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# National Report on the Implementation and Impact of Erasmus+ in Norway



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# National Report on the Implementation and Impact of Erasmus+ in Norway

MIDTERM EVALUATION OF THE ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME 2021-2027 AND THE  
FINAL EVALUATION OF THE ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME 2014-2020

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# Executive summary

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This national report on the implementation and impact of Erasmus+ in Norway presents the main findings from the midterm evaluation of the 2021-2027 programme, and the final evaluation of the 2014-2020 programme in Norway. The evaluation has been conducted by the independent consultancy firm, ideas2evidence, after an open and competitive call for tenders issued by the Ministry of Education and Research.

The findings, conclusions and suggestions for improvements presented in this report are based on extensive data, from both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data collected for this report include in-depth interviews with all Norwegian National Agencies (NA) and National Authorities (NAU), with beneficiaries and participants across all target fields, sectors and most actions, and a survey to all Norwegian project coordinators. Secondary sources include existing research reports on Erasmus+ in Norway, and statistics from the Norwegian NAs on applicants and projects awarded.

## Effectiveness

Erasmus+ has to a large extent delivered the expected outputs, results and impacts in Norway. Awareness and use of the programme have increased, and the ambitious quantitative targets for the current period outlined in the Government Strategy are all within reach. Cooperation with European partners enables Norwegian institutions and organisations to share and develop knowledge, methods and best practices that hold the potential of improving the quality of their operation. In regard to mobility, soft benefits such as intercultural learning and increased self-efficacy are more predominant than academic and subject-specific learning.

The four horizontal priorities have been well received, mainly because of their close alignment with national challenges and priorities. The priorities have influenced the thematic orientation of the projects, and to some extent the design and execution of the activities. Despite a strong commitment to the green transformation among many stakeholders and users, a green approach to international collaboration and mobility is hard to achieve in practice in Norway, mainly due to the long distances to most European destinations. The extra focus on inclusion of groups with fewer opportunities has been well received and perceived as a call for action in Norway.

The strong political push, combined with the efficiency of the NAs, are important driving forces behind the positive results. Some of the changes made to the current programme, e.g. small-scale partnerships, accreditation of mobility projects and the Partnerships for Excellence, have also added to the results. On the negative side, bureaucratic application procedures, abstract language and dysfunctional IT systems have reduced the programme's ability to achieve its objectives.

## Efficiency

Cost efficiency seems to have improved within KA2 and centralised actions from the previous programme, partly due to the introduction of lump-sum budgeting and small-scale partnerships within KA2, and reduced application requirements within centralised actions. Within KA1, the administration of mobility has become more labour-intensive within higher education, while the introduction of accreditation actions has improved cost efficiency in other sectors. Further simplifications can improve participation, especially within youth and sport.

The collaborations between the NAs/NAUs and the European Commission, and between the NAs and the sectors, are considered satisfactory. However, the NAs and sectors call for more, early, and clear information from the Commission regarding centralised actions.

## Relevance

The objectives of Erasmus+ are relevant to identified needs and problems in Norwegian society, as well as to the programme's target sectors. The current programme is perceived as more relevant than the previous one. However, reaching relevant organisations within the youth and sport sectors has proven challenging, due to the heterogeneity of the fields, as well as scarcity of administrative capacity in many relevant organisations.

## Coherence

The different actions and objectives have a high degree of internal coherence, with a potential for synergies between the various actions. There are also signs of an increase in internal coherence, compared to the previous period. Concerning external coherence, there are examples of synergies between Erasmus+ and other available programmes, although there seems to be room for improvements in this area.

## Added value

For stakeholders, institutions and participants, the Erasmus+ programme enables activities and collaborations that would not otherwise be possible through alternative funding. The primary added value is the extensive collaborations and networks across borders, which in turn produce the outputs, results and outcomes. The discontinuation of the programme would result in considerably reduced opportunities for mobility, dwindling networks and bring most of the activities funded by the programme to a halt.

To ensure the sustainability of results and outcomes, leadership commitment to projects as well as wider organisational involvement is paramount. Several changes to the design of the current programme to ensure leadership buy-in have been well received among stakeholders and institutions alike, especially the accreditation actions and the European Universities initiative (EUI).

Despite Norway's position as a non-EU country, Norwegian stakeholders and beneficiaries believe that European values are highly relevant, and that the programme contributes to a more positive impression of European collaboration in Norway.

## Suggestions for improvements

### High importance

- ◆ Better adapt the application process and its terminology to the administrative resources and language of the various target sectors.
- ◆ Improve the coherence between the objectives of mobility and the green horizontal priority by conducting a thorough analysis of ways to improve the individual users' cost-benefit considerations of green travel.
- ◆ Increase the additional funding for green travel.
- ◆ Reduce the complexity of student grant calculation, e.g. use month as the calculation unit rather than day.
- ◆ Continue the improvement of existing IT systems both at the system and user level, particularly the Beneficiary module. Ensure continuity of IT systems across programme periods.

- ◆ Remove the strict regional budget quotas in KA171 International mobility to allow for stronger synergies between Erasmus+ funding and funding from Norwegian programmes focusing on cooperation outside of Europe.
- ◆ For the next programme period, reconsider the budget profile. A more linear budget profile would improve the probability of a steady growth in high-quality applicants and the absorption of the budget increase.
- ◆ Improve access to information and transparency about centralised actions, for both NAs and users.

### Additional suggestions

- ◆ Continue the efforts to include stricter eligibility checks to reduce the number of projects submitted by “application factories”.
- ◆ Adjust the dedicated financial support mechanism for inclusion of those with more complex needs.
- ◆ Reduce the number of audits and controls imposed on the NAs, to free funds that can be directed towards core activities.
- ◆ Further increase the NAs’ flexibility in the distribution of funds between actions, as funding for some actions is inadequate.

# Chapter 1: Overview of Erasmus+ in Norway

Through the EEA Agreement, Norway is a programme country in Erasmus+ on par with EU Member States. Norway has participated in the various forms of the Erasmus+ programme since 1992. It is generally held that the participation has yielded good results and that Erasmus+ has allowed Norway to pursue vital national policy objectives in the areas of education, training, youth and sport through European cooperation.

## The Government Strategy

Shortly after the launch of the new Erasmus+ 2021-2027 programme, the Norwegian Government published its strategy for Norway's participation in Erasmus+ and the European Education Area (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2021). The Strategy emphasises the alignment of European and Norwegian objectives, priorities and challenges within the fields of education, training, youth and sport, and states that the cooperation in the period 2021-2027 shall:

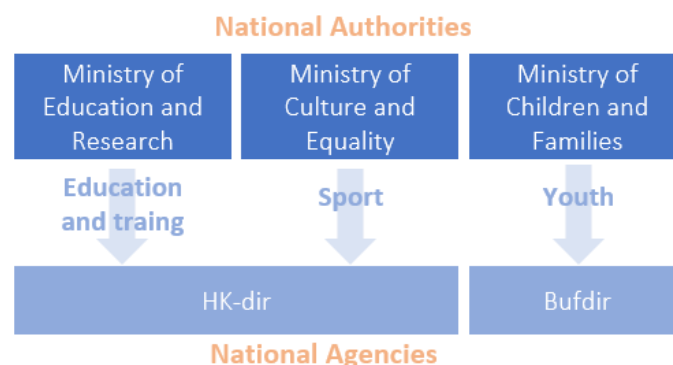
1. ... help to solve major societal challenges,
2. ... strengthen collaboration between education, training, the labour market and society,
3. ... give more people an opportunity to participate in an international learning environment,
4. ... contribute to the development of policy and framework conditions.

To achieve these objectives, the strategy defines a set of quantitative targets for Norwegian participation in the various actions and activities. These are ambitious aims and involve doubling quantitative participation in several actions compared to the previous period.

## Governance and implementation

The responsibility for funding and implementing the decentralised actions in Norway is shared between two National Agencies (NAs). The Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (HK-dir) is in charge of the fields of education and training, and sport, with the Ministry of Education and Research (KD) and the Ministry of Culture and Equality (KUD) as National Authorities (NAUs), respectively. The Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Bufdir) is NA for the youth field, while the Ministry of Children and Families (BFD) is the NAU for this field.

Figure 1: Organisation of Erasmus+ in Norway





## Erasmus+ 2021-2027 in numbers

The new Erasmus+ 2021-2027 programme has been well received across the target sectors in Norway, and the quantitative targets in the Government Strategy are within reach for the majority of actions and activities. As of October 2023, the two NAs report the following key numbers:

Table 1: Status of Erasmus+ decentralised funding in the period 2021 to October 2023<sup>1</sup>

		Projects		Grants		Participants	
		Submitted	Awarded	Submitted	Awarded	Submitted	Awarded
<b>Higher education</b>							
KA131	Mobility projects	100	100		37 053 048	23 934	16 293
KA171	International mobility projects	39	35	12 775 928	5 169 451	2 884	1 147
KA220	Cooperation partnerships	50	20	18 052 803	7 150 523		
	Sum	189	155	30 828 731	49 373 022	26 818	17 440
<b>School education</b>							
KA120	Accreditations	218	170				
KA121	Accredited mobility projects	214	213		11 475 974	17 363	9 049
KA122	Mobility projects	48	39	1 536 103	1 268 663	916	791
KA210	Small-scale partnerships	54	25	2 850 000	1 230 000		
KA220	Cooperation partnerships	52	17	13 395 747	3 741 651		
	Sum	586	464	17 781 850	17 716 288	18 279	9 840
<b>Vocational education and training</b>							
KA120	Accreditations	129	108				
KA121	Accredited mobility projects	148	148		14 808 534	8 421	5 337
KA122	Mobility projects	32	26	1 588 016	1 181 603	506	396
KA210	Small-scale partnerships	19	7	1 050 000	390 000		
KA220	Cooperation partnerships	37	16	11 661 670	5 224 280		
	Sum	365	305	14 299 686	21 604 417	8 927	5 733
<b>Adult education</b>							
KA120	Accreditations	34	26				
KA121	Accredited mobility projects	38	38		1 291 815	868	860
KA122	Mobility projects	37	34	1 058 762	875 445	556	493
KA210	Small-scale partnerships	40	19	2 250 000	990 000		
KA220	Cooperation partnerships	68	21	18 369 513	4 853 038		
	Sum	217	138	21 678 275	8 010 298	1 424	1 353
<b>Sport</b>							
KA182	Mobility projects	9	9	152 759	64 470	66	35
<b>Youth</b>							
KA150	Accreditations	8	3				
KA151	Accredited mobility projects	4	3		413 502	350	500
KA152	Mobility of young people	250	79	11 125 400	3 591 367	12 753	4 485
KA153	Mobility of Youth workers	56	20	2 247 914	833 390	2 215	875
KA154	Youth participation activities	56	33	2 425 995	1 355 612	8 037	5 388
KA155	Discover EU inclusion actions	11	9	180 243	147 013	72	62
KA210	Small-scale partnerships	90	23	5 250 000	1 320 000		
KA220	Cooperation partnerships	63	20	15 569 852	5 130 942		
	Sum	538	190	36 799 404	12 791 826	23 427	11 310
<b>All sectors</b>							
	HK-dir - National agency	1 366	1 071	84 741 301	96 768 495	55 514	34 401
	Buudir - National agency	538	190	36 799 404	12 791 826	23 427	11 310
	<b>Grand total</b>	<b>1 904</b>	<b>1 261</b>	<b>121 540 705</b>	<b>109 560 321</b>	<b>78 941</b>	<b>45 711</b>

<sup>1</sup> Please note that accredited mobility projects do not submit a budget, but a number of mobilities. However, when the project is awarded, the awarded number of mobilities is reflected in an awarded grant. For this reason, submitted and awarded grants are not directly comparable in all rows where numbers are aggregated across actions. As an example, HK-dir comes out with a higher number for awarded grants as compared to submitted grants for most sectors.

As of December 2023, a total of 1261 decentralised projects have been awarded a total of EUR 109 560 321. The awarded funding has supported 45 711 unique mobilities within KA1, across all sectors. For KA2, the portfolio of funded projects consists of 74 small-scale partnerships and 94 cooperation partnerships. In all sectors and for the majority of actions, the demand (submitted projects and grants) is considerably higher than the available funds.

## Chapter 2: Methods and data

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The evaluation has been conducted by the independent consultancy firm, ideas2evidence, after an open and competitive call for tenders issued by the Ministry of Education and Research. Adherence to the evaluation guidelines provided by the European Commission was emphasised as an essential requirement for the evaluation. In addition, a short list of evaluation questions was added by the Ministry. The majority of these were further specifications of questions already listed in the guidelines.

The evaluation is based on the following data and sources of information:

- ◆ A number of existing research reports and evaluations focusing on the implementation of specific parts of Erasmus+ in Norway.
- ◆ Data on submitted and awarded projects from the current and previous periods provided by the two NAs.
- ◆ Interviews with informants from the three NAUs (3 interviews) and the two NAs (9 group interviews).
- ◆ Interviews with beneficiaries and participants across all target fields and sectors (28 interviews).
- ◆ A survey sent to the contact persons for all projects awarded in the current programme period, coordinated from Norway (a total of 529 respondents).

All the interviews were based on interview guides covering relevant parts of the list of evaluation questions from the guidelines. The 28 interviews among beneficiaries and participants included the following groups:

- ◆ Erasmus+ coordinators at higher education institutions (HEIs) (3),
- ◆ partner of a European University Alliance (1),
- ◆ partner of a Centre of Vocational Excellence (1),
- ◆ coordinator of an Erasmus Mundus Joint Degree (1),
- ◆ coordinator of a European Teacher Academy (1),
- ◆ project coordinators across all levels of the school education sector (6),
- ◆ project coordinators from the VET sector (3),
- ◆ project coordinators from adult education centres (3),
- ◆ county level authorities responsible for accredited mobility projects in the school, VET and adult education sectors (2),
- ◆ project coordinators from sport organisations (2),
- ◆ coordinators of projects in the youth sector (3), and
- ◆ representatives of central umbrella organisations in the youth and sport fields (2).

The survey population comprised the contact persons for all projects in the current period, coordinated from Norway. However, given that a fair number of these individual respondents coordinate more than one

project, there are fewer unique contact persons than the number of projects. We decided that each contact person should only answer on behalf of one of these projects, and therefore asked them to choose one project among the alternatives. This gave us survey data material that allowed us to break down the answers by project characteristics, such as action codes. The response rate for the survey is high, close to 74 per cent, with a balanced distribution across sectors and actions.

The evaluation and the report follow the guidelines provided by the European Commission and address all five evaluation criteria of the intervention logic. However, when it comes to the more detailed research questions, the report gives priority to questions where our data material allows us to present the most relevant and useful input.

## Chapter 3: Effectiveness

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In the evaluation framework, the question of effectiveness concerns the extent to which the objectives of the Erasmus+ programme are achieved.

It is our general view that Erasmus+ has delivered the expected outputs, results and impacts in Norway. This is evident from quantitative indicators of participation and use, as well as from previous studies and evaluations. The numerous informants from the implementing bodies and target sectors whom we have interviewed in the context of the current evaluation, generally confirm this view.

### Outputs

From a quantitative point of view, Norway has witnessed a steady growth in general awareness of Erasmus+ and the actual use of the majority of actions over the last two programme periods, only interrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic. During the previous period (2014-2020), most of the quantitative targets set by the NAUs were met prior to the pandemic. Three years into the current period (2021-2027), the even more ambitious targets outlined in the Government Strategy are all within reach. Moreover, over the two programme periods, we have witnessed a gradual shift from a situation where Erasmus+ was largely seen as a mobility programme, to a more comprehensive understanding of the programme as also being a measure for institutional cooperation. The number of partnership projects coordinated by a Norwegian institution is also increasing.

With a few exceptions, the sectors have so far into the new programme period been able to absorb the increased budget without a significant reduction in the quality of the awarded projects. The quantitative growth has been particularly strong in the school and vocational education sectors. In higher education, where the great majority of institutions are involved in Erasmus+ activities, the development is particularly strong for KA1, both concerning the number of applicants and the volume of mobilities, but the interest in cooperation partnerships is also growing substantially. In addition, an increasing number of Norwegian HEIs have become partners and coordinators of centralised KA2 actions such as European Universities, Teacher Academies and Centres of Vocational Excellence. The weakest growth has so far been in the youth and sport sectors where it has taken longer to raise awareness of Erasmus+ among all potential user groups.

### Results and impacts

In regard to qualitative measures of goal attainment, there is less hard evidence to rely on, especially for the current programme period where the reporting from ongoing projects is still fragmentary. However,

several studies and reports based on data and experience from the preceding period provide a fair amount of evidence to suggest that Erasmus+ largely meets its objectives in Norway. The aims and objectives of the programme are in line with Norwegian priorities for the education, training, sport and youth sector, allowing the beneficiaries and participants to use Erasmus+ to add an international dimension to their regular activities and operations. Access to a network of quality-assured European partners is of utmost importance to enable international collaboration, especially for sectors with fewer alternative vehicles for international cooperation, i.e. the youth sector and lower levels of the educational system.

In our survey to the contact persons of all awarded projects in the current programme period, we asked to what extent the projects' objectives are achieved (appendix, figure 3.1). The majority of these are ongoing projects, and the assessment is thus based on perceived achievements to date. The average score is high, around 4.25 on a 5-point scale, all individual actions falling in the 3.82 - 4.50 range. KA2 projects score on average slightly higher than the KA1 projects (4.31 compared to 4.18). Using higher education as an example, cooperation partnerships score 4.25 compared to 3.85 for the mobility projects.

## Partnerships

Cooperation with European partners enables Norwegian institutions and organisations to share and develop knowledge, methods and best practices that hold the potential of improving the quality of their operation. In the education sector, where Erasmus+ is seen as the central tool for quality development, there are numerous examples of how KA2 activities have led to the development and subsequent use of new teaching methods, curricula and materials, as well as improvements of relevant systems, procedures and policies. Moreover, for the involved staff, the cooperation networks are arenas for development of knowledge and professional skills, as well as sources of personal experience, inspiration and job satisfaction. However, as we describe in more depth below, direct involvement in the partnerships is in some cases limited to a smaller number of dedicated individuals, and the methods and platforms for knowledge sharing at the institutional level are sometimes underdeveloped. This prevents the institutions from exploiting the full potential of the outputs and results from the collaborations.

The focus of Erasmus+ on cooperation between educational institutions and partners from the labour market and society is well aligned with important priorities in Norwegian educational policies, most significantly the emphasis on innovation, labour market relevance, lifelong learning and reducing school dropout rates. To encourage this type of cooperation, the Government Strategy states that at least 15 per cent of all partnerships for cooperation coordinated from Norway should involve partners from the business and employment sector. Thus far into the current programme period, the target is met by a solid margin. Close to 40 per cent of the awarded partnerships include a labour market partner. According to our informants from the education sectors, there are many examples of collaborations where the active involvement of labour market partners is crucial for the activities and outcome of the project. However, we have also learned of projects where the labour market partners play a more passive role, and where the expected cross-sector synergies are weaker. A clear and mutual understanding of the roles and interests of partners from different sectors of society within the context of the project seems to be a key factor in this respect.

## Mobility of learners

Regarding the KA1 activities, all evidence indicates that these are delivering the expected results in Norway, especially on the learner side. The interest in taking part in mobility projects far exceeds the available budgets, except in the adult education sector. The growth is particularly strong in the school education sector, where mobility for pupils was transferred from KA2 to KA1 from the previous to the current

programme period, and where the accreditation system seems to have boosted interest from several parts of the school system.

As regards the benefits to learners (pupils, apprentices and students), previous studies as well as our informants place particular emphasis on personal, social and cultural skills. Mobile learners become more confident, mature and independent as they learn to adjust to changing circumstances and to manage cultural as well as linguistic challenges. A mobility stay in a foreign country is, moreover, an arena for intercultural learning, promoting the development of values such as tolerance, understanding and solidarity. Language learning is also mentioned as an important outcome by many of our informants, both as a benefit in its own right, and as an instrument for achieving other benefits.

For students in higher education, mobility stays at a foreign HEI is also an opportunity to pursue academic goals. A study based on data from the preceding period (Ryssevik & Jones, 2020), shows that the average learning outcome for Norwegian students visiting a European university is quite high, and highest for students who were motivated by academic factors when they made the decision to study abroad. However, the study also showed that on average, culturally oriented motivations rank higher than academic oriented motivations, in the mobile student's decision-making process. This is in line with findings from a Nordic study of Erasmus+ student mobility based on data from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden (Haru et al., 2022).

When it comes to the other parts and levels of the educational system, the impact on learners' subject-specific competence and professional skills is less evident. A study of mobility in the vocational education and training sector (Dahle et al., 2019), concludes that the results are mixed. There are examples of schools that use Erasmus+ to offer students specialised training in a subfield they cannot offer at their own school, and in some instances VET mobility is used strategically by regions to develop and gain access to specialised competence that is in high demand in local industries. Others report that work placements have a more limited impact on the students' professional skills, as students primarily take on a role as bystanders or are assigned simpler tasks during the mobility stays.

A similar conclusion seems to be applicable in the school education sector. A study of *School-to-School Partnerships* and *School Exchange Partnerships* from the previous programme period (Dahle, Misje, et al., 2021), finds that "soft benefits" from mobility stays, such as intercultural understanding and personal development dominates, and that more academically oriented results are less evident. Unfortunately, there is not yet any systematic evidence to indicate how the transfer of mobility in the school education sector from thematically orientated KA2 projects to standard KA1 mobility projects, is affecting the balance between academic and "soft" benefits.

In the school education and VET sector, mobility of learners is generally perceived as positive for the climate of understanding and cooperation between staff and students. For many schools, international cooperation and learner mobility is also used as a means to improve the standing of the school compared to other schools in the area. Moreover, Dahle et al. (2019) finds that a number of schools in the vocational education sector report that the mobility projects have improved their standing in their local network of labour market partners and training facilities. The local business community views the schools as more relevant partners in an increasingly international labour market.

In the youth sector, informal learning opportunities for the development of personal, social and cultural skills is of particular importance. Findings from an analysis of data on Norwegian participation from the Ray monitoring surveys 2014-2020 (Huang & Bøler, 2021), indicate that the programme delivered the expected results for project coordinators and project participants. In addition to improved skills and competences, increased intercultural awareness, a European network of contacts and better understanding of diversity in

society were highlighted as especially important results. Our informants confirm that these results are still valid for the current programme period.<sup>2</sup> The mobilities increase the self-confidence and self-efficacy of the participating youths, which in turn improve their likelihood of employment.

The programme's focus on groups with fewer opportunities is important in this respect, and fully in line with Norwegian policy aims. Several informants report that mobility stays give marginalised youth a chance to reinvent themselves and improve their prospects. In the field of youth, 30 per cent of participants have over time been categorised as persons with "fewer opportunities". While this percentage dropped substantially during the pandemic, the NA reports that it is growing steadily but is still below the pre-pandemic level.

## Mobility of staff

A recent study of staff mobility in higher education in Norway (Ryssevik et al., 2023), finds that this is a particularly relevant scheme for smaller and less research-intensive HEIs. At institutions with easier access to international research funding (i.e. Horizon Europe), the balance between teaching and research oriented mobilities often tips towards the latter. The variation in the use of staff mobility across institutions therefore reflects the division of labour in the HEI sector and the priorities, reward structures and career paths that predominate at individual institutions. The study finds that staff at institutions with an explicit strategic commitment to staff mobility use the scheme to a greater extent than staff at other institutions. However, there is no evidence to suggest that a strategic orientation increases the outcome of the mobilities. The outcome is on average reported as high, especially for quality development.

Interestingly, the study finds that HEIs that make extensive use of the Erasmus+ staff mobility scheme do not systematically have more student exchanges than other institutions. There seems to be a relative disconnect between the two, and there is little evidence to indicate that staff mobility is used in a systematic way to prepare for and promote student mobility. This finding deviates from the school education and VET sectors, where a higher number of staff mobilities are more directly related to the mobility of learners, either to develop the relationship to a destination school, to prepare for mobility of learners, or to accompany a group of learners on their mobilities. While some teachers participate in courses and seminars and take advantage of job shadowing opportunities, there is less tradition for teachers in the school education and VET sectors to use staff mobility for the sole purpose of increasing their own competence and experience. Nevertheless, Dahle et al. (2019) and Dahle et al. (2021) find that teachers benefit from their mobilities in terms of intercultural understanding, access to networks, motivation and job satisfaction. Reflection and discussions on didactics and teaching methods with their international colleagues are also highly valued.

In the field of youth, many organisations have limited budgets for professional development for their employees, with opportunities provided through Erasmus+. According to our informants, there is also evidence to support that mobility of youth workers as well as collaboration partnerships and Training and Cooperation Activities (TCA) have had a positive effect on the quality of youth work.

## Policy development and cooperation

At the policy and system level, the opportunity that Erasmus+ provides for Norwegian national authorities and policy makers to take part in vital discussions and development efforts at the EU and European level is highly appreciated. This is most strongly voiced by the Ministry of Education and Research, which regards

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<sup>2</sup> Data from the RAY monitoring surveys of the current period were not available before delivery of this report. Nor were final reports from finalised projects.

the government level arenas as important platforms for cooperation, allowing Norway to learn from European initiatives and reform processes, but also to communicate Norwegian positions and perspectives on these issues. The policy arenas provided through the Erasmus+ programme are critical to ensure that Norway plays an active role in the shift towards a more integrated European Education Area.

The European Student Card Initiative is an example of a concrete process that is important to Norway and in line with Norwegian principles of harmonisation and efficient digitalisation of administrative processes. Another example, demonstrating how solutions and schemes originally developed in Erasmus+ are influencing Norwegian educational policy, is a newly implemented national scheme for awarding status as a centre of vocational excellence. The Norwegian scheme is both influenced by, and seen as a supplement to, the Centres of Vocational Excellence scheme under Erasmus+.

## Factors influencing outputs, results and impacts

Several factors influence the outputs, results and impacts of Erasmus+ in Norway. On the positive side, the strong political push from above combined with the competent and efficient work of the two NAs, are of the utmost importance. Several changes to the programme have also had a positive effect, most notably the introduction of small-scale partnerships that lowered the entry-level threshold for smaller and less experienced organisations, and European Universities and the new accreditation system that in different ways have encouraged a stronger strategic orientation, longer-term commitments and management buy-in. On the negative side, the time it takes to raise awareness of the programme in all relevant sectors should not be underestimated. The reputation of Erasmus+ as a “bureaucratic” programme is a critical hurdle in this respect, fuelled, in the current period, by problems concerning delayed and partly dysfunctional IT systems. The number of enthusiast-driven projects as compared to projects with broader involvement is also an issue preventing organisations from exploiting the full potential of their participation. In addition, costs and budgets are a critical factor for a country situated on the periphery of Europe. We describe these factors in further detail below.

### Positive factors - drivers

Internationalisation has been high on the political agenda for many years in Norway, especially in education but also in other sectors, exemplified by the Government’s Erasmus+ strategy (2021) and a recent White paper on student mobility in higher education (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2020). Over the years, this focus has created a strong political push to engage in internationalisation activities, giving momentum and legitimacy to the process of mobilising the target sectors to utilise the programme.<sup>3</sup> The Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Education (SIU) was established as early as in 1991 and is in its current incarnation (HK-dir) the NA for education and sport. Together with the NA for the youth sector (Bufdir), which was substantially strengthened ahead of the current project period, a strong and professional apparatus is in place to handle the implementation of the programme, as well as the communication with current and potential users. As described elsewhere in this report, the work of the two agencies is highly rated by their respective sectors, and a critical driver of the relative success of Erasmus+ in Norway. Furthermore, to encourage wider use of the centralised activities of Erasmus+, a nationally funded scheme provides financial support for applicants for the development and establishment of projects. Moreover, until recently, the incentive-based part of the funding system for the HEI sector in

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<sup>3</sup> The push is stronger in education than in the youth and sport sectors, due to the relative independence of the latter with respect to state governance.

Norway, included an indicator for exchange students providing a financial incentive to increase student mobility.<sup>4</sup>

Several of the changes made to the new programme have been well received in Norway and will potentially influence the results and impacts in a positive way. In accordance with the intention, the introduction of small-scale partnerships, has made it easier for smaller and less experienced organisations to be involved in international cooperations. So far, a total of 74 small-scale partnerships are being coordinated from Norway in the current period, compared to 94 cooperation partnerships. The scheme is of particular importance to the youth sector, where the administrative resources of the beneficiaries are normally limited. Both in the youth sector and in the school education sector, the small-scale partnerships currently outnumber the cooperation partnerships. According to our informants from the sectors, the administrative burden is better aligned with the resources of their organisation. A lower number of project partners is also reported as a positive for less experienced coordinators. On the other hand, there is evidence to suggest that small-scale partnerships are more applicable in some sectors than in others. In the VET sector in particular, the scope of the average project is normally too wide to fit the budget and other constraints of the small-scale alternative.

Another change that, according to our informants, has yielded positive effects in Norway, is the system of KA1 accreditation in the school, VET, adult education, and youth sectors. A total of 307 accreditations have been awarded in Norway in the current programme period (with 403 funded mobility projects), the majority in the school education and VET sectors.<sup>5</sup> A substantial number of these are consortium-level accreditations, where local and regional authorities in their capacity as school owners apply on behalf of all educational institutions of a particular type in a community or region. According to our informants, accreditation adds a longer-term perspective to the mobility projects, encouraging the applicants to formalise a strategy for their involvement. Accreditation will normally also require a stronger top-level commitment from the school leadership or school owners. Geographically defined accreditations in the school, VET and adult education sectors are of particular value in this respect, as they provide a framework for strategic use of Erasmus+ at the local and regional level, using internationalisation as a vehicle to foster collaboration with the labour market with the aim of increasing local and regional knowledge and skills levels. An additional effect of consortium-level accreditations is easier access to the programme for schools with limited experience of Erasmus+.

Several of the centralised Partnerships for Excellence have proved to have similar effects, in particular *European Universities*. A Norwegian partner of a European University Alliance describes the project as a “motorway for cooperation”. It serves as a framework for other internationalisation activities at the institution, achieving results that were previously out of reach with a more fragmented approach. It is also a project that is firmly rooted in the strategy of the institution and with strong top-level involvement. A strategic orientation combined with management buy-in provides favourable conditions for making an impact but requires the management to create enthusiasm and the support of key faculty throughout the organisation. At HEIs with strong traditions of academic independence, the latter is not guaranteed. Another positive effect, described by our informant, is access to labour market and industry partners, not only the partners of the home institution’s regional ecosystem, but also the associated partners of the other HEIs. The European University initiative is in this way building bridges between several regional ecosystems across Europe.

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<sup>4</sup> The indicator will be removed in 2025, as part of a comprehensive restructuring and simplification of the financing system.

<sup>5</sup> Approximately 85% of the mobility projects in the school education and VET sectors are accredited in the current period.



Developing and connecting regional ecosystems is also an important effect of another centralised Partnerships for Excellence activity: *Centres of Vocational Excellence*. An informant from one of the four COVE projects with Norwegian partners – a partnership focusing on excellence in health care – underlines the quality-driving aspects of the project, not only for the involved providers of education, but also for the networks of health care institutions associated with the project.

### Negative factors - barriers

Proceeding to factors that have a negative effect on outputs, results and impacts in Norway, the efficiency of the programme seems to be of critical importance. To many organisations, the Erasmus+ administrative processes are perceived as complex and labour-intensive, and demand resources that some organisations simply do not have. This is particularly critical for smaller organisations, and for participants from the voluntary sector that often lack paid administrative support. However, even the better resourced institutions in the higher education sector frequently voice frustration with the administrative burden. (See chapter 4 for further details.)

Consequently, over the years an image of Erasmus+ as a “bureaucratic” programme has taken shape, preventing efficient reach-out to all relevant parts of the target sectors. In a country where there is a prominent trend towards simplification and efficient digitalisation of administrative processes, this has made Erasmus+ a harder sell for the NAs. The severe deficiencies of the current IT support systems have made this even more challenging and to some extent overshadowed the concrete simplifications that were put in place in the new programme. Therefore, in areas where alternative funding is available, Erasmus+ is not always the first choice among the potential users.

Another major factor concerns the level of involvement in Erasmus+ funded activities at the receiving institutions. Across all sectors, a substantial number of projects are still driven by individual or a small number of enthusiasts. These are projects that typically involve a limited part of the staff, and that frequently also lack strong top-level commitment as well as anchoring in organisation-wide strategies. Individual enthusiasts might play an important role in “getting the ball rolling” but this is normally not enough to spur the development of a local culture for internationalisation. Besides the obvious risk of basing the project on individual enthusiasts, projects in this category quite often also lack proper mechanisms for knowledge sharing, preventing the rest of the organisation from enjoying the fruit of the international cooperation. Increasing the number of projects with stronger organizational involvement, horizontally as well as vertically, should therefore be prioritised within the education sector. The introduction of accreditation actions has so far proved to be a promising way to achieve this as regards KA1 activities.

A third factor negatively affecting outputs, results and impacts, is the travel rates. Due to Norway’s location on the periphery of Europe, the financial support for travel is too low to cover the actual costs. This is particularly true for the northernmost parts of the country where the total budget will often be spent on tickets before the traveller even leaves the country. The substantially lower participation rates in the North compared to the rest of the country can, in part, be explained by this fact. According to informants from one of the NAs, due to the amount of additional administrative work required, the application procedure for extra funding for particularly expensive travels is often not utilized.

### Quality of applications

According to our informants from the NAs, the *quality of applications varies across sectors and actions*. In higher education, the NA is pleased with the quality and relates this to the high number of applications as well as the changes to the application and evaluation process introduced by lump-sum budgeting. With a

fixed budget, the quality of the project takes centre stage. One indication of the quality of applicants is the quality of the highest-rated project that is not funded, which, in higher education, is normally a very good candidate, according to our informants.

In other sectors, most notably in adult education, vocational education and training and the youth sector, the NAs are more uncertain regarding the quality of applications. This is less related to the quality of the application text as such, and more to the relevance of some of the applicants. According to our informants from the NAs, the best formulated applications ticking the highest number of relevant boxes, quite often come from organisations with a looser connection to the sector and to the issues and objectives addressed by the application. These are organisations that are able to handle the complex and often abstract terminology of the calls and application forms, and which in some cases probably come close to what has been labelled “application factories”. The NAs would like to see a higher number of high-quality applications from the core organisations of the various sectors (i.e. primary schools, vocational education centres, youth organisations, municipal youth work units etc.) which often fall short due to a lack of application writing skills and resources.

Several of our informants point to the complexity and abstract terminology of the application forms as an important reason for this situation. A side-effect of the gradual harmonisation of actions and procedures across sectors, which has been achieved over the last two programme periods, is a more generic terminology with a looser link to the operation and daily practice of many members of the most relevant target groups. Especially in the youth field, the NA for youth reports spending substantial resources on guiding potential applicants. To prevent the selection process becoming a playground for the most professional application writers, the application process should be adapted to the practice and terminology of the various sectors.

Our informants unanimously support the efforts made by the European Commission to introduce stricter eligibility checks to reduce the number of projects submitted by “application factories”. According to Bufdir, the number of applications dismissed due to eligibility checks has increased in the current project period.

## The four horizontal priorities

The four horizontal priorities of Erasmus+ 2021-2027 add a *thematic focus* to the activities under the programme. In some respect, especially when it comes to inclusion and the fight against climate change, they also signal *how the activities should be designed and executed*. Generally, the horizontal priorities have been well received in Norway, mainly because of their close alignment with national challenges and priorities. (See chapter 5 for further elaborations.)

The Government’s Erasmus+ Strategy defines quantitative targets for three of the four priorities: *at least 25 % of all partnerships coordinated by a Norwegian organisation shall address the topic of sustainability, the topic of inclusion and integration or the topic of digitalisation.*<sup>6</sup> There are also additional targets related to project design and execution: *at least 20 % of all partnerships shall receive additional funding for green travel, or combine physical and digital mobility, and at least 30 % shall receive additional funding for inclusion measures.*

So far, the quantitative targets concerning thematic orientation have been met. A total of 40 % of the partnerships coordinated by a Norwegian organisation address *inclusion and integration*, 39 % address

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<sup>6</sup> Why the fourth priority, participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement is not included in this list, is not mentioned in the strategy document.

*digitalisation*, and 29 % address *sustainability*. The result for the fourth priority, *participation and civic engagement*, for which there is no target in the strategy, is 18 % (appendix, figure 3.2).<sup>7</sup> We observe substantial differences across sectors: Digitalisation is the most frequent topic in higher and adult education, sustainability is most frequent in school education and the youth sector, whereas inclusion and integration is most frequent in the adult education, school education and higher education sectors. Moreover, youth is the only sector in which a thematic focus on participation and civic engagement is addressed by one third of the partnerships. Vocational education and training seem to be the sector where the horizontal priorities have had the least impact on the thematic orientation of the projects. According to one of our informants, the horizontal priorities are perceived as “academically oriented” and therefore less relevant for the vocational sector where partnerships and mobilities often have a stronger focus on the practical skills of a particular trade or profession.

It is worth noting that the proportions among the submitted and awarded applications are similar, indicating that the strong focus on the horizontal priorities is not a product of the selection process. However, it is still too early to identify the deeper and potentially transformative effect of the projects vis-à-vis these priorities. The sheer volume of activities combined with the fact that they are reinforcing related activities in education and research in Norway, could herald significant results.

## Sustainability and the fight against climate change

Sustainability and the fight against climate change is high on the political agenda in Norway, and according to our informants there is a strong sense of commitment among the beneficiaries to the greenest possible design of projects and mobilities. Nevertheless, many find it difficult to succeed due to the peripheral location of Norway. Although we are told anecdotes about weeklong travel by train and bus across Europe for a few days meeting, this is not normal practice. For short stays, there are few viable green alternatives when travelling from Norway to most destinations in Europe, especially if the point of departure is in the peripheral parts of the country. To illustrate, one of our informants from a European University project told us that Norwegian staff and students are exempted from the project’s *Green Mobility Guidelines* when travelling. The additional funding provided by Erasmus+ for green travel is in most cases insufficient. To compensate for the extra hurdle, some Norwegian HEIs offer local financial support to students who chose a climate friendly travel option.

In our survey to current project coordinators, we asked them to what extent they had implemented various carbon footprint reduction measures in their projects (appendix, figure 3.3). Only 19 % of the projects report a large degree of green travel. A higher proportion, 31 %, had reduced the amount of travel, and 33 % had made efforts to reduce their carbon footprint when abroad.

For Norwegian participants, it is fair to conclude that, in many cases, green travel is the least viable option in the efforts to make international cooperation more climate friendly. A conscious approach to the amount of physical travel and meetings required, combined with a wider and more flexible use of digital communication, seems more appropriate. An alternative that can be used in some instances, is *Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPS)*, which were introduced in Erasmus+ 2021-2027. Several of our informants spoke favourably about BIPs and explain that they are “loved by students”. Most notably, they give a broader group of students international input and experience at a comparatively low cost. On the negative side, the administrative burden is described as discouraging given the size and scope of the projects.

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<sup>7</sup> No data were available for indicators related to programme execution at the time of writing.

## Inclusion

The extra focus on the inclusion of groups with fewer opportunities in the current programme period has been well received and perceived as a call for action in Norway. As a response, the two NAs have developed strategies, arranged conferences and meetings, created information material and guided their users. They have also addressed the question of how a concept like “hard-to-reach” should be understood in a Norwegian context, e.g. whether geographical location in a peripheral part of the country could be added as a criterion. As mentioned above, the northernmost parts of Norway have been severely underrepresented in Erasmus+ until now. In addition, the question of language in the communication around these issues has been addressed. In a society where equal opportunity for all is the norm in education, sport, the voluntary sector and other relevant social arenas, being labelled “disadvantaged” or “with fewer opportunities” could be experienced as stigmatizing.

When asked whether they have taken extra measures to include groups with fewer opportunities in their projects, only 29 % of our survey respondents gave a negative response (appendix, figure 3.4). Half of the projects have taken smaller measures, and an additional 21 % report having taken major measures. The latter group is on average pleased with the outcomes of these measures, scoring 4.1 on a 5-point scale.

Our informants from the user communities, told us in interviews that they as a rule make an effort to include everyone in their international activities. From the school education and VET sectors, we were also told about low-performing learners whose motivation and self-efficacy were given an extra boost during and after a mobility stay. In some cases, even individuals with severe disabilities and with a high need for additional support have been included in group mobilities. We are told that these mobilities require considerable planning and extra staff, and that the additional funding nowhere near covers the costs. They also entail strict and labour-intensive reporting requirements.

Inclusion is of particular importance in the youth sector, where marginalised groups and youth with a looser connection to organised, voluntary activities are important target groups. According to our informants from the sector, involving these groups in Erasmus+ activities requires substantial efforts due to the complexity and abstract language of the application and administration procedure. Even though the introduction of small-scale partnerships may have lowered the barrier to some extent, the inclusion of marginalised groups and less resourced organisations is still a challenge. For these groups, the design of the programme is counteractive to one of its most important objectives, we are told by informants from the sector.

## The effects of the pandemic and war

The Covid-19 pandemic affected the startup of the new Erasmus+ programme period in Norway, as elsewhere in Europe. It took some time after the lockdowns to get the wheels rolling, remove the practical barriers and reignite interest in international travel. Delayed project activities from the previous period, might also have reduced the number of applications for new projects during the first calls of the new programme. In our survey to current project coordinators, more than half of the mobility projects (53 %) report that the execution of their projects was affected to a large or very large degree (appendix, figure 3.5). For the sake of comparison, 36 % of the KA2 projects report the same experience.

A study of the effects of the pandemic on international education and research collaboration in Norway (Ryssevik et al., 2021), found that Erasmus+ which primarily fund intra-European cooperation were less affected than projects funded by programmes supporting cooperation with non-European countries.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For Erasmus+, this was projects funded in the previous period (2014-2020), still active or recently completed.

However, the pandemic had severe ramifications for the execution of the projects. For the Erasmus+ projects, half of the activities came to a complete halt, compared to 62 % for the other programmes.<sup>9</sup> Another 36 % of the activities were subject to various forms of adaptations or delays and only 15 % went ahead as planned. The study also found that projects in the school education sector were more affected than projects in higher education, most likely explained by the latter's crisis management capacity due to easier access to various administrative, technical and educational support functions.

An interesting observation from the study was that it was not only the mobility activities that came to a standstill during the pandemic. Activities less reliant on physical mobility across country borders were also affected. This even included forms of cooperation that were originally planned as digital, for example virtual summer school courses, workshops, student collaboration projects etc. However, the "crash course" in digitalisation that many of the beneficiaries underwent during the pandemic, pointed to a more flexible approach to internationalisation, combining physical and digital interaction.

The Russo-Ukrainian War, which entered a new stage with the Russian invasion in February 2022, has so far had less effect on the execution of the Norwegian led Erasmus+ projects. Only 9 % of the KA1 projects report that the war and the consequent European sanctions against Russia, have affected<sup>10</sup> the execution of the projects to a large or very large degree, as compared to 5 % of the KA2 projects (appendix, figure 3.6). There are only small differences across actions and user groups, although *Mobility of young people* and *International mobility in higher education* seems to have been somewhat more affected than projects from other actions.

## Conclusions

Erasmus+ has to a large extent delivered the expected outputs, results and impacts in Norway. We have witnessed a steady growth in the awareness and use of the programme, and the ambitious quantitative targets for the current period outlined in the Government Strategy are all within reach. Cooperation with European partners enables Norwegian institutions and organisations to share and develop knowledge, methods and best practices that hold the potential of improving the quality of their operation. In regard to mobility, soft skills like intercultural learning and increased self-efficacy are more predominant than academic and subject-specific learning.

The four horizontal priorities have been well received, mainly because of their close alignment with national challenges and priorities. The priorities have influenced the thematic orientation of the projects, and to some extent the design and execution of the activities. Despite a strong commitment to the green transformation among many stakeholders and users, a green approach to international collaboration and mobility is hard to achieve in practice in Norway, mainly due to the long distances to most European destinations. The extra focus on inclusion of groups with fewer opportunities in the current programme period has been well received and perceived as a call for action in Norway.

The strong political push, combined with the efficiency of the NAs, are important drivers of the positive results. Some of the changes made to the current programme, e.g. small-scale partnerships, accreditation of mobility projects and the Partnerships for Excellence, have also improved the results. On the negative side, bureaucratic application procedures, abstract language and dysfunctional IT systems have reduced the programmes' ability to achieve their objectives.

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<sup>9</sup> Please note that these proportions relate to individual project activities.

<sup>10</sup> Defined as delays, changes to planned activities or change of partners.

## Suggestions for improvements

- ◆ Continue the efforts to include stricter eligibility checks to reduce the number of projects submitted by “application factories”.
- ◆ Better adapt the application process and its terminology to the administrative resources and language of the various target sectors.
- ◆ Increase additional funding for green travel.

## Chapter 4: Efficiency

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When assessing the efficiency of a programme, the main indicator is the programme’s cost efficiency, i.e. the extent to which the desired effects are achieved at a reasonable cost. The empirical data collected for this report indicate that cost efficiency seems to have improved within KA2 and centralised actions from the previous programme, while within KA1 actions, cost-efficiency has improved within some, and deteriorated within others. In this chapter, we will present the main findings concerning the administration and efficiency of the programme, and pinpoint concrete areas for improvement.

### Cost efficiency

The overall assessment of this evaluation criteria is that although cost efficiency seems to have improved somewhat within certain actions, there is considerable room for reducing the administrative costs of the programme.

At the system level, the NAs and the NAUs find Erasmus+ to be a fairly bureaucratic programme. The level of bureaucracy exceeds what is common in Norwegian public administration. At the same time, these stakeholders recognise that a programme encompassing 33 countries with different administrative cultures and transparency needs to have mechanisms in place to ensure that funding is used as planned, and not misused.

However, the Norwegian NAs and NAUs advocate further reducing the administrative burden of the programme, at both system and user level, in order to free funds that can be directed towards the programme’s core activities, and increase the attractiveness of the programme. This position is in line with the administrative culture and principles in Norway and in other Nordic countries, where administrative control systems, on the spectrum between detailed oversight and full trust, tend to be more inclined towards trust, than in many other European countries.

More specifically, at the system level, the NAs find that the extent and number of audits imposed on the NAs require considerable manpower, which drains resources from core activities, such as outreach and user support. They also find considerable room for further simplifying reporting requirements and improving IT systems both at the system and user level.

At the user level, one way of assessing cost efficiency is to consider the balance between the efforts needed to administer a project, and the funding awarded. If the funding awarded is not considered proportionate to the administrative efforts, it reduces the attractiveness of the programme for potential applicants and acts as a barrier to the inclusion of new, and especially, less resourced organisations.

A clear finding from our survey to current project coordinators is that there is an imbalance between the awards funded and the efforts required to administer projects. The survey shows that a majority of the project coordinators find that large or very large administrative efforts are required vis-à-vis the funds awarded (appendix, figure 4.1). The results also reveal differences between KA1 and KA2 actions, as a

greater share, two thirds of KA1 coordinators, find that the administrative burden is too large in relation to the funds awarded. In other words, a large share of Erasmus+ funding recipients find the programme to be unnecessarily bureaucratic, despite efforts in the current programme period to simplify project administration.

## Effect of simplification measures

During the development of the current programme, a number of simplification measures were introduced to reduce the administrative burden for NAs, programme beneficiaries and participants. Reducing the administrative cost will lower the entry barriers to the programme, thus making it more inclusive.

The overall conclusion to the question of whether the administrative burden has been reduced is that opinions are quite divided. At both the NA level and the user level, a considerable share of our informants and respondents actually find that the administration burden has increased in the current programme period.

In the survey to project coordinators, we asked those who had also coordinated a project in the previous programme period, whether they found the administration and reporting of projects easier or harder in the current period. The respondents are equally divided between *easier*, *harder* and *no substantial change*, with a third in each category (appendix, figure 4.2). We observe a similar variation in responses to a similarly worded question about the application process. However, the majority here found that the process had become easier.

The interviews indicated that the assessment of whether the administrative workload has been simplified varied across actions. Deeper analysis of the survey material confirmed this hypothesis. While a clear majority of KA2 projects find that administration has been simplified in the current programme period, this is not the case for KA1 projects, where a larger share finds that administration has become harder rather than easier (appendix, figure 4.3).

Furthermore, there is considerable variation between the various KA1 actions. Within education, the survey data shows that while the administrative burden seems to have increased in higher education in particular, it has been reduced within school education and VET actions. Informants especially point to the administrative benefits resulting from the introduction of the accreditation actions in most sectors.

In the youth field, respondents and informants do not find that the programme has become easier to administer. Informants particularly point to the complexity of the application forms, which acts as a deterrent for youth involvement and participation in these processes, counteractive to the Erasmus+ objectives for the field. Rather than promoting broad involvement of youth and participants, applications are often handled by a key person in the organisation with strong administration and writing skills, as the forms are considered both somewhat abstract and also quite technical.

## Simplification measures – KA2

Both at the NA level and user level, informants find that KA2 actions have become easier to administer, and thereby more cost efficient, in the current programme period due to the introduction of lump-sum grants. In the previous period, the NAs spent considerable time manually going over and reducing budgets for each project, and the projects had to develop detailed budgets, and report in detail on expenditures. The majority of project coordinators for KA2 projects find that the introduction of lump-sum grants has simplified administration (appendix, figure 4.4).

However, some project coordinators find that the new budgeting rules have made it harder to apply for and administer projects. The reason for this, according to some of them, is that they feel that they still have to develop shadow budgets and keep all receipts and detailed accounts, in case of audits.



Another simplification measure that was introduced in the KA2 portfolio in the current programme period is *small-scale partnerships* for all sectors except higher education. Both NAs and project coordinators for small-scale projects find that the measure serves its purpose. In the survey, 11 out of 12 project coordinators for small-scale projects report that the measure has made it easier for potential applicants with no or limited experience to apply for and carry out a project (appendix, figure 4.5). In interviews, coordinators relate that the measure lowers the threshold for entering into a partnership with a new partner because of the reduced reporting. They find that it is a “soft” introduction to the Erasmus+ programme, and a good way to increase their own understanding and expertise in the programme.

### Simplification measures – KA1

While a larger share of KA1 projects find that administration has become harder rather than easier from the previous to the current programme period, there is considerable variation between the sectors. The survey data show that while the administrative burden seems to have increased particularly in higher education, it has been reduced in school education and VET. These findings are corroborated in interviews within these sectors and the NAs.

In particular, KA1 actions in higher education seem to have become more laborious to administer. Our informants express that while they were hoping for simplifications in the current programme period, especially regarding the calculation of student grants, they find that increased flexibility for students has resulted in considerably more work on the administrative side. The HEIs welcome the increased opportunities for students, e.g. extra grants for green travel, inclusion grants etc., but the changes have increased the burden of documentation and administration. At the NA level, HK-dir also finds that administration pertaining to KA1 in higher education has increased.

At the same time, the introduction of accreditation to sectors and fields outside of higher education seems to have simplified the administration of mobilities considerably. This is the opinion of almost 90 per cent of the current project coordinators of accredited mobility projects who have experience of mobility projects from the previous period (appendix, figure 4.6). Informants from accredited institutions find the application process to be straightforward and efficient.

### Simplifications – Centralised actions

With regard to centralised actions, the NA for education and sport has observed a positive development, as the documentation burden has been reduced for applicants. In the previous period, all applicants had to submit a considerable amount of documentation when applying for centralised actions, whereas in the current period, only the nominated projects have to submit documentation, reducing the administrative burden for both the applicants and the reviewers.

### Delayed and dysfunctional IT systems

IT systems form an important part of the administrative support tools for the programme. According to our informants, these systems were not in place when the new programme period started, and when they were finally released, the functionality of some of them was far from optimal. This caused considerable frustration and additional administrative work both at the NA and the user level.

In fact, results from the survey to current project coordinators show that the delayed IT systems negatively affected 76 per cent of the projects (appendix, figure 4.7). For the majority of projects, the consequence was additional administrative work, but for 18 per cent of the projects this resulted in delays and reduced quality.

The delays and quality issues seem to have affected KA1 projects the most (appendix, figure 4.8), especially in higher education where the majority of mobilities take place (appendix, figure 4.9). Within KA1 actions in higher education, 50 per cent of project coordinators report that the problems with the IT systems caused



project delays and affected the quality of project implementation. Delays relating to the *Beneficiary module*, where individual mobilities are registered, caused particular challenges as the HEIs were unable to calculate students grants, and had to develop alternative systems for registering information. Several informants used the term “disaster” to describe the IT challenges and referred to administrative staff taking sick leave or changing job due to the increased workload. Informants from the NAs were also concerned that the problems caused by the IT systems would act as a disincentive for potential new applicants.

## The size of the budget and distribution of funds

Overall, the NAs find that the total budget for decentralised actions is adequate. However, in some sectors, the funding for certain actions is insufficient. In education, additional funding for small-scale partnerships is needed across all relevant sectors and for cooperation partnerships in higher education.

Although most informants agree that the cornerstone of the programme should continue to be mobility, and that the bulk of the funding should continue to be allocated to KA1, the NA for education calls for more funds toward KA2, in order to keep a critical mass of applications and projects.

As there are sometimes unspent funds within certain actions, the increase of the reallocation rule to 35 per cent has been well received, because it gives the NAs more flexibility to redistribute unspent funds to actions in higher demand, and applications of higher quality. Although the current system for redistributing funds is perceived as more flexible than that of the previous programme period, continued and increased flexibility is still called for. The NA for education and sport suggests increasing the reallocation rule to 50 per cent, as this would reduce the need for contract amendments, thereby reducing administrative costs.

Within international mobility, the NA for education and sport calls for more flexibility in the distribution of funds between regions. In Norway, the interest in international mobility far exceeds the available funding in all regions, except the Western Balkans. Despite attempts from the NA to mobilise the education sector to involve the region in their mobility projects, the funding is not absorbed. At the same time, many high-quality applications for collaborations with countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America are rejected due to lack of funds. A reallocation mechanism, e.g. in line with the mechanism for redistribution between actions, would allow for more flexibility, and for better synergies between national and EU policy priorities.

A point of concern for the NAs, is the profile of the budget allocations across the programme period. The sharp budget increase towards the end of the period makes the NAs’ outreach and recruitment work challenging. A key task for the NAs will be to ensure that they have sufficient high-quality applicants towards the end of the period. However, if they create a high level of interest early on in the programme period, many qualified applicants will be rejected due to lack of funds. Such rejection may then discourage these applicants from applying again when funds increase. On the other hand, if the NAs rev up their outreach efforts towards the end of the period, they might not be able to create the momentum of high-quality applicants needed to absorb the allocated budget. As the budget profile makes it challenging to achieve an outreach and recruitment strategy that ensures a steady growth in participation, the NAs call for a more linear increase in the budget in the next programme period.

Regarding centralised actions, funding is considered inadequate. Due to strong competition for funding, and low allocation rates, many potential applicants find the likelihood of success low. At the same time, the costs and administrative burden of applying for centralised actions is considered high. For many potential applicants, the combination of low success rates and high administrative costs is a deterrent to applying.

## Anti-fraud measures

Organisations welcome the Commission’s new measures for preventing fraud, “application factories” or “empty organisations”, i.e. organisations applying for Erasmus+ funding, but with little intent to contribute

towards the objectives of the programme. Such organisations complicate the work of serious organisations looking for relevant and reliable project partners.

This is a particular challenge in the adult education and youth sectors, where many organisations are fairly new to the Erasmus+ programme. Organisations in these sectors call for measures to prevent instances of fraud and easier access to networks of quality-assured and trustworthy partners. In the adult education sector, the NA for education has responded to this request by arranging webinars in collaboration with EPALE Norway on how to find reliable partners.

## Efficiency of cooperation between different actors

Overall, the NAs and the NAUs are satisfied with the collaboration vis-à-vis the European Commission. However, the views within the NA for education and sport vary to some extent. Some frustration is aired concerning the multiple channels of communication, which make it difficult to understand which channel to use, and to know which responses are authoritative when conflicting information is found in different channels. Furthermore, getting answers to questions can take considerable time, depending on who you are in contact with. There seems to be a general pattern where responsiveness varies substantially between the various points of contact.

The NAs complement the Commission's efforts to facilitate collaboration between programme officers across countries. Both NAs find that they benefit from participating in the international and Nordic NA networks, as well as the more informal working groups appointed by the Commission. In the Nordic network, for instance, the NAs feel that the challenges encountered in the administration of the programme are quite similar, and that the exchange of ideas and experiences is useful.

The NA for education and sport requests more information and transparency from the executive agency regarding centralised actions. The NA is responsible for informing and counselling potential applicants and participants about the actions. However, NA informants find that they lack in-depth knowledge about the centralised actions, which impede their ability to carry out this task. In addition to requesting more and earlier information about these actions, the NA calls for more transparency and access to the evaluations of centralised projects, in particular results and allocation rates, and information about Norwegian applicants. Such requests were also made during the previous programme period, indicating that few improvements have been made in this area. Improved information and transparency would make the centralised actions more accessible for potential applicants, especially those at grassroot level with less resources to use on applications, thus making the programme more inclusive.

Participants in the Partnerships for Excellence (e.g. Innovation Alliance, European Universities, Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees) also request more, earlier and clear information from the Commission. Informants find that relevant information is often posted late, that the response times to specific questions are long, and that responses can often be inconsistent. These delays and inconsistencies particularly apply to reporting and finance and the management of lump-sum budgeting in larger projects. However, some initiatives by the Executive Agency also receive positive feedback, such as "information days".

The collaboration between NAs, the sectors and participants in Norway is assessed as highly satisfactory by all relevant actors. Participants report that they receive the necessary help and guidance, and that the NAs are available when challenges occur (appendix, figure 4.10). While some participants call on the NAs to take on a more pro-active role, so that the users themselves do not have to request necessary information, most find that access to information and webinars is sufficient. The collaboration between the NA for education and training and sport and the NA for youth has improved, but there is still room for more collaboration between the two.

A new feature of the current period is the possibility of accreditation for sectors and fields outside of higher education. This has led to increased cooperation between different levels of government in Norway.

Involved schools consider this a very positive development; in addition to simplified administration of mobility, they also gain access to useful information and guidance from local and regional authorities. This helps increase engagement and access to the programme for inexperienced schools in particular.

## Conclusions

Cost efficiency seems to have improved in KA2 and centralised actions compared to the previous programme period. Important simplification measures for KA2 actions have been the introduction of lump-sum budgeting and small-scale partnerships. Simplification measures have also been introduced within KA1, most importantly, the possibility of accreditation to sectors and fields outside of higher education. However, cost efficiency has deteriorated within some KA1 actions. Due to bureaucratic processes and dysfunctional IT systems, project coordinators and administrators experience an imbalance between funds awarded and the efforts required to administer projects. Thus, improvements are called for. Further simplifications can make it easier for target groups with less resources to use the programme.

The total budget for decentralised actions is mostly considered adequate, although the funding for certain actions is considered insufficient in some sectors. Although informants agree that the cornerstone of the programme should continue to be mobility, the NA for education calls for more funds toward KA2 actions. The NA also calls for furthering the flexibility of the reallocation rule to 50 percent, and for improving flexibility in the distribution of funds between regions in order to improve synergies between national and EU policy priorities.

Some users, especially in the adult education and youth sectors, struggle to find partners that are relevant and genuinely interested in contributing towards a common goal. “Empty” organisations create uncertainty among serious project coordinators in their search for reliable partners.

Regarding the decentralised actions, the collaboration between the NAs/NAUs and the European Commission, and between the NAs and the sectors, are considered satisfactory. However, the NAs and sectors call for more, early and clear information from the Commission regarding centralised actions.

## Suggestions for improvements

Our evaluation indicates the need for improvements in the following areas:

### Administration

- For KA1 projects, simplify application forms and processes, grant agreements and reporting procedures, particularly in the youth and sport fields, to increase the attractiveness of the programme and facilitate youth involvement and participation.
- Reduce the complexity of student grant calculation, e.g. use month as the calculation unit rather than day.
- Continue the improvement of existing IT systems both at the system and user level, particularly the Beneficiary module. Maintain increased staffing levels and prioritization of the IT tools in the European Commission. Ensure continuity of IT systems across programme periods.
- Reduce the number of audits and controls imposed on the NAs, to free funds that can be directed towards core activities.

### Funding

- Further increase the NAs’ flexibility in the distribution of funds between actions, as funding for some actions is inadequate.
- Within international mobility, increase flexibility in the distribution of funds between regions.

- For the next programme period, reconsider the budget profile. A more linear budget profile would improve the probability of a steady growth in high-quality applicants and the absorption of the budget increase.

### Collaboration

- Improve access to information and transparency about centralised actions, for both NAs and users.

## Chapter 5: Relevance

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In assessing the relevance of the programme, we explore to what extent the objectives of Erasmus+ address the needs and problems in society, and to what extent the programme activities and actions address the objectives. A key question is also whether the programme and its objectives and activities are perceived as relevant to the target groups it is supposed to serve. Is the programme successful in attracting and reaching target audiences?

The programme is considered relevant to its target sectors and policy areas, in particular the education and training sector. In the youth and sport sectors, the interest and participation from relevant youth and sport organisations is lower than desired, despite the NAs' targeted recruitment efforts. This is partly due to the heterogeneity of the youth field, making efficient outreach challenging, but is likely also due to limited capacity and resources in many relevant organisations.

### Do the objectives address relevant needs?

A main finding in our evaluation is that the Erasmus+ objectives address important needs and challenges in Norway, and that the objectives are well-aligned with objectives high on the Norwegian political agenda. The addition of the four horizontal priorities increases the thematic relevance of the programme, especially in the education field, as they overlap with Norwegian high-priority objectives. This finding is evident from interviews with relevant stakeholders and from the review of relevant policy documents, such as the Government's strategy for participation (2021).

Our evaluation indicates that the objectives of Erasmus+ 2021-2027 address relevant needs and challenges for the sectors involved. The NA for education in particular emphasises that participation in Erasmus+ contributes to achieving national policy objectives in education. The current beneficiaries of the programme agree: In our survey to the Norwegian project coordinators, a high share (91 per cent) find that Erasmus+ enables them to address needs and challenges that are relevant and important to their institutions (appendix, figure 5.1).

### Relevance of the horizontal priorities

All four priorities are considered highly relevant in the Norwegian context, and the Government's Erasmus+ Strategy underlines that the priorities address major societal challenges. As an illustration of the close overlap between European and Norwegian priorities in the field of education, the horizontal priorities of Erasmus+ are fully reflected in the values and principles of the current core curriculum of the school education system (including VET). The close alignment with the Erasmus+ horizontal priorities increases the relevance of the programme in the school education sector, and facilitates the incorporation of Erasmus+ activities in the schools' curricula.

Inclusion and diversity is considered the most relevant priority for most beneficiaries. More than 90 per cent of survey respondents find this priority relevant or highly relevant. *Participation and civic engagement* is the second most relevant priority, while the relevance of *digital transformation* is ranked slightly lower, especially among beneficiaries in the youth and sport programme. We also note some variation in the assessment of relevance between sectors. Participants from higher education and adult education consider the digital transformation as more relevant than the green transformation or inclusion and diversity (appendix, figure 5.2). A few of our informants from the higher education sector pointed out that the horizontal priorities could be interpreted as a new political dimension to Erasmus+, a dimension they were uncertain about the merits of. Within vocational education and training, informants stated that it has proven challenging to integrate the horizontal priorities in mobility projects, especially for apprentices.

In assessing the relevance of the horizontal priorities, a key question is whether the actions and activities of the current programme are designed in ways that address the needs and problems in these areas. The guidelines for the national report place extra emphasis on the twin (digital and green) transformations and inclusion and diversity.

At the system level, the NAs and NAUs see the priorities of the Green and Digital Transformation as a pervasive part of the current programme. All applicants to KA1 and KA2 actions must reflect on the “twin transformations” in their applications. This increases awareness of the issues among the applicants and encourages a thematic focus on needs and challenges linked to these processes. The introduction of measures such as incentives for green travel<sup>11</sup> are also considered important to reduce the carbon footprint of the programme. Below we will discuss whether the programme’s activities and actions are designed in ways to increase inclusion and diversity in the programme.

### Improved relevance in the current programme period

Findings from the evaluation indicate that the relevance of the programme has increased from the previous to the current period. In our survey to current project coordinators, we asked to what extent they find the current programme more or less relevant compared to the previous programme period. The question was only put to respondents who had also been involved in projects funded by Erasmus+ 2014-2020. As much as 43 per cent of the respondents reported that they found the current programme more relevant than the previous one, and an additional 14 per cent found it much more relevant. The rest (approx. 42 per cent), found the relevance unchanged (appendix, figure 5.3).

### Outreach and knowledge about the programme

In this subchapter, we investigate how successful the programme is in attracting and reaching target audiences and groups, and how well the programme is known to the relevant communities in Norway.

NAUs and NAs are overall satisfied with the programme’s ability to reach target audiences and groups in different fields and sectors covered by the scope of the programme. There is a general sense of improvement from the previous programme period. However, there is still considerable variation in participation between sectors and target groups, and room for improvement in reaching certain groups.

In the higher education sector, most institutions participate in Erasmus+, but participation varies considerably across institutions and academic fields. Programmes of professional study with a short duration have proven hard to reach, as well as tertiary vocational educational institutions. Furthermore,

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<sup>11</sup> Green travel, or sustainable means of transportation, is defined as “travel that uses low emission means of transport for the main part of the travel, such as bus, train or car-pooling.” (European Commission, 2023).

several HEIs still perceive Erasmus+ primarily as a mobility programme, despite the NA's efforts to promote the KA2 actions to institutions with experience of KA1.

Stakeholders see mobility in adult education as of limited relevance to learners. The majority of learners in Norwegian adult education are immigrants in need of Norwegian language training and basic education, in some cases combined with work practice. Furthermore, many participants combine adult education with working and caring for family, which makes international mobility hard to prioritise. Consequently, for many learners in this target group, mobility is not the most relevant activity.

In the youth sector, due to the heterogeneity of relevant organisations, outreach and recruitment is more challenging than in the more hierarchical education and training sector. The youth field is characterised by a plethora of various non-profit organisations and municipally funded activities, making efficient outreach challenging. The NA for youth has partnered with key umbrella organisations for youth work and for NGOs in order to raise awareness and improve recruitment from the most relevant organisations to the programme. Nevertheless, the NA would like to see more youth driven project applications, more applications from the most relevant NGOs and from municipalities.

In sport, the KA1 mobility action was just introduced, and the awareness of the action is consequently limited in the field. The NA had to open a second call for projects in order to receive sufficient applications, however the second call resulted in the budget for the action being absorbed. As this is a new field with a considerable pool of potential applicants, the potential for reaching more organisations in future calls with larger budgets is considerable.

Data from our interviews indicate two main reasons for the subpar participation in some of the target sectors in Norway: Firstly, a lack of knowledge about Erasmus+ among the organisations. In the fields where Erasmus+ is less known, some data indicate that the organisations are simply not aware of the possibilities of the programme. It takes time to build a critical mass of awareness, especially in the heterogenous communities of voluntary organisations. Furthermore, as described in chapter 4, the perceived administrative burden of Erasmus+ adds to this challenge. Although Erasmus+ can encompass projects that fit a wide variety of objectives, it requires administrative capacity and attention, which are scarce resources in many organisations.

### Hard-to-reach and disadvantaged groups

Although inclusion has been a priority over time in the programme, administrators and participants at both system and institution level find that the current programme's emphasis on inclusion pervades the design of the programme to a much higher degree than previously. Our informants at the system level find that the focus on inclusion is manifested not only in policy documents, but also in concrete efforts and measures. The adoption of the horizontal priority "inclusion and diversity", as well as the Commission's Inclusion and Diversity Strategy have contributed to the heightened focus on inclusion.

The horizontal priority allows for the prioritisation of applicants with fewer opportunities and many of the actions have "supporting participants with fewer opportunities" as an award criterion. The dedicated financial support mechanism and reduced duration of mobilities, are identified by stakeholders as promising measures to increase the participation of these groups. Beneficiaries point out that the additional funding covers important participant needs, for instance costs linked to adapted travel and personal assistance (e.g. mobility with deaf interpreters), which other grants and programmes do not cover.

At the same time, our evaluation indicates that participants with complex needs and participants living in Northern Norway are groups currently not sufficiently reached. The cost of participation is a limiting factor

for both groups. The extra financial support for inclusion measures is still inadequate to cover the costs for participants with complex needs. In Norway, it can be argued that a peripheral location is “preventing [people] from having effective access to opportunities under the Programme” (European Commission, 2021). International mobility can be very costly for people living in Northern Norway, due to high transport costs.

## Suggestions for improvements

The objectives of Erasmus+ are relevant to identified needs and problems in Norwegian society, as well as to the programme’s target sectors. Our data indicate that the current programme is more relevant than the previous one. However, reaching relevant organisations in the youth and sport sectors has proven challenging. Our evaluation indicates that the lower participation from relevant organisations in these sectors is partly due to scarcity of capacity and resources in these organisations, driving them to prioritise their core activities over international youth projects. The evaluation recommends improvements in the following areas:

- Reduce the programme entry cost by simplifying the application procedures.
- Adjust the dedicated financial support mechanism for inclusion of those with more complex needs.
- A closer analysis of the cost of green travel, as increased support would incentivise more climate friendly travel.

## Chapter 6: Coherence

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In the assessment of coherence, two dimensions are considered: *internal coherence*, meaning how well different actions work together, and *external coherence*, meaning whether the intervention complements or contradicts other interventions with similar objectives.

Overall, the assessment of coherence is in line with the findings from the Mid-Term review of Erasmus+ 2014-2020: The different actions and objectives have a high degree of internal coherence, with a potential for synergies between the various actions. There are also signs of an increase in internal coherence, compared to the previous period. Concerning external coherence, there are examples of synergies between Erasmus+ and other available programmes, although there seems to be room for improvement in this area.

### Internal coherence

Based on an independent desk study of the objectives and actions of the programme, as well as interviews with stakeholders at all levels, we find that the internal coherence of the programme’s objectives and actions is fairly high.

However, there is a caveat concerning the coherence of objectives: There is reason to question the coherence between the green horizontal priority and the objectives involving mobility: Learning mobility is obviously central to Erasmus+. However, mobility, and in particular long-range mobility for participants from the peripheral parts of Europe, is inherently incompatible with low emissions and climate neutrality. This potential incoherence is of special salience to Norwegian participants, and in particular to participants from the northernmost parts of the country. For the latter, any other means of travel than flying is both costly and time-consuming, making it challenging to combine low emissions with travel to Europe. Several

policy recommendations identify this as a major dilemma (Alves & Terzieva, 2022; Buiskool & Hudepohl, 2020). It is beyond the remit of this evaluation to suggest improvements to “green” Erasmus+, but we do note that the extra funding for green travel seems to be too low for many participants.

That being said, the coherence between the actions is perceived as high. Several of the interviewed beneficiaries report that they find considerable coherence and synergy between the actions: The beneficiaries are able to differentiate the actions and to identify those most suitable for their own objectives and available resources. The informants appreciate the progression in complexity from the “easier” mobility actions, which is the point of entry for the majority of organisations, via the more complex partnership actions, all the way up to the highly ambitious and centrally managed Partnerships for Excellence. The introduction of small-scale partnerships in the current programme, added another most welcome step to this ladder.

Organisations with sequential or simultaneous utilisation of the actions, experience positive synergies. Some examples include: 1) beneficiaries involved in mobility projects found potential partners for partnership projects during their mobility, 2) beneficiaries with small-scale partnerships (KA210) found that the smaller scale worked as a useful introduction to cooperation partnerships (KA220), 3) and in higher education, the prestigious European Universities alliances are used as “umbrella projects”, making it easy to connect other internationalisation activities to the alliance cooperation, for instance BIPs, student and staff mobility, cooperation partnerships, joint degrees or other Partnerships for Excellence.

Although most applicants apply for one type of action, 35 per cent of applicants<sup>12</sup> applied simultaneously or sequentially for two or more actions, indicating that many applicants find synergies between actions. The four most common combinations of two or more actions are: 1) KA121-VET and KA121-SCH (accredited mobility projects for learners and staff in vocational education and school education)<sup>13</sup>, 2) KA131-HED, KA171-HED and KA220-HED (European and International mobility and cooperation partnerships in higher education), 3) KA152-YOU and KA153-YOU (mobility for youth and youth workers) and 4) KA121-SCH and KA210-SCH (accredited mobility for school and small-scale partnership in school education) (appendix, figure 6.1 and 6.2).

## External coherence

There are several grants and funding schemes regionally, nationally and in the EU that target the education and training, youth and sport fields. The coherence between Erasmus+ and these grants and schemes is generally considered good.

The factor that distinguishes Erasmus+ from most other programmes and grants is the international dimension: In the youth and sport fields there are no other internationally oriented funding schemes to choose from, and the current beneficiaries commonly point to the international nature and objectives of Erasmus+ as the reasons why the programme is preferred. In education, and especially in higher education where several alternative programmes support international activities, the strong European focus of Erasmus+ is a decisive factor.

In higher education, the interplay between teaching and research is important. As mentioned in chapter 3, a recent study of Erasmus+ staff mobility (Ryssevik et al., 2023) shows that the frequency of use of this action, reflects the division of labour within the sector. Erasmus+ staff mobility is heavily used at

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<sup>12</sup> This period, until October 2023.

<sup>13</sup> Note that a high number of secondary schools in Norway are combined schools offering vocational programmes as well as programmes qualifying students for higher education.



institutions where the balance between research and teaching tips towards the latter. At the more research-intensive institutions, staff tend to prioritise international mobility funded by Horizon Europe or other internationally oriented research programmes. However, the study also finds that staff from the less research-intensive institutions, often combine their Erasmus+ funded mobilities with efforts to develop contacts and networks with future research collaborations in mind.

There are also numerous examples of Erasmus+ funded student mobility benefitting from the Norwegian HEI's research collaboration funded by Horizon Europe or other programmes. Contacts developed through research collaborations make it easier for exchange students to integrate at the institution they visit and can even increase the academic benefits of the stay.

A study of the Norwegian Government's Panorama Strategy<sup>14</sup> (Dahle et al., 2020) found that just a few of the projects funding bilateral cooperation with the countries prioritised in the strategy, through Norwegian programmes like UTFORSK and INTPART, also included funding from Erasmus+. Moreover, the study also found that joint funding by Norwegian programmes and Erasmus+ was more frequent in non-Panorama countries than in Panorama countries. A likely reason for this was alluded to in chapter 4: the allocation of budget for Erasmus+ international mobility across regions. As this allocation is highly biased towards countries and regions with a lower priority on the Norwegian internationalisation agenda, the potential synergies between Erasmus+ and the Norwegian-funded programmes are weakened.

Another example of sub-optimal synergies is between Erasmus+ and international cooperation projects funded by the EEA Grants.<sup>15</sup> A study of the experience of Norwegian partners in projects funded by the EEA Grants (Dahle, Jones, et al., 2021) found that only one out of four of the projects had additional funding from Erasmus+ or other relevant programmes. Norway has asked for a closer alignment between the programmes to create stronger partnerships and synergies. However, the partners point to the inadequate coordination of calls as well as conflicting objectives and evaluation frameworks as major reasons for this situation. This issue should possibly be addressed on the EEA Grants side rather than the Erasmus+ side.

## Suggestions for improvements

- Improve the coherence between the objectives of mobility and the green horizontal priority by conducting a thorough analysis of ways to improve the individual users' cost-benefit considerations of green travel.
- Consider increased funding of green travel.
- Remove the strict regional budget quotas in KA171 International mobility to allow for stronger synergies between Erasmus+ funding and funding from Norwegian programmes focusing on cooperation outside of Europe.

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<sup>14</sup> The Panorama Strategy is a strategy for international cooperation in higher education and research with a selection of non-European countries: Brazil, India, Japan, China, Russia and South Africa.

<sup>15</sup> The EEA Grants are financial contributions made by Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein to the EU, as compensation for the EFTA states' access to the EU Single Market through the EEA Agreement.

## Chapter 7: Added value and sustainability

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### Added value

In chapter 3, we presented the results and impacts of the previous programme, and the preliminary results and impacts of the current programme. In this chapter, the main evaluation question is what the added value of Erasmus+ is, in other words what results and impacts could *not* be achieved without Erasmus+, e.g. through alternative national financial schemes.

There is widespread consensus among our informants and respondents, that Erasmus+ enables activities, and thereby yields results, which could not otherwise be achieved through alternative funding schemes (additionality).

In fact, when we asked the current project coordinators whether their project activities would be carried out without Erasmus+ funding, e.g. through other financial schemes, more than 70 per cent responded, “not at all”, while 25 per cent responded, “to a considerably lower degree” (appendix, figure 7.1).

The various types of activities would most likely be affected differently. The NA for education and sport argues that without Erasmus+, it would potentially be possible to sustain some outgoing mobility through Norwegian funding schemes, but certainly not at the same volume as through Erasmus+. Such a scheme would, however, only ensure outgoing, and not incoming, mobility.

For KA2 and KA3 activities, the lack of Erasmus+ funding would be disastrous. Unilateral, national funding schemes would not be able to ensure partnerships on the same scale or as extensive as through the Erasmus+ programme. This is due both to funding and to the fact that a Norwegian funded project coordinated by a Norwegian partner would be less attractive and more complicated to be involved in for potential partners than a more multilateral project.

At the system and policy level, the Ministry of Education and Research argues that the KA3 actions give administrators and policy makers access to the most vital discussions and developments in the European education policy area, and that without this access, policy development would move in diverging, rather than similar, directions in European countries.

The primary added value of Erasmus+ is the extensive collaborations and networks across borders that the programme enables, which form the foundation for producing all the outcomes presented in chapter 3. These collaborations are considered the most important additionality of the Erasmus+ programme among all our informants and in the survey to project coordinators.

At the NA and NAU level, informants point to the experiences of Switzerland, as an example of how difficult it would be to develop extensive networks in the education sector without Erasmus+. Although Switzerland has some of the top-rated universities in Europe, they struggle to develop the kind of relationships that are being facilitated through the Erasmus+ programme. The consequences of being on the outside of the Erasmus+ programme is also becoming increasingly severe, as the programme continues to develop into a larger and more all-encompassing programme, in particular in higher education, through the European Universities Initiative. When the incentives to find partners among the partner countries increase, it becomes harder for countries on the outside to find collaborators among the partner countries. The shared rules and regulations among the partner countries further facilitate the collaboration between them, rather than with non-partner countries.

The NA and the NAU for education and sport argue that without Erasmus+, these networks would dwindle, and that there are no alternative funding sources that could ensure the continuation of these

collaborations. These informants point to the example of the UK, and how many networks involving British partners have dwindled since they left the Union and the programme.

Also, among project coordinators, access to quality-assured networks and collaborators is considered the key added value of the programme, which generates all results, benefits and impacts. In the survey to current project coordinators, we asked them to list up to three words to describe the benefits of the Erasmus+ programme that would not be achieved through alternative funding schemes. The most frequent responses can be grouped into two main categories. The first category pertains to these networks, and how the programme provides access to participation in communities at all levels, from the individual and group level to the institutional level, and also the national policy level. Through these peer networks, the respondents find that they can exchange ideas, develop the quality of their fields and give their participants opportunities they would not otherwise have.

The second category of responses has to do with volume, and the long-term scope of the programme. Respondents point to the fact that no other funding source would enable mobility and collaboration on the same scale as the Erasmus+ programme. They also point to the long-term scope of the programme and many of its actions, which provide opportunities to work towards more strategic and long-term goals, than shorter-term project funding.

The question of the added value of Erasmus+ also raises the question of what the consequences would be if the Erasmus+ programme was to be discontinued. To summarise, discontinuation of the programme would result in considerably reduced opportunities for mobility, dwindling networks, and bring most of the activities funded by the programme to a halt. This would as a consequence reduce the exchange of knowledge and ideas and result in the fields of education, sport and youth becoming more nationally insular.

## Sustainability

Most of our informants talked about the long-term effects of participating in the programme, effects that will be sustained after the termination of a specific programme. In fact, when we asked the current project coordinators whether they believed that the results of their projects at the institutional level would be sustained for a long time after project termination, 91 per cent responded to a large or a very large degree (appendix, figure 7.2).

At the same time, many projects are led by individual enthusiasts, and the degree of anchoring in the organisation or institution varies. Leadership commitment as well as wider organisational involvement is paramount to ensure that the positive results and products of an intervention are sustained. The current programme period addresses this challenge in several ways. Informants report that the accreditation actions have been successful measures to ensure leadership buy-in. In the higher education sector, informants particularly point to the European Universities Initiative as a leadership-anchored action. At the same time, informants in this sector question whether EUI projects are sufficiently anchored in the lower levels of the organisations.

## Promotion of European values, knowledge and integration

The promotion of European values and the strengthening of European integration and belonging are central objectives of the Erasmus+ programme. As Norway is one of six Erasmus+ countries are not members of the EU, a key question is whether the European and EU values are considered relevant in a Norwegian context.

Our informants are unanimous in their belief that European values are highly relevant. Informants at the NA, NAU and institution levels hold that European values are also Norwegian values. At the same time, the NAs and the NAU for education and sport point out that in their promotion of the programme in Norway, they normally use a somewhat different language, and potentially emphasise these values less than in many other European countries, due to our status as a non-EU country. The debate about EU membership is a contentious political topic in Norway, and rhetoric on topics such as *European integration* is easily politicised.

Nevertheless, our data indicate that the programme does promote European values, European integration and knowledge about Europe. Our informants believe that the programme contributes to a more positive impression of European collaboration in Norway. Some informants point out that the application process alone promotes an awareness of European values, as a high-quality application necessitates reflection on these values. Other informants emphasise that working on shared challenges in projects stimulates a sense of co-citizenship, and that we are not alone with these challenges.

The NAU also points to the policy level actions, and how the collaboration between Erasmus+ countries contributes to reducing barriers and thereby further facilitating collaborations between European countries. The NAU also believes that research and education are pillars for building trust in Europe, something that has become abundantly clear during both the Covid-19 and Ukraine crises. In the higher education sector, the NAU also believes that the EUI will propel the shift towards a more integrated European education sector.

It is also clear that the project coordinators find that their projects contribute to European values and integration. In the survey, we asked them whether they believed that their projects contributed to 1) intercultural learning, 2) more knowledge about Europe and European integration, 3) a stronger sense of European belonging, and 4) increased awareness of European values. More than 80 per cent of the respondents believe that their project has contributed to each of these to a large or very large degree (appendix, figure 7.3).

## Conclusions

For stakeholders, institutions and participants, the Erasmus+ programme enables activities and collaborations that would not otherwise be achieved through alternative funding. The primary added value is the extensive collaborations and networks across borders, which in turn produce all the outputs, results and outcomes we have presented previously. The discontinuation of the programme would result in considerably reduced opportunities for mobility, dwindling networks, and a halt to most of the activities funded by the programme.

To ensure the sustainability of results and outcomes, leadership commitment to projects as well as wider organisational involvement is paramount. Several changes to the design of the current programme to ensure leadership buy-in have been well received among stakeholders and institutions alike, especially the accreditation actions and the EUI.

Despite Norway's position as a non-EU country, Norwegian stakeholders, participants and beneficiaries believe that European values are highly relevant, and that the programme contributes to a more positive impression of European collaboration in Norway.

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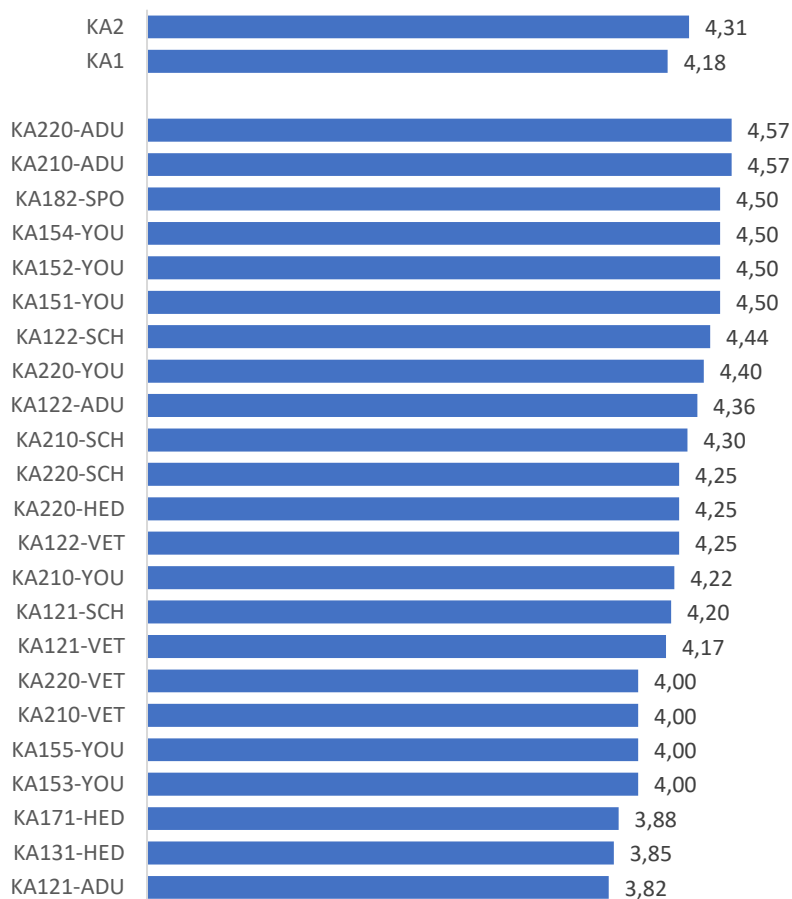
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# Appendix

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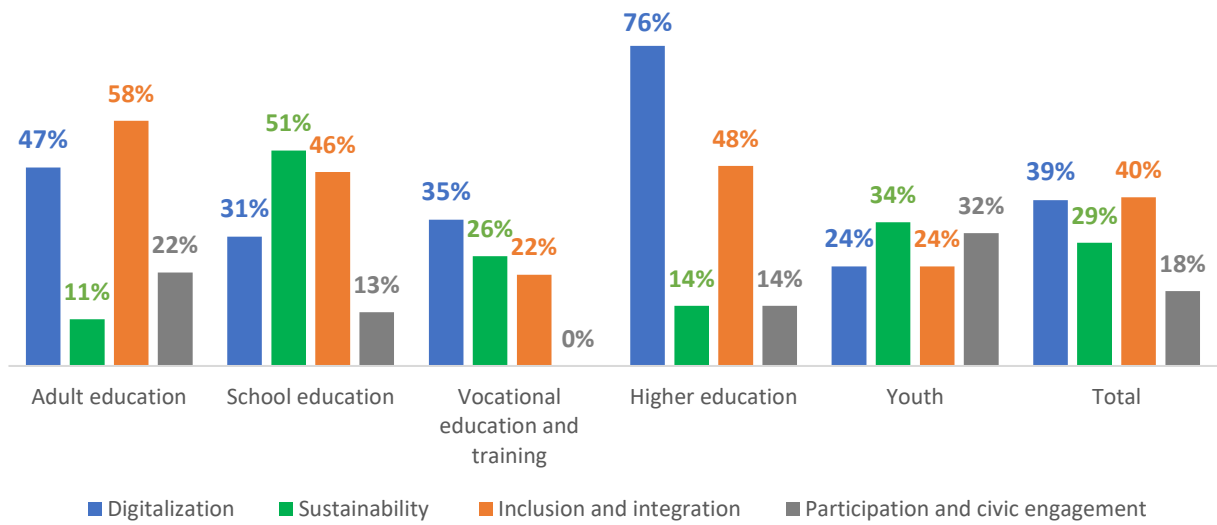
Figure 3.1. The projects' goal attainment\* (N=458)



\* Average score on a scale from 1 "very low goal attainment" to 5 "very high goal attainment"

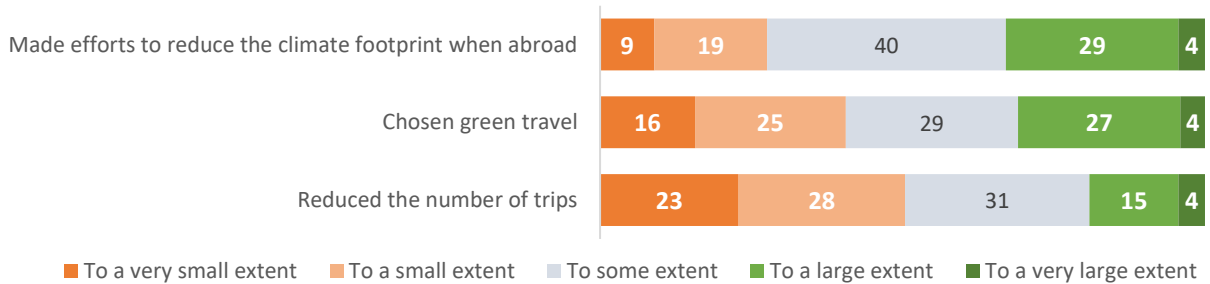
Source: Survey to Norwegian project coordinators

Figure 3.2. Share of KA210 and KA20 projects that have the four horizontal priorities as a theme (%) (N=157)



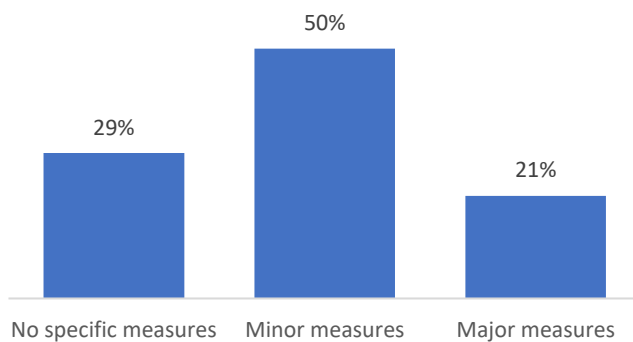
Source: Statistics from HK-dir and Bufdir

Figure 3.3 To what extent the projects have implemented various climate change reduction measures (%) (N=458)



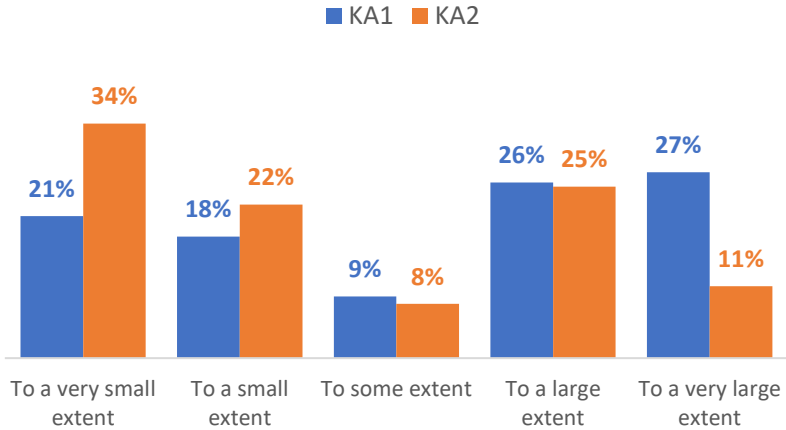
Source: Survey to Norwegian project coordinators

Figure 3.4. Have the projects taken extra measures to include hard-to-reach groups? (%) (N=373)



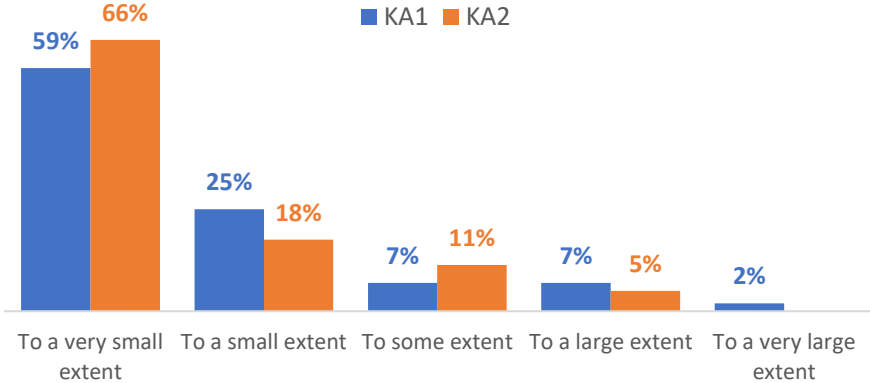
Source: Survey to Norwegian project coordinators

Figure 3.5. To what extent the Covid-19 pandemic affected the execution of the projects (%) (N=342)



Source: Survey to Norwegian project coordinators

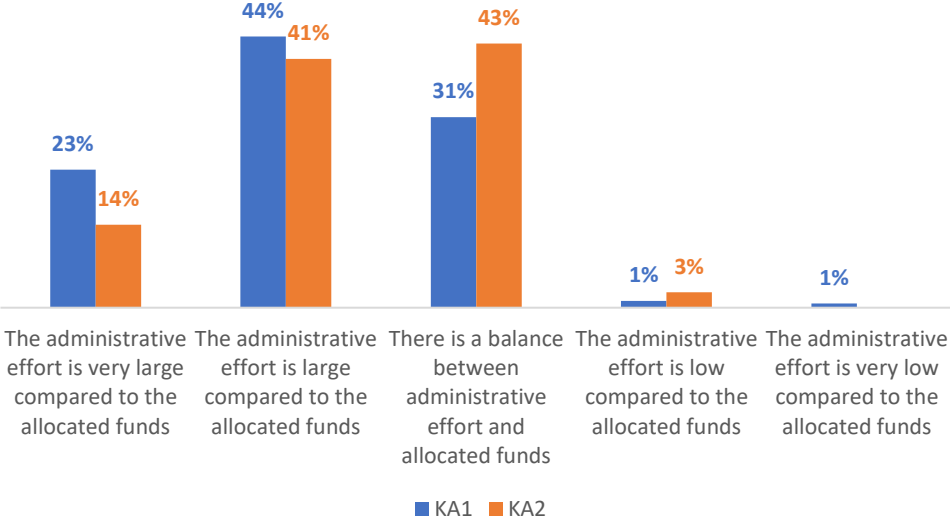
Figure 3.6. To what extent the Russo-Ukrainian War, and European imposed sanctions, affected the execution of the projects (%) (N=341)



Source: Survey to Norwegian project coordinators

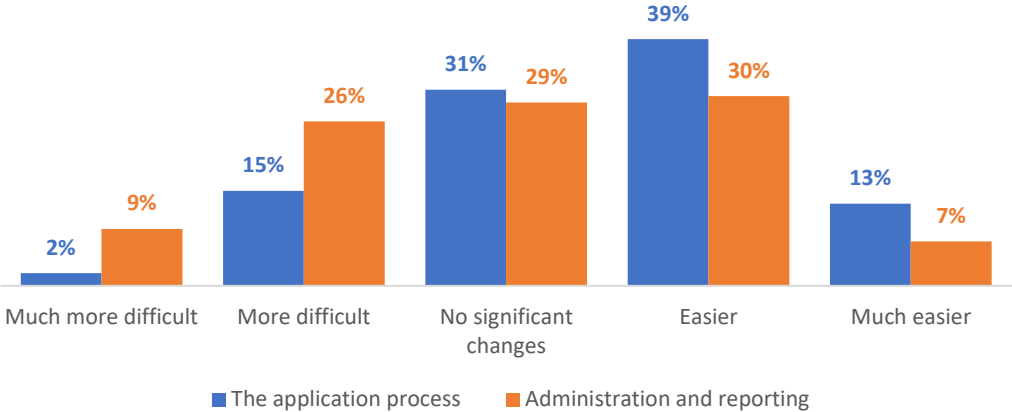


Figure 4.1. The balance between the administrative efforts required to apply for and administer the project, and the size of the allocated funds (%) (N=360)



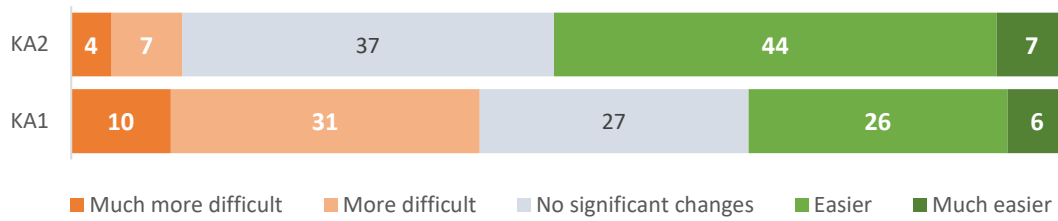
Source: Survey to Norwegian project coordinators

Figure 4.2. Is it easier or more difficult to apply for and administer projects in the new program period? (%) (participants in both program periods only) (N=141)



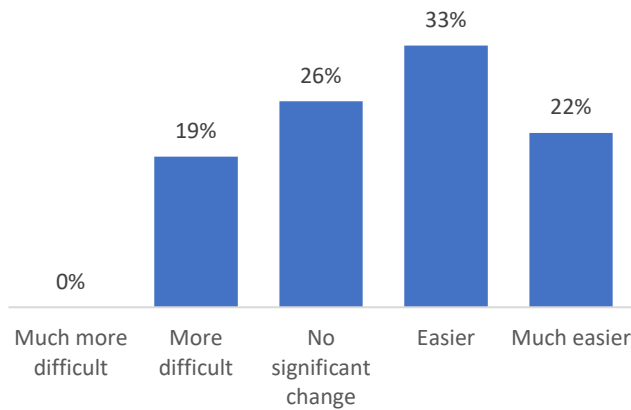
Source: Survey to Norwegian project coordinators

Figure 4.3. Is it easier or more difficult to administer projects in the new program period? (%) (participants in both programs periods only) (N=141)



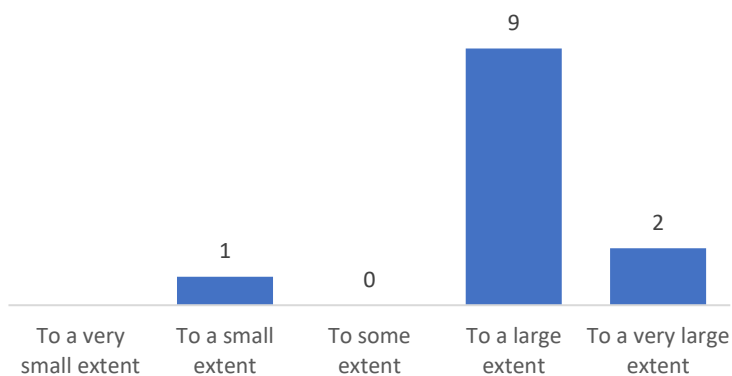
Source: Survey to Norwegian project coordinators

Figure 4.4. Has the introduction of lump sum grants made it easier or more difficult to apply for and administer projects? (%) (KA2 grant recipients only) (N=27)



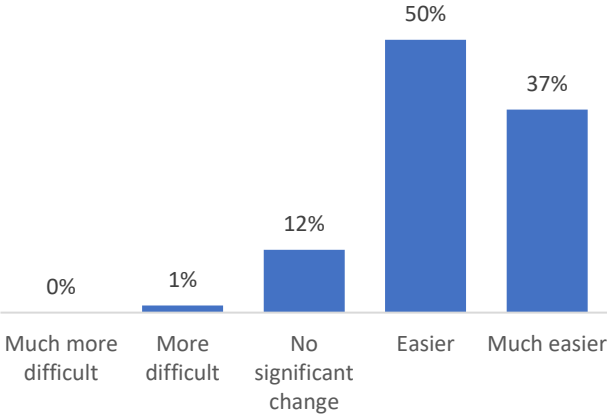
Source: Survey to Norwegian project coordinators

Figure 4.5. Have small-scale partnerships made it easier for potential applicants with limited experience to apply for and manage projects? (small-scale grant recipients only) (N=12)



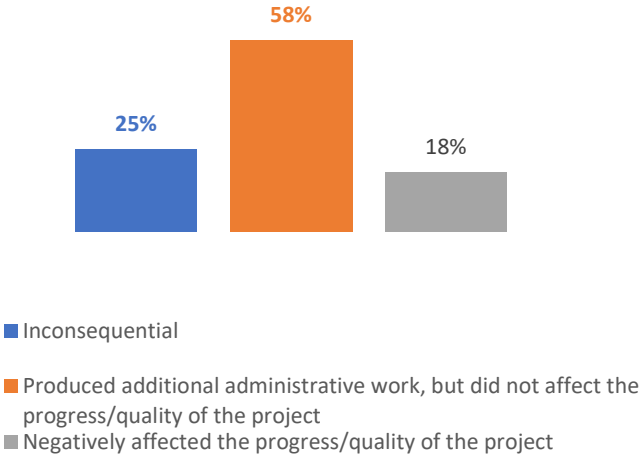
Source: Survey to Norwegian project coordinators

Figure 4.6. Has the accreditation measure made it easier or more difficult to apply for new projects? (%) (Accreditation grant recipients and Erasmus+ grant recipient in the previous program period only) (N=78)



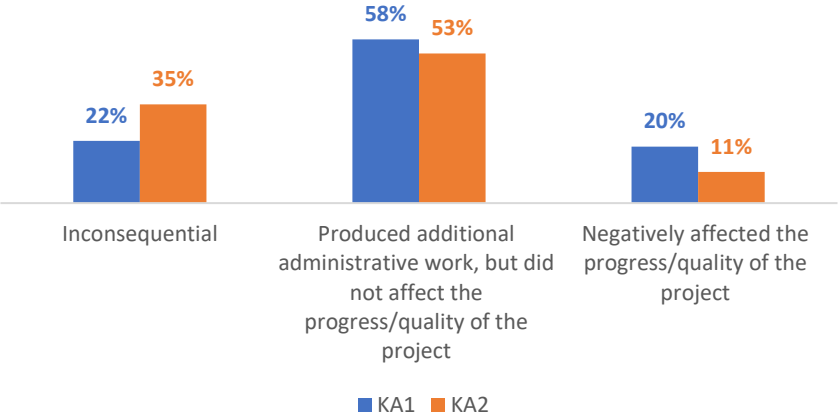
Source: Survey to Norwegian project coordinators

Figure 4.7. Consequences of central IT systems not being fully developed when the new program period started (%) (N=293)



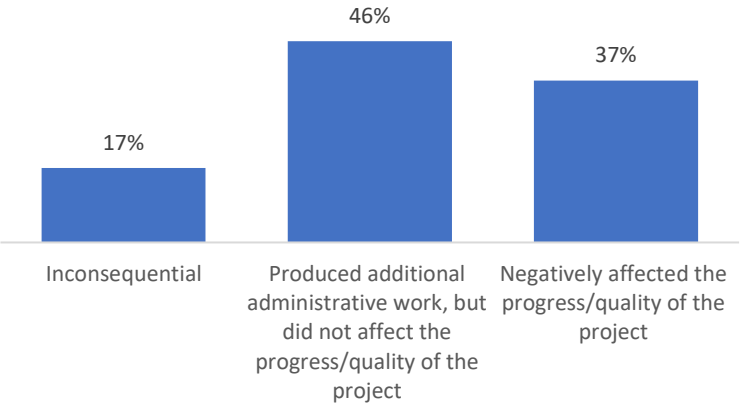
Source: Survey to Norwegian project coordinators

Figure 4.8. Consequences of central IT systems not being fully developed when the new program period started (KA1/KA2) (%) (N=293)



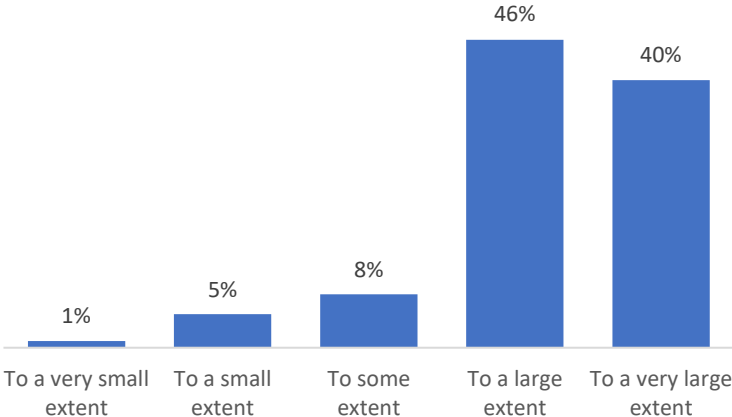
Source: Survey to Norwegian project coordinators

Figure 4.9. Consequences of central IT systems not being fully developed when the new program period started (Higher education) (%) (N=52)



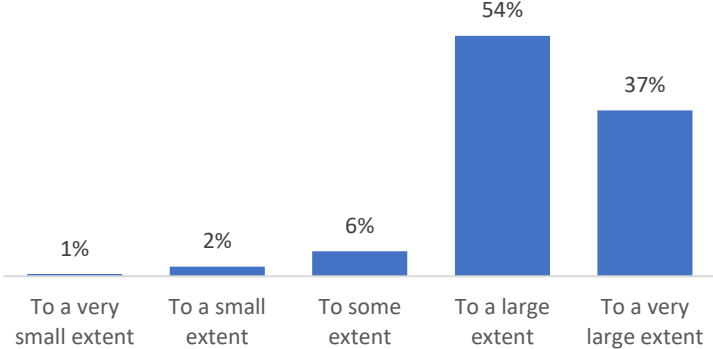
Source: Survey to Norwegian project coordinators

Figure 4.10. Have you received the help and guidance from the NA that you needed during the application process and the implementation of the project? (%) (N=349)



Source: Survey to Norwegian project coordinators

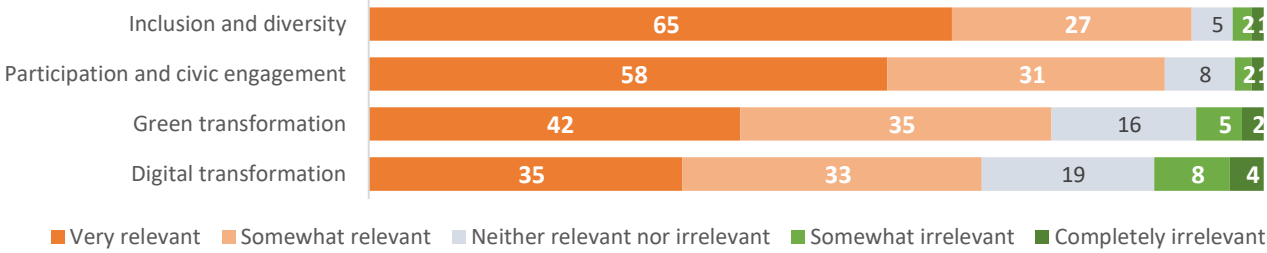
Figure 5.1. To what extent does Erasmus+ (2021-2027) provide opportunities to work with issues and objectives that are relevant to your organization/institution? (%) (N=374)



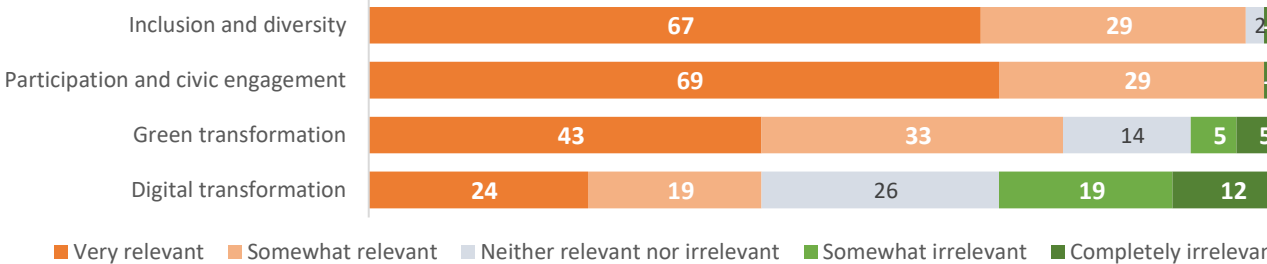
Source: Survey to Norwegian project coordinators

Figure 5.2. How relevant is each of the four horizontal priorities to your project? (%)

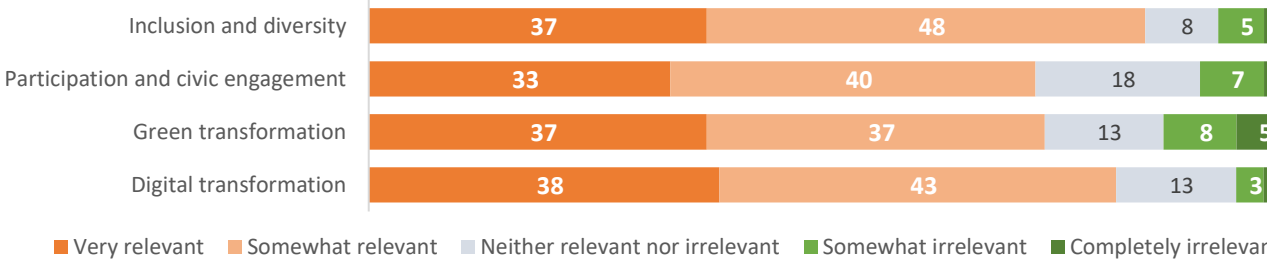
All participants (N=370):



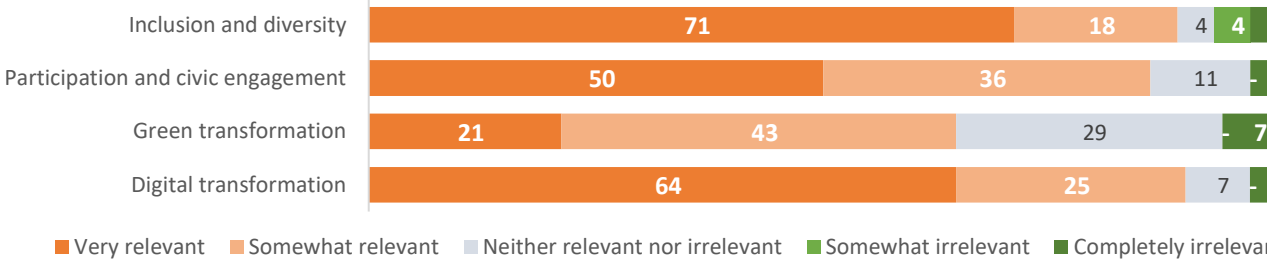
Youth and sports (N=42):



Higher education (N=60):

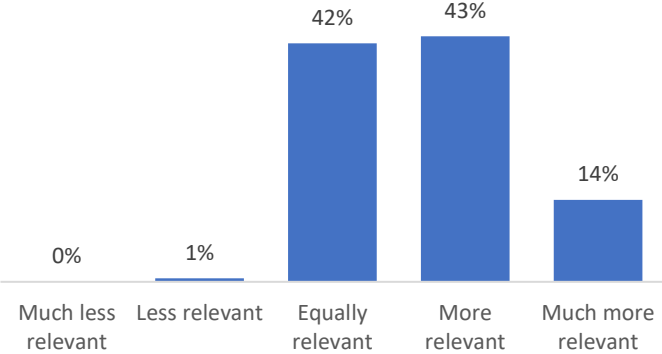


Adult education (N=28):



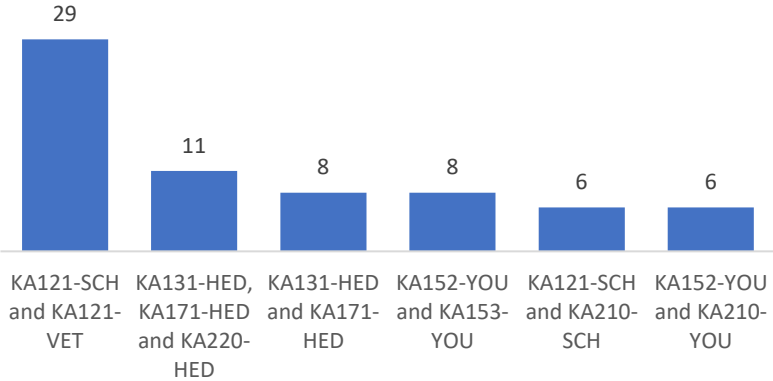
Source: Survey to Norwegian project coordinators

Figure 5.3 Is the current program more or less relevant to your organization/institution than the previous program? (participants in both programs only) (%) (N=160)



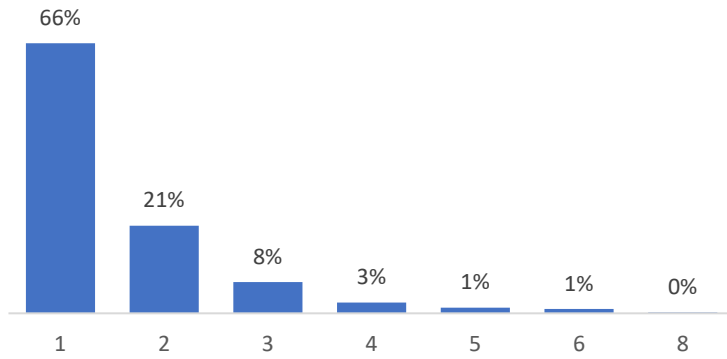
Source: Survey to Norwegian project coordinators

Figure 6.1. Number of applicants that have applied for two or more actions at least once, by combination of actions. Six most frequent.



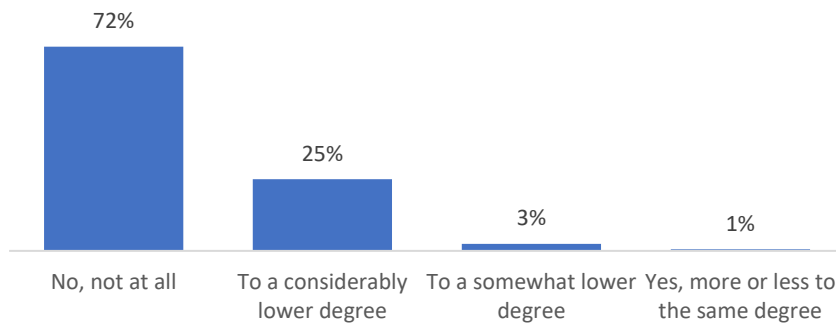
Source: Statistics from HK-dir and Bufdir

Figure 6.2 Percent applicants by number of actions applied for (%) (N = 576).



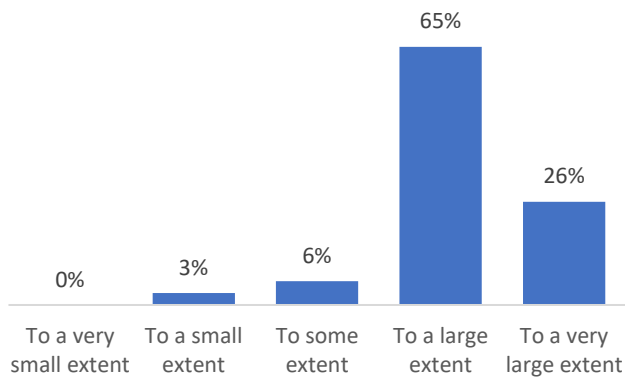
Source: Statistics from HK-dir and Bufdir

Figure 7.1. Without Erasmus+ funding, would project activities be carried out, e.g. through other financial schemes? (%) (N=365)



Source: Survey to Norwegian project coordinators

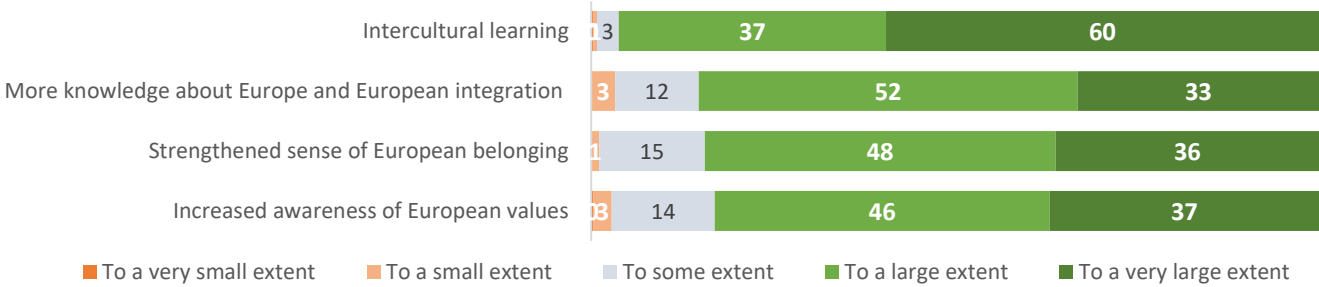
Figure 7.2. Will project results at the institutional level be sustained for a long time after project termination? (%) (N=167)



Source: Survey to Norwegian project coordinators



Figure 7.3. To what extent have the projects contributed to the following? (%) (N=365)



Source: Survey to Norwegian project coordinators



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