



Include adult learners in Erasmus+ mobility actions – but do it right!

EAEA's statement

April 2022

EAEA strongly supports the inclusion of adult learners in mobility actions in the new Erasmus+ programme from 2021 to 2027. This will benefit those participating in mobility, while reducing age discrimination in public funding opportunities. However, first experiences from some European Member States show that the implementation of mobility actions for adult learners suffers from 'teething problems', which we would like to address in this statement, alongside a set of recommendations, to improve the programme.

The target groups

The **target groups of the recently established mobility measures** (Erasmus+ KA1 for adult learners) are determined at the national level¹, but should, according to the official instructions of the Erasmus+ Programme Guide, primarily be aimed at **"low-skilled" adults**.

- **Defining "low-skilled" adult learners at the national level:** Requiring national authorities to define the term 'low-skilled' brings about two major issues:
 - o Firstly, it creates discernible pressure on the E+ National Agencies and their staff, as it may prove burdensome for them to determine which applications would be eligible for funding, since it requires expert knowledge of the specific target groups and their learning needs.
 - o Secondly, this approach potentially leads to some national authorities and E+ National Agencies defining, and applying, the threshold for 'low-skilled' inconsistently with other countries, thus widening the gap in equal opportunities for successful applications between different EU countries.
- **Stigmatisation of learners:** Participants are reluctant to be labelled as 'disadvantaged' and 'low-skilled', fearing stigmatisation. To select eligible candidates, adult education providers need to collect sensitive socio-economic data from the course participants. This is, firstly, contrary to international and European best practices on data protection. As recalled by the [EU Agency for Fundamental Rights and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#), "data collection activities should not create or reinforce existing discrimination, bias or

¹ "The definition of eligible adult education programmes and low-skilled adult learners in each EU Member State or third country associated to the Programme will be defined by the competent National Authority and published on the website of the relevant National Agency. In principle, persons that have not completed at least an upper secondary education programme will be considered low-skilled adult learners." ([Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2022, version 2](#))

stereotypes”.² Secondly, it can prevent adults to enrol in courses for fear of stigmatisation. Moreover, it may be difficult for project applicants to ascertain whether potential participants can be considered ‘low-skilled’ in accordance with the requirements of the Erasmus+ rules at the national level.

- **Low individual funding for adult learners:** Adult learners receive lower individual funding rates for mobilities than adult educators. For many countries, the individual funding for the learner per day is too low to cover the costs of accommodation, subsistence and local transport. This would require co-financing by the learner or the sending organisation, which is not possible in most cases. Especially learners from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds do not have the personal funds to (partly) finance their own learning mobility. Furthermore, adult learners should have the same right to adequate accommodation and subsistence as adult educators. Adult learners may legitimately not find satisfactory to stay in accommodations typically suitable for younger students, which may be the only option available given the more limited Erasmus+ funding allocated.
- **Burdensome conditions for adult learners from disadvantaged backgrounds:** Experience has shown that it is particularly difficult for this target group to reconcile days-long training with work, parenting and caregiving responsibilities. “Low-skilled” adults are more likely to be in precarious working conditions, and their employers may not appreciate, nor be willing to accommodate, the need to be absent from work for several days– especially if these training activities are not directly linked their current tasks or type of work. Potential participants would, therefore, be at risk of losing their income. Single parents and women with a migration background may encounter additional obstacles to enrol courses abroad due to, among other factors, the lack of a support network, access to childcare and caregiving services, and gender discrimination.

The quality

The purchase of commercially available training services is not supported by the Erasmus+ programme. However, feedback from some countries shows that employers may perceive commercially available training services as being of particularly high quality. Where employers are willing to make (paid) working time available to their employees for participation in adult learning, they tend to be more interested in (commercial) offers with a stronger connection to the workplace.

This raises the question of **quality**: EAEA is convinced of the high quality of non-commercial adult learning services in Europe, but the lack of uniform quality criteria for all course offerings prevents stakeholders from appreciating the value of non-commercial training. This may lead to unjustified assumptions about the quality of training, based merely on its cost.

² https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/ec-july-2018-guidelines-equality-data-collection.pdf

The motivation

The point mentioned above also raises a second question: who actually wants a learning opportunity? Does the desire come from the learner, or do employers want to use Erasmus+ as a “free” training opportunity for their staff, i.e. a training opportunity where the course costs are covered through the Erasmus+ grant?

Erasmus+ mobility actions should primarily serve to stimulate the motivation of adults to continue learning, guiding them towards ways to develop and improve their skills and abilities. Erasmus+ should make adults appreciate that learning can be rewarding, entertaining, meaningful and that it brings a plethora of benefits, including a sense of community and greater well-being.

The cooperation

Learning opportunities are organised in **cooperation between the sending and the receiving organisation**.

- The receiving organisation is not being provided any course fees or compensation for the effort (i.e. preparation and mobilisation) of its staff before or during the mobility activity. The sending organisation, on the other hand, has to send - together with the learner - a qualified educator for the entire duration of the mobility, as double supervision is required. These are **additional financial burdens** for adult education organisations, which often can only be managed by large providers through sufficient additional funds. For small and medium-sized providers, the effort required exceeds the potential benefit. In addition, adult educators often work on freelance contracts and/or for several different employers. This means that they may lose or not even be able to accept work assignments, as they need to retain the flexibility to accompany learners.
- Sending and receiving organisations have to design a learning programme that is tailored to the respective target groups. This is extremely burdensome in terms of **workload** for learning providers, especially as there is no compensation for this extra effort.

In general, EAEA's members, but also some National Agencies, observed a **decrease in Erasmus+ grants for adult learning projects as well as government funding** between 2020 and 2021 in a number of countries. This prompts, especially at the launch of a new part of the programme, potential project applicants to withhold their application for one or more application rounds. At the same time, National Agencies may opt to act rather conservatively when allocating funds.

Both the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have a very negative impact on the situation of learners and adult education organisations (e.g. higher energy prices, general inflation and wage-price spiral, limited possibilities for transnational cooperation), diminishing their capacity. Many of them are now struggling with their funding and are, in some cases, forced to transfer available funds away from staff to operational costs - for example, to pay increased rents for course premises, heating costs, etc. The Erasmus+ lump sums for applicant and sending organisations do not cover these higher additional costs.

Why do we still strongly believe in adult learner mobility in Erasmus+?

It offers much-needed learning provision and helps to put the right to lifelong learning into practice.

The European Commission has the mandate to develop an action plan for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. In its first principle, **the Pillar states that everyone has the right to lifelong learning**. To put that into practice, adults need to be given the possibility to engage in learning. Through learning mobility, adult learners will be able to participate in non-formal (i.e. structured or semi-structured) learning activities that may not be offered in their own countries or regions. This is particularly relevant for learners from small countries where adult learning offers are limited, as well as for learners from countries where adult education provision is not strongly developed, or where there are no quality offers on a specific learning topic or theme. Target groups of learning mobility could be defined according to themes or specific learning needs.

It promotes European values and democracy.

Given the Covid-19 pandemic and the Ukraine war, we consider this element to be central because people are beginning to reflect more not only on questions about their material and financial prospects, but also about the future of democracy in their own country and the EU. Learning mobility for adults provides an opportunity to foster mutual understanding and civic skills, exposing learners to different cultures and facilitating people-to-to people exchanges. **The learning experience created through mobility contributes significantly not only to the development of personal and interpersonal competences, such as language and communication skills, empathy, tolerance of ambiguity and team-working skills, but also to promote European values and democracy.** Learning mobility creates awareness about the benefits stemming from the European integration project, while strengthening cooperation and solidarity. It supports the delivery of the Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching.

It creates multipliers of adult learning.

Adult learners who participated in learning mobility will act as multipliers of their learning experience and skills they have acquired. It also shows that participation in adult learning can be a transformative experience for adult learners and their social and professional environment. Learners, therefore, often act as champions of learning in their communities and will inspire other people to participate in adult learning. Against this background, it is clear that learning mobility is necessary to reach the EU level targets³ for participation in adult learning: i.e. at least 47% of adults aged 25-64 should have participated in learning during the last 12 months, by 2025, and at least 60% of adults aged 25-64 should have participated in learning during the last 12 months, by 2030.

³ Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030)



Additionally, participation in learning mobilities is a low-threshold step into European cooperation in other areas of the personal and professional life of learners.

It supports the physical and mental health of people and increases their well-being.

Erasmus+ mobility can be a unique opportunity for adult learners to visit another country. The learning effect of this cannot be underestimated: mobility trains many life skills that can also play an important role after mobility, including communication skills and problem-solving skills, for instance through finding one's way in a new environment, asking for information and using relevant services in a foreign country. In addition, it also promotes physical health, as participants of mobility actions are also more physically mobile at the place of learning, given that they may visit different sites, complete a cultural programme, and much more. The new impressions and experiences, contacts with new people, and the learning itself also promote mental health and active ageing. An Erasmus+ mobility conveys that learning can be enjoyable and can stimulate learners to continue their learning path.

Recommendations for European policy makers

Make the participation in Erasmus+ mobility actions a right for adults from all backgrounds, also by providing sufficient funding to sending and receiving organisations.

Empower everyone to participate in mobility actions. Give workers the right to devote a number of days per year to self-determined and self-oriented learning, without having to justify to their employers the relevance of the chosen learning activity for their job, thus creating an enabling and stimulating environment for professional development. Increase the daily rate for adult learners who go on a mobility to cover all costs related to an adequate accommodation, subsistence and local transport.

Focus on learning objectives rather than specific target groups, to make learning inclusive.

Learning should be inclusive, and bring together learners from diverse backgrounds rather than advancing further segregation. Focusing on learning objectives would also increase the participation of people from disadvantaged backgrounds and with special needs in Erasmus+ mobilities.

Provide additional support for learners with lower educational attainments, special learning needs, disabilities, parenting and caregiving responsibilities.

People with lower educational attainments, special learning needs, disabilities and/or parenting and caregiving responsibilities should be given the chance to participate in mobilities, but must be prepared and supported accordingly, also from a financial point of view. Guidance plays a central role in this process: to promote awareness of the benefits of lifelong learning; to foster resilience to discrimination, stereotypes and prejudices; and to develop self-confidence for oneself and one's learning potential.



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Raise awareness among social partners of the individual learning needs and ambitions of adults - that may legitimately transcend the temporary and short term priorities of the labour market and employers, and that should be respected.

Adults should be able to choose their own learning path. Erasmus+ mobility can provide an effective platform to acquire new knowledge and skills - irrespective of socio-economic constraints. Participation in Erasmus+ should therefore be seen as an additional learning opportunity that can also foster individual and collective well-being. Erasmus+ should not be perceived, or promoted, as a substitute for on-the-job training. Policymakers should raise awareness among social partners of the wide range of benefits of adult education, beyond up- and re-skilling needs for job readiness.

Promote, and fund, also virtual and online mobility programmes for all adult learners.

The opportunity to attend an Erasmus-funded mobility programme, partially or entirely, in a virtual environment may enable learners from a variety of backgrounds to participate in adult learning and education. Such programmes may help reach adults that, for different reasons, may be unable or unwilling to attend a physical mobility programme. Virtual learning environments should be designed in an accessible and inclusive manner, especially for learners with lower digital skills, special learning needs and disabilities.

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 120 member organisations in 43 countries and represents more than 60 million learners Europe-wide.