



Europe is more than the EU: towards more inclusion of non-EU members from Eastern Europe

in Erasmus+

EAEA Statement

November 2022

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.

EAEA pays specific attention to members who are based outside of the EU and who lack some of the opportunities for cooperation that are available within the EU. To better serve their needs, in 2021 EAEA established a working group “Europe is more than the EU”, which includes EAEA Executive Board members. The group, whose main focus is on organisations based in Eastern Europe, developed the following results:

- A survey on the needs of EAEA non-EU members based in Eastern Europe, available in [EN](#), [BCSM](#) and [RU](#);
- A roadmap towards a closer cooperation between EAEA and its non-EU members, available in [EN](#), [BCSM](#) and [RU](#).

The information below is based on the work of the working group “Europe is more than the EU” cited above as well as the [EAEA country reports](#).

Erasmus+ programme for non-EU members from Eastern Europe: EAEA members’ feedback

EAEA members greatly appreciate the Erasmus+ programme, which drives innovation, improves participation and quality of adult learning provision; the importance of the programme has been continuously highlighted by EAEA in its [advocacy work](#). That said, non-EU countries in Eastern Europe still face barriers to access the Erasmus+ programme, especially if they work in the non-formal adult education sector. As of 2022, only Serbia, Turkey and North Macedonia are third countries associated to the Programme and can access all its actions. Other countries, such as Western Balkans (Region 1) and Neighbourhood East (Region 2), can access certain actions, but not those in adult learning and education.



More specifically, actions for which non-associated third countries are eligible include¹:

- Youth participation projects and mobility of youth workers;
- Virtual exchange of higher education and youth organisations;
- Capacity-building in higher education, in VET, in youth and sport;
- Centres of Vocational Excellence;
- Jean Monnet Teaching and Research actions.

Clearly, the actions listed above target youth, VET and higher education. Actions that would be particularly relevant for the development of the adult education sector, such as mobility of adult education staff, are not included. Forward-looking projects, which have a specific focus on policy and would also be of specific interest to non-EU countries in Eastern Europe, are not eligible for participation in Western Balkans and Neighbourhood East. Additionally, capacity-building in adult education is not a separate action of the Erasmus+ programme, even though capacity-building is one of the most important needs in the sector in Eastern and Southern Europe, according to EAEA members.

Restrictions for non-associated third countries also apply in Erasmus+ Key Action 2 (KA2) calls, which the adult learning sector in Europe considers particularly valuable in fostering innovation and best practice exchange. As a general rule, “Cooperation Partnerships target the cooperation between organisations established in EU Member States and third countries associated to the Programme,” as per the Erasmus+ Programme Guide for 2022. The document also states that “organisations from third countries not associated to the Programme can be involved as partners (not as applicants), if their participation brings an essential added value to the project and as long as the minimum participation from three organisations from three different EU Member States and third countries associated to the Programme is fulfilled”. While EAEA appreciates the opportunity, there is a concern that applying organisations might feel discouraged from including partners from third countries not associated to the programme, fearing that they might put their application at a disadvantage. Additionally, small-scale partnerships, which might be of particular interest to organisations that do not have experience with the Erasmus+ programme, are only open to EU member states and associated third countries.

Additionally, while some of the actions might seem open to third countries not associated to the programme, a closer look at the priorities of the specific calls shows that some of them might be of less interest to non-EU countries. For example, cooperation partnerships in adult education clearly refer to existing EU policy (“creating upskilling pathways”); this may not be relevant in the countries whose national policymakers are less concerned by EU policy on education.

The division into different sectors in education and training is also a challenging aspect for many adult learning providers in non-EU countries in Eastern Europe. EAEA members from Western

¹ According to the [Erasmus+ Programme Guide for 2022, Version 1](#)



Balkans and Neighbourhood East are often legally established as VET centres, due to the fact that in their countries adult learning is defined primarily or exclusively as vocational education and training. That said, their scope of activity often includes liberal adult learning and education. This might put them at a disadvantage when applying for actions that target specifically adult learning and education. Some applicants submitting a project in the field of adult learning and education might fear that including an organisation whose primary activity is VET, which is often the case in Eastern and Southern Europe, will risk a negative evaluation from the assessors.

Finally, even those countries that are fully eligible to participate in the Erasmus+ programme are likely to face barriers. EAEA members from Eastern and Southern Europe, who represent countries with weak adult learning structures, report struggling with some of the administrative rules under Erasmus+. Financially unable to employ staff, they often work with freelancers or volunteers, which makes it impossible for them to declare staff costs under some actions of the programme.

Recommendations

To better serve the needs of non-EU countries based in Eastern Europe, EAEA recommends the following improvements to the Erasmus+ programme:

Third countries associated to the programme, including those from Regions 1 and 2, should be eligible to participate in actions on adult learning and education. Non-formal adult learning and education has clear benefits for active citizenship and fostering a just digital and twin transition², all of which are among the priorities of DG NEAR for Eastern Partnership and Western Balkans. In societies marked by a demographic change, in which adults represent a vast majority of the population, transnational cooperation and capacity-building in education and training cannot be focused exclusively on youth, higher education and VET, as it is currently the case under the Erasmus+ programme for Neighbourhood East and Western Balkans. Eligibility for mobility of adult education staff (under KA1) and cooperation among organisations and institutions (under KA2), including forward looking projects, would be of particular benefit to adult learning organisations in Neighbourhood East and Western Balkan countries, improving participation in learning, professionalisation of adult learning staff and adult learning policy.

Capacity-building actions in the Erasmus+ programme should also be open to adult learning and education. Currently only organisations representing youth, higher education and VET can participate in capacity-building actions under Erasmus+. Non-formal adult learning providers would greatly benefit from such an opportunity, as the sector lacks political recognition and remains underfunded, especially in Eastern and Southern Europe. This reduces opportunities for professional development among adult education staff and consequently the quality of adult learning provision.

More support to Erasmus+ applicants is needed to better serve the needs of non-EU countries based in Eastern Europe. Organisations with little experience with the Erasmus+ programme might

² For more information, please consult the [EAEA Manifesto for Adult Learning in the 21st Century](#).



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THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

be discouraged from applying for a project or even joining a consortium as a partner. This is especially the case in countries where adult learning and education suffers from little political recognition and consequently limited funding to employ staff who would be available to actively seek out new opportunities for cooperation. National Agencies should play an active role in encouraging adult learning organisations to apply for funding and in providing support for example by organising webinars; in countries where no National Agencies have been established yet, European associations such as EAEA could provide such support.

Non-EU countries based in Eastern Europe have specific needs that should be taken into consideration when assessing Erasmus+ applications. Particular attention should be paid to the context in which the organisations are working, and the diversity of provision that they might be offering. Many organisations based in Neighbourhood East as well as in Western Balkans, while legally operating as VET providers, also offer non-formal / liberal adult education courses, which should be taken into account when accessing applications in which they are included. They should also be provided with an opportunity to take part in meetings virtually due to costs and visa requirements that travel to the EU can involve. Additionally, project management rules under Erasmus+ should allow for more flexibility for example in reporting staff costs, to better reflect the reality in which some adult learning providers operate.

[More information](#)

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