



WHAT HAPPENED TO THE 'PLUS' IN ERASMUS+?

EAEA Statement

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In 2017, the [European Association for the Education of Adults \(EAEA\)](#) published a statement that urged policy-makers to put the 'Plus' into Erasmus+ and strengthen adult education within the programme. One year later, after the launch of the [Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing 'Erasmus'](#) by the European Commission, we have to ask what happened to the 'Plus' as it has disappeared completely from the name of the future programme.

While the proposal for the future Erasmus programme still includes educational sectors beyond higher education such as adult education, we believe that renaming Erasmus+ back to Erasmus might send a signal to all stakeholders that the programme will resume its focus on mobilities of students in higher education. Erasmus+, however, stands for lifelong learning and all educational sectors and measures included in this concept.

Erasmus+ has supported adult education organisations from all over Europe in their efforts for more innovation and cooperation in the sector. This 'Plus' in Erasmus+ is essential for the lifelong learning approach of ET2020 and the further implementation of the [Renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning](#), as well as the implementation of [Upskilling Pathways](#).

Adult education is tackling many of Europe's most pressing challenges, such as the inclusion of migrants and refugees, automation and digitalisation, inclusion of socially isolated persons, among many others. However, according to the proposal of the European Commission, the budget share remains unchanged at less than 4%. While we welcome the doubling of the overall budget for the future Erasmus programme, the budget share for adult education needs to be significantly higher in order for adult education to be able to make an impact.

The mid-term evaluation of Erasmus+ showed that the adult learning sector supposedly does not have sufficient systemic impact. While we do not agree with the overall evaluation, it is not surprising: the smaller the resources, the smaller the impact, even though it is still remarkable how much adult education organisations can achieve with limited resources.

While less than 4% of the Erasmus budget is allocated to adult education, the (potential) target group of adult education is significantly larger than in any other educational field: 55% of the total population in the European Union is between the age of 25 and 65, i.e. the age group that is considered in the labour force survey, and almost 85% of the population is between 15 and 65 years and older.

As a result of the Erasmus+ mid-term review, adult education in the new programme is supposed to focus (exclusively) on low qualified people as its main target group. This is contradictory to a holistic approach to adult education and lifelong learning which aims to promote social inclusion and active citizenship among all adult citizens. Currently, participation levels in adult education (among the working population) are around 11%. This is far away from the ET2020 benchmark of 15% that should



be achieved until 2020, and the new benchmark 25% until 2025, and both are highly unlikely to be reached with the current and the proposed future funding of the sector, particularly with a narrowing down of the target group.

The European Association for the Education of Adults welcomes the introduction of small-scale projects in the new programme. They will increase the accessibility to the programme by smaller organisations with limited financial and human resources. This 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. However, in contrast to VET and Higher Education, the new programme does not foresee any large-scale projects, such as European alliances for adult education. Adult education alliances could bring together practitioners and researchers to tackle key European challenges such as democracy or digitalisation and ensure an impact at the policy level.

The proposal for the future Erasmus programme also mentions that mobilities for adult education staff will be opened to staff from outside of adult education that work in a position related to education and training. While an inclusive approach is very positive, this then needs to be reflected in the budget.

A future Erasmus+ programme that aims to make an impact in all educational sectors, including adult education, needs to keep the 'Plus' in Erasmus and allocate a much higher budget share to adult education.

More information

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The European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) is the voice of non-formal adult education in Europe. EAEA is a European NGO with 142 member organisations in 44 countries and represents more than 60 million learners Europe-wide.