

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

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March 1st 2017

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Abbreviations, terms and explanations

EACEA - Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency

EVS - European Voluntary Service

HEI – Higher Education Institution

KA1 - Key Action 1: Learning mobility of individuals, including the Student Loan Guarantee Facility

KA2 - Key Action 2: Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices

KA3 - Key Action 3: Support for policy reform

NA - National Agency

NAU - National Authority

SIU - Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Education (NA for education and training)

Bufdir - The Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (NA for youth)

Executive summary

The conclusions presented in this report are based on extensive empirical data collected through interviews with informants at the NAU and NA levels, as well as with participating organisations across fields and sectors, in addition to document analyses.

Benefits of programme

Participation in the Erasmus+ programme constitutes a cornerstone in Norwegian educational policy. The programme is essential for cooperation at all education levels and with relevant partners outside the education system. Erasmus+ also supports policy development in the field of education providing real added value through sharing best practices and by supporting initiatives that would not have been possible at individual national level without Erasmus+. Norway particularly emphasises Erasmus+ contributions to:

- Knowledge about Europe and the European dimension in education
- Increasing student and staff mobility
- Providing an arena for cooperation with the business sector
- Supporting various initiatives for innovation in the education sector
- Peer learning and sharing of good practice through the Open Method of Coordination (OMC)
- Supporting the Bologna process, and by this providing valuable input to creating a real European Higher Education Area

The evidence from this evaluation report indicates positive effects from Erasmus+ and previous programmes at the level of individuals, participating organisations, and policy. **At the individual level**, participating organisations report improved key competences and skills for individuals that participate in mobility projects, in particular improved transversal skills, language and intercultural skills. In the youth field, the effect of mobility stays on marginalised youth in is particularly salient. **At the level of participating organisations**, improved teacher competence and quality through staff mobility are reported. Strategic Partnerships are considered unique opportunities to develop new methods and work on long-term quality improvement. **At the policy level**, Erasmus+ is contributing to youth participation in local and regional politics. In the field of education and training, the programme is contributing to increased cross-sectoral collaboration against dropout rates.

Synergy effects and efficiency benefits

- The various key actions generate positive synergies, as they complement each other and allow projects to build on each other.
- An integrated programme has led to more collaboration across fields and sectors. Thematic synergy effects between sectors in the education and training fields facilitate administrative work and knowledge-sharing, and collaboration on complex issues such as dropout rates.
- The streamlining of actions across sectors within the education and training field has improved the communicability of the programme, increasing the potential for impact, and has reduced the administrative burden on the NA.
- Erasmus+ has brought more legitimacy to the youth field.
- Simplified grants and unit costs have led to efficiency benefits at the level of the participating organisations.
- Reporting procedures have been simplified.

Elements to be maintained in the upcoming programme

- All three key actions (and their sub-actions) are seen to have positive effects and are expected to be maintained in the upcoming programme.
- The Strategic Partnership actions are particularly welcomed and considered to have great potential impact. The policy level and NA level stress the importance of continuing to prioritise Strategic Partnerships in the upcoming programme, and to increase the funding for these actions.
- NA and policy informants emphasise the potential of the centralised actions, e.g. Knowledge Alliances. They welcome the continuation of the centralised actions in the upcoming programme, and propose increased funding for these actions.

Suggestions for improvement

Funding:

- Increase flexibility in the distribution of funds between decentralised actions, as funding for certain actions is inadequate. In Norway, there is a particular need for more funding for VET pupil mobility and Strategic Partnerships in higher education.
- Increase funding for centralised actions.
- Match the daily rates for participants in youth exchanges and in youth worker mobility.
- Boost the funding for dissemination activities in order to increase impact.

Administration:

Simplify and rationalise administrative processes across fields and sectors:

- Further streamlining of actions within education and training to reduce the administrative burden.
- Make language more user-friendly.
- Simplify application forms and processes in order to increase access for target groups without a professionalised internationalisation apparatus, and further simplify reporting procedures.
- Simplify processes for learning agreements and institutional agreements in higher education.
- Improve technical solutions and further digitalisation, i.e. electronic agreements and signatures.
- Ensure continuity of ICT-systems and improving the communication between the systems.
- Standardise grants for exchange students.
- Present sector and field specific programme guides.

System of cooperation and division of tasks

- Increase guidance and flow of information about the centralised actions from the EACEA.
- Introduce a clearer mandate for the working groups, and a clearer division of tasks between the working groups, the NA and Programme committees, and the Commission.

Structure of programme

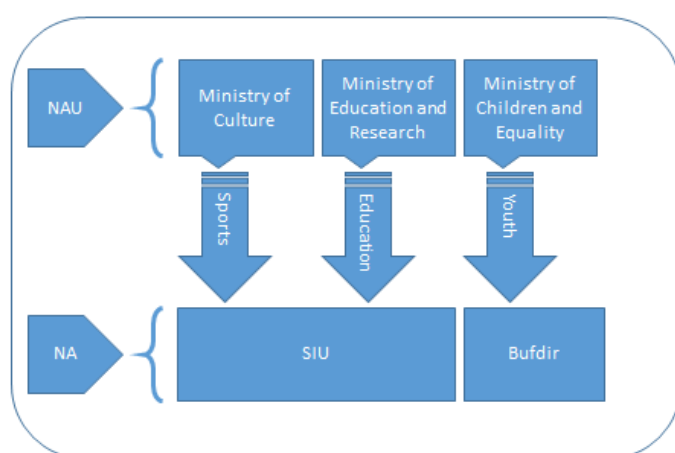
- Extract the sports field from Erasmus+ in order to make the programme more coherent and its profile more distinct.
- Introduce smaller scale Strategic Partnerships within the VET and adult education sectors.
- Introduce mobility for upper secondary pupils.

To summarise, Norway's position is that the Erasmus+ programme generates considerable benefits and positive synergies within and across fields and sectors, and that the main structure of the programme therefore should be continued into the next programme period. There is a general view that Erasmus+ constitutes a more holistic and coherent approach to internationalisation of the education and youth fields than previous programmes. Still, the report uncovers areas for improvement, e.g. regarding the distribution of funds, administrative procedures and technical solutions.

Overview of the Erasmus+ programme in Norway

Through the EEA Agreement, Norway is a programme country in Erasmus+ on par with full members of the EU. The responsibility of funding and implementing the decentralised actions is shared between two National Agencies. The Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Education (SIU) is in charge of the education and training and sports fields, with the Ministry of Education and Research and the Ministry of Culture as National Authorities, respectively. The Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Bufdir) is National Agency for the youth field, while the Ministry of Children and Equality is the National Authority for this field.

Figure 1: Organisation of Erasmus+ in Norway



In 2015, SIU awarded a total of €16,4 million to Erasmus+ decentralised actions in the education and training field. Table 1 shows the number of projects awarded, the success rate, and amount awarded per key action and action.

Table 1: Decentralised funding for the education and training field, Norway 2015

Key Action	Action Type	Projects		
		# Awarded	Success Rate	Grant Amount Awarded (EUR)
KA1 – Learning Mobility of Individuals	School education staff mobility (KA101)	33	78%	587 020
	VET learner and staff mobility (KA102)	57	95%	3 494 468
	Higher education student and staff mobility (KA103)	48	100%	6 101 950
	Adult education staff mobility (KA104)	6	75%	83 070
	Higher education student and staff mobility between Programme and Partner Countries (KA107)	18	67%	1 266 544
Sub-total Key Action 1		162	88%	11 533 052
KA2 – Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices	Strategic Partnerships for school education (KA201)	2	50%	344 902
	Strategic Partnerships for vocational education and training (KA202)	4	44%	1 041 009
	Strategic Partnerships for higher education (KA203)	6	35%	1 564 972
	Strategic Partnerships for adult education (KA204)	2	29%	504 388
	Strategic Partnerships for Schools Only (KA219)	14	4%	1 400 101
Sub-total Key Action 2		28	41%	4 855 372
GRAND TOTAL		190	75%	16 388 424

Source: *The Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Education (SIU).*

In 2015, Bufdir awarded a total of €2,9 million to decentralised actions in the youth field. Table 2 shows the number of projects awarded, the success rate, and amount awarded per action and key action.

Table 2: Decentralised funding for the youth field, Norway 2015

Key Action	Action Type	Projects		
		# Awarded	Success Rate	Grant Amount Awarded (EUR)
KA1 - Learning Mobility of Individuals	Youth mobility (KA105)	99	77%	2 447 780
Sub-total Key Action 1		99	77%	2 447 780
KA2 - Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices	Strategic Partnerships for youth (KA205)	3	27%	295 920
Sub-total Key Action 2		3	27%	295 920
KA3 - Support for policy reform	Dialogue between young people and policy makers (KA347)	4	36%	150 650
Sub-total Key Action 3		4	36%	150 650
GRAND TOTAL		106	70%	2 894 351

Source: *The Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Bufdir)*.

Methodology for the preparation of the National Report

Role of actors

The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research first issued an open call for tender to prepare the National Report. As no offers were submitted, the Ministry assigned the task of preparing the national report to the National Agency for education and training (SIU), which further assigned the task to an independent consultant, ideas2evidence. The main idea behind bringing in an external evaluator was that an independent party would be better suited to collect data on the participating organisations' view on the role of and cooperation with the National Agencies, which have the roles of both funder and controller of the organisations' activities.

The role of ideas2evidence has been to collect data on the evaluation questions through interviews and analysis of documents and statistics, and prepare and finalise the report. SIU's role as commissioning authority has been to provide ideas2evidence with reports and statistics, contribute as interviewees, and to review and comment on a draft of the final report. The Ministry of Education and Research, the Ministry of Children and Equality, and the Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs have contributed through interviews and by reviewing the final draft of the report.

Selection and priority of standard questions

Because of the number and scope of the evaluation questions from the European Commission, SIU and the Ministry of Education and Research found it necessary to prioritise between and omit some questions. The selection of questions to be answered is based on two criteria; 1) relevance/usefulness to other programme countries: on which questions does Norway have particularly useful input, which can also benefit other programme countries?; and 2) relevance to Norwegian interests: which questions are particularly relevant to Norwegian interests?

Based on these criteria, each question was ranked on a 3-point scale from high to low priority. All high priority questions were to be answered, medium priority questions could be answered, while low priority questions could be omitted. Six questions were ranked "low priority" and are therefore not answered in this report. These are questions 2, 9, 12, 14, 19 and 20. All high and medium priority questions have been answered.

Data collection

The conclusions in this report are based on extensive empirical data collected through interviews in addition to document analysis. In order to get as comprehensive as possible an understanding of the views and opinions of the various stakeholders, we conducted interviews at three levels: the level of National Authority, the level of National Agency, and the level of participating organisations. At each level, we conducted a number of interviews to cover both fields and key actions. The table below gives an overview of the number of interviewees and interviews at each level, in each field, and total. We conducted a total of 43 interviews, with a total of 61 interviewees.

Table 3: Number of interviews and interviewees per field, level and in total.

	Field					
	Education and training		Youth		Total	
	# interviews	# interviewees	# interviews	# interviewees	# interviews	# interviewees
National Authorities (group)	1	5	1	5	2	10
National Agencies (group)	8	16	3	5	11	21
Participating organisations	23	23	7	7	30	30
Total	32	44	11	17	43	61

Since the decentralised administration of Erasmus+ is divided between two National Agencies, we conducted group interviews at each agency. In order to cover both fields and all key actions, we carried out several group interviews at each agency. Similarly, we conducted group interviews at each of the two National Authorities, the Ministry of Education and Research and the Ministry of Children and Equality. As there are only centralised actions in the sports field, we have not included any specific data collection for this field.

The uneven number of interviews in each field partially reflects the funding for education and training versus youth, and is partially a result of the goal of covering all fields, key actions and sectors, which made it necessary to conduct more interviews in the education and training field.

Research institutes, although key stakeholders in the programme, are not represented in the study, as they do not participate in the programme. Similarly, the participation of SMEs in the programme is marginal. For this report, interviews have been conducted with two SMEs and one large enterprise.

The table below details the distribution of interviews with participating organisations in each field and each sector.

Table 4: Number of interviews with participating organisations, per field, sector, type of organisation and actions represented.

Field	Type of organisation	Number of Organisations	Actions represented
Education and training		23	
	<i>Higher education</i>	8	103,107, 203
	Higher ed. Institution	7	
	Business/industry	1	
	<i>VET</i>	6	102,116, 202, sector skill alliance
	County administration*	2	
	Upper secondary school (vocational)	1	
	Higher ed. Institution	1	
	Business/industry	2	
	<i>School education</i>	6	101,201, 219
	Municipality**	2	
	Lower secondary school	1	
	Upper secondary school (academic)	2	
	County administration*	1	
	<i>Adult education</i>	3	104, 204
	Adult education centre	3	
Youth		6	KA1 (EVS, Youth Exchanges, Youth Workers Mobility), KA2 and KA3
	NGO	3	
	Foundation	1	
	County administration*	1	
	Municipality	1	

*School owner, upper secondary level

**School owner, early childhood education through lower secondary level

Answers to standard questions

Effectiveness

(Question 1) To what extent have Erasmus+ and its predecessor programmes contributed to the realisation of the Erasmus+ specific objectives?

Because of the scope of this question, the NAU for education and training has chosen to **focus on results relating to objectives one and two**; 1) the improvement of key competences and skills, and 2) fostering quality improvements at the level of educational organisations and in youth work.

Outside of interim and final evaluations, the research on the effects of Erasmus+ and the previous programmes in Norway is in general limited. In two SIU-reports on internationalisation in upper secondary, and primary and lower secondary, schools were surveyed on the perceived effects of internationalisation efforts.¹ These reports encompass all internationalisation programmes, and although EU programmes that now are included in Erasmus+ (e.g. Comenius and Leonardo) were the most utilised programmes, we cannot isolate the perceived effect of these programmes from the others. The effects reported in this section are therefore mostly based on the extensive number of interviews with various stakeholders that were conducted for this report, and compared with available data and international research when such is available. **Informants believe Erasmus+ and its predecessor programmes contribute to the realization of objectives one and two in a number of ways.**

¹ SIU, 2011 and 2015.

Objective 1: Improving key competences and skills.

In the field of **education and training**, in addition to improved language skills, the effect most frequently referred to is ***improved transversal skills for pupils, apprentices and students that participate in mobility projects***. This was underscored by informants within both the higher education and the VET sectors. Within upper secondary study preparatory education, some informants observed similar effects after exchanges within Strategic Partnership projects. A number of informants report that pupils, apprentices and students improve their ability to think innovatively and independently, improve self-efficacy, and the ability to adjust to changing circumstances. Various pupil surveys support this finding.² According to the Erasmus Impact Study, employers value these transversal skills higher than both specific subject knowledge in their field and work experience.³ Several informants underscore that it is not internationalisation *per se* that is important for the employers, but the secondary effects of internationalisation: getting robust employees equipped to handle change and constantly shifting circumstances, and who have the ability to think innovatively. Another informant pointed out that a mobility project is in fact an entrepreneurial project: you have to learn to build a new life in a new country. Several informants also emphasise that mobility stays greatly impact the language and cultural skills, self-confidence and self-efficacy of the pupils, apprentices and students.⁴

Organisations in the **adult education sector** also report that staff mobility and Strategic Partnerships have led to improved key competences among staff. One organisation has experienced increased demand for knowledge-sharing and courses from other organisations after having participated in E+ projects.

Within the VET sector in particular, informants point out several positive effects of mobility stays. Many refer to ***improved subject specific competence for pupils in fields not offered at the pupils' school***. A number of schools, in particular in the VET sector, utilise VET mobility strategically to be able to offer students specialised training in a sub field they cannot offer at their own school, and that is often not even available in Norway.

In line with findings from the Impact Study, some informants in the VET-sector also report that ***pupils and apprentices that return from mobility stays get apprenticeships or jobs back home*** because of their mobility stay.

Increased opportunity for employment is a reported effect also in the youth field, among volunteers. Many report having obtained a job because of their volunteering experience. At a 20-year anniversary celebration for EVS in Norway in 2016, Bufdir interviewed many of the former volunteers about the impact their EVS-experience had on their lives, and many reported how they had acquired jobs because of their volunteering experience.

In the youth field, objective one pertains to improving key competences and skills of young people, including those with fewer opportunities, and promoting participation in democratic life in Europe and the labour market, active citizenship, intercultural dialogue, social inclusion and solidarity. In addition to increasing the employability of volunteers, two effects stand out from the interview material.

A recurring theme from the interviews was ***the impact of mobility stays on marginalised youth***. Several informants, both at the National Agency level and the level of the participating organisations, report that mobility stays particularly benefit youth who are marginalised in their local communities, ***by giving them a chance to reinvent themselves***. The informants' narratives go as follows: The mobility projects give marginalised youth a chance to be in a new context where they are given a new role, are seen with fresh eyes, and learn new skills. This makes them feel competent, and contributes to changing their self-

² See e.g. SIU (2013): Living and Learning – Exchange Studies Abroad.

³ European Commission (2014).

⁴ Findings in Meng-Hsuan Chou and Åse Gornitzka (2011) support these findings, as does a survey among Norwegian exchange pupils in upper secondary school support this finding (SIU 2016).

perception. Upon their return, they are seen as more resourceful and often participate more (social inclusion). These narratives are supported by a dissertation that further found that youth exchanges contribute to changing young dropouts' learner-identity from negative to positive, increase several of their key competences, and motivate them to take further education (Vasbø, 2011). According to SIU, a similar effect is observed in mobility projects in the VET sector that aim to reduce dropout rates.

Transnational research findings show that mobility projects contribute to improving youth's key competences and skills in general, not just those of marginalised youth.⁵ Research findings for the Norwegian participants are in line with those of the transnational findings. In particular, participants from Norwegian Youth in Action projects reported increased interpersonal, social and intercultural competences in addition to being able to communicate in another language.⁶

Another salient theme was the importance of the programme for ***promoting participation in democratic life and active citizenship***. Several municipalities and counties utilise the programme actively in order to lay the grounds for better youth participation in politics. Several municipalities have taken advantage of the programme to develop youth councils, which gives youth a formal role in local politics and in municipal planning. There are several examples of municipalities that have built up their youth work around Erasmus+, and use the programme to engage youth locally. When returning from mobility stays, the municipalities recruit them to contribute actively back in to their community.

Research findings also indicate that participating in Erasmus+ projects for youth increases the political and social participation of the individual participants. More than 40 percent of Norwegian youth that were part of a Youth in Action project reported that they participated in political and social activities to a greater extent than before.⁷

Objective 2: To foster quality improvements

In the field of ***education and training***, objective 2 is to foster quality improvements, innovation excellence and internationalisation at the level of education and training organisations.

The most frequently reported effect from programme participation at the level of the participating organisations is ***improved teaching competence and quality***, through teacher mobility and Strategic Partnerships. Existing survey material on school internationalisation supports this finding. In primary and lower secondary school, 70 percent of principals at schools that have participated in internationalisation programmes believe it has a positive effect on the school's academic offerings (SIU, 2015). In upper secondary school, 84 percent of teachers and principals believe international cooperation improves teachers' competence (SIU, 2011).

There are also numerous examples of teachers and organisations ***introducing new teaching methods*** as a result of Strategic Partnerships or teacher mobility, within the school, adult education and higher education sectors. According to one HEI there has been a large increase in the percentage of staff on mobility who report that they have developed new teaching methods as a result of the mobility project.

An example from higher education illustrates how Strategic Partnerships can lead to the development of new methods and processes in the educational field. Three universities in Norway, the UK and Spain have developed a teaching app for nursing students in all three languages. Starting in the fall of 2017, the app will allow nursing students in the three countries to download e-compendia through the app. This opens up new opportunities when it comes to organisation, student involvement and digitalisation in nursing education. More specifically, the app may facilitate decentralised teaching and increase opportunities for

⁵ RAY (2014).

⁶ Huang (2013).

⁷ Ibid.

supplementary training. There are also examples of HEIs that have developed new study programs as part of E+ projects, e.g. an online study program in Aramaic, developed in a partnership between a Norwegian university and universities in Germany and the UK.

Informants from both SIU and participating organisations underscore the value of E+ for **organisational development and entrepreneurial activities** for the participating organisations. Although many of the projects do not represent innovations in a European or global context, they can be seen as **innovative at the level of the participating organisation**. An example is a primary school, which reorganised their entire mathematics teaching system after having participated in a Strategic Partnership with schools in Ireland, Greece and the Czech Republic. They also emphasise that projects with an entrepreneurial focus often have tangible results, for instance student start-ups. However, several organisations point out that innovation and entrepreneurial activities are an integral part of their strategy, and that it is hard to isolate the actual effect of the Erasmus+ projects vis-à-vis other initiatives. Nevertheless, they do believe that there are synergetic benefits resulting from the various initiatives.

Several informants, especially at the HEI-level, also pointed out the **benefits of Erasmus+ for the internationalisation process of the organisations**. Clearly, there are direct and immediate internationalisation effects through each ongoing project. Also, informants pointed out several secondary or indirect effects; participation in Erasmus+ projects is prestigious and can increase the status of the organisation and give access to new network and contacts, as well as other programs and in financial sources, if used strategically. Furthermore, Erasmus+ can lead to greater international faculty recruitment for organisations participating in Erasmus+. Two of the largest universities in Norway report that they attract talented students through mobility projects who either choose to stay or later return as PhD students or faculty. As one informant points out, Norwegian students and staff who go on mobility also serve as international ambassadors for the institution, which can further affect international recruitment.

In the **youth field**, most of the organisations we talked to underscore **that Erasmus+ is providing a unique opportunity to work actively on raising the quality of youth work**, by enhancing youth workers' knowledge or by developing new products and methods that can be used in youth work. Few such opportunities exist in the youth field, and they find it very valuable e.g. to be able to send their youth workers to courses. The youth workers return with new methods and reignited enthusiasm, which they spread within the organisations. To some organisations, Erasmus+ funds are critical for both competency and organisational development.

The NAU underscore the important role of Erasmus+ in developing new research and building competence within the youth field, which can contribute to increasing quality in youth work and raising youth workers' professional status.

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

There is great consensus among our informants at the policy and NA-level that there is a **very high degree of overlap and alignment between Norwegian and EU goals within both the educational field and the youth field**.

Within the field of education and training in general, Norwegian and EU policy development is closely connected, e.g. Norway and the EU both participate in the Bologna process, which has greatly affected the development of Norwegian and EU educational policy in higher education. The Ministry of Education and Research considers it to be of utmost importance that E+ is supporting the Bologna Process and contributing to several of the activities in this pan-European process to modernise higher education, make it more transparent and to enhance cooperation in the European Higher Education Area.

There are also several examples of how former programmes have contributed to changing the educational field in Norway, as well as laws and regulations.⁸ One example is the introduction of Erasmus Mundus, which resulted in a change in the Act Relating to Universities and University Colleges in order to clarify that joint master degrees were permitted.

Informants at the policy and NA levels in particular point out three issues that are high on the agenda in both Norway and EU: **dropout rates, basic skills and VET education**. Within the EU, as in Norway, improving VET education and the status of the education is a political priority, and there is an ongoing discussion on how to achieve this. The teaching of basic skills in the workplace is an area where Norway is considered to be at the forefront in Europe. This has also been the theme of several Erasmus+ projects. Regarding drop-out rates, informants at both policy and NA-levels underscore the importance of sectors and countries working together in order to lower the rates, and the Erasmus+ programme is viewed as an important tool in this respect. Although dropout rates are high on the political agenda in Norway irrespective of Erasmus+, informants at the policy level point out that E+ projects may affect *how* Norwegian educational authorities at the national, regional and local level work to reduce or prevent students dropping out. As an example, according to leaders at the NA-level, ***the integration of several programmes into one has facilitated more cross-sectorial cooperation to deal with topics such as dropout rates.***

Within the **youth field**, there are several examples of how E+ projects contribute to policy development, in particular when it comes to ***enabling youth participation in the political and administrative processes at local and regional levels***, through the creation of youth councils. In 2013, a project with participants from youth councils in Mid-Norway focused on promoting youth participation in transportation planning. Politicians from both the regional and the national level participated, and as a result of the attention it brought, the government has suggested making youth participation in transportation planning statutory.

There are also examples of the programme being used actively to achieve political goals locally. One county has used the programme as part of their effort to halt depopulation, and a municipality has used it to reduce dropout in secondary education.

An example of how Erasmus+ funded projects within the youth field can affect policy-making on a smaller scale is an NGO-initiated project that trains youth leaders in leadership, decision-making, campaigning and how to press for political action on relevant topics. Leading politicians, e.g. the Minister of Foreign Affairs, are invited to their meetings, and in 2015, several participants in the project, among them four Norwegians, were sent to Paris to participate in the COP 21 on climate change.

Are some actions more effective than others in affecting policy development?

There is no substantial evidence that supports a claim that some actions are more effective than others in influencing policy-developments. However, the NAUs and the NAs bring up actions they believe have a particular potential for affecting policy development. The NAU for education and training believes that ***KA3 projects have the greatest potential to affect*** policy-making, especially with the increased emphasis on these actions within the current programme period. The policy level in education and training has been involved in various innovative projects within KA2 and KA3, through the application process, and being part of the steering committees/implementation boards in the projects. This is contributing to dissemination of results and higher level of awareness of policy implications for the projects.

In the youth field also, the NAU and the NA point to KA3 actions as particularly important for influencing policy development. The NAs ***also consider KA1 mobility actions important to influencing policy***. Within the VET sector for instance, pupil, apprentice and teacher mobility has improved understanding of various

⁸ Meng-Hsuan Chou and Åse Gornitzka (2011) describe this development in the report “*Den femte frihet og Kunnskapens Europa. Konsekvenser for Norge*”.

countries' systems and created a need for recognition of foreign VET-education. Such recognition will make it easier to carry out a mobility stay in another country. These processes lead to further alignment of educational systems. One example is a plan for all countries to develop curricula based on learning outcome. Another is increased focus on dividing courses into modules. Better-aligned curricula can later facilitate worker mobility between these countries.

In the youth field, there are also examples of projects within **KA2 Strategic Partnerships that aim to affect policy development**. An example is an organisation involved in a partnership that has the purpose of developing methods to improve youth participation. As a part of the project, the organisation is working with a public agency in Norway to look at ways to increase youth participation throughout the entirety of the agency's service system.

(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 our country? To what extent have these approaches been effective? Can any particular points for improvement be identified?

Several efforts are being made at both the level of the National Authorities and the National Agencies to enhance the effects of Erasmus+ in Norway.

Within the field of education and training, international cooperation is high on the political agenda in Norway, and its place in educational policy has been **increasingly consolidated through policy documents, institutionalisation and funding**. Through a 2008-09 white paper, the government sought to better anchor the goal of increased internationalisation in national educational policy by defining internationalisation in education not only as a goal in and of itself, but also as a means to improve the quality and relevance of Norwegian education.⁹ This is further emphasised in a recent white paper on quality in higher education, where internationalisation is defined as a prerequisite for quality in education.¹⁰ The Ministry also emphasises the growing institutionalisation of internationalisation work, both at the policy level and at the level of the participating organisation, a development that has been strengthened by the stricter requirements in Erasmus+ to anchor projects at an institutional level.

Moreover, internationalisation is increasingly becoming part of the curricula at various levels. There is also more interaction and collaboration across organisations. For example, in the higher education sector NOKUT (The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education) is increasing its focus on internationalisation when developing new regulations for the quality of study programmes. As a follow-up, SIU and NOKUT will collaborate on analysis of the impact of internationalisation as well as promotion of high quality student exchange.

As part of the government's emphasis on internationalisation of education, **funding incentives have been strengthened**. In higher education, part of the result-based funding for HEIs is based on number of student mobilities.¹¹ In order to further incentivise institutions to receive and send more students, the government has increased the per-student incentive from 2017, to €1100. The financial institutional incentive for sending out students on Erasmus+ mobility *vis-à-vis* all other internationalisation programmes, is further strengthened by 50%, a €1650 per-student incentive.

Furthermore, with the introduction of Erasmus+, the Ministry of Education and Research increased SIU's operating funds with €1,2 million annually in order to enhance SIU's role in the implementation of the programme.

⁹ St. meld. 14 (2008-2009), p. 5.

¹⁰ St. meld. 16 (2016-2017), p. 63.

¹¹ Prop. 1 S (2016 – 2017): Kunnskapsdepartementet.

From 2017, the government also rewards HE institutions financially for participation in E+ centralised actions, as has already been the case for participation in Horizon 2020. Educational cooperation through Erasmus+ is strongly encouraged, and **in 2016, the government issued strategic goals for Norway's participation in the programme.**

Within the **adult education sector** SIU received extra funding from the Ministry of Education and Research to increase the international activity. The funds were used partly for preparatory visits and partly to organise a contact seminar in Brussels, which resulted in at least three Strategic Partnership applications.

At the NA level, in order to increase Norwegian participation in centralised projects, SIU has allocated seed money for such projects. Organisations that aim to apply for Knowledge alliance, Sector Skills alliances etc. can apply for up to €11,000 in seed funding for the preparation of the application. Most of the Norwegian projects that have been awarded centralised funds had received seed money for the development of their project.

Within the youth field, the Ministry of Children and Equality looks at ways to combine Erasmus+ with other grant schemes, in order to achieve synergetic effects. They are also promoting Erasmus+ in relevant settings.

The NAs are also working to enhance the effects of Erasmus+ through informational and promotional activities, such as information meetings, application-writing seminars, and seminars with organisations that have been awarded grants. The organisations are in general very content with the support and help they receive from SIU and Bufdir. However, both NAs wish they had the capacity to engage in more promotional work in order to reach more organisations. This was a general concern expressed by nearly all informants at this level.

Both NAs believe that they could be more proactive in their recruitment of new organisations, and that there is untapped potential there. At SIU, programme officers in several sectors emphasise the need for broad dissemination and communication of the results of Erasmus+ and the various E+-projects, to both key stakeholders and potential new organisations in order to increase interest. However, dissemination of results require robust data. SIU is therefore calling for better systems for facilitating and enabling measurement of results and effects.

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

Based on the interview material, there is little evidence to indicate that certain actions are more effective than others. Rather, we have the distinct impression that the E+ actions are effective in *different ways* and at *different levels*, and that they complement each other.

There is broad consensus at the NA level in both fields that mobility should remain the core activity of Erasmus+. Across fields and sectors there is **agreement that mobility projects have a particular and immediate effect on the individual level, because of the sheer number of participants.**

However, although mobility is considered to have an effect primarily on the individuals that participate in a mobility project, the informants believe that such projects over time can have a broader effect at both an institutional and a national level. Several informants at SIU and some of the schools that were interviewed underscored the importance of **VET pupil and apprentice mobility.** Some VET schools report that they have experienced **improved recruitment** to the programmes that offer such projects. The opportunity for mobility may therefore have a broader effect in contributing to making VET education more attractive.

Furthermore, some **VET schools have experienced that pupil and apprentice mobility may lead to closer collaboration between the school and the training establishment** if both parts participate in the project. They also see great potential for quality improvements and development of new teaching methods in this action, as teachers who join pupils on mobility stays are put in contact with a new professional environment.

The importance of **Strategic Partnerships** is underscored by both NAs, and by several organisations and organisations within the education and training and the youth fields. Informants emphasise the **effects at the institutional level** in particular. They argue that Strategic Partnerships can affect quality, content and innovation by giving organisations an opportunity to work goal oriented, structured and long-term with other organisations. Strategic Partnerships are viewed as **a unique opportunity to work on long-term quality improvement**.

One informant from a youth organisation believe the ripple effects from Strategic Partnerships are greater than from mobility projects, as partnerships allow organisations to work more closely with important partners. Partnerships offer organisations an opportunity to expand their network, exchange knowledge and experiences.

However, the effect that Strategic Partnerships may have on an individual level should not be underestimated. Although the projects usually involve fewer participants than mobility projects, they have the potential to reach many individuals, e.g. through products that are developed in the project. One example is the teaching app for nursing education, which in the long run, by increasing availability, can give more people access to higher education.

The following example from a county in western Norway illustrates one possible effect of a Strategic Partnership: Through a County consortium, French and German language teachers in upper secondary education can go on Erasmus+ staff mobility to a French and a German university. Through a Regio project with the county and a Norwegian university, the French university has developed a teaching programme for, and in collaboration with, the county's French language teachers. As a part of the process, the programme leader has visited the county to observe French instruction in relevant schools and to discuss the teachers' expectations, methods and the Norwegian school system with teachers and school leadership. The result is a programme that is highly relevant to the Norwegian teachers' needs. The county contrasts this experience with their experience of sending teachers of German language on mobility to a university in Germany. This course was not developed through a partnership process, and the participating teachers found the instruction to be insufficiently adapted to their reality and needs. The county's representative is confident that the different experiences of the teachers are due to the partnership process of developing and customizing the programme for the teachers of French language, which would not be possible without a Strategic Partnership.

Programme officers at SIU also emphasised the significance of **VET Strategic Partnerships**. While pupil and apprentice mobility in the VET sector has been and is important in order to identify areas for improvement and standardisation across countries, Strategic Partnerships provide an opportunity to work more methodically and strategically to improve VET, which has the potential to affect development, quality and content at the institutional level and the systemic level.

Furthermore, two HEIs with experience from both partnerships and centralised projects, considered **Strategic Partnerships to be an important stepping-stone to participation in centralised projects**, as it enables organisations to develop good projects.

One factor that is considered to determine effectiveness within the education and training field, is the **stricter requirements in Erasmus+ to anchor projects in the leadership**. Several informants at the NA level points out that this may strengthen the effect of each project at the institutional level, **because projects are better aligned with the organisation's goal and embedded in the organisation's strategy**. These

requirements seem to have had an effect on the institutionalisation of projects, and several schools view these requirements as **a positive change** from the previous programmes.

Within the **youth field**, **KA3 is considered particularly important for influencing policy development**, especially concerning the participation of youth in political processes. As regards effects at the individual level, informants at both Bufdir and the youth organisations emphasise **the effect of volunteering on the individuals that participate in EVS**, because of the long duration of the mobility. At the same time, they underscore **the value of youth exchanges because they can serve more youth**, and have valuable learning effects on the individual, although such mobilities involve shorter stays. The NAU points to the fact that youth exchange and EVS can offer youth an early experience with international mobility, and they also emphasise the inclusive nature of youth exchange and the opportunity it represents for marginalised youth in particular. A Norwegian research study on pupils that had dropped out of school after lower secondary found that mobility exchanges as short as two weeks had an impact on a number of the pupils' key competences (Vasbø, 2011). It also had an impact on their self-confidence, self-understanding, their sense of mastering social and academic situations and helped them develop a positive learner identity, which finally was decisive for convincing them that they would be able to finish upper secondary school.

One informant argues that **youth worker mobility** is more effective than other types of mobility, because of a **"multiplier effect"**: Through the work of one youth worker, the organisation can reach a larger group of youth. Another informant emphasised this action as an effective way to develop new methods and learn from the experiences of others.

(Question 6) To what extent has the integration of several programmes into Erasmus+ made the programme more effective in your country?

It is too early in the programme period to draw any substantiated conclusions about whether the integration has made the programme more effective, especially if we interpret the term "effect" in the strict statistical sense. However, informants at both the policy level and the NA level see several positive developments that have the potential to increase effectiveness.

Within the **education and training field**, both the NA leadership and several programme officers highlight the **positive aspects of streamlining the programme**. They believe a restructuring was necessary in order to make the programme more coherent and unified, and that **this can have a positive impact on the branding of the programme**. Better branding means that Erasmus+ can reach more pupils, students, youth, teachers and organisations, which means greater potential for impact. At the same time, programme officers in the VET and school sectors point out that the previous programmes Leonardo and Comenius had a strong brand name, and that it will take time for Erasmus+ to obtain a similar brand position within these sectors.

In the **youth field**, the NAU believes that being part of **Erasmus+ brings more legitimacy to youth work** - that it is beneficial to be part of the Erasmus+ family. The NA also sees positive synergy effects in that they can join in on several of the other NA's activities, such as informational meetings, which is something they would not have done if the youth field were not part of Erasmus+. More legitimacy and more visibility does again mean potential for reaching more youth and thus greater impact.

The NA leaders in both fields believe **the potential for collaboration across sectors and fields is greater** through Erasmus+ than through previous programmes, especially through the Strategic Partnership actions. This belief is supported by both NAUs. The fact that HEIs participate in projects within all sectors in Norway, illustrate this. There are also several examples of Strategic Partnerships where NGOs from the youth field are collaborating with educational organisations, and the education and training field is starting to see more collaboration across its sectors. An example is the aforementioned increase in cross-sectoral collaboration to combat dropout rates.

Do you see scope for changes to the structure of Erasmus+ or its successor programme that could increase effectiveness?

Several proposals for changes to the structure of the programme have been made from both youth and education and training fields. Several of these suggestions have the potential of increasing the effectiveness of the programme, making it more accessible to the target groups, and thus increasing the potential for broader impact.

SIU calls for **further streamlining within the education and training field**. There are still unnecessary differences in rules and regulations between the educational sectors that result in an extra administrative burden at both the NA and the level of the participating organisations. The Upper Secondary level serves as an example here. In Norway, the counties are school owners for both academic upper secondary and vocational school, and many schools combine academic and vocational educational programmes. Consequently, these schools and the county administrations have to deal with two separate sets of rules and processes, and approach two different departments at SIU for information and support about each programme. Some differentiation between sectors is necessary in order to accommodate the different needs of the target groups. Still, further alignment of the programme structure may simplify informational and promotional work, make it easier for users to navigate in the programme, and make the application process more efficient. SIU suggests using the higher education mobility process as a template in the application process. Although the charter system has been introduced in the VET and the school sectors, the guidelines are much more detailed than in the higher education sector.

It is important to note that **the NA for youth does not want further streamlining in the youth field**. The transition to Erasmus+ involved a considerable increase in the administrative burden on the NA, and the NA is concerned that further streamlining between the fields would entail further escalation of the administrative work.

Another suggestion from informants at both the NAs and the participating organisations in the education and training field, is to **open up for small-scale Strategic Partnerships in the VET and the adult education sectors**. To many smaller organisations, Strategic Partnerships are too ambitious and demanding. The result is a funding bias in favour of larger organisations with a professional apparatus to handle projects of this scale, while smaller organisations are outranked or refrain from applying. Some programme officers at SIU point to Strategic Partnerships in the school sector, where much of the funding is awarded to HEIs, as an example. In order for the programme to reach the smaller organisations and consequently have a broader impact, several informants at the NA and among the organisations are therefore calling for a system change. However, the SIU leadership questions whether such a change will undermine the strategic role of E+.

There is also a request coming from the entire education and training field to reintroduce **mobility for upper secondary pupils**. Mobility is an important tool for internationalisation, and adding pupil mobility in upper secondary will likely also result in increased student mobility in higher education, as research shows that pupils that go on mobility stays are more likely to do so again in the future (Wiers-Jenssen, 2011). Many upper secondary schools in Norway are combined academic and vocational schools, and informants from these schools see the benefits of pupil mobility in the VET sector, and wish they could offer a similar opportunity for their other pupils.

Programme officers in both NAs believe that in order for Erasmus+ to have a greater impact, **more funding should be allocated to dissemination activities**. This could prevent a situation where several professional environments work on and develop similar products without communicating with each other.

Another proposal for increasing the effect of Erasmus+ is **to better exploit the potential in the incoming and returning pupils, students and staff**. Internationalisation at home is an important part of the

Norwegian educational policy, and incoming and returning pupils, youth, students and staff are significant contributors.¹² According to several informants from participating organisations, more weight needs to be placed on how these groups can be pulled into internationalisation in Norway, how they can contribute to increased cultural understanding, and how they can affect instruction.

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

The NA leaderships find that the total budget for decentralised actions is adequate. However, **within some sectors, the funding for certain actions are inadequate**. In Norway, within education and training, there is in particular a need for more funding for VET pupil mobility and Strategic Partnerships in higher education. In 2015, there were 17 applications for Strategic Partnerships in higher education, 13 of which scored between 71 and 92 points. If SIU had not transferred funds from other actions and sectors, only one project would have received funding. With the transfer of funds, six partnerships were funded. Within VET mobility, all eligible applicants receive funding, and the funds are distributed based on application points awarded.¹³ Subsequently, because of the high demand for this action, the funds are spread thin, and the best projects only get 45 percent of the funds they apply for, which results in considerably fewer VET pupil and apprentice mobilities than they applied for.

As there are often unspent funds within other actions, SIU, Bufdir and the Ministry of Education and Research is calling for **more flexibility in the distribution of funds between decentralised actions**. The current system for distribution of funds is perceived of as fairly rigid, and funding that could benefit participants sometimes go unused. SIU leadership and the Ministry of Education and Research emphasise that each country will have different needs, and the current system for distribution of funds is not sufficiently flexible to accommodate to each country's needs. Within the youth field, Bufdir is in particular calling for more flexibility regarding KA3, to which the 20 percent reallocation rule does not apply.

Overall, the **distribution of funds across KA1 and KA2 is considered appropriate**. Most informants agree that the cornerstone of the programme should continue to be mobility, and that although KA2 and KA3 are welcome additions to the programme, the bulk of the funding should remain apportioned to KA1. The NA for youth does for instance point out that they could spend considerably more on KA2. However, an increase in the KA2 budget should come from an overall budget increase, and not from transferring KA1 designated funds. This would be poor prioritizing, as Youth in Action is primarily a youth programme and these actions target youth directly.

In higher education at the NA level there is also a **call for more flexibility in the distribution of funds within the international credit mobility action**. The allocation of funds for specific regions results in unused funds for some regions, while there are unmet demands in other. A key point here is the priority of neighbouring regions. Informants point to the fact that what constitutes neighbouring regions differs among EU/EEA countries, hence it should be possible for each country to make priorities accordingly. More flexibility would allow nations to prioritise their own neighbouring regions, or regions that Norwegian participants have a particular interest in collaborating with.

Because of the rigidity in terms of regional allocations, programme officers also find it hard to promote international credit mobility to institutions.

SIU is furthermore requesting **more flexibility regarding the structure of the budget process itself**. In particular, they are calling for more time to handle amendment. Funds are allocated in June, while budget

¹² See for instance St. Meld. 14 (2008-2009), p. 24.

¹³ Applicants that fulfil the formal requirements and receive a minimum of 60 points.

adjustments take place in October, leaving SIU only two weeks to reallocate unused funds. The rigidity of the timing and the chronology of the budget process result in unused funds.

Regarding the **centralised actions**, *SIU and the Ministry of Education emphasised that the funding for these actions is insufficient* and the competition is too high, and therefore call for increasing the funding for these actions.

(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?

Besides issues already mentioned under questions 6 and 7, **the challenges most frequently voiced by both the organisations and the NAs relate to efficiency**. In Norway, there is a trend towards de-bureaucratisation and digitalizing of administrative processes. To many organisations, the Erasmus+ processes are very administratively labour-intensive, and demand resources that some organisations simply do not have.

The call for more efficient administrative processes is especially strong from the higher education sector. Two main challenges were brought up by all the institutions we interviewed. The first challenge, mentioned by all HEIs that were interviewed, pertains to the **calculation of grants for mobility students**. The current system, with separate calculations for each student based on the exact start and return date is a considerable resource drain for the administrations, also because it requires repeated recalculations of scholarship rate,. The institutions are therefore requesting more standardised grants, i.e. monthly calculations.

Second, managing and administering the different learning agreements and institutional agreements is extremely resource intensive for the institutions. The main challenge is the amount of agreements, and what many HEIs find to be the excessive bureaucratic processes pertaining to these documents. Informants specifically mentioned the system of signatures as a challenge. In addition to the number of signatures that are required for each learning agreement they point out that it is difficult to get the receiving institutions to sign the learning agreements before the semester starts. Therefore, a full-scale implementation of the “Erasmus without papers” pilot is welcomed. Several higher education institutions **suggest making all agreements electronic and introducing electronic signatures** in order to facilitate these processes, in addition to **shorten and simplify the agreements** to make them easier for students and staff to read and understand.

Informants across all fields and sectors appreciate the increased use of digital solutions. For instance, SIU finds that the IT-tools MT+ and EplusLink has facilitated program administration, and according to organisations reporting has been considerably improved through digitalisation. However, there is a **general call for further digitalisation and improvements to existing technical/digital solutions, both at the level of the NA and the participating organisations**. This includes IT-systems that communicate better and digitalisation of all processes, including electronic forms and electronic signatures. In Higher Education, informants are positive to the inclusion of the OLS tool, but find that it has brought with it considerable extra administration as it does not communicate with the mobility tool.

According to the Ministry of Education and Research, digital routines should be integrated in the programme at a larger scale, in order to improve administrative routines and to make it easier to plan and complete mobility for students. The results from the projects Erasmus without papers and EMREX (Enable smooth Mobility and Recognition of External qualifications) show that electronic transfer of students records between educational organisations should be the norm. The biggest benefits of these projects are the increased availability, quality and reliability of information about student records of achievement

information. Informants also stress the importance of continuity of ICT-systems from programme period to programme period.

In the youth field, as well as in the school and the adult education sectors, many informants report that the application process is too demanding and they question the current standardised process. They find it problematic that small schools and youth groups, which are often amateur applicants applying for small sums, have to go through the same process as large higher education institutions applying for very large sums, and that often have a more professionalised apparatus. Consequentially, the threshold becomes too high for many smaller organisations and groups, and many refrain from applying. In the **youth field**, some organisations emphasise user participation, and would like to involve youth in the application and reporting process in Erasmus+. However, because of the complexities of the procedures, this has proved difficult.

More specifically, organisations find that there is a lot of overlap between categories and questions in the application form, and that the language is hard to understand. Many organisations expressed a belief that being awarded grants has more to do with “breaking the code” in terms of using the right language, than about the actual quality of the project. Organisations that apply and are awarded project funding frequently find that the reporting requirements are also too extensive and demanding unless they have a designated international coordinator.

From both the youth field and the education and training field, therefore, comes a request to ***simplify application forms and processes in order to increase access for target groups without a professionalised internationalisation apparatus***. Application procedures should be rationalised, made more user friendly and easier to navigate. The NA for youth is proposing making the homepage more intuitive for potential applicants, by displaying all the available actions and activities.

A concern expressed by Bufdir pertains to the time frame of the **EVS-process**. Many of the youth that participate need a new opportunity fast, but the process of organizing an EVS-stay, including finding a receiving organisation, often takes too long, and the youth lose interest. Bufdir is therefore ***suggesting a new system to assist EVS-applicants in finding a receiving organisation***.

Efficiency

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

The main objection to the current division of tasks concerns policy discussion and decision-making at the EU level. Within **the education and training field**, the National Authority and the NA leadership find that both ***Programme Committee meetings and the NA meetings are increasingly drained of policy content***, and therefore decreasingly serve as an arena for policy discussion and decision-making. Both the NAU and the NA leadership find that while technical or administrative issues make up an increasing part of the agenda in the Programme Committee meetings and the NA meetings, policy and substantive discussions on matters of relevance to the development of the programme and of education and training in Europe have been moved to working groups.

The regulation provides no legal basis for these working groups and their role in policy discussions is therefore questioned. The SIU leadership finds that the Commission often presents the outcome of working group discussions as decisions that have been made, while members of the working groups feel

that they lack the authority or mandate to make decisions. Thus, a new informal level with an unclear mandate has emerged, which represents a democratic problem.

Hence, the National Authority and the NA leadership propose (re)introducing a clearer division of tasks between the working groups, the Committees and the Commission. Working groups should be temporary, have a clear mandate, and primarily serve as preparatory arenas, while substantive and policy discussion and decision-making are brought back into the Committee meetings.

Within SIU, programme officers' view on the NA meetings vary. Within higher education, programme officers find NA-meetings to be effective and informative, and that they have an important advisory role. The NAs participate actively, and they find the Commission to be responsive to their input. Several changes in 2016 and 2017 are results of input from the NAs in these meetings. An example is the introduction of the travel grants for remote areas starting in 2017. A frequent feedback during our interviews was that the rate levels for the travel grants were inadequate, which result in geographical bias as potential applicants from geographical peripheries were discouraged from applying.

In the youth field however, Bufdir is content with the NAs involvement in the policy discussions, and feel that the Commission's youth department is actively involving the NAs to get input on the programme's development.

Both NAs are requesting more guidance and information from the executive agency regarding centralised actions. The NA for education and training in particular is calling for more information from the EACEA about these actions. The NA is responsible for informing and guiding potential applicants and participants about the actions. However, informants find that the NA lacks in-depth knowledge about the centralised actions, that is necessary to be able to satisfactorily carry out this task. Several organisations that have applied for these actions confirm the NA's own assessment. In addition to requesting more and earlier information about these actions, SIU calls for more transparency and access to the evaluations of centralised projects. It would also be useful for the NAs to have a more clearly defined role in the implementation of these actions, similar to the role national agencies have in the implementation of Horizon 2020.

In respect to decentralised actions, the NA find that cooperation with the EACEA is very satisfactory, and that follow up and service regarding e.g. IT- tools is good.

Another factor that relates to the division of tasks, is ***the system of audits and control***. Both National Agencies are experiencing excessive auditing which is a drain on the resources and takes time away from outreach activities and serving organisations. The Commission's audit comes in addition to SIU's internal audit (undertaken by the independent auditing company KPMG) and an external audit, undertaken by BDO on behalf of the Ministry of Education and Research. Both of these audits have clear goals, build on each other, and are available to the Commission. The SIU leadership is questioning the added value of this extra audit for three reasons, first, since the internal and external SIU audits are already available to the Commission, second, because the purpose of the Commission's audit is unclear, and third, because the company undertaking the audit on behalf of the Commission is considered to lack the necessary knowledge and expertise to revise the programme, resulting in low quality reports.

The Ministry of Education and Research highlights that Erasmus+ supports ET2020 and cooperation in the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). This working method contributes to knowledge sharing, information of best practice through peer learning, and the establishment of European networks of experts in the field of education. The Ministry would like to see further developments in the use of OMC and better dissemination of the results from the peer learning activities.

(Question 11) To what extent has the integration of several programmes into Erasmus+ resulted in efficiency gains or losses for the implementation of the programme in your country, both at the level of the National 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?

We find that the experience with and perception of efficiency loss versus gains vary between levels, fields, sectors and actions. At the NA level, SIU find that the integration has led to efficiency gains, while Bufdir has experienced the opposite. Although Bufdir finds that Erasmus+ has led to more administrative work, youth organisations report efficiency gains. At the level of the participating organisations, the assessments of net efficiency gains versus loss vary from sector to sector within the field of education and training. The VET sector and the adult education sector find efficiency gains within Strategic Partnerships and mobility actions respectively, the school sector and the HEIs experienced a sharp efficiency loss with the transition to Erasmus+. However, a more uniform programme structure is considered to have had a positive effect on efficiency as it is easier to plan participation in several actions in order to reach an overarching goal.

According to SIU leadership, the integration has led to overall efficiency gains in the implementation of the programme at the NA-level, primarily **due to the considerable cut in the total number of actions and the streamlining across sectors**. The result is a more uniform programme that is both easier for the various sectors to understand and easier for SIU to communicate to potential applicants. At the NA-level, that opens up for harmonisation of procedures and more collaboration among programme officers across sectors and actions. Due to more streamlining (e.g. similar content across actions, same deadlines) some activities can be consolidated, for instance informational meetings and application writing workshops.

Still, the workload for SIU has not diminished, due to numerous idiosyncrasies left over from the previous programme, e.g. varying rules for mobility across sectors.

Bufdir's experience is the opposite. Although the NA is positive to the youth field being included in Erasmus+, it has led to a considerable drop in efficiency at the NA level. The main reason for this is that the standardised IT-tools, application processes and contracts are poorly harmonised with the actions in the youth field. Bufdir is therefore spending more time guiding on technical and administrative issues concerning applications and reporting, than on quality and content. In order to improve efficiency, Bufdir is proposing reducing the number of IT-tools, adapting them more to the youth field (preferably by including the NAs in the further development of the tools), and introducing separate contracts for the youth field.

Another element introduced with Erasmus+, which in Bufdir's experience **reduces efficiency, is the integrated programme guide**. Informants in the education and training field, from both the NA and the participating organisations, share this opinion. Many applicants find the guide's structure confusing as each action being covered several places. This is particularly true for organisations without designated international coordinators, which is often the case in the youth field and much of the school and adult education sectors. From both fields there is a call for **field and sector specific programme guides** in order to make the application process less confounding and more accessible.

Interestingly, among **the youth organisations we talked to there was a consensus that the transition to Erasmus+ brought with it efficiency gains**, especially in the reporting, which they consider to be simpler. A municipality report that Erasmus+ means less paperwork, that the applicant can apply for several projects in the same application, and that reporting has been simplified.

In the **VET sector**, the transition from Transfer of Innovation projects to Strategic Partnerships involved a significant reduction in number of actions in addition to simplified grants and simpler reporting, resulting in efficiency gains both at the NA level and at the beneficiary level. In regards to VET mobility, neither the NA nor the organisations perceive of any change in efficiency.

Within the school sector however, the integration seems to have led to efficiency losses. The schools find that the threshold has increased with Erasmus+ due to a more complicated application process and higher demands on the content of the application. To many schools, the language of innovation, intellectual outputs and multipliers is alienating. The reporting requirements have also increased with Erasmus+.

Organisations in the ***adult education sector*** have experienced a significant efficiency gain in mobility, as several mobilities are now included in the same contract.

Higher education institutions find that mobility projects have become a bigger administrative drain than previously, due to more micromanagement and the introduction of ICT-systems that do not communicate. The international credit mobility action has increased the administrative burden considerably for both the NA and the HEIs. This is primarily due to the rigidity of the per-region budgets, the stricter application assessment requirements, ICT-systems that are not adapted to the action and its sub budgets and the fact that the HEIs are responsible for the administration of both the incoming and outgoing students.

Proposals for changes that could increase efficiency across the fields and sectors are: ***more user-friendly language, increased use of electronic solutions and further simplification of reporting requirements.***

(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?

Across fields, sectors and actions, both the NAs and the organisations report that ***the system of simplified grants and unit costs in general have resulted in considerable efficiency benefits for the participating organisations.*** The introduction of line items and automatically generated budgets saves time and reduces the chance of man-made errors. The informants find that the process of creating a budget is considerably simpler since costs are automatically generated, and that it has simplified reporting considerably. Bufdir welcomes the introduction of more unit costs.

However, ***a number of the applying organisations find the presentation of the financial provisions hard to penetrate***, both in terms of language and clarity, and spend much time on deciphering them. For many applicants, the budgeting process is very demanding, in particular for Strategic Partnerships. Several informants reported that they had to attend several application writing seminars in order to understand the financial provisions and to be able to set up a budget. Without the seminar, they would not have managed to set up a budget on their own.

Furthermore, ***SIU is concerned about the low rates for the incoming international credit mobility students.*** Norway is a high cost country, and many of the students come from countries without national student funding programmes, and do not have enough funds to cover basic living costs. Within higher education it is also a challenge that the rates are considerably lower than in the Horizon 2020 programme.

Within the ***youth field, the NA points out as a problem the difference in daily rates for participants in youth exchanges versus participants in youth workers mobility.*** In Bufdir's view there is no substantive reason for this difference, and they find the difference discriminating. The NA is also concerned that organisations that would normally apply for youth exchanges now apply for youth workers mobility because it generates more funding, while it is really just poorly veiled exchanges.

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

The perception of the adequacy of the resources available for the implementation of the programme varies considerably between the two NAs.

At SIU, both the leadership and the programme officers agree that overall resources are adequate. Several programme officers point out that at peak times, during application deadlines and application assessments, they could use more staff. Mostly the extra workload during these periods is handled by hiring external evaluators. The programme officers also wish they had more capacity to do informational and promotional work in order to recruit new organisations, but find that most of their time is spent on administration and contact with applying and awarded organisations.

Buadir is considerably less satisfied than SIU with their current staffing situation. With the transition to Erasmus+, the funding of the Youth in Action programme was reduced in Norway, because the two National Authorities decided to divide the operating funds proportionally based on the size of the project funds. To Buadir, this is frustrating, since some tasks (such as informational work and training) are fixed and time-consuming, irrespective of funds awarded.

In order to reap synergy benefits from the various internationalisation programmes, the SIU leadership is employing a consistent strategy of having programme officers work across several internationalisation programmes. SIU is also collaborating closely with the other Nordic NAs, sharing experiences, reporting, and training experts, which saves resources and foster contact between the countries.

Relevance

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

Across all three levels, the Erasmus+ objectives are found highly relevant. At the policy level, the Ministry of Education and Research underscores that there is great overlap between Norwegian and EU educational policy, and that the Erasmus+ objectives are well aligned with Norwegian educational objectives. The same holds for the youth field. Many organisations find that they can realise strategic goals through Erasmus+ because their organisations' objectives align so well with those of Erasmus+. Although certain objectives are more relevant to some sectors than others, all sectors and organisations find that several of the objectives align with their own.

Further, **informants across all levels appreciate what they perceive as the flexibility of the Erasmus+ objectives**; if circumstances change, the objectives can change. Many refer to how the Erasmus+ programme addressed the changing refugee situation by including a new objective. They find it positive that the Commission used the programme as a measure to meet this new challenge.

At the same time, within the education and training field, **certain objectives are perceived as more relevant in some sectors than in others.** Some organisations in the higher education sector find that the focus on key competences and skills is more relevant to the school sector than to higher education. Similarly, some adult education organisations and schools find the goal of innovation excellence too ambitious for what they are trying to achieve; to solve problems that are close and immediate.

The sectors also differ in their assessment of the Erasmus+ emphasis on employability. Some organisations within the higher education and school sector think that this objective is given too much priority. Several informants stated that the **increased focus on employability and the competitiveness of**

students that came with Erasmus+, has come at the expense of the intrinsic and cultural value of education. In the school sector, some informants found that the increased focus on employability has resulted in less attention being placed on study preparatory activities, as well as less funding for such activities.

Other informants, however, point to the fact that unemployment is increasing in Norway and that *employability therefore will become a more important objective in the coming years.* In the VET sector, some programme officers believe that even more emphasis should be put on adapting VET education to the needs of the labour market, and modernizing and improving the status of the VET educations.

In the youth field, informants at all levels underscore the importance of objective 2, to foster quality improvements in youth work. Organisations that work with youth relate that there are few options for quality improvement work within this field, and that the Erasmus+ programme is a great opportunity for them. The Ministry of Children and Equality point out that youth workers have a weaker professional affiliation than e.g. teachers and social workers, and that the Erasmus+ programme therefore is particularly important for the professional development of this group.

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

In general, the different stakeholders and sectors that we interviewed *experienced the Erasmus+ objectives as very relevant to their needs.* This is more thoroughly covered in the response to question 16.

The extent to which the programme is successful in attracting and reaching target audiences and groups varies from sector to sector and between target groups.

Persons with disadvantaged background and fewer opportunities are a target group for the programme, and the beneficiaries can move funds to the budget post "special needs". More flexibility in the time given to handle amendments could, however, strengthen this priority. This would allow additional funding to the beneficiaries when demands for "special needs" occur. Funds that have been allocated to persons with disadvantaged backgrounds and fewer opportunities are often not utilised due to the lack of flexibility in reallocating funds.

Improving employability and closer ties between the educational field and the private sector are important Erasmus+ goals. Still, *finding relevant businesses to collaborate with has proved challenging* for many organisations. One explanation is related to the limited role that businesses are offered in the projects. They serve primarily as providers of internships and guest lectures, and are rarely involved in the project development phase. To many businesses, in particular SMEs, participation in E+ projects is also a question of costs. The businesses interviewed for this report all related that participation in Erasmus+ projects was a loss-making project financially, as the hourly rates are too low to cover their costs. As one representative from a private business put it: "We have to ask ourselves, what's in it for us?"

Research institutes are another key stakeholder that has proven difficult to recruit. Funding is probably the main explanatory factor. Unit costs are far from sufficient to cover their participation in the programme, and as they are mainly externally funded, it is unlikely that Norwegian research institutes will become active in the programme.

Within higher education, Erasmus+ is still primarily perceived as a mobility programme. The challenge, according to SIU, lies in reaching a broader target group at the organisation, which includes the faculty

and leadership, not just the international coordinators. This partly has to do with the way many HEIs are organised, with research and student administrations somewhat detached from academic staff. Strategic Partnerships, and other types of projects, need to be initiated by and based in the work of the academic faculty, and anchored in the institutional leadership. The international coordinators at some HEIs relate the same; most faculty still perceive of Erasmus+ mainly as a mobility programme, and have little knowledge about the other project funding opportunities. Both SIU and the international coordinators believe more direct outreach to faculty in relevant arenas is necessary. However, several international coordinators also relate increased interest from faculty after the institution had been awarded one or several Strategic Partnerships. Thus, as Erasmus+ proceeds, one can expect a certain snowball effect from each awarded project at the institutional or faculty level.

In the school sector, SIU observes ***a considerable difference in the participation of upper secondary schools versus primary and lower secondary***. Upper secondary level participates in Erasmus+ to a much higher degree. Lack of the resources and expertise that are necessary in order to carry out a complex application process can be one explanation for some primary and lower secondary schools. However, the informants believe ***the difference is also partially connected to school ownership***. In Norway, the municipalities are school owners for early childhood education, primary school and lower secondary, while the counties are school owners for upper secondary and VET schools. While SIU is in regular contact with the 19 counties, contact with the municipalities (currently 426) is encumbered partly by the sheer number of municipalities, the variations in the municipal structures, and the fact that there are few arenas where SIU can meet the municipalities. While many counties take an active role in the Erasmus+ work and recruitment, this is less common among the municipalities. Reaching and getting the municipalities to take on a more active role is thus an important task moving forward.

Recruitment to Strategic Partnerships has proved challenging in the VET, school and adult education sectors. The program officers at SIU point out two main challenges: 1) Strategic Partnerships are too advanced and ambitious for most schools to engage in, and 2) to many schools and teachers, Strategic Partnerships involve considerable additional work, particularly since costs for substitute teachers are not covered, meaning that teachers often have to make up for lost time when they return from a project.

Within the adult education sector, the main challenge pertains to identifying and reaching all relevant organisations, as the sector consists of a plethora of different organisations and providers.

The youth field has a similar challenge. The fact that youth work is organised differently in the municipalities, and to a certain extent depends on local enthusiasts, makes it difficult to identify the relevant person or role to address. Bufdir collaborates closely with umbrella organisations like The Norwegian Children and Youth Council and the National Youth Club Organisation in order to reach youth organisations.

The general impression from interviews with Bufdir and beneficiaries in the field is that ***Erasmus+ is not very well known in the youth field***. A county that is considered in the forefront in the youth field, and that takes on an active role in spreading Erasmus+ information, relates that even in their county, many school advisors and organisations are not familiar with the programme, despite all their effort to be visible. Bufdir has a number of suggestions as to how to reach more organisations and schools: increase the use of multipliers (i.e. youth coordinators in the municipalities, international coordinators in the counties); encourage the users to share their experiences and emphasise local impact in reporting.

Attracting Norwegian youth to the EVS programme has proved particularly challenging. While Norway receives approximately 100 youth from abroad annually, only 40 Norwegian volunteers go abroad. The low number of outgoing volunteers may be partially due to low levels of youth unemployment in Norway, but may also be due to insufficient informational and outreach activity. Bufdir points out that being understaffed means that these activities are kept at a basic level.

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+?

In general, informants at **the policy level and NA level in both fields are content with the coherence between the various actions brought together in Erasmus+**. In particular, they point out positive synergies between various KA1, KA2 and KA3 actions, and have experienced that projects can build on each other. Typically, mobility is a precursor for Strategic Partnerships. Another example is the development of curricula through Strategic Partnerships, which then can be used in a joint master's degree. Simpler actions can be used to build more complex projects over time, and both Bufdir and SIU emphasise the positive aspects of this complementarity. SIU also find thematic synergy effects between sectors, which facilitate work and knowledge sharing across sectors.

SIU is **somewhat less content with the coherence between the various fields brought together in Erasmus+**. With the addition of the youth and the sports fields, SIU leadership is concerned that the programme's profile has become less distinct. In particular, they find that there is a lack of coherence between the sports fields and the two other fields. It is not uncommon to use sports as an arena for inclusion and learning in the school sector, however, in Erasmus+, sports is organised as centralised actions, and have weak connections to the education field. The SIU leadership recommends extracting this field from Erasmus+ in order to improve programme coherence and thus external coherence.

Regarding the coherence between the youth field and the education and training field, there seems to be potential for improvement. The youth field sometimes taps into the education and training field, joining meetings, seminars etc., and several Strategic Partnerships in the youth field also involve formal learning. However, this collaboration seems to go one way, with the formal education field to a lesser extent involving non-formal learning in their projects.

European added value and sustainability

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

The SIU leadership has a clear goal of being able to absorb the foreseen budget increase. However, they are requesting more information about the timing, size and distribution of funds, in order to be prepared and put in extra efforts where necessary.

Increased funds will, however, demand stronger recruiting and promotional efforts, in particular in regard to school and adult education mobility where the budgets are currently barely absorbed. In other areas, the extra funds will be very easily absorbed. This is particularly true for VET mobility and HE Strategic Partnerships. In these areas, the budget could be doubled several times and the budget would still easily be absorbed on high quality projects. In VET mobility, only 37 percent of the mobilities applied for are awarded (2015 numbers) although 95 percent of the organisations are awarded VET mobility funds, meaning that there is a great demand for more funding for this action.

Although SIU is prepared to escalate efforts to recruit target groups in order to absorb the expected budget increase, the leadership and programme officers are at the same time underscoring the need for greater flexibility in the distribution of funds between actions and sectors. Greater flexibility will allow each country to adapt efforts to their national educational needs, and lead to a more effective use of the funding. There is also need for greater within-action flexibility in international credit mobility. Currently,

90 % of funding is spent. However, if the distribution of funding across regions remains as is, spending the funds may prove challenging.

The NA for youth is intent on absorbing the planned budget increase. Except for KA2 Strategic Partnerships where there are many qualified applicants that Bufdir would have liked to be able to fund, Bufdir is aware of the boost of recruitment efforts the increase will necessitate, especially regarding EVS and youth exchange. Bufdir sees great unused potential in the role of the municipalities and counties, and welcome the budget increase as a way to involve this sector. Bufdir would also welcome a parallel increase in operating funds in order to increase capacity for informational activities, recruitment and follow up, which would help facilitate higher quality applications and projects.

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