

More funding for non-formal adult education in the future Erasmus+ programme!

Synthesis Paper of the European Association for the Education of Adults und the European Office for Catholic Youth Work and Adult Education on the further development of Erasmus+

The present paper was drafted in collaboration between the European Association for the Education of Adults and European Office for Catholic Youth Work and Adult Education. Together, EAEA and the organisations represented by the European Office represent more than 60 million learners Europe-wide.

We acknowledge that Erasmus+ is one of the most successful EU-funding programmes and emphasize its significance for an ever closer Union and the future of European Integration. We believe that due to the education challenges ahead, the role of non-formal adult learning in Erasmus+ should not only be maintained but strengthened significantly.

Today Europe faces three main challenges relevant for non-formal adult education:

1. **Nationalism and Euroscepticism:** According to the Eurobarometer Survey 48% of Europeans do not trust the EU and 50% think the Union does not take into account their views. In many European countries, nationalist parties have become relevant political forces. In France, Marine Le Pen came close to winning the presidential elections and in 2019 the United Kingdom will become the first Member State to leave the EU. All these developments show that European Integration should not be taken for granted and that efforts to spread a common European Identity and active EU-citizenship need to be stepped up.
2. **Making education inclusive:** 70 million Europeans have low basic skills and 43% do not have basic digital skills, there is an increasing need for the integration of migrants and refugees as well as social inclusion of persons from disadvantaged backgrounds. If Europe intends to remain the most competitive region in the world, it is paramount to equip everyone with the skills required for active participation in society and success on the labour market. To ensure the access of these diverse groups to lifelong learning and to reach the EU target to raise the participation in adult learning to 15% by 2020 and the European Education Area target of 25% by 2025, more sustainable levels of funding for adult education are urgently needed.
3. **Active ageing:** Europe's society is ageing. Between 2006 and 2017 the share of population aged 65 and over compared to the total population increased from 16,8% to 19,4%. The impact of education on people's health and well-being has been documented extensively in recent years. As a result, participating in adult education is an important cornerstone of active ageing.

A strong adult education part in Erasmus+ holds the potential to make a real difference for all these challenges. To transform Erasmus+ into a true catalyst for adult learning in Europe, we propose the following modifications to the programme:

Budget

Adult learning has the smallest programme budget within Erasmus+ despite having to address some of the most pressing challenges and the largest target group across Europe. In all key actions, funding demand exceeds the available offer many times. The small budget allocated to adult learning actually means that smaller countries have only a few hundred thousand Euros for the whole adult education sector, which comprises both mobilities for adult education staff and the work of strategic partnerships.

Despite its low budget share in Erasmus+, non-formal adult education is committed to the European dimension in their daily work. The training of staff members abroad and the forging of alliances with partner organisations from all over Europe play a key role within the sector.

To fully acknowledge and develop the potential of the non-formal education sector for the challenges mentioned afore, we recommend:

- To, at the very least, triple the overall Erasmus+ budget.
- To ensure improved admission rates for adult education: Significantly increase the budget share of adult learning within the Erasmus+ budget.

Funding rules

With the current programming period, the introduction of lump sums brought significant simplifications. Still, the programmes' funding rules and the real expenditure requirements on the ground are not always in line. For example, preparing good projects requires face to face meetings in advance. Current funding rules do not allow for preparatory visits.

Planning and executing good projects requires staff. According to the current rules, funding is largely restricted to expenses related to travel, accommodation and material costs. Covering the complete additional staff costs often overburdens organisations from the not-for profit sector and discourages many Erasmus+ applications. The management fee, intended to cover material costs, are often insufficient to fund the dissemination activities required by the programme.

Travel expenses may only be refunded if the travelled distance exceeds 99 km. Travel expenses are calculated from the linear distance between two places. In border regions, cross-border mobilities below a distance of 99 km are very common. Calculating travel expenses from the linear distance does not allow for a realistic display of real costs and disadvantages participants from remote areas and cities who will always travel at a higher cost, even if planning thoroughly.

To adapt the programmes' funding roles to expenditure realities on the ground, we recommend:

- Reintroducing the funding of preparatory visits dedicated to the preparation of projects. To limit the administrative work to a minimum, we suggest that a cost category "preparatory visits" be included in the application form.

- Disconnect the funding for staff expenditures from the need to produce intellectual outputs and expand it to all form of strategic partnerships and mobilities within adult education. Lump sums for staff expenditure should be graded according to income groups (country groups) similar to table A on intellectual outputs on page 168 of the 2018 Erasmus+ programme guide. Strategic partnerships, knowledge alliances and capacity building projects within key action one allow lump-sum based funding for staff expenditure when intellectual outputs are produced.
- We propose replacing the linear distance based calculation by a lump-sum reimbursement per kilometre covered, starting from a distance of 20 km including travel within a country.

Application forms and programme guide

Erasmus+ is intended to be an easily accessible programme. However, completing the application forms as well as managing and reporting on projects requires a substantial amount of expertise and preparation. Consequently, a sector of commercial advisers and consultancies has developed. This cannot have been the intention of the programme.

The current Erasmus+ programme promotes medium-size projects. However, even small projects can have profound effects on the quality of adult education, the transfer of innovation and the creation of a common European area of adult education. At the same time, the implementation of bigger projects, such as European networks or alliances to make an impact at the policy level, is not possible within the budget frame.

To improve accessibility, we recommend:

- To create a budget line with drastically shortened, simplified application forms for small-scale projects. The EU-Interreg programme "[Deutschland-Niederland](#)" already **allows for such very simplified procedures. In Interreg** very small projects can apply for funding until 1.000 euros through a simple online application tool. Beside information about partner organisations and the planned budget, only four additional questions have to be answered: What are the goals of you project? How many participants do you expect? How many visitors do you expect? What is you cross-border impact? The application form can be found [here](#).
- To create a budget line for large-scale adult education projects, such as the sector skills or knowledge alliances that are available to other sectors. These adult learning alliances could bring together practitioners and researchers to tackle key challenges like democracy or digitalisation.
- To give more organisations in non-formal adult education the possibility to apply for Erasmus+ funding, we also recommend offering a second application deadline.
- To provide adequate times frames to allow potential applicants sufficient preparation time.
- To make the 300-page programme guide more user friendly by shortening and simplifying. One option would be to split it up into several specialized programme guides for different topics such as "higher education", "school", "adult learning" and "youth".

Target groups and countries

Currently, mobilities in adult education are only available to adult education staff. However, the budget for these mobilities is tiny. In many underfunded countries and organisations, Erasmus+ is one of the few opportunities for staff development and therefore plays a central role for it.

Learners of non-formal adult education cannot participate in KA1 mobility actions in Erasmus+. People who pursue an education outside the formal sector are as open and curious about educational mobility in Europe as university students and have similar multiplier roles. Therefore:

- Learners in non-formal adult education, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, should once again receive the opportunity to directly participate in mobility projects.
- Ensure that associations from European countries that are neither Member States nor Candidate Countries can fully participate in the programme.

National agencies

The national agencies are inconsistent when it comes to providing information. This is as true for the registration of new project partners in the URF (Unique Registration Facility) and the ECAS (European Commission Authentication Services) databases as for the approval of projects or the counselling of applicants, e.g. on project drafts. These differences in approach can be observed as much among the four national agencies in Germany as with other European national agencies.

The peer review system used to assess applications has increased the impartiality of the scorings. Numerous reports of arbitrary scorings indicate that the consistency is in need of improvement.

We recommend to:

- Standardise the concepts and information provided by national agencies.
- Professionalise the peer review system by providing higher compensations and thorough preparation to external reviewers. Involve national agencies in the assessment and decision-making. Leaving the assessment and decision-making exclusively to independent experts is inadequate.

Social Inclusion

Projects with disadvantaged people require more social support resources during the preparation, the implementation and the follow-up. This must be reflected in the funding. Currently, the exact amount of the additional funding has to be indicated in the application form, yet the cost is

difficult to predict, especially when it comes to psychosocial or mental disabilities. In order to ensure comprehensive inclusion, an ex post adjustment of the required additional funding needs to be made possible. Special funding for disabled people must not be included in the maximum grant. Facilities, institutions and organisations working with disadvantaged or disabled young people should be enabled to bill the expenses for professional full-time staff. This is the only way to guarantee the continuity in attendance which is especially important to disadvantaged (young) people.

Programme design

In the current programme period, the EU funds for life-long learning, youth, sport and higher education were merged into Erasmus+. This integration strengthened EU-funded mobility projects and can therefore be regarded as successful. Unfortunately, the integration of multiple programmes into one has also caused a loss of visibility for the individual programme parts. To protect the visibility of Erasmus+ and maintain the focus on mobility projects, further merging with other programmes should be avoided. A usage of Erasmus+ funds to promote employment cannot be advised. The European Solidarity Corps should be established as a separate programme outside of Erasmus+.

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