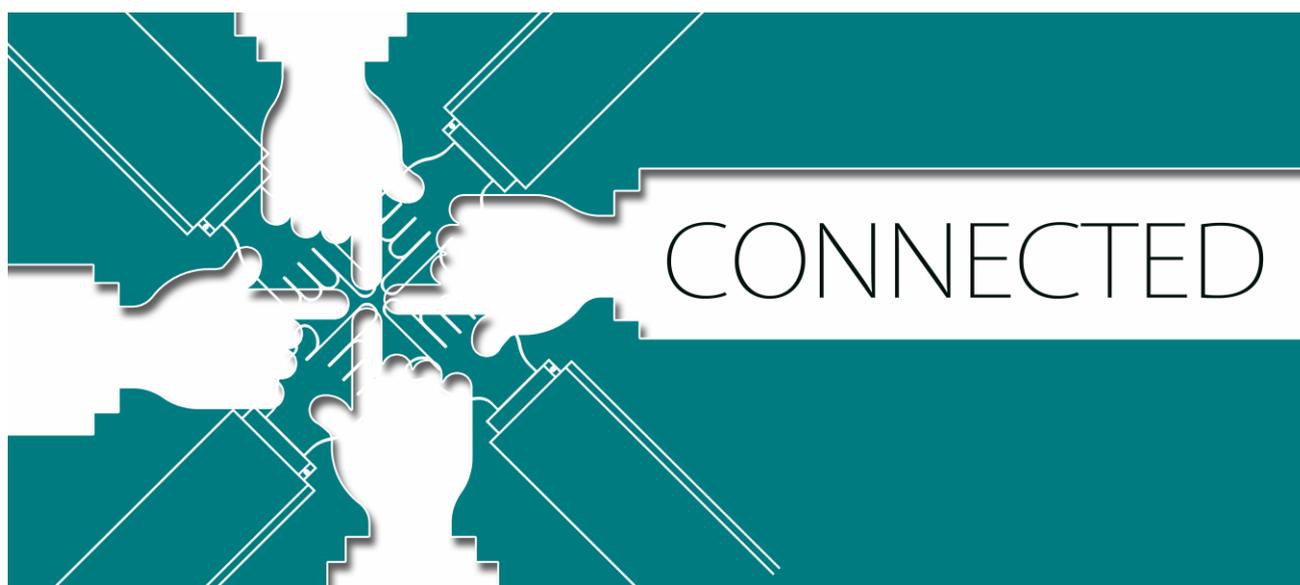


NATIONAL REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT OF ERASMUS+ IN LATVIA

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE OF THE REPUBLIC OF LATVIA



VERNERS PELŠS / AGITA MEŽJĀNE

verners@irb.lv / agita@irb.lv

+371 26101941 / + 371 26552291

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TERMS

AIPY - Agency for International Programs for Youth

E&T – Education and Training

EK – European Commission

EU – European Union

EU programmes – Lifelong Learning, Youth in Action

ICT – Information and communications technology

NAU – National Authority

KA 1 – Key Action 1: Learning mobility of individuals, including the Student Loan Guarantee Facility

KA 2 – Key Action 2 : Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices

KA 3 – Key Action 3 : Support for policy reform

NA – National Agency

LPP - Lifelong Learning Programme

SEDA - State Education Development Agency Republic of Latvia

TCA – Transnational Cooperation Activities

VET – Vocational education and training

ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME IN LATVIA

Erasmus+ programme provides Latvia with the opportunity to modernize education system and expand the international dimension at different levels of education, and supports the development of work in the area of youth.

Erasmus+ helps to achieve the goals set out in the Education Development Guidelines for Latvia 2014-2020, in Europe 2020 and ET 2020 strategies, as well as in the Youth Policy Implementation Plan 2016-2020.

The Ministry of Education and Science is the National Authority in Latvia for the implementation of Erasmus+ programme. The decentralized activities of the programme in the field of education and training are administered by the State Education Development Agency (SEDA); in the area of youth – by the Agency for International Programmes for Youth (AIPY).

Erasmus+ funding available to Latvia for the 2014-2020 programming period is planned to be EUR 105 million. It is expected that support will be provided for around 50 000 people to study, practice and improve professional qualifications, and implement international cooperation projects in the fields of education, youth and sports.

In the first 3 years (2014, 2015, 2016), SEDA has approved projects for decentralized activities in education and training at the total amount of 41 276 254 EUR. Table 1 shows the number of approved projects, the success rate and the amount of support granted per activity.

Table 1. Decentralised funding for the education and training field, Latvia

Key Action/ Action Type		Year	Applications submitted	Applications awarded	Success Rate	Grant Amount Awarded (EUR)
KA1 - Learning Mobility of Individuals	School education staff mobility (KA101)	2014	109	29	26,61%	419 604
		2015	89	58	65,17%	549 284
		2016	72	47	65,28%	422 523
	VET learner and staff mobility (KA102)	2014	49	41	83,67%	2 118 506
		2015	40	33	82,50%	2 625 910
		2016	45	36	80,00%	2 913 029
	Higher education student and staff mobility (KA103)	2014	42	40	95,24%	5 898 609
		2015	46	46	100,00%	5 679 692
		2016	45	45	100,00%	5 941 935
	Adult education staff mobility (KA104)	2014	73	15	20,55%	77 033
		2015	32	13	40,63%	63 742
		2016	30	16	53,55%	64 515
	International higher education (KA107)	2014	0	0	0,00%	0
		2015	31	18	58,06%	1 252 825
		2016	39	26	66,67%	1 432 461
Sub-total Key Action 1			463			29 459 668
KA2 - Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices	Strategic Partnerships for schools education (KA201) and (KA219)	2014	36	10	27,77%	2 002 233
		2015	39	11	28,21%	2 034 104
		2016	45	15	33,33%	2 310 347
	Strategic Partnerships for vocational education	2014	7	4	57,20	1 050 080
		2015	10	7	70,00	804 825
		2016	8	5	62,50	850 328

	and training (KA202)					
	Strategic Partnerships for higher education (KA203)	2014	16	2	12,50%	380 770
		2015	14	3	21,43%	508 810
		2016	10	2	20,00%	368 412
	Strategic Partnerships for adult education (KA204)	2014	21	3	14,30%	483 618
		2015	15	2	13,33%	438 934
		2016	16	5	31,25%	584 125
Sub-total Key Action 2				69		11 816 586

Source: State Education Development Agency Republic (SEDA)

With regard to decentralized youth activities, in the time period of 2014 to 2016 including, AIPY has approved a total of 360 projects for an amount of EUR 6 853 834 (see Table 2).

Table 2. Decentralised funding for the youth field, Latvia

Key Action/ Action Type		Year	Applications submitted	Applications awarded	Success Rate	Grant Amount Awarded (EUR)
KA1 - Learning Mobility of Individuals	Youth mobility (KA105)	2014	210	95	45,24%	1 688 387
		2015	272	117	43,01%	1 991 221
		2016	362	128	35,36%	2 129 335
KA2 - Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices	Strategic Partnerships for youth (KA205) and (KA200)	2014	27	3	11,11%	219 341
		2015	32	3	9,38%	288 113
		2016	20	5	25%	280 949
KA3 - Support for policy reform	Dialogue between young people and policy makers (KA347)	2014	8	2	25%	82 000
		2015	5	3	60%	103 680
		2016	7	4	57,14%	70 808

Source: Agency for International Programs for Youth (AIPY)

METHODOLOGY FOR THE PREPARATION OF THE NATIONAL REPORT

Purposes of the report

- Provide an evidence-based opinion on the benefits of Erasmus+ programme and the implementation of EU programmes in Latvia, providing an in-depth presentation of the situation in Latvia.
- Reflect the benefits of the support provided by Erasmus+ programme and EU programmes in Latvia, analysing the absorption of funding and the impact of the achieved results on national priorities.
- Provide a hypothetical assessment comparing the results of Erasmus+ programme implementation and the projects implemented within the framework of EU programmes with the possible situation in the field of education and youth affairs if these programs had not been implemented in Latvia.

Aspects of the report

The methodology used for the development of the report aims to ensure optimal linkage with the evaluation questions set out in Section 3.3.3 of the EC Guidance note, as well as the criteria - a set of indicators - defined in Annex 2 of the EC Guidance note.

Target groups

The following target groups are explored in the report:

- Participants in Erasmus+ programme (KA1, KA2 and KA3 activities): project applicants for decentralized activities in the field of education and training, and in the area of youth.
- Rejected applicants in Erasmus+ programme (KA1, KA2 and KA3 activities) in the field of education and training, and in the area of youth .
- Representatives of the Erasmus+ NAU National Committee and policy makers, representatives of NAs and institutions involved in the implementation of the programme, as well as internal auditors of Erasmus+ programme in Latvia.

Research methods

Quantitative research method: the opinion of target groups was obtained by collecting information from statistical sources, databases and other sources of information available to the NAs (studies, surveys).

The following secondary sources of information are used within the method:

- EUROSTAT statistics.
- Data aggregated by the NAs.
- Survey / questionnaire data obtained during the previous programming period.

Qualitative research method: the target group's opinion was obtained through 80 telephone interviews and 8 group discussions, 16 in-depth personal face-to-face interviews as well as by analysing primary sources of information.

80 telephone interviews were performed:

- 60 interviews with participants/project applicants for Erasmus+ (KA1, KA2 and KA3 activities) and the EU programmes for decentralized activities in the field of education and training, as well as in the area of youth.
- 20 interviews with applicants in the field of education and training, and in the area of youth rejected by Erasmus+ programme (KA1, KA2 and KA3) and the EU programmes.

Telephone interviews were based on previously developed questions about applicants' experience with Erasmus+ programme, their satisfaction, benefits, difficulties and obstacles. The main purpose of telephone interviews was to identify the trends and major topics further discussed in working groups.

Working groups

In total, 8 working groups were organized, in which the issues and major topics identified in telephone conversations were discussed in detail.

4 of the working groups consisted of project applicants in the field of education and training; 2 of the working groups were made up from project applicants in the area of youth.

Each group was made up of representatives of one particular sector (higher education, school education, vocational education, youth), thus obtaining a detailed summary of the views of the respective sector.

2 of the working groups were made up from applicants whose project applications had been rejected.

The working groups analysed the achieved results, sought solutions and improvements to the existing problems.

In-depth interviews

In total, 16 in-depth personal interviews were conducted with representatives of the Erasmus+ NAU National Committee and policy makers, NAs and other institutions involved in the implementation of the programme, as well as internal auditors of Erasmus+ programme in Latvia.

Other sources of information

The following sources of information were used: the NA annual programme reports and submitted to the European Commission; programme guidelines; studies and evaluations of programmes; other documents.

ANSWERS TO STANDARD QUESTIONS

Effectiveness

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

To improve the level of key competences and skills

The KA1 activity has the greatest impact on increasing the level of competences and skills in both sectors. It continues the work of LLP and Youth in Action of the previous period and is aimed at improving individual competences and skills. KA1 remains the most demanded activity (by number of applications) also in Erasmus+ programme.

In the E&T sector, 463 projects¹ have been approved in the activity of learning mobility (KA1) over a three-year period; the largest portion of approved projects - 44%² - is in higher education (KA103 and KA107 activities).

In 2014, at the beginning of implementation of Erasmus+ programme, the number of approved projects was the smallest, because many projects were rejected due to poor quality of project applications. For example, only 26.61%³ of the projects were approved in general education

¹ Statistics aggregated by SEDA.

² Statistics aggregated by SEDA.

³ Statistics aggregated by SEDA.

segment. The quality of projects has improved with each passing year. In 2016, 65.28%⁴ of the projects submitted by general education institutions were approved.

In youth sector, the number of approved projects in KA1 activity has been increasing year by year (from 95 approved projects in 2014 to 128 in 2016). Also, the number of projects submitted in the activity has increased significantly (from 210 projects in 2014 to 362 - 2016)⁵.

The representatives of general education segment indicate in their reports that the implementation of KA1 activity has contributed positively to the professional skills of teachers by expanding their knowledge of different teaching methods and their creative and effective application in teaching. Within the framework of projects, innovative ideas and approaches promoting the interest and motivation of pupils to actively participate in learning process were created. The good practices of other EU countries in the field of education were taken over; ICT and social skills, self-confidence, and foreign language skills were developed. Participation in the projects has expanded the teachers' horizons, encouraged them to search, develop and adopt new solutions for providing quality education on a daily basis. Another benefit is the opportunity to get acquainted with culture and traditions of other countries.⁶

A positive assessment with respect to competence improvement has been received from vocational school students: *"during mobility trainees from various VET schools acquired new theoretical knowledge, practical skills and professional competences as well as improved their intercultural communication abilities and broadened understanding about education systems and field-specific issues in different countries. Participants highly appreciated an opportunity to get practical experience in working with different technologies and equipment."*⁷

Similarly, appreciation has been expressed by all segments involved in the E&T sector. The competences and skills acquired within Erasmus+ projects are similar to those mentioned in the LLP⁸ during the previous programming period.

Telephone interviews and focus group discussions with representatives of youth organizations showed clear evidence that participation in KA1 has significantly improved the competencies needed to work with young people, communication skills, as well as the ability *"to get along with people who have a different cultural background"*⁹ and *"the ability to negotiate a joint solution from different viewpoints"*.¹⁰ These benefits are similar to those identified in other member states in the Transnational Analysis¹¹.

Both statistics and discussions with national policy makers, NAs and project applicants confirm KA1's crucial role in improving competences and skills, and the demand for these activities continues to exceed the supply.

⁴ Statistics aggregated by SEDA.

⁵ Statistics aggregated by AIPY.

⁶ Erasmus+ programme NA yearly report (period 1 January 2016-31 December 2016), SEDA.

⁷ Erasmus+ programme NA yearly report (period 1 January 2016-31 December 2016), SEDA.

⁸ Study "Satisfaction of Erasmus academic and general staff with mobility: experience, benefits and impact", 2013, SEDA

⁹ Erasmus+ programme NA yearly report (period 1 January 2016-31 December 2016), AIPY.

¹⁰ Erasmus+ programme NA yearly report (period 1 January 2016-31 December 2016), AIPY.

¹¹ Exploring ERASMUS+: Youth in Action. Effects and outputs of Erasmus+: Youth in Action Programme Transnational Analysis 2015/2016.

To foster quality improvements

The Strategic Partnership activity (KA2) provides the opportunity to develop the participating organization, the quality of its services and capacity. The project results in the field of E&T include the development of guidelines for innovative learning methods, education programmes, various methodological materials, etc.; in the area of youth - innovative training methods and tools. Given the long-term nature of projects implemented within the framework of the activity, it is too early to assess its direct impact.

In the E&T sector in the KA2 activity, 69 projects¹² have been approved in total within three years after the start of Erasmus+ programme.

There is a very high demand for the KA2 activity in the higher education sector, but the available support is sufficient for only a couple of projects, therefore, the number of approved projects is very small (success rate in 2016 is only 20% - out of 10 submitted projects, 2 were approved)¹³. This has been highlighted as a core problem in the focus group discussion by higher education representatives.

An even more dramatic picture can be observed in youth sector where the overall success rate in 2014 and 2015 was 11.11% and 9.38%, respectively, and only in 2016 it reached 25%, indicating the need for an increased funding for the activity¹⁴.

It should be particularly emphasized that in 2016 there was a sharp increase in the number of KA2 projects in adult education segment.

The largest number of approved KA2 projects over the last three years has been in general education sector: *Strategic Partnerships for school education* (KA201 - 13 projects) and *Strategic Partnerships for Schools Only* (KA219 - 23 projects)¹⁵. The projects identified and achieved the following objectives: improved performance among young people with low levels of basic skills, promoted social inclusion of young people, facilitated learning of ICT skills for both education staff and young people.¹⁶

In the field of vocational education, this activity supported projects implementing priorities such as "*development of high-quality work-based VET*", facilitated linkage of vocational education with labour market demand, strengthened cooperation between vocational education schools and entrepreneurs.¹⁷

In 2016 several projects approved in 2014 in higher education segment were completed. A good example is the project on mediation research: "*During the project several intellectual outputs were produced such as an online book on mediation, video materials / lectures and mediation expert's network / database was created. The project included various types and length of mobility taking place in Lithuania, Estonia, Italy and Latvia. All achieved project objectives and produced results fully comply with Erasmus+ programmes strategic partnership priorities. The project positively affected the awareness of involved member state countries about the gains from*

¹² Statistics aggregated by SEDA.

¹³ Statistics aggregated by SEDA.

¹⁴ Statistics aggregated by AIPY.

¹⁵ Statistics aggregated by SEDA.

¹⁶ Erasmus+ programme NA yearly report (period 1 January 2016-31 December 2016), SEDA.

¹⁷ Erasmus+ programme NA yearly report (period 1 January 2016-31 December 2016), AIPY.

mediation, which in turn could decrease the workload of courts and bring understanding among disputants in all types of controversies – of civil, criminal, administrative and international nature.”¹⁸

Discussions with the representatives of E&T and youth sector pointed out that KA2 activity is crucial for the organization's development and internationalization, but the low number of supported projects is demotivating to develop and submit projects that can generally rely on the achievement of Erasmus+ objectives.

Policy Reforms

The tool available for youth sector is the decentralized activity KA3, the implementation of which has a direct impact on policy development at local government level. This activity has significantly contributed to the participation of young people in decision-making processes as well as the development of youth policy at local level. In this activity, project applicants are non-governmental youth organizations as well as municipalities. In KA3, the highest number of project applications was received in 2014 and 2016, when 8 and 7 projects respectively were submitted, 2 and 4 of them were approved.

The tool available in youth sector, TCA, allows the agency to provide significant support to the development of youth policy at national level.

Language learning and development

The interviews with Erasmus+ project implementers confirmed that language skills had significantly improved during the project. The representatives of general and vocational education pointed out that the low levels of foreign language knowledge among teaching staff is the most common reason why institutions do not participate in Erasmus+ programme calls for proposals. However, participation in a project ensures that its members become more open and study foreign languages more intensively in order to make the most of the opportunities offered in future projects. The participants of the predecessor programmes LLP and Youth in Action pointed out as well that the improved language and communication skills were one of the most significant benefits.

Non-formal learning

Erasmus+ has defined the percentage of project participants who have received Youthpass as one of the indicators of the programme's quality. This has encouraged the AIPY to pay particular attention to this aspect, which has resulted in an increase in the number of Youthpass holders. For example, AIPY “has set this target as the average share of participants receiving Youthpass is 85%”¹⁹. 332 out of 419 participants received Youthpass in projects granted in 2014 (79%). 467 out of 513 participants received Youthpass in projects granted in 2015 (91%).²⁰ The interviewed individuals admitted that Youthpass is being used as an essential instrument to ensure successful competition in labour market. All of the above confirms the strengthening of the level of recognition of non-formal learning under the influence of the programme.

¹⁸ Erasmus+ programme NA yearly report (period 1 January 2016-31 December 2016), SEDA.

¹⁹ Erasmus+ programme NA yearly report (period 1 January 2016-31 December 2016), AIPY.

²⁰ Erasmus+ programme NA yearly report (period 1 January 2016-31 December 2016), AIPY.

Question 2 - To what extent has the progress on the realisation of the specific objectives contributed to the realisation of Erasmus+ general objectives in your country, regarding the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy, including the headline education target (employment; research and development; climate/energy; education; social inclusion and poverty reduction) and regarding the objectives of the ET2020 strategic framework, including the corresponding benchmark?

Erasmus+ general objectives

The main objectives of Erasmus+ correlate directly with Latvian E&T and Youth Sector Policy Planning Documents, the issues, objectives and indicators mentioned therein.

Erasmus+ projects implemented in Latvia are directly aimed at achieving the main objectives of the programme (indicated in Annex 1).

Europe 2020

The implementation of Erasmus+ programme in Latvia contributes to the achievement of the Europe 2020 goals in the fields of education, employment and welfare.

Latvia's progress indicators in the framework of Europe 2020 strategy:

- The employment rate has stabilized after the economic crisis of 2008-2010. The employment rate for 2015 has reached 72.5% - just a little short of reaching the target of 73%²¹.
- Since 2008, significant progress has been made towards reducing the number of early school leavers. If the figure was 15.5% in 2008²², then in 2015 - only 9.9%, thus fully reaching the Europe 2020 goal.
- Individuals who have completed higher education: Latvia has reached the Europe 2020 target for this indicator, exceeding the 40% mark. Progress since 2005 has been significant - from 18.5% to 41.3% in 2015²³.
- Less progress has been made in research and development investments - only 0.69%²⁴ of GDP in 2014, thus failing to reach the national target of 1.5% and the EU target of 3%.
- In 2015, the level of poor population fell to 309 000 inhabitants (in 2005 there were 463 000 people living in poverty in Latvia)²⁵.

ET2020

The implementation of Erasmus+ programme has a direct impact on the achievement of the ET2020 objectives. The impact study of the previous Erasmus programme found that the mobility programme contributes to employment. Mobility participants not only acquire knowledge in a particular field, but also improve other skills important for competitiveness in labour market. It is twice as unlikely that they will be unemployed for a long time. For example,

²¹ Eurostat data.

²² Eurostat data.

²³ Eurostat data.

²⁴ Eurostat data.

²⁵ Eurostat data.

5 years after graduation, Erasmus participants are 23% less likely to be unemployed than other graduates.²⁶ Erasmus+ continues to ensure this positive impact.

Latvia's progress indicators in the framework of ET 2020 (data for 2015):

- 94.4%²⁷ of children from the age of 4 years up to the age when compulsory education is started, took part in pre-primary education and care. The indicator is above the EU average, but still slightly below the target of ET 2020 (95%).
- The proportion of 15-year-olds who had poor reading achievements -17.7%, in mathematics - 21.4%, and in science - 17.2%, showing a better average score in mathematics than in the European Union, but failing to reach the ET 2020 target of 15%²⁸.
- The proportion of early education and training leavers (18-24 years old) was 9.9%²⁹, well below the EU average and fully fulfilling the ET 2020 target of 10%.
- The employment rate of recent graduates (people aged 20-34 who dropped out of education by one to three years before the reference year) was 78.8%³⁰, well above the EU average, however failing to reach the ET 2020 target (82%).
- Participation in tertiary education (30-34 years old) is 41.3%³¹, well above the EU average and fully meeting the 40% target defined by the ET 2020.

Question 3 - To what extent have Erasmus+ actions in your country influenced policy developments in the domains of education and training and influenced policy developments in the area of youth?

Influence on policy developments in the domain of education and training

The decentralized activities KA1 and KA2 of E&T sector have no direct influence on the development of local education policies, since they are geared solely to the development of individual skills and strategic partnerships. Erasmus+ activities in E&T sector can be considered to focus on developing the internal strategies and policies of applicant institutions. As a result of the discussions with the representatives of E&T sector it was concluded that the new Erasmus+ architecture, unlike in the previous period, has increased the institutional impact of projects, thus allowing organizations to better define their development goals and to develop policies and strategies for internationalization, innovations and other aspects (this aspect was especially highlighted by general and vocational education organizations).

It can be concluded that the overall impact on policy development can be enhanced in E&T sector, and KA2 activity could serve as a core instrument for this. The development of cross-sectoral cooperation projects should be encouraged, involving municipalities and sectoral associations as partners.

²⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/library/study/2014/erasmus-impact_en.pdf

²⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/monitor2016-lv_lv.pdf

²⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/monitor2016-lv_lv.pdf

²⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/monitor2016-lv_lv.pdf

³⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/monitor2016-lv_lv.pdf

³¹ https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/monitor2016-lv_lv.pdf

Influence on policy developments in the area of youth

The decentralized KA3 activity has been designed for the youth sector. Its implementation has a direct impact on policy development at local / municipal level. This activity is implemented by youth non-governmental organizations and local authorities.

One of the national policy priorities in the area of youth is the development of local government's youth policy. KA3 activity directly affects the achievement of these goals. A very good example is the project "Youth Policy Strategy", which involves 8 municipalities: *"8 involved municipalities will work together as a team to achieve a common goal: to develop eight effective youth policy strategies that streamlined through a single collaboration platform based on fulfilling the true interests and needs of local youth, aims to identify and address the problems while also involving local politicians and specialists."*³²

Discussions with youth organizations confirmed that KA1 and KA2 activities, too, indirectly affect the development of policy in youth sector as young people and youth workers have the opportunity to mention the best practices of other countries in discussing the policy development process with local decision makers.

The tool available in youth sector, TCA, allows the NA to provide significant support to the development of youth policy at national level, for example, regarding the recognition of non-formal learning and strengthening of youth work.

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

Co-financing and co-funding

National co-financing in the implementation of Erasmus+ at a project level is provided exclusively for mobility in higher education:

- 1) KA103 within the 1st key activity "Mobility of the Higher Education Sector between Programme Countries". This approach was applied also before 2014, under Erasmus LLP activity. National policy makers agree that co-financing is vital for ensuring student and university staff mobility, which, in its turn, promotes internationalization of higher education and the quality of studies, and Erasmus+ is the only instrument (with such a broad geographic coverage and budget size) for implementing it. Given the socio-economic situation in Latvia, there was a high risk of a decrease in the number of mobilities due to insufficient personal financial resources of potential participants (necessary to ensure full implementation of the project). In order to address this risk, the Ministry of Education and Science in 2017 allocated 1.7 million EUR as national co-financing for the implementation of KA103 activity, thus increasing the level of individual support by EUR 200 per month for student mobility and increasing the daily allowance established by EC by 20% for each day of mobility for university staff.³³

³² Erasmus+ programme NA yearly report (period 1 January 2016-31 December 2016), AIPY.

³³ Erasmus+ programme NA yearly report (period 1 January 2016-31 December 2016), SEDA.

2) KA107 of the 1st key activity "International Student and Staff Mobility". Since 2016, co-financing of the state budget is also provided for mobility between programme countries and partner countries (KA107), in 2016 in the amount of EUR 361 198. The state budget co-financing is intended to increase the level of individual support of outgoing members of mobility, as well as to implement additional mobility with the priority co-operation countries identified by the Ministry of Education and Science.

Compared to 2014, 2015 and 2016 calls for proposals, co-financing in 2017 has increased by EUR 337 090. Further co-financing is planned for ensuring full implementation of KA103 activities.

The major role of co-financing was also highlighted during the focus group discussion of university segment. Other E&T segment representatives and youth organizations did not highlight the need for co-financing during the discussion.

In addition to higher education co-financing, the state co-finances the policy support tools and networks of Erasmus+ programme as well as administrative budgets of the NAs for their specified functions.

Promotion

Both SEDA and AIPY have adequate financial resources to promote Erasmus+ visibility. The following activities are being carried out: organization of seminars, printing and distribution of advertising materials, advertising in the media, organizing of individual trips to local governments (in the youth sector), etc. Through telephone interviews, 87.9% of Erasmus+ programme participants acknowledged the availability of information - it is easy to find and understand, and it is widely available.

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

By analysing the findings and interviews, it is not possible to determine which of Erasmus+ activities is more effective. Each activity has its own objectives and field and level of influence. Mobility enhances the personal growth of its participants (acquired and advanced professional knowledge, new working methods, improved foreign language, ICT and social skills).³⁴ Compared to the previous programming period (LPP and Youth in Action programme), the impact of mobility projects has increased on an institutional level. As it was emphasized in the focus groups, the fact that only institutions were eligible to apply for support, had increased the opportunity to design and implement more targeted mobility projects that were based on the long-term development plan.

Strategic partnerships provide for the development and implementation of innovative teaching methods, the transfer of good practice, internationalization. It significantly affects not only the development of an institution, but also contributes to the overall improvement of education quality. The activity has a long-term impact. This could be further enhanced, if the transfer of the

³⁴ Erasmus+ programme NA yearly report (period 1 January 2016-31 December 2016), SEDA.

most successful project results to other Latvian institutions was more targeted. This opinion was supported also by the participants of focus groups.

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

National Agency SEDA in the field of E&T has agreed that integrating Lifelong Learning and Youth in Action programmes under a single brand has been the right decision, since Erasmus+ is highly regarded at national, organizational and individual levels. The 30 year history of Erasmus+ ensures recognition of the programme not only at the political level, but also in the wider community.³⁵

AIPY, however, believes that the inclusion of youth area in the programme and the use of a “brand” name that is clearly associated with the field of education has undermined the visibility of the youth programme. In general, this programme continues to be associated with formal education in society.

Other issues arising from the new architecture - see Question 8.

Individual interviews with NAs` staff, telephone interviews and focus groups with supported beneficiaries highlighted several positive aspects of the new programme architecture that contribute to the achievement of Erasmus+ objectives:

- Decentralization of activities - in the new programme, part of the activities are more accessible due to their decentralization, for example, international cooperation in higher education. Earlier this activity was not so readily accessible to Latvian organizations because of the need to participate in a single European call for proposals, thus competing with all Member State projects.
- Strategic partnership projects in the area of youth contribute significantly to its long-term development. At national level, this type of support and funding would not be possible given that the area of youth in Latvia is relatively new; there is a lack of human and financial capacity.
- The number of projects submitted in the areas of E&T and youth has increased, and, as a result, also the quality of all aspects of the approved projects has grown (development process, goals and planning activities, implementation). This can be explained both by the requirements of the programme and by the applicants' desire to ensure high competitiveness of their projects, given the level of activity in all KAs.
- The fact that projects can be submitted only by institutions ensures mobility for more people, a wider dissemination of results, better transfer of knowledge, programme visibility, project quality - higher human and financial capacity.

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

³⁵ “Erasmus+ expectations for the future” a contribution from NA Directions Education and Training, 2017

In general, both E&T and youth sector receive more funding under Erasmus+ than under the previous programming period. The amount of budget as a whole ensures achievement of the stated objectives of the programme.

Although financing has increased, in the E&T sector there are still projects in both mobility and strategic partnership activities, that meet the quality requirements, but do not get approval due to lack of funding (see Question 1).

During focus groups with rejected project applicants, the view was expressed that the possibility of limiting the number of projects to be approved for one organization should be considered, thereby providing opportunities for more organizations to receive funding within an existing budget.

In the focus group discussions, representatives of higher education pointed to the need for greater funding to be transferred to the strategic partnerships of higher education institutions. Similar views were expressed also by national policy makers. Representatives of other E&T segments indicated that the distribution of funding was adequate and there was no need to change the proportion of funding previously stipulated in the regulation.

With regard to youth programmes, given the high level of activity, additional funding should be directed to mobility projects of youth workers within the framework of KA1 activities. The need is also based on the fact that youth affairs are a comparatively new sector in Latvia, therefore, youth work at the national level has been rapidly developing in recent years - especially the promotion of youth workers' mobility. Whilst in other countries these employees must have higher education in the specified field, in Latvia there are no such requirements. Accordingly, these employees need to be trained and this programme provides youth workers with a perfect opportunity to acquire the necessary specific knowledge and skills.

It contributes to the development of youth work in Latvia as a whole and broadens the range of people who can support the involvement of young people (including those with limited opportunities) in international mobility activities (youth exchanges, European volunteering).

Probably, also KA2 should receive more funding, as this activity places greater emphasis on ensuring that the EU and national policy priorities are linked.

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

The most common project design and implementation problems mentioned by Erasmus+ programme participants (including those institutions whose projects had been rejected) who were interviewed by telephone:

- Complexity of the guidelines and the project application form:
 - a) The terminology used in programme guidelines is complex, ambiguous. The respondents working in youth sector point out that the terminology is very complicated and the guidelines contain a lot of unnecessary information, since only a very small part refers to the area of youth;

- b) In strategic partnership projects, partners in different countries interpret and understand the guidelines differently.
- Planning and organization of work with partners: there are cases when a partner needs to be replaced (a partner withdraws from the project); differences in the work culture; different interpretation of guidelines and conditions.

Both NAs inform project applicants about potential problem situations and their solutions by means of seminars, individual communication.

When analysing project design and implementation difficulties in specific activities, it is especially important to emphasize the area of youth, which faces major changes in the new architecture of Erasmus+ programme. Youth activity projects have the same requirements as formal education institutions, which as a result limits the ability of many youth sector organizations to participate in the programme due to insufficient human resources. Uniform requirements have been set for both education institutions, where responsibility for project development and management work is usually undertaken by a department with relevant experience, - and for youth organizations where the project work is carried out by volunteers. Young people have not yet acquired the skills required to prepare quality projects. Even though this is sometimes referred to as a positive aspect contributing to raising the level of project management skills, a significant number of projects is however submitted by the same youth organizations that can already be perceived as professional organizations active on international and national levels for a long period of time. Smaller, newly established, regional organizations do not apply for this funding because of the above-mentioned barriers. In order to change this situation, AIPY organizes targeted training for young people so that they can successfully prepare for mobility activities, and finances this training from the administrative budget. In order to provide a wider range of applicants (involving small / local or newly established organizations that do not have the capacity to implement an international project), the programme should include first level (first-step) projects. These would allow organizations to get their first experience in the programme and prepare for project submission at international level.

Question 9 - To what extent are the approaches and tools that are used for disseminating and exploiting the results of Erasmus+ in Latvia? Where do you see possibilities for improvement?

The beneficiaries interviewed through telephone interviews and focus groups acknowledged that publicity was not a problem and was considered sufficient to inform about the specific project and the opportunities offered by Erasmus+. The most popular publicity channels are as follows:

- Internet environment / media - organization and municipality websites, social networks - information posted on organizations and members' profiles, Youtube.com.
- Media - regional or specialized newspapers, magazines, TV.
- Public events - seminars, courses, meetings, for example - educational meeting for teachers and pupils' parents, meetings of professional associations, international conferences and interregional seminars, information days and "Erasmus+ experience stories", lectures.
- Printed materials, handouts - booklets, posters, postcards, USB storage devices.

- The result of a project that serves as a publicity tool, for example, dictionaries created in a printed and electronic format.

Assessing the quality of publicity activities in the field of E&T, the NA acknowledged that educational institutions are very actively and creatively striving to inform about their implemented project. Organizations are proud of their achievements in this particular area. Dissemination of project results for both target audience and general public provides an increase in the number of pupils and students, which is vital for the existence, competitiveness and development of an educational institution. This correlation was also confirmed by the view expressed in the focus group of vocational education schools, namely, the larger the number of students provided with mobility opportunities, the more they are motivated to apply for studies in a particular school.

NA officials stated that in large-scale youth projects (for example, KA2 projects) high-quality dissemination activities are being implemented. In some KA1 projects publicity is implemented to formally meet the minimum requirements of the programme. Information about the project and its results is placed on the websites of the organization and / or local governments, and in printed booklets. The publicity measures of KA2 projects are more creative and innovative. In order to improve the quality of publicity activities, AIPY has organized training for project applicants.

Efficiency

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

A simple and effective Erasmus+ governance structure has been established in Latvia – the Ministry of Education and Science is the responsible institution in Latvia for implementing the programme, but decentralized activities are managed by NAs - SEDA in the E&T segment and AIPY in the area of youth. This structure operated successfully also in the course of the LLP and Youth In Action programmes.

AIPY appreciates the involvement of NAs in decision-making at EC level. Workshops are being organized, and their performance is assessed as productive.

Particular emphasis should be placed on cooperation between the two NAs with the NAs of other countries. Since 2000, agencies have been meeting twice a year. These meetings result in interpersonal cooperation, discussion and resolution of issues currently relevant for the particular area, development of a common position for negotiations with the EC. If there are issues affecting the EC, including Erasmus+, a common position is developed and later presented to the EC. This cooperation model is considered to be effective.

The NAU carries out (outsourced) annual audits of SEDA and AIPY. The number of recommendations issued by the independent auditors to the NAs has declined annually, mostly

referring to minor technical details. However, NAs believe that, given the well-organized system and the fact that the agency's operational programme is set up for 2 years, the audit should be carried out once every 2 years. This would reduce the administrative burden and save budget funds. SEDA has also been audited by the EC and the European Court of Auditors.

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

Integration and IT tools

NAs have a different assessment of the integration of predecessor programmes into Erasmus+. If SEDA believes that the integration of activities has improved the effectiveness of programme monitoring, AIPY believes that it has not had a significant impact. Both NAs agree that the introduction of IT tools has made it easier for agencies to organize project evaluation and monitoring. The availability of IT tools is also welcomed by project applicants. NA points out that initially additional resources had to be invested in advising applicants on the use of IT tools, but since 2015, the situation has significantly improved.

The positive effects of decentralization

The new program architecture has made strategic partnership activities more accessible to higher education institutions (decentralization of activities has been carried out). In discussions with national policy makers, the assumption has been expressed that decentralization could be extended in the activity "Transfer of innovations in higher education".

Differences between the youth sector and the E&T sector

Although the youth sector, in general, receives more funding from Erasmus+ than before and is more diverse, the assessment of the effectiveness of Erasmus+ as expressed by youth organizations is not 100% positive. Some of the respondents point out that in the previous programming period there were simpler requirements and greater opportunities for funding.

These issues in the youth sector are directly opposite to the views of the representatives of E&T sector, who emphasize that Erasmus+ application procedure is reasonable, structured and simplified. This can be explained by the institutional character of this sector and their previous experience in projects.

Quality requirements and increase of competition

In fact, the representatives of all sectors point to an increase in quality requirements and project competition compared to the previous programming period. Many good-quality projects are placed on reserve lists, yet ultimately do not receive support. The increase in the budget (discussed further in Question 21) is mentioned as one of the solutions to the problem.

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

In interviews both educational and youth organizations expressed the view that there were no significant differences in the effectiveness of the implementation of different activities. The implementation of KA2 in all sectors is emphasized as more complicated. Most often, the coordination of project between several partners is mentioned as the greatest challenge. However, usually problems get solved. Implementation efficiency is also ensured by the previous experience of implementers: 80.6% of the existing Erasmus+ project implementers (interviewed by telephone) have previously participated in LPP and Youth In Action activities. The efficiency of implementation is ensured also by NA's guidance and advice provided both before the conclusion of the project grant agreement, when a meeting with beneficiaries is held, in which the conditions and the most important aspects to be addressed are discussed, and during the implementation process – via telephone, e-mail or personal meetings.

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

Administrative burden for project applicants

Most respondents pointed out that the administrative burden has not decreased and differs in various activities. The introduction of the IT tool ensuring electronic submission of the project and facilitating document circulation was referred to as a positive factor. Although in 2014 there were complaints about technical problems in the operation of the system as well as questions and uncertainties about a correct use of the tool, in general project applicants are satisfied with the new project submission system.

Telephone interviews revealed that the development and implementation of KA2 projects require more time and effort:

- Completion of application form - is more complicated and time-consuming. Respondents point out that the same questions are sometimes repeated, only the wording is different.
- Language differences - for example, project coordinators wrote a project in German, although the working language was English.
- Additional documents - for KA2 projects, a certain amount of financing requires a financial guarantee, which is very difficult to prepare and obtain in Latvia.

Again, the complexity of project templates and the high demands of the programme in the activities of the youth sector do not contribute to the participation of youth organizations (especially small, newly established and regionally based) in Erasmus+ programme. The issue and the suggested solutions are discussed in Question 8.

Administrative burden for national agencies

No information has been received from both NAs on the existence of inappropriate administrative burden. Erasmus+ administrative requirements are clearly defined, manageable and adequately monitored.

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

56% of project implementers interviewed by telephone admitted that they are generally satisfied with the functionality of the new IT tool. Although when using the system for the first time many uncertainties and questions arise, as soon as the user gets acquainted with it, the advantages are immediately acknowledged: the project does not have to be submitted personally in printed form (thus the applicant saves time and transport costs); calculations are made automatically; the system shows errors; once data is entered, there is no need to enter it repeatedly; submission of reports is easier.

When explaining the situation about the efficiency of using the IT tool, NAs acknowledged that technical problems and uncertainties occurred in 2014, when the new system was introduced. From 2015 the number of questions has decreased; at the moment they are received mostly from those who submit a project application for the first time.

85% of the respondents interviewed by phone needed help with using the IT tool. Almost always to address the problems people turn for help to the NAs (by phone or via e-mail). Respondents also appreciated the seminars organized by the two NAs presenting the use of the IT tool. The support provided by SEDDA and AIPY in this area was assessed as qualitative and operational.

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

During the interviews, representatives of both NAs pointed out that both financial and human resources are appropriate for quality implementation of Erasmus+ programme in Latvia. During the examination of project applications, additional staff are recruited if necessary. Neither under Erasmus+, nor previous LPP and Youth In Action, there has been no need to prolong project application evaluation deadlines, which indicates an ability of NAs to provide adequate capacity. Respondents interviewed in telephone interviews (including applicants whose projects had been rejected) appreciated the professionalism of the two agencies, interpersonal skills, and ability to provide rapid response/assistance. The agencies not only provide advice and support during the development and implementation of projects, but also explain in detail the reasons why the application was rejected in order to enable the applicant to improve it and re-submit in the future.

Relevance

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

The supported projects are fully in line with Erasmus+ objectives and priorities - both in E&T segment and in the area of youth. Erasmus+ objectives are clearly defined and reflected in the Education Development Guidelines of Latvia 2014-2020 and the Youth Policy Implementation Plan for 2016-2020.

It is essential that in the future, Erasmus+ programme maintains a focus on education (including non-formal education in the area of youth) as a key element having a direct impact on the increase in employment. Mobility and strategic partnership are the most important activities addressing the issues of internationalism and competitiveness in the education system of Latvia.

It would be necessary to target a larger part of the budget on strategic partnership projects in higher education. To date, only 2 to 3 projects are approved annually in Latvia while more than 50 institutions are eligible for this activity. This makes it difficult for higher education institutions to choose only one project to be submitted; they also lose motivation to develop new ideas, prepare and submit projects within the framework of the calls for proposals.

The interviewed representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science and NAs admitted that there would be a need to prioritize and incorporate certain priority goals of national importance into the programme. This arrangement was applied in the previous programming period, and it gave certain benefits to projects where specific problems / priorities were addressed. Priorities for Latvia are:

- social integration - the reduction of social inequality is a very topical issue for Latvian society, especially in the context of the existing "gap" between large cities and regions (availability of services, including access to high-quality education);
- excellence in vocational education - it would be necessary to support initiatives aimed at promoting excellence in vocational education and promoting its prestige;
- the number of young people active in NGOs is relatively low; support mechanisms should be developed to increase this level of involvement. The European Voluntary Service should also be preserved as an important initiative contributing to raising the level of competence of young people.

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

NAs very actively and thoughtfully organize various informative events to address the target audience of the programme activities, motivate to participate in the calls and invite the applicant organizations to include people with special needs and from different social groups in their projects. Seminars are held both in Riga and in other major regional cities. Some of them are available online. Presentations are published on NA websites. 49% of telephone interview respondents indicated that NA seminars were the source of information where they first learned about Erasmus+; others received information from the organization's management and colleagues.

The interviews with the officials of the Ministry of Education and Science and NAs, and the focus groups interviews with project implementers addressed the issue of the ability of Erasmus+ programme to reach the target audience, the existing problems, and suggestions for increasing the number of applicants in the activities:

- **In the field of E&T**, the most common obstacle for potential applicants among general education and vocational education organizations is the lack of English language skills among school staff, which results in fear of being in a foreign environment and lack of self-confidence. Even if the school administration has the appropriate capacity to prepare a project application, it is difficult to attract participants from among the teachers due to the aforementioned reason. This problem is especially acute with regional schools and senior teachers. Those schools participating in Erasmus+ programme actively contribute to the teaching of foreign languages to teachers by paying tuition fees. The lack of sufficient language skills was also highlighted in conversations with adult education representatives. In higher education, the main problem is the low level of funding for strategic partnership projects.
- **In the area of youth:** a small number of youth organizations and their members. In 2013, the proportion of young people in youth organizations and initiative groups was only 12%³⁶. According to the current "Youth Policy Implementation Plan 2016-2020", by 2020 the rate of 17% must be achieved³⁷. Erasmus+ is an essential tool for supporting the objectives of the proposed guidelines and the architecture of the new programme contributes to the emergence of new youth organizations or the integration of young people into existing organizations (by defining that a project can be submitted only by an organization). However, the main obstacle to increasing the number of applicants in the activities, i.e. excessive requirements, was already discussed in Question 8. It is necessary to simplify the application procedure or to develop a "first step" activity that would encourage the participation of youth organizations in Erasmus+ programme. Particular attention should be paid to making small and newly established and regional youth organizations more active, and also to adjusting the programme to the needs of young people with limited opportunities.
- In order to improve the project involvement of **people with special needs and limited opportunities**, various seminars and discussions are arranged in which interested parties are informed about the possibilities, conditions to be taken into consideration and the experience of other participants. For example, in 2016 SEDA organized a discussion on "Erasmus+ mobility of people with special needs: opportunities and reality". However, the total number of people representing these groups in projects remains low, for example, in 2016 in E&T segment people with special needs and limited opportunities participated only in VET learner and staff mobility (KA102) - 3% and 5% of the total number of participants respectively.

Youth projects show a relatively high number of participating young people with fewer opportunities, for example, in 2016 approved projects (KA105, KA205, KA347), 24% of the participants were young people with fewer opportunities.

Youth organizations are a vital element in achieving these target groups in the youth

³⁶ http://viaa.gov.lv/files/news/23768/izm_erasmus_20_janv_2014.pdf

³⁷ Youth Policy Guidelines for 2015-2020.

sector, which can, in cooperation with local authorities, stimulate the involvement of young people with special needs and limited opportunities.

To increase the number of young people with fewer opportunities in the programme, AIPY has organized several international and national events, such as an international exchange of experience seminar for prison staff, several national seminars on promoting social inclusion in Erasmus+ projects.

Support activities should be continued (including through the TCA) in order to ensure a high quality involvement of these target groups in the projects.

Internal and external coherence and complementarity

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

Both NA representatives and surveyed participants acknowledged that KAs are clearly defined, their distribution is logical and understandable. Focus group discussions emphasized that activities, by interacting with each other, also complement each other. This is confirmed by telephone interview results - 40% of surveyed project implementers have implemented both mobility activity and strategic partnership or KA3. Often a strategic partner in KA2 activity is or has been a hosting organization in a mobility project. Previous cooperation has been mutually productive and has evolved to a strategic partnership. During the interviews, it was also noted that the institutions prefer to participate in KA2 activity as a partner of another project applicant's country, thus significantly increasing the opportunity to receive Erasmus+ funding for the achievement of the goals set by the institution.

Inconsistencies

The general education sector points to inconsistencies between KA1 and KA2 activities as, for example, pupil mobility as such is not supported in KA1 activity, although in KA2 projects it is possible in a certain form.

Representatives from different education segments indicate that there are differences in rates between KA1 and KA2 activities, such as travel costs.

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

65% of respondents are not aware of other programmes similar to Erasmus+. Meanwhile, 35% of the respondents interviewed via telephone mentioned several programmes within the framework of which they had implemented mobility projects. The Nordplus programme is mentioned most often. It aims at improvement and implementation of innovations in the educational systems of the Nordic and Baltic countries. The programme supports projects that

promote acquisition of knowledge, exchange and networking. Nordplus has 5 sub-programs - Youth Education, Higher Education, Adult Education, Horizontal and Nordic Language Programmes. The programme includes Baltic and Nordic countries: Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, Denmark (including Greenland and Faroe Islands), Finland (including the Åland Islands), Iceland, Norway, Sweden.

The second most commonly mentioned programme is the European Economic Area (EEA) and the Norwegian Financial Instrument (NFI) LV05 "Research and Scholarships", which can be used to apply for scholarships for studies in Norway, Iceland or Liechtenstein. The recipients of the scholarship are university lecturers and students from any level and field of study.

These programmes cover countries in certain regions and their budgets are relatively small, so it can be concluded that Erasmus+ programme does not have equivalent alternatives in Latvia.

All applicants, whose project applications were rejected, continued to submit applications in ERASMUS+ programmes. During the discussion in the working groups, respondents explained that ERASMUS + is more effective and meets their needs much more than other programmes. There were no cases when after project application rejection applicants' submitted similar application in different programmes. All rejected applicants had improved their applications quality and finally were granted within the ERASMUS+.

European added value and sustainability

Question 20 - To what extent Erasmus+ and its predecessor programmes produce effects that are additional to the effects that would have resulted from similar actions initiated only at regional or national levels in Latvia? What possibilities do you see to adjust Erasmus+ or its successor programme in order to increase its European value added?

Erasmus+ programme is vital for Latvia as it is practically the only instrument that helps to achieve the goals set in the internationalization of education and in the development of international co-operation. Implementation of programme activities ensures the development of individual skills and knowledge, transfer of good practice, development of innovations, improvement of the quality of formal and non-formal education.

Unlike other support programmes mentioned in Question 19, Erasmus+ includes all EU countries and individual EU co-operation countries, offering broad opportunities for cooperation. The programme introduces the participants to the culture of other countries, contributes to acquisition of foreign languages and promotion of EU values. Even after 2020, the programme must be continued, as no EU country can, by itself, be able to implement Erasmus+ tasks and achieve its objectives on such a large scale.

In order to increase the impact of the programme, particular attention should be paid to the sustainability of project outcomes. A very positive step for ensuring sustainability was made by establishing that projects can be submitted solely by institutions, thus allowing a more targeted transfer of the project results within the organization. In the future, it would be important to further promote the transfer of project-generated, successful, practice-tested results to other related institutions. This recommendation was expressed also during focus group discussions.

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

The NAs believe that the increase in budget will be absorbed efficiently by increasing the number of approved project applications. Currently, a large proportion of projects of appropriate quality are not approved due to lack of funding, especially in strategic partnership activities.

The focus groups with rejected project applicants even express the view that the possibility of limiting the number of projects to be approved by one organization per year should be considered, thus giving the possibility to more organizations to receive financing within the existing budget.

In E&T segment the responsible institutions in Latvia have defined that the largest part of the budget should be channelled into strategic partnerships in higher education. As already mentioned in Question 16, only 2 to 3 projects are approved per year, although the number of high quality projects is much higher.

Given the high level of interest and the quality of applications in the area of youth, an increase would be needed in all activities, but especially – for projects promoting the mobility of youth workers.

CONCLUSIONS

Effectiveness

Level of achievement of programme's specific objectives

1. The KA1 activity - **mobility** in E&T segment and the area of youth - has the greatest impact on increasing the level of competences and skills.

The mobility of education institutions, university lecturers has contributed positively to their professional skills by broadening their knowledge of different teaching methods and their creative and effective use in teaching / study work. Within the framework of projects, innovative ideas, approaches that promote students' interest and motivation to actively participate in the study process were created. The good practices of other EU countries in the field of education were taken over.

During the mobility, higher education and vocational education students learned new theoretical knowledge, gained practical skills and professional competences, as well as improved intercultural communication skills. Vocational education students highly appreciated the opportunity to gain practical experience working with different technologies and equipment.

During the mobility period, youth workers have significantly improved their competence in working with young people, communication skills, including intercultural skills.

All participants of the mobility within the framework of their projects developed ICT and social skills, learned foreign languages, got acquainted with the cultures and traditions of other countries.

2. The **strategic partnership** activity has provided the opportunity to develop the organization, the quality and capacity of the services it offers, and has promoted inter-sectoral cooperation. The following project results in the field of E&T were mentioned most of all: innovative teaching methods, guidelines, education programmes and methodological materials; in the area of youth: innovative training methods and tools.

KA2 activity is very important for the organization's development and internationalization. It has a long-term impact that could be reinforced if the transfer of the most successful project results to other Latvian institutions was better targeted. A significant disadvantage is the small number of projects supported within the framework of its call for proposals - this could demotivate institutions to develop and submit new projects.

3. The decentralized activity KA3 available to the youth sector has a direct impact on the development of policy at the local government level. As a result of its implementation, mechanisms are created for providing youth participation and dialogue with local decision-makers.

Compliance with goals

The core objectives of Erasmus+ correlate directly with the Latvian E&T and youth sector policy planning documents, the issues, objectives and indicators mentioned therein.

The implementation of Erasmus+ programme in Latvia contributes to the achievement of the Europe 2020 goals in education, employment and welfare.

Erasmus+ programme has a direct impact on the achievement of the ET2020 goals. The implementation of mobility projects fosters employment. Mobility participants not only acquire knowledge in a particular field, but also improve other skills important for competitiveness in the labour market. Lifelong learning is promoted and supported.

The new architecture of the programme

1. Compared to the previous programming period (LPP and Youth in Action Programme), the impact of mobility projects has increased at an institutional level. The approach that only institutions are eligible to apply for support, has increased the opportunity to design and implement more targeted mobility projects that are based on the long-term development plan. This ensures mobility for more people, a wider dissemination of results, a better transfer of knowledge.
2. The number of the projects submitted in the areas of E&T and youth has increased, and as a result also the quality of all aspects of the approved projects has grown (development process, goals and planning activities, implementation). This can be explained both by the requirements of the programme and by the applicants' desire to ensure high competitiveness of their projects, given the level of activity in all KAs.
3. Although the programme funding has increased, there are still projects in E&T sector in both the mobility and strategic partnership activities, that meet the quality requirements, but do not get approval due to lack of funding. It is necessary to increase / redistribute the budget allocated for the establishment of strategic partnerships between higher education institutions. With regard to youth programmes, given the high demand, additional funding for the implementation of KA1 activities should be allocated.

Administrative burden

In the new Erasmus+ programme, the requirements for youth activity projects are comparable to those set for formal education institutions. This is limiting the ability of many organizations to participate in the programme due to insufficient capacity of human resources. A significant number of projects is submitted by the same youth organizations that can already be perceived as professional organizations active on the international and national levels for a long period of time. Smaller, newly established, regional organizations do not apply for this funding because of the above-mentioned barriers.

Efficiency

1. A simple and efficient Erasmus+ administration structure has been established in Latvia - the Ministry of Education and Science is the NAU in Latvia for the implementation of Erasmus+ programme. In E&T sector decentralized activities of the programme are administered by SEDA; in the area of youth – by AIPY.

2. Under the new Erasmus+ programme, the administrative burden has not diminished and is different across the activities. A positive factor is the introduction of the IT tool, which ensures electronic submission of projects and facilitates document circulation.
3. Implementation of the projects is assessed as effective, the set goals and tasks are achieved. The successful implementation of projects is also ensured by the previous experience of implementers in the LPP and Youth In Action activities and the quality guidance / assistance provided by the NAs.
4. Financial and human resources of both NAs are appropriate for quality implementation of Erasmus+ programme in Latvia.

Relevance

1. NAs very actively and thoughtfully organize various informative events to address the target audience of activities, motivate them to participate in the calls for proposals, and invite the applicant organizations to include people with special needs and from different social groups in their projects.
2. The most common obstacle for potential applicants among general education and vocational education organizations is the lack of English language skills among school staff, which results in fear of being in a foreign environment and lack of self-confidence. Even if the school administration has the appropriate capacity to prepare a project application, it is difficult to attract participants from among the teachers due to the aforementioned reason. This problem is especially acute with regional schools and senior teachers.
3. In order to improve the project involvement of people with special needs and limited opportunities, various seminars, discussions and other activities are being arranged. However, in E&T sector the total number of people representing these groups in the projects remains low.
4. The activities, by interacting with each other, also complement each other. Often a strategic partner in KA2 activity is or has been a hosting organization in a mobility project.

European added value and sustainability

1. Erasmus+ programme is vital for Latvia as it is practically the only instrument that helps to achieve the goals set in the internationalization of education and in the development of international co-operation. The programme is an essential tool for strengthening the competences of young people, including young people with fewer opportunities and youth workers, enhancing international cooperation in the field of youth, and providing significant support for the development of youth policy.
2. After 2020, the programme must be continued, as no EU country can, by itself, be able to implement Erasmus+ tasks and achieve its objectives on such a large scale.
3. In order to increase the impact of the programme, particular attention should be paid to the sustainability of project outcomes. In the future, it would be important to further promote the transfer of project-generated, successful, practice-tested results to other related institutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Since the strategic partnership is an activity vital for raising the quality and competitiveness level of higher education in Latvia, it is necessary to increase / redistribute the budget allocated for this activity in order to increase the number of implemented projects.
2. It is necessary to allow an inclusion of those activities into projects that support national priorities and promote them by awarding additional points. Priorities for Latvia: social integration, excellence in vocational education and involvement of young people in NGOs.
3. In order to ensure the sustainability of projects, particular attention should be paid to increasing the efficiency of the transfer of project-generated, successful, practice-tested results. It is important to carry out transfer of results not only within the institution, but also in other related institutions.
4. Given the positive effects they have had so far on achieving Erasmus+ objectives, retain the existing sectoral breakdown of decentralized activities. In addition, consider the transfer of best practice between sectors (for example, transfer the internationalization dimension present in the higher education and youth segments also to the vocational education, and the youth segment's activity of policy intervention - by complementing it in a decentralized way to the education and training sector).
5. Evaluate the possibility of establishing a more user-friendly set of project application documentation for the youth sector.
6. In order to ensure a wider range of applicants in the area of youth (involving small / local or newly established organizations that do not have the capacity to implement an international project) and to increase the number of participating young people with fewer opportunities, the programme should include local level (first-step) projects. This approach would enable organizations to get their first experience in the programme and prepare for submission of an international project.
7. Maintain the TCA instrument as it allows the NAs to provide substantial support to project applicants and implementers to increase the quality of projects, and to support the development of youth policy at the national level.
8. Evaluate the possibility of increasing the funding for youth workers' mobility projects, as raising the competence of this target group directly contributes to the development of youth work in Latvia in general and broadens the range of people who can support the involvement of young people (including young people with fewer opportunities) in international mobility activities under Erasmus+ programme.

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ANNEX 1 - Specific objectives Erasmus+ (relevant for this midterm evaluation)

Education and Training

- to improve the level of key competences and skills, with particular regard to their relevance for^[L]the labour market and their contribution to a cohesive society, in particular through increased opportunities for learning mobility and through strengthened cooperation between the world of education and training and the world of work;
- to foster quality improvements, innovation excellence and internationalisation at the level of education and training institutions, in particular through enhanced transnational cooperation between education and training providers and other stakeholders;
- to promote the emergence and raise awareness of a European lifelong learning area designed to complement policy reforms at national level and to support the modernisation of education and training systems, in particular through enhanced policy cooperation, better use of Union transparency and recognition tools and the dissemination of good practices;
- to enhance the international dimension of education and training, in particular through cooperation between Union and partner-country institutions in the field of VET and in higher education, by increasing the attractiveness of European higher education institutions and supporting the Union's external action, including its development objectives, through the promotion of mobility and cooperation between the Union and partner-country higher education institutions and targeted capacity-building in partner countries;
- to improve the teaching and learning of languages and to promote the Union's broad linguistic diversity and intercultural awareness.

Youth

- to improve the level of key competences and skills of young people, including those with fewer opportunities, as well as to promote participation in democratic life in Europe and the labour market, active citizenship, intercultural dialogue, social inclusion and solidarity, in particular through increased learning mobility opportunities for young people, those active in youth work or youth organisations and youth leaders, and through strengthened links between the youth field and the labour market;
- to foster quality improvements in youth work, in particular through enhanced cooperation between organisations in the youth field and/or other stakeholders;^[L]
- to complement policy reforms at local, regional and national level and to support the development of knowledge and evidence-based youth policy as well as the recognition of non- formal and informal learning, in particular through enhanced policy cooperation, better use of Union transparency and recognition tools and the dissemination of good practices;
- to enhance the international dimension of youth activities and the role of youth workers and organisations as support structures for young people in complementarity with the Union's external action, in particular through the promotion of mobility and cooperation between the Union and partner-country stakeholders and international organisations and through targeted capacity-building in partner countries.

ANNEX 2 - EU objectives

Erasmus+ objectives

The aim of Erasmus+ is to contribute to the Europe 2020 strategy for growth, jobs, social equity and inclusion, as well as the aims of ET2020, the EU's strategic framework for education and training.

Erasmus+ also aims to promote the sustainable development of its partners in the field of higher education, and contribute to achieving the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy.

Europe 2020

In the framework of the Europe 2020 strategy, Latvia has set the following objectives:

- employment rate for age group among 20-64 year olds – 73%;
- gross domestic expenditure on R&D – 1,5%;
- greenhouse gas emissions in non-ETS sectors – 17%;
- share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption - 40%;
- early leavers from education and training – below 10%;
- at least 34% of 30 to 34 years olds should have completed tertiary education or the equivalent;
- people at risk of poverty or social exclusion – below 529 thousands.

ET 2020

ET 2020 set four common EU objectives to address challenges in education and training systems by 2020:

- Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality;
- Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training;
- Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship;
- Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.

The following EU benchmarks for 2020 have been set for education and training:

- At least 95% of children (from 4 to compulsory school age) should participate in early childhood education;
- Fewer than 15% of 15-year-olds should be under-skilled in reading, mathematics and science;
- The rate of early leavers from education and training aged 18-24 should be below 10%;
- At least 40% of people aged 30-34 should have completed some form of higher education;
- At least 15% of adults should participate in lifelong learning;
- At least 20% of higher education graduates and 6% of 18-34 year-olds with an initial vocational qualification should have spent some time studying or training abroad;
- The share of employed graduates (aged 20-34 with at least upper secondary education and having left education 1-3 years ago) should be at least 82%.