ERASMUS+ IMPLEMENTATION SURVEY RESULTS
2018

LIFELONG
LEARNING
PLATFORM
EUROPEAN CIVIL SOCIETY FOR EDUCATION

GENERAL RESULTS

Following the success of the Erasmus+ implementation surveys from previous years, the Lifelong Learning Platform ran its 2018 Erasmus+ Implementation Survey from 27 August to 15 October last year.

The purpose of this year's survey was to evaluate the experience of beneficiaries in the fifth round of applications for the Erasmus+ programme and in particular the perspective of EU-wide networks with long-standing experience of EU funding. This survey seeks to provide decision-makers with an evaluation from direct beneficiaries on what is working well, what could be improved and what is lacking in the programme, and thus provide useful reflections for the future of the programme. The Lifelong Learning Platform hopes that the survey results will guide decision-makers in finding solutions to improve the programme considered by many

as a success story for EU citizens.

The survey targeted only European level organisations and collected a total of 41 responses from European networks. The number of responses appears reduced compared to previous years because the 2018 survey adopted an even more targeted approach - focusing on European level organisations exclusively in order to gain views from stakeholders with a high-level of expertise and representing a large number of beneficiaries across the EU and at different levels (local, regional, national), as the vast majority of them have 5 or more years of experience working with Erasmus+ and its predecessor programme.

Concerning the main results of the 2018 survey, these include:

◆ 78% of respondents have **5 or more years of experience** working with Erasmus+ and/ or the previous Lifelong Learning Programme, which shows their views are based in a deep understanding of the overall programme.

◆ For respondents, their organisation's **own membership is identified as the most common way to find project partners** or build a consortium (87%), followed by EU networks/organisations (51%). This shows that EU networks tend to partner with their own members in projects, thus demonstrating commitment to support their work and draw from their expertise on the ground. This can also translate into an additional difficulty for newcomers in accessing the programme if they are not part of these established networks.

◆ A considerable **32% of respondents consider they spent too much time in preparing their application**, while another 63% consider it rather time-consuming. This is broadly consistent with findings from previous years. This shows that for many organisations responding to the survey - who in large part already have many years of experience with the programme - there remains much room for simplification.

◆ Just slightly more than half of the respondents (52%) report encountering some kind of **bureaucratic or administrative difficulty** with the implementation of a project, again very similar to observations from previous years.

◆ While respondents are largely satisfied with the relevance and extensiveness of the Programme Guide, a significant proportion (66%) remain doubtful or are only moderately satisfied about its **user-friendliness**.

◆ **Funding remains a problematic issue**, with a considerable 73% of respondents finding it is insufficient to cover their real needs. This is up from 49% last year which - given the profile of respondents this year as exclusively European-level organisations - appears to show that the latter's needs are insufficiently addressed by the funding available.

◆ A majority of respondents (73%) think that **Erasmus+ objectives and actions are well aligned with policy priorities** in their field of work, which can be considered a positive sign about the programme's relevance.

◆ Slightly more than half (55%) think that the programme allows them to implement **cross-sector cooperation projects** - this indicates some room for improvement given the widely acknowledged value of cross-sector cooperation.

◆ Respondents express a generally good level of **satisfaction with the evaluation process**, particularly feedback on completed projects, although as in previous years dissatisfaction is expressed concerning generic feedback on rejected applications, as well as contradictory comments in the same evaluation report and respective scores.

◆ **Future priorities** for the programme identified by respondents are, as in previous years, social inclusion and citizenship education - followed by promotion of lifelong learning, synergies between formal and non-formal education, amongst others.

◆ A considerable number of respondents (58%) do not think the overall **financial support** for the programme is sufficient to meet its objectives.

PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Type of organisation

Of the 41 answers received, the respondents are evenly divided between European non-profit organisations (46.34%) and European-wide network civil society organisations (46.34%) and a few European wide networks. This year, local and national organisation did not take part in the Erasmus+ survey.
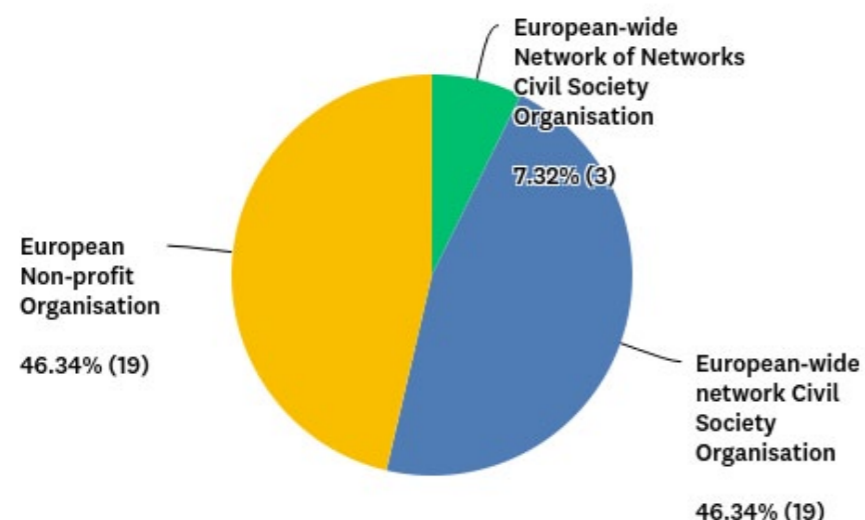
Field of specialisation

Majority of respondents specialise in the non-formal education sector (53.66%), followed by equally divided between youth sector and vocational education and training (both 39.02), higher education (26.83%), citizenship education (21.95%), school education (17.07%), professional higher education (12.20%), and teacher education (7.32%). In comparison to last year's findings the results differ, particularly in terms of non-formal education (last year 30.77%) and youth (last year 26.15%). Specialisation in sports and early childhood education remain lowest (both 4.88%).
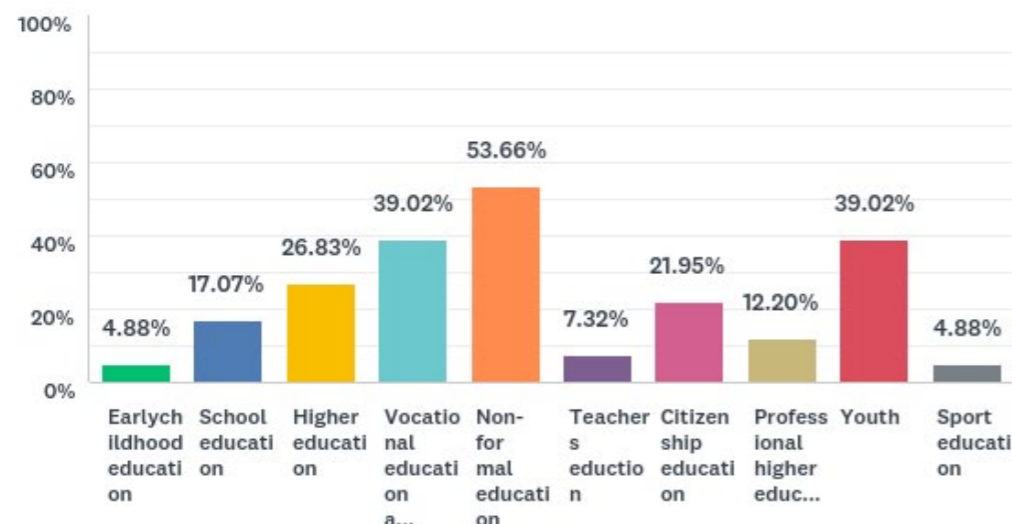
Respondents' experience with Erasmus+ and/or previous Lifelong Learning Programme

As the chart below depicts, vast majority of respondents (78.05%) have 5 and more years of experience with Erasmus+ and/or previous Lifelong Learning Programme. This suggests that many responses are based on a strong familiarity with how the programme operates. The percentage of newcomers (not applied yet but planning to) is at 2.44%, which makes it lower than last year (9.23%). Number of respondents with 1-4 years of experience remains the same as last year.
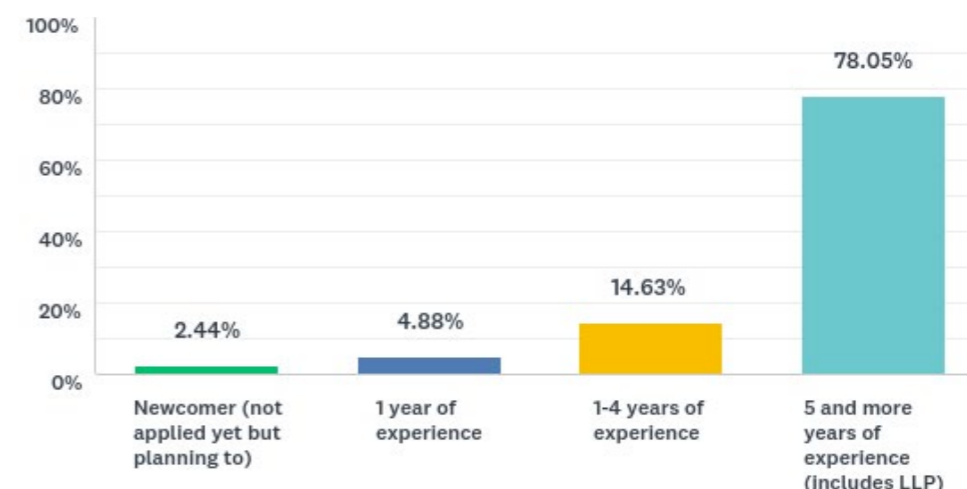
Respondents' role in Erasmus+ and/or previous Lifelong Learning Programme

The majority of respondents have experience both as coordinator and partner (70.73%), showing a diversity of experience. 19.51% declared they have experience only as coordinator, while 7.32% have experience only as partner. Last year, 15.38% respondents declare they have experience only as coordinator, while 20.00% have experience only as partner.
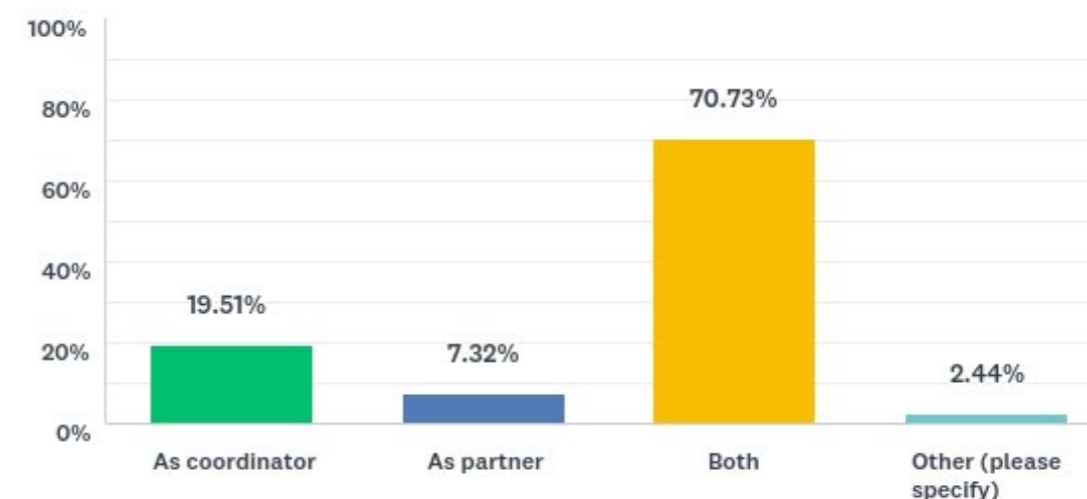
Respondents receiving operating grant from Erasmus+

As is shown in the picture below, a majority of respondents (63.41%) receive an operating grant from Erasmus+ programme. 31.71% state that they do not receive an operating grant from the programme, while 4.88% state that they are planning to apply for an operating grant.
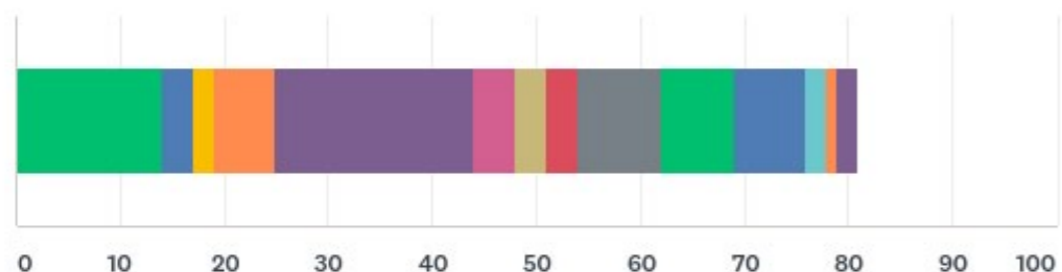
GENERAL INFORMATION

Application for 2017-18 Erasmus+ Calls for proposals

The majority of respondents (87,18%) applied for 2017-18 Erasmus+Calls for Proposals, while 12.82% indicated they did not apply.

Key Action(s) to which respondents applied

Key Action 2 - Strategic partnerships in the field of education, training and youth (48.72%) and Key Action 1 - Learning mobility of individuals in the field of youth (35.90%). Last year, survey respondents' highest number of applications went to Key Action 1 (24%) and Key Action 3 – Support for policy reform – Forward looking cooperation through education, training and youth (12%).
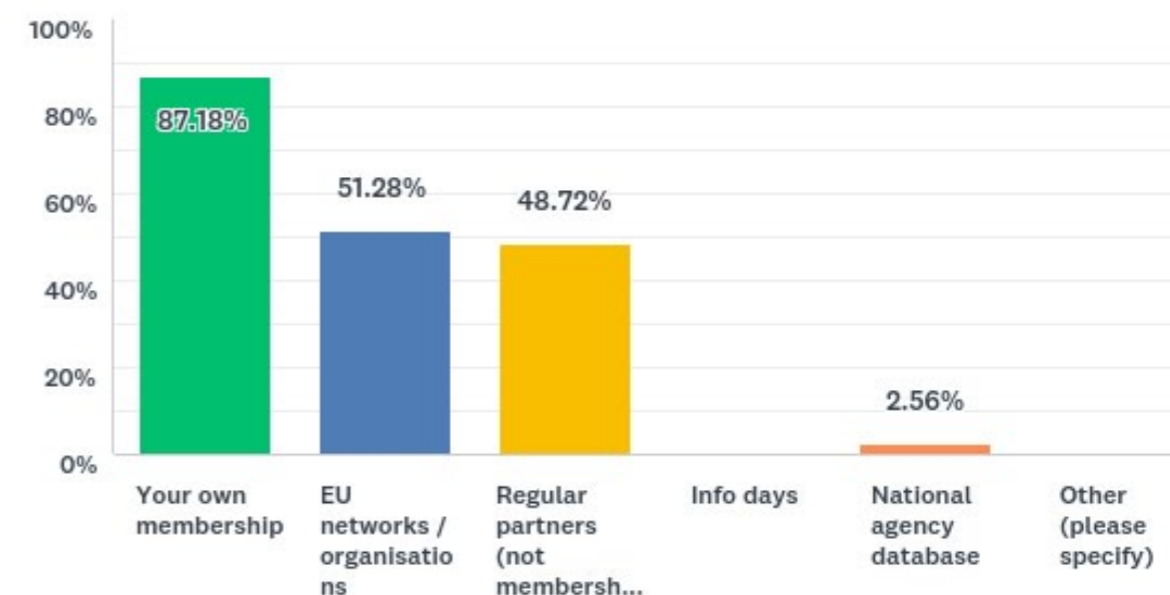
Success rate for respondents applying in 2017

With approximately same results as in last year's survey, findings show that high proportion of respondents applied successfully in last year's Erasmus+ Calls for Proposals (74.36%). This very high success rate shows that the respondents of our survey are on the whole experienced users of the Erasmus+ programme.

Building consortia

As the chart below shows, the most common way to build consortium or find project partners for 87.18% of respondents is through their own membership. Broadly similar to last year, the proportion of respondents building consortium or finding project partners through EU networks/organisations stands at 51.28% and for regular partners at 48.72%. **The high percentage for own membership this year shows that EU networks clearly tend to partner with their own members in projects, thus demonstrating commitment to support their work and draw from their expertise on the ground.**

Q8 For which Erasmus+ Action(s) did you apply?

- Key action 1 - Learning Mobility of individuals in the field of youth
- Key action 1 - Learning Mobility of individuals in the field of education and training
- Key action 1 - Learning Mobility of individuals - large scale European Voluntary Se
- Key action 1 - Learning Mobility of individuals – Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Deg
- Key action 2 - Cooperation for innovation and good practices - strategic partnersh
- Key action 2 - Strategic partnerships in the field of education, training and youth
- Key action 2 - Cooperation for innovation and good practices - Knowledge Alliance
- Key action 2 - Cooperation for innovation and good practices - Capacity-building i
- Key action 2 - Capacity-building in the Field of Higher Education
- Key action 3 - Meeting between young people and decision-makers in the field of y
- Key action 3 - Support for policy reform - Social inclusion through education, trai
- Key action 3 - Support for policy reform - Forward looking cooperation through ed
- Call for Vocational Education and Training Mobility Charter
- Jean Monnet Actions   Sport Actions   Other (please specify)

Q10 From your experience, what was the easiest way to find project partners or build a consortium?
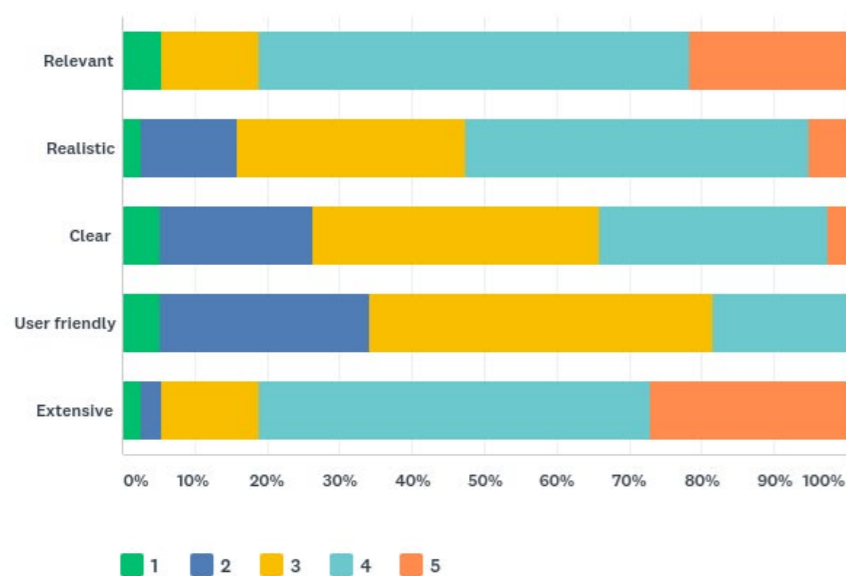
APPLICATION PROCESS

Geographical coverage

Regarding the countries where the survey respondents applied for Erasmus+, Belgium is the country with the most applications (44.74%), because of mostly Brussels-based European networks. Member state receiving second highest number of applications is France (23.68%). 42.11% of respondents submitted their application to the Executive Agency (EACEA) for civil society cooperation, and 34.21% for other centralised calls. As the results indicate, **a centralised solution at EU level for European networks would help to resolve the given situation as currently they have to compete with local Belgian organisations.**

Erasmus+ programme user guide

Respondents were asked to rate a number of descriptions of the Erasmus+ programme guide, with 1 being the lowest score and 5 being the highest. As shown by the graph below, the **relevance** of the guide is particularly appreciated, as the percentage of respondents providing a score of 4 reaches 59.46% and 5 reaches 21.62%. However, respondents doubt that the guide is **user-friendly**, as this receives a score of 4 from only 18.42% of them, while none of the respondents mark it 5. Moreover, there is still room for improvement of the **clarity** of the guide as this receives a score of 4-5 from only 34.21% of respondents. Moreover, 81.08% give a score of 4 or 5 indicating that the **extensiveness** of the programme guide is appreciated.

Q12 How do you find the Erasmus+ programme guide following aspect(s) : (1 low - 5 high)

National Agencies and EACEA support to applicants

There is a reasonably good level of satisfaction with the support provided by National Agencies and EACEA in the application process, with 78.95% of respondents stating that this was sufficient. Those replying that it was not sufficient nevertheless reach a substantial figure (21.05%), so there clearly remains room for improvement. The comments from respondents also emphasised that the sufficiency of supports varies from one NA to another.
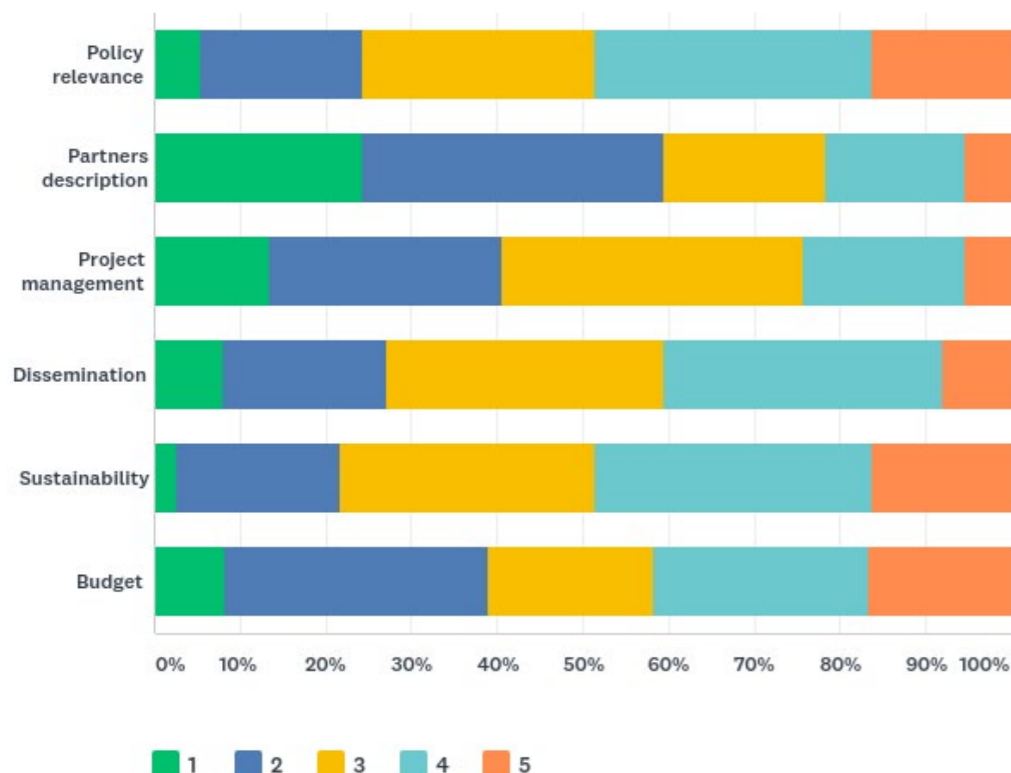
Application forms

Respondents were asked to rate a number of descriptions of the Erasmus+ application forms, with 1 being the lowest score and 5 being the highest. The responses suggest that the application forms are rather reliable and comprehensive with the scores of 4 in these categories exceeding 40%. However, they are considered coherent and, particularly, user-friendly to a lesser extent. Indeed, a score of 3 or less is awarded by 72.97% of respondents for user-friendliness, which, while not a bad performance per se, suggests potential for improvement. An additional factor to bear in mind is that, although the overall scores appear somewhat satisfactory, this can also be understood as the perception of highly experienced applicants who, year by year, get more familiar with the application process.

Individual parts of application form

Respondents were asked about the level of difficulty of the different parts of the application process, with 1 being the least difficult and 5 being the most difficult. The graph below suggests that the partners' description is the most straightforward phase of the application with 59.46% awarding a score less than 3, with project management also reaching 40.54% in that score range (so a low level of difficulty). However, the responses giving a score of more than 3 (so a high level of difficulty) were at 40-50% for the other parts of the application of the application procedure – which indicates that there is still much room for improvement when it comes to simplifying them.

Q15 Rate from 1 to 5 the application (s) parts according to their level of difficulty? (1 low - 5 high)

Application stages

Here respondents were asked to rate the different aspects of the application stage according to their level of difficulty, with 1 being the least difficult and 5 being the most difficult. The responses indicate that the level of difficulty is approximately similar in all aspects of the application stage - across all 30-40% of respondents provide a score higher than 3, suggesting that they are rather complex overall.

Q16 Rate from 1 to 5 the aspects of the application stage according to their level of difficulty? (1 low - 5 high)
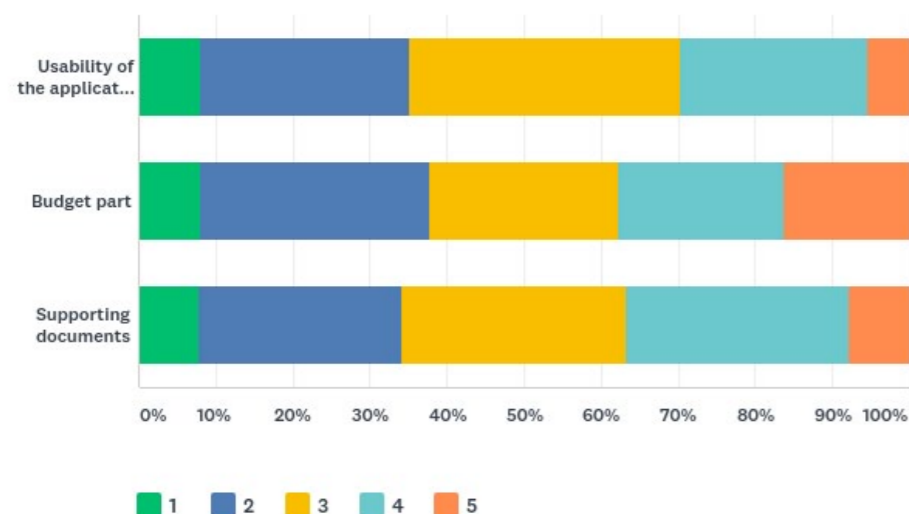
Time commitment to preparing applications

A substantial proportion (31.58%) of respondents feel that it took them too much to prepare the application, while another 63.16% still consider it rather time-consuming. Although it is understandable that the process of making an application involves a certain time commitment, this data shows that for many organisations responding to the survey, who in large part already have many years of experience with the programme, the project application could be considerably simplified. Moreover, the results are largely consistent with last year's findings, where 36% of respondents found that it took them too much time to prepare the application and another 50% considered it rather time-consuming.

Q17 How much time did you spend preparing the project application?
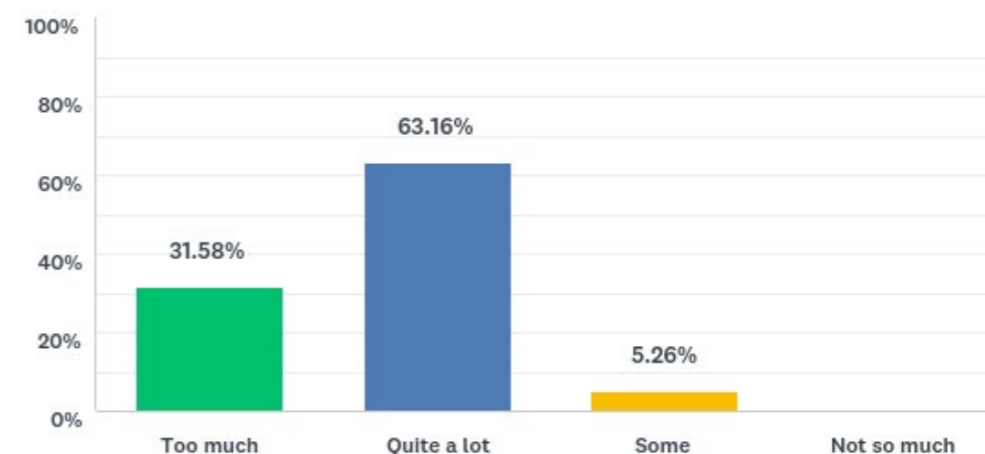
IMPLEMENTATION

Administrative burden

Respondents were asked about administrative hurdles in the process of project implementation. **Just slightly over half of the respondents (51.52%) encountered some kind of bureaucratic difficulty in implementing a project.** While implementation is unlikely to ever be a completely smooth process, the high percentage reporting difficulties is nevertheless striking. In their comments respondents mention the administrative problems encountered in the case of National Agencies, reporting that in some cases different agencies have different interpretation of the same rules.

Budget

Unlike last year's survey results for this question which were equally distributed between yes (51%) and no (49%), the results below are striking in the fact that a majority (72.73%) are mostly dissatisfied with the funding provided to cover the real needs, while only 27.27% find the funding sufficient. **Given the profile of respondents this year as exclusively European-level organisations - this result appears to show that the latter's needs are insufficiently addressed by the funding available.**

Centralised management

A majority (60%) of respondents give a positive assessment of EACEA's implementation and management of centralised actions. However, the figure of 40% giving a negative response remains rather significant, so there is clear room for improvement.

Lump sum system

The graph below shows that survey respondents mostly consider the lump sum system suitable and simplified. However, only 24.24% consider it being accurate and 21.21% find it sufficient, while 36.36% stated they find it insufficient. This year's results are a little more striking that last year when 25.64% found it sufficient, while 21.09% found it insufficient.


Q21 In your experience, the lump sum system is:
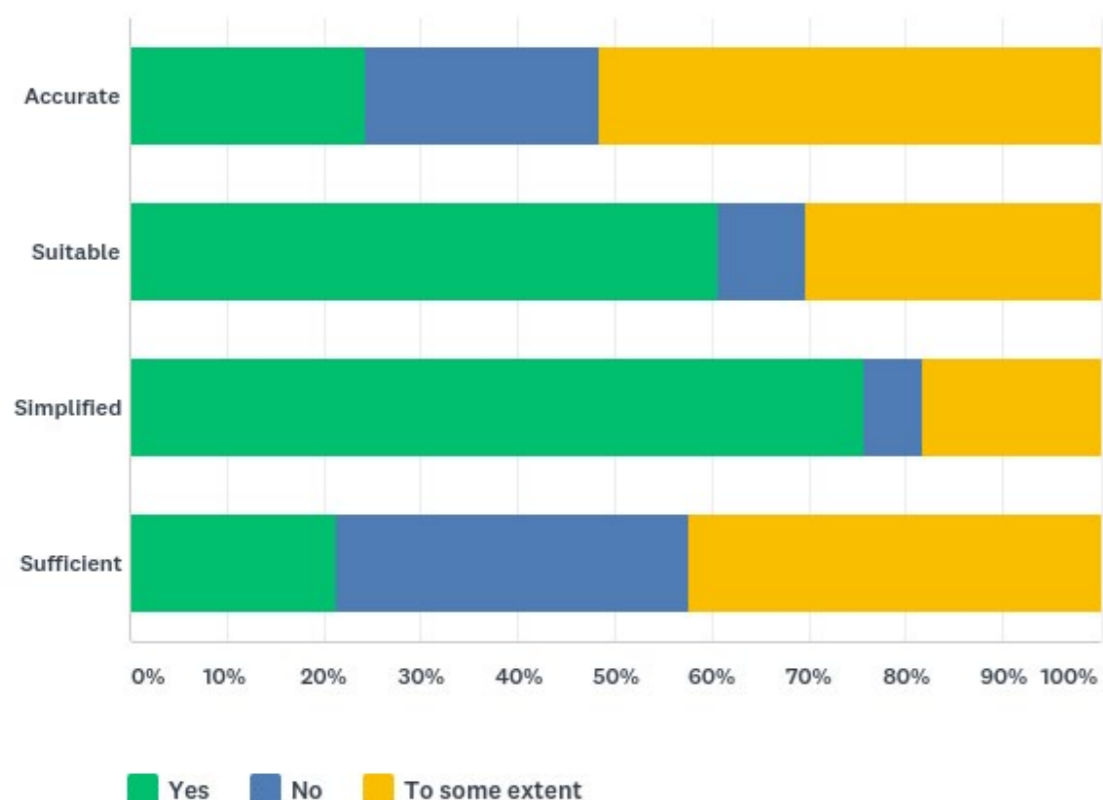
Administrative and financial handbook

Respondents were asked about their ease of understanding of the administrative and financial handbook, with a score of 1 being the lowest and a score of 5 being the highest. A score of 4 was given by no less than 30% of respondents in all aspects (supporting documents, reporting rules, eligible costs, reporting of project results, unit costs, real costs), while a score of 5 was given by 10-20% for all. Overall, the ratings suggest that there is still room for improvement, particularly when it comes to the parts on eligible costs and reporting of project results - both received a score of 3 or less from 30.3% of respondents, indicating only moderate to low level of understanding.

Q22 How well do you understand the 'administrative and financial handbook'? (1 low - 5 high)
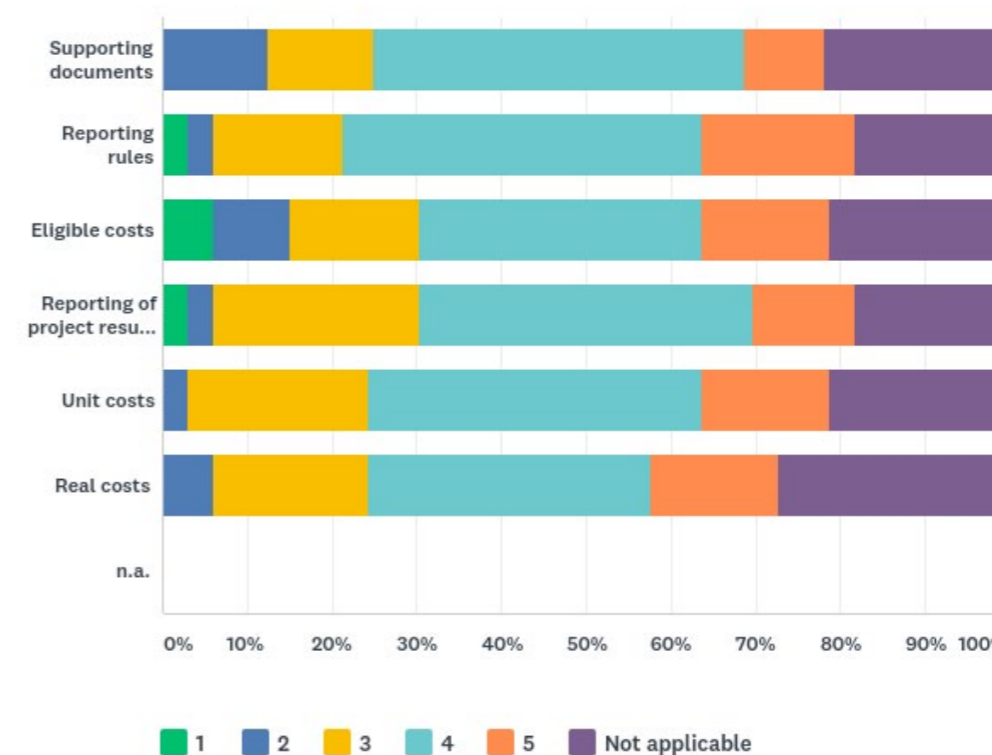
Procedures for project implementation

The chart below indicates that a considerable proportion of respondents finds the procedures for project implementation (kick-off, reporting, closing) at NA level moderately clear (score of 3 from 33.33%), while the top rating of 5 was nevertheless provided by 18.18%. The diversity of responses across the score range could be attributed to the differences in National Agencies depending on the country. A majority of respondents rate positively the clarity of procedures at EACEA level (48.48% provide a score higher than 3).
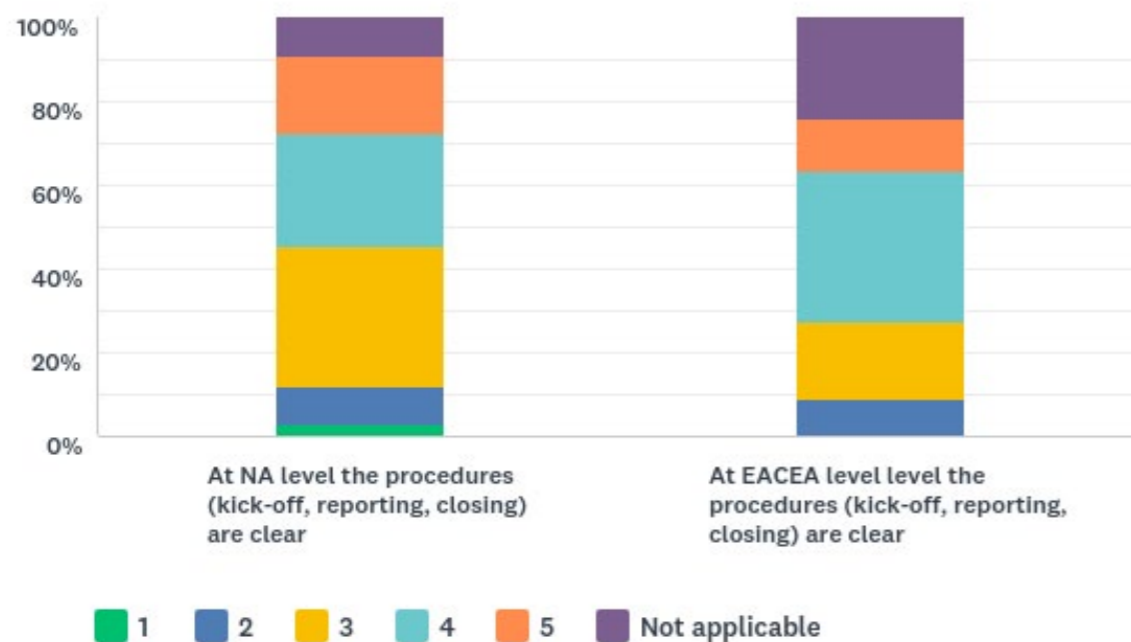
PROGRAMME RELEVANCE

Programme objectives and policy priorities

Responses here reveal that the majority of respondents (72.73%) believe that the objectives and actions of the Erasmus+ programme are well aligned with policy priorities in their field of work. While a little lower in comparison to last year (89.74%), this remains a generally positive sign about the relevance of the programme to the main concerns of its stakeholders. Some respondents nevertheless commented that there is a high rigidity on rules. Some specific observations were not enough focus on learners of all ages and not enough space for social inclusion beyond the topic of migrants/refugees.

Social dimension of the programme

The programme's positive consideration of individuals' socio-economic needs and the needs of different learners was assessed as lower this year (48.48%) in comparison to last year (74.36%). The results clearly indicate room for improvement on social inclusion. Some stated that students/participants with disabilities encounter disproportionate difficulties, lack of consideration of adult learners, and it has been added that access needs should be fully covered. One respondent pointed out that the programme does not take into account socio-economic needs of education providers who lack resources to become active in European projects.

## Implementation of cross-sector cooperation

Just over half of the respondents (54.55%) find that Erasmus+ allows them to implement cross-sector cooperation projects, while the remainder expressed the opposite. It is necessary to note even though some respondents provided a positive answer, they added that the pressure of having tangible results is often too high and that there is not enough time to prepare outputs. Some respondents stated that evaluators often lack the cross-sector experience to truly enable cross-sector cooperation, while a few others stated that cross-sector cooperation is difficult to do. A particular observation was that non profit organisations cannot apply for KA1 teacher mobility. **The results are not very satisfying overall considering the benefits of cross-sector cooperation and the fact that the programme is supposed to facilitate this.**

EVALUATION PROCESS

Feedback on project applications

Respondents were asked for their opinion about the sufficiency of the feedback that they were given on their project application, if applicable. For the National Agencies, the results indicate that the feedback received was considered above average for a large number of of respondents (42.42% providing a score of 4 or higher), although the figure of 39.39% for scores in the range 1-3 nevertheless indicates space for improvement. For EACEA, the findings also indicate that the feedback on project applications can be considered rather satisfactory overall, with around 45.5% of responses awarding a score higher than 3.

Q27 Did the evaluation report on your submitted project application provide enough feedback? (Rate from 1 not at all to 5 definitely yes)
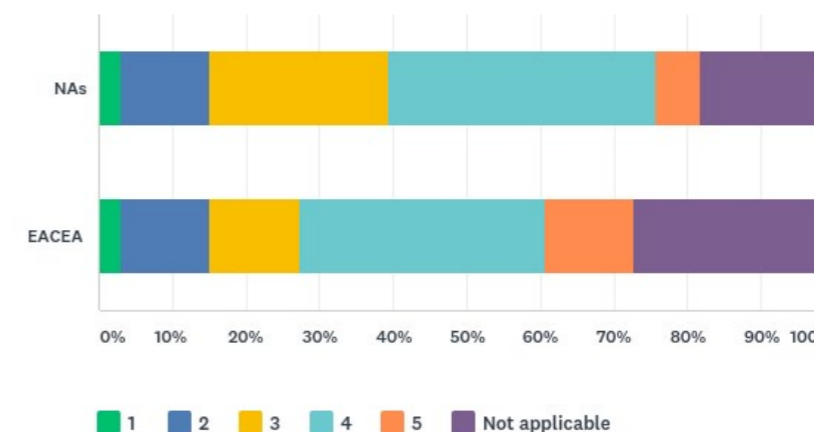
Feedback on completed projects

Feedback concerning the evaluation report on completed projects is given a rating higher than 3 by 63.63% of respondents, which indicates a high level of satisfaction.

Main reason for dissatisfaction

Among the points raised, respondents suggest administrative burden, the length of the report, very generic comments, and that evaluators sometimes are not really flexible in understanding some changes put in place in the implementation of projects. The point was also raised that some evaluation reports are clearly a summary that is copy-pasting the evaluation of two different evaluators and that this leads to contradictory statements within the reports (e.g. one evaluator stating dissemination is very strong and in the following paragraph dissemination is highly criticised). The effort to streamline reports by National Agencies could be improved. They added that often feedback is thus not very useful for the purpose of re-application.

FUTURE PROGRAMME

Priorities for future programme

Concerning what the priorities of the Erasmus+ successor programme should be, respondents mention a variety of issues but there are some common points. **The strongest priority is by far social inclusion**, particularly the need to give students from disadvantaged backgrounds the possibility to undertake a period of mobility. **Citizenship education** is another area which many respondents feel the next programme could focus on, in other words, helping people to participate in democratic life and learn how to live together. Both resemble last year's survey findings. This year respondents also placed emphasis on the promotion of lifelong learning, synergies between formal and non-formal education, and people's mobility.

Structure of the programme

As per improvement of programme's structure, although largely satisfied some of the responses indicated the need for simplifying the application, flexibility, ensuring budget allocation based on demands of beneficiaries, and more equality between the sectors. Another suggestion was that there should be more scope for non-formal learning and mobility opportunities for people of all ages, particularly volunteers.

Financial support

Concerning the views of respondents on the sufficiency of funding, a striking 58.06% do not think the overall financial support is sufficient to meet the programme objectives, while only 12.90% think it is. These figures are more striking than the results of last year's survey (40% found the funding not sufficient). Indeed, **the fact that only around one tenth of respondents consider the overall funding sufficient is a cause for concern, especially for a programme which is so in demand and promoted by both the EU and Member States as a success story for European citizens.**

Q32 Do you think the overall financial support of the programme for the different key actions for the 2014-2020 period is sufficient to meet its objectives?
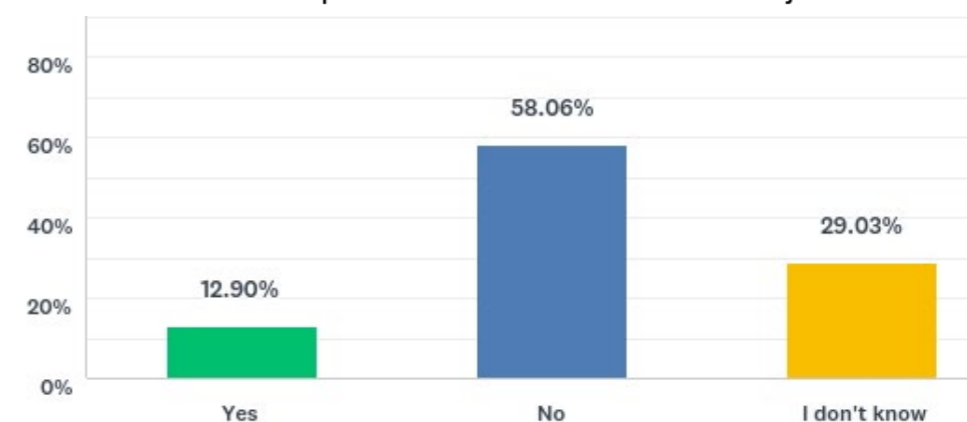
Synergies with other programmes

An impressive number of respondents (80.65%) are in favour of developing closer synergies between Erasmus+ programme and other EU programmes. This resonates with the ongoing discourse at EU level about the need to foster closer synergies between programmes under the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework. The programmes suggested for synergies with Erasmus+ were: ESF, Rights and Values Programme/Europe for Citizens, Horizon2020, AMIF. It was observed that some simplification and access to a broader range of organisations would be required to make such synergies a success. In terms of how they could work in practice some suggestions were: identification of common goals and target groups, cooperation meetings between project coordinators (and ideally partners), active exchange during all project phases in order to arrive at a common dissemination strategy (linked websites or even a joint one); all this could lead to the organisation of joint trainings or creation of joint platforms holding all developed materials/tools organised by topic and/or target group.

CONCLUSIONS

From the above findings the Lifelong Learning Platform gathers the following conclusions on how to enhance the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme for the remaining period 2019-2020:

User-friendliness

▶ Continue and intensify efforts to simplify all aspects of the application procedure and reduce bureaucracy, including more user-friendly application forms.

▶ Provide a clear Programme Guide written in a more user-friendly language - this could be achieved, for example, by avoiding or at least clearly explaining jargon such as "intellectual output" or "exploitation".

Evaluation

Enhance the reliability of feedback by making the evaluation process more transparent; checking consistency throughout evaluation reports and scoring system; and improving overall training process for evaluators - with more harmonised standards across National Agencies - to ensure quality, actionable feedback.

Cross-sector cooperation

▶ Further incentivise and facilitate the implementation of projects engaging several sectors, including non-formal education. This also requires evaluators to have a broader understanding of cross-sector cooperation in order to better evaluate such projects.

Support for EU networks

Provide a centralised solution for EU networks for project applications - the vast majority are based in Brussels and must compete with local Belgian organisations when applying to the Belgian National Agencies.

Further support the role of EU networks in strengthening their members' engagement in the programme.

Budget

▶ Increase lump sum funding to better meet the real needs of beneficiaries.

▶ Allocate a higher overall budget to the future programme so that it has sufficient resources to meet its objectives.

Priorities for future programme

Enhance the social dimension of the programme by better addressing the needs of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Strengthen the programme's support for citizenship education.

Pursue synergies between Erasmus+ programme and other sectoral programmes - yet in the spirit of enhancing access to a broader audience and keeping the administrative burden low.

LIFELONG LEARNING PLATFORM

EUROPEAN CIVIL SOCIETY FOR EDUCATION

The Lifelong Learning Platform is an umbrella association that gathers 42 European organisations active in the field of education and training, coming from all EU Member States and beyond. Currently these networks represent more than 50 000 educational institutions (schools, universities, adult education and youth centres, etc.) or associations (involving students, teachers and trainers, parents, HRD professionals, etc.) covering all sectors of formal, non-formal and informal learning. Their members reach out to several millions of beneficiaries.

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