“There are member states with a mobility fund. The mechanism is in place, there's a procedure, there's a diagram, there are examples, so a new programme does not need to be invented”*).

The challenges in using (more) resources : the trends in the first 4 years of ERASMUS+ show a constant high level of interest for ERASMUS+ projects in all the fields and for all organizational categories; therefore, there are no challenges in using more resources.

According to E+ Office Representatives in higher education, it would be useful to divide the destination countries in categories after a more realistic cost evaluation *“depending on the purchasing power and the salary range in each country”* (for example *“Germany and Bulgaria are in the same category”*); increasing the subsistence allowance in Nordic countries; taking into account mobility requests from universities and not *“past performance in allocating the number of approved or financed mobilities. This past performance should be re-evaluated in allocating the number of mobilities. It could be a correction coefficient, with a lesser contribution. There are universities for which this is an obstacle.”*

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

EFFECTIVENESS

1. **The success of the previous programmes: Life-Long Learning and Youth in Action programmes, had a significant positive contribution to the reputation of the ERASMUS+ programme.** The transition from one programme to the other was well organised and prepared, although in the first year of ERASMUS+ many applications continued the logics of the previous components. The research shows that after a short natural inertia, there was a gradual improvement.
2. **The National Agency managed the transition period successfully,** operating adequate modifications to the staff structure and to the internal organisation of the institution. The change process was treated as an institutional learning experience which led to increasing the efficiency of their activity. The development of support networks for territorial institutions was an advantage for more efficient programme management.
3. **The simplification of the financial management, as well as the trust and visibility created at the on-set of the ERASMUS were certainly positive elements of the transition, but also generated a certain confusion and need for adaptation from the beneficiaries.** Research data indicates that an adjustment period was necessary for the beneficiaries, to get them accustomed to the new approaches, particularly in the case of public education establishments.
4. **The instruments, the successful practices experimented within the projects, could be capitalised on through national strategies, policy documents or methodologies.** Many of the implemented projects are aimed at developing competencies and innovation in certain domains, but they cannot contribute directly and immediately to the development of official documents, capitalised on at national level (as policies, strategies etc.). What is obvious, nevertheless, is the worth of all instruments and practices used, as they highlight that it is useful to have forum in charge of gathering success elements and using them into policies and national strategies.
5. **The success and experience of certain projects in the LLP and YiA programmes appear to be, in many cases, favouring factors for successful projects under the ERASMUS+ programme.** With regard to KA1, for example, the data shows that there is an important percentage of the applications submitted by schools that had already received funding, with experience and skills in drafting coherent projects, with chances of success. By contrast, schools in the most disadvantaged areas, either do not apply or do not get financing. The main reasons for which they do not apply are: lack of project drafting skills, lack of foreign language communication skills, fear of project management, high staff fluctuation, excessive workload for teachers and principals etc. It is likely for things to improve throughout the implementation of the Inclusion strategy launched by the Agency in 2016.
6. **The implementation of the ERASMUS+ programmes and of the previous programmes has stimulated the organisational development of NGOs with various areas of expertise.** The implementation of the ERASMUS programme provided the NGOs with the possibility of operating and providing actions for target groups, and with the possibility of developing the organisation and national and international networks. The ERASMUS programme has been contributing and continues to contribute to improving project drafting and management skills.
7. **The projects proposed for financing still have shortcomings in terms of describing the expected impact.** According to the information provided by the project evaluators, the applications continue to be fragmented and deficient in the impact section, due to the lack of concrete indicators and the lack of specific descriptions related to the effects on the direct and indirect beneficiaries of the projects. That is why, support for applicants is required for the purpose of achieving better expression of the expected impact, in terms of indicators, but also their correlation with the expected impact of the Programme.
8. **The information infrastructure behind the implementation of the ERASMUS+ programme had numerous weaknesses in use, which is common knowledge for all National Agencies.** Users were under the impression that often attempts to fix some problems would lead to creating other problems. They hope that the future programme will enjoy a more stable electronic infrastructure.

EFFICIENCY

1. **In terms of efficiency, the results arrived at justify or even exceed budget allocations, considered, in many cases, insufficient. Overall, financial allocations are insufficient, and allocations between domains and key actions could be reviewed.** For example, from the perspective of the respondents there is an unbalance between global financial allocations in the ERASMUS+ Programme, which currently has several mobility funds. The research data highlighted, nonetheless, the need to find a balance through more important allocations for strategic partnerships, which are able to create an impact at the level of education systems, training or youth – with proper financing. According to the data provided by the National Agency, the increase announced in 2014 of the budget for ERASMUS+ becomes visible only in 2017 and will continue until 2020.
2. **The good operation of the Programme stemmed from its internal, correlated with the steps taken by the beneficiaries.** Within the programme, financial support is seen from the outside as being predictable. The direct relationship between the terms of the contract (well understood and undertaken by the parties) and financial support is considered predictable.
3. **The research data indicates the need to invest in directions such as structured dialogue for the youth or adult education,** which currently have insufficient budgets, by comparison to the requests/ needs of the beneficiaries.

RELEVANCE

1. **At the level of the Programme and of the National Agency, there is constant concern for encouraging the participation through applications from all areas and all (potential) beneficiaries that are less well represented.** This was a permanent concern for the Agency. Encouraging areas or groups that are less well represented in terms of applications through training sessions, through constructive feedback after evaluation, were support elements for the development of project drafting and management skills within the organisations. These steps lead to building “traditional partnerships” - consortiums which attracted new beneficiaries without experience in implementing European projects, from disadvantaged areas, whose actions were aimed directly at the population in the respective areas.
2. **Nevertheless, there are some categories of beneficiaries or mobility types that are poorly represented:** early education, job shadowing, decreased demand for volunteer conducting mobility in Romania. It is necessary to have strategies that are better directed at certain categories of audience: from the rural area; strategies for people with special needs in the university area (for which an inclusion strategy has already been launched).
3. **It is necessary to have a better identification of the training needs for the direct beneficiaries and the applicant organisations.** The impact of the projects proposed for financing are still deficient in identifying the needs of the beneficiaries and in formulating the expected impact. That is why, in 2016 the design for project drafting (delivered by the trainers in the network coordinated by the Agency) was modified to place more accent on the sessions for the identification of organisational needs.
4. **Projects in the field of school education are perceived as being very relevant in relation to the needs of the schools, teachers and pupils, even if respondents admit there are project where the declared needs as more “supply driven”.** Schools need such projects and are very interested in developing their project management skills in order to enjoy the opportunities of the ERASMUS+ programme (there are many training requests concerning project drafting from schools). The applications forms are complex and discourage those less experienced in drafting projects.
5. **There are certain areas which overlap.** For example, **Europass and the Youthpass** tool – share some overlapping, and there does not appear to be an intention of unification; it entails confusion for the **European audience**.

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL COHERENCE AND COMPLEMENTARITY

1. **From all perspectives, projects under ERASMUS+ are more effective and efficient than other projects from other financing sources:** their results are clearer results, tangible, they allow

delimitation, they have a reduced level of formalism and bureaucracy as compared to other projects e delimited (such as FSE).

2. **By comparison to other projects, the implementation of ERASMUS+ enjoys very good and experienced coordination from the National Agency.** According to the research data collected from the beneficiaries, the standards guiding the programme are much clearer than in other programmes, and project evolution is more predictable. Beneficiaries are informed, trained and the rules, don't change along the way. The ERASMUS+ programme has a clear identity between the financing available for education and training, with no competing initiative. This is mainly due to the transnational component which it capitalizes on.
3. **In terms of implementation, it is considered that organising several rounds of applications every year, for education and training, like under LLP, was a better option.** A single round of applications per year means a longer waiting time for those who did not received financing and who want to re-submit the projects or for those who did not submit application but would be interested in such projects. It should be noted that for the Youth Sector there are 3 rounds per year, but the Agency is of the opinion that two rounds would be sufficient. The first two are much too close and do not allow for enough time to improve applications.

EUROPEAN ADDED VALUE AND SUSTAINABILITY

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Continuing and extending the programme with additional financial allocations for K2 (strategic partnerships, for all sectors) and for projects involving mobility of students and adults in the *learners* category – these projects have proven their worth and it is necessary to multiply them.
2. Strengthening the support systems for school and managerial teams in disadvantaged areas or institutions and organisations working with children at risk of social and school exclusion.
3. Diversifying assistance provided to education establishments or other organisations having failed repeatedly in the application selection process, which did not receive financing for any project. Organising several contact, information and training seminars in the areas where schools accessed few projects.
4. Identifying, by the Ministry of National Education, of mechanism for promotion and valorisation of good practices resulted following the implementation of ERASMUS+ projects, in order to allow scaling within strategic projects at national level.
5. Balancing allocated amounts per categories of actions, in line with the needs identified.
6. Planning two rounds of applications per year, to increase success chances for some categories of beneficiaries having failed repeatedly.
7. Training activities for the technical, administrative and accounting personnel, involved in project implementation. A proposal from the beneficiaries would be issuing – by the Ministry of Public Finance – of financial-administrative norms for schools to observe, training of accountants by the National Agency upon contract conclusion;
8. Study visits for individuals with guidance and control positions, special programmes for principals/ eligibility of the county school inspectorate for mobility;
9. Simplifying application forms. ERASMUS+ forms appear simpler, but are sophisticated and involve nuances that are difficult to manage, they demotivate and cause abandonment of intentions to draft a projects, at least for projects requesting little financing and aimed only at cooperation for good practice exchange;
10. Simplifying and improving the online reporting system.

5. Annexes

Table 1 List of research tools and number of people investigated

Research methods	No of tools applied	No of participants
Individual interview ANPCDEFP management (general director, deputy director)	1	2
Individual interview Programme and project inspector, MNE	1	1
Group interview NA action teams (Communication, Eurydice)	1	2
Group interview NA action teams (KA2)	1	2
Group interview NA action teams (KA1)	1	6
Focus group Programme and project inspectors, County School Inspectorate	1	25
Questionnaire Programme and project inspectors, County School Inspectorate	1	42
Focus group with students, beneficiaries of ERASMUS+	2	24
Focus group Representatives of ERASMUS+ university offices	2	20
Focus group (world cafe method) Representatives of ERASMUS+ university offices	1	60
Questionnaire Representatives of ERASMUS+ university offices	1	60
Focus group ERASMUS+ trainers	1	8
Focus group ERASMUS+ evaluators	1	8
Focus group NGOs	1	8
Focus group Beneficiary organizations (best practices)	1	25
Focus group Decision-makers, ECVET experts	1	8
Questionnaire Special schools that did not have projects	1	15
Case studies Organizations that benefited from ERASMUS+ projects	1	14

Table 2 List of NA reports analyzed as part of the evaluation

1.	Report on the questionnaire-based survey on the impact of the participation of teachers in training/learning mobilities funded under the “Lifelong learning” Programme, 2007-2013 ⁴
2.	Report on the questionnaire-based survey on the impact of the participation of IVET students in vocational training mobilities funded under the Lifelong Learning Programme - Leonardo da Vinci sectoral programme, on their labour market integration (2015) ⁵
3.	Report on the results of the analysis of the answers to the questionnaire-based survey on the satisfaction of project candidates and beneficiaries under the ERASMUS+ programme, for 2015. ⁶

⁴ http://www.anpcdefp.ro/userfiles/Raport_studiu_profesori16.pdf

⁵ http://www.anpcdefp.ro/userfiles/Raport_studiu_IVT.pdf

⁶ http://www.anpcdefp.ro/userfiles/Satisfactie_externa_2015_public.pdf

4.	Results of the satisfaction survey among beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries of LLP, TIA and ERASMUS+ 2014 ⁷
5.	Results of the satisfaction survey among beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries of TIA and TIA 2013 ⁸
6.	Results of the satisfaction survey among beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries of TIA and TIA 2012 ⁹
7.	Results of the satisfaction survey among beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries of TIA and TIA 2011 ¹⁰
8.	Results of the satisfaction survey among beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries of TIA and TIA 2010 ¹¹
9.	Report on the implementation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in 2013 ¹²
10.	Report on the implementation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in 2012 ¹³
11.	Stories in movement... ¹⁴ - stories awarded during the Stories in movement Competition - the most beautiful mobility experience, July-September 2012.
12.	Report on the implementation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in 2011
13.	Impact Report- Additional measures to fund the Comenius mobility, 2011
14.	Report on the implementation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in 2010
15.	Report on the implementation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in 2008 2009
16.	Report on the implementation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in 2007 2008
17.	Report on the TIA Programme implementation

⁷ http://www.anpcdefp.ro/userfiles/Raport_satisfactie_externa_2014.pdf

⁸ http://www.anpcdefp.ro/userfiles/Raport_privind_satisfactia_beneficiarilor_2013.pdf

⁹ http://www.anpcdefp.ro/userfiles/raport_satisfactie_2012.pdf

¹⁰ [http://www.anpcdefp.ro/userfiles/raport_satisfactie_2011\(1\).pdf](http://www.anpcdefp.ro/userfiles/raport_satisfactie_2011(1).pdf)

¹¹ http://www.anpcdefp.ro/userfiles/Raport_satisfactie_2010.pdf

¹² http://www.anpcdefp.ro/userfiles/Raport_2013_ver_2.pdf

¹³ http://www.anpcdefp.ro/userfiles/Raport_2012.pdf

¹⁴ http://www.anpcdefp.ro/userfiles/brosura_mobilitate.pdf