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Research-based Impact Analysis of Erasmus+ Adult Education Programmes

Impact of Erasmus+ on the Adult Education Sector

Italy

Report April 2024



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Impact measurement in Erasmus+ adult education

Italian National Report

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Introduction

Erasmus+, an initiative spearheaded by the European Union, facilitates the development of individuals across Europe and globally by backing their educational, career, and personal growth. To accomplish this objective, the program has instituted various international endeavours. Within Erasmus+, particular emphasis is placed on the adult learning domain, aiming to empower adults confronting difficult circumstances to enhance their socio-economic resilience through educational means. Its primary focus lies in augmenting language, numeracy, digital, and other proficiencies to foster greater self-sufficiency and independence among disadvantaged adults. In contrast to other sectors of the Erasmus+ initiative, such as vocational education and training, higher education, and primary and secondary education, adult learning is administered by a diverse array of organizations, including charities, cultural institutions, libraries, and voluntary associations. Moreover, in addition to professionals, these organizations often engage volunteers to support adult learners, especially those acquiring a new language. Another notable feature is the lack of national strategies for adult learning in many EU Member States, contrasting with the established norms in primary, secondary, and higher education sectors. Furthermore, the demographic of adult learners is remarkably diverse, including individuals with diverse educational backgrounds, limited digital literacy, migrant backgrounds, disabilities, and older individuals. Considering the extensive diversity among these groups, adult education addresses a wide range of learning requirements.

Presently, there is a lack of general comprehension regarding the impact that Erasmus+ has on adult learners, staff, volunteers, and organizations engaged in adult education. To improve the coordination of research efforts directed towards strengthening the efficacy of international cooperation and mobility projects in adult education, and to facilitate continuous improvement and quality enhancement of the Erasmus+ program, a transnational research network has been established. This network is supported by funding from Erasmus+.

The RIA-AE Network aims to achieve several objectives:

- 1) Enhance understanding of the effects of international cooperation and mobility projects in adult education under the Erasmus+ program;
- 2) Foster collaboration and dialogue among research, policy, and practical implementation.



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- 3) Contribute to advancing and refining the quality of the Erasmus+ program by facilitating rigorous evaluation and impact research that is both high-quality and practice-oriented;
- 4) Enhance the visibility of the advantages of adult education in both the EU and its Member States, as well as underscore the significance of Erasmus+ through advocacy efforts.

To achieve these objectives, the RIA-AE network endeavours to foster collaboration among National Agencies of Erasmus+ across different European countries, concentrating on developing a novel methodology for evaluating programs and assessing impacts in adult education within the Erasmus+ framework.

This framework serves as a platform for assessing existing research and knowledge regarding the benefits and impacts of adult education (repository), curating this knowledge, and enhancing it through various research projects aimed at evaluating the effects of mobility projects and partnerships. Research initiatives can target impact assessments at individual, organizational, or systemic levels, exploring key thematic areas aligned with the priorities of the Erasmus+ program. One significant research endeavour entails conducting a comprehensive impact study of Erasmus+ on adult education organizations, staff, and learners throughout Europe.

Collaboration within the Network operates on the basis of shared responsibility and remains open to welcoming new members. The cooperative framework encompasses several national agencies and external research partner institutions, such as universities and research institutes. Each national agency participating in the network can decide whether to conduct the research projects internally (based on available resources and staff expertise) or to engage an external partner.

In pursuit of high-quality research outcomes, network partners adhere to shared standards of social and educational research that align with internationally recognized ethical norms. The research methodologies employed encompass a wide range of approaches commonly utilized in sociology, political science, and education, including quantitative, qualitative, or a combination of both methods.



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1. Overview of studies evaluating mobility in Erasmus+

The Italian Erasmus+ National Agency INDIRE has been managing for more than twenty years the European programmes of the education system in Italy. This includes the school and higher education sectors, and the adult education sector since 2000.

The new Erasmus+ programme started in 2014 and brought important changes to the previous organisation. For this reason, from 2014 to the present, the National Agency has carried out investigations and self-studies, briefly reviewed in this paper.

1.1 Mobility in Erasmus+. First results in the fields of school education, higher and adult education (2015)

Domain or sector: School, Higher and Adult education sectors

Authors: Studies and Analysis Unit – Indire NA IT02

Link: https://2014-2020.erasmusplus.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/2_Quality-impact-KA1-Erasmus-mobility.pdf

Main findings:

In this study the Agency takes stock of the results of the projects (financed in 2014 and already concluded in 2015) to produce an impact assessment in three areas.

The analysis is informed by the results of the implementation of mobility projects. It highlights critical issues and innovations introduced by the structural changes of the European programme.

For adult education, the projects under consideration are 24 in number, of which 18 lasted one year and 6, two. The *mobilities* explored in these projects totaled 337, divided into two types of training: 1) structured courses or training events (including job shadowing activities) and 2) teaching/training activities.

The study is in large part based on the analysis of *Final Reports*, that allowed to identify critical issues as well as good practices, and the *Participant Reports* to collect mostly quantitative data relating to the



type of mobility carried out, the duration, the country of destination. More importantly, the participant reports revealed results in terms of learning and new skills and reasons behind the participants' choice, the impact of learning at a personal/professional and institutional level, the intention to start other Erasmus+ projects, and so forth.

The survey provides the point of view of those directly interested: teachers and trainers who committed to an experience that would develop their professional knowledge and abilities, create a network of new partners, and stimulate developing new practices within their institutions.

The Report offers information on the countries most requested to perform *Staff training abroad* and *job shadowing*, with the United Kingdom in first place, followed by Spain, France, Romania, Lithuania, Finland and Germany.

The Report also reveals a noteworthy growth in terms of new participants: 161 people out of 214 were involved for the first time.

The study certifies that the planning approach is improving participating institutes by identifying training gaps and sharing solutions. Thus, the objectives to be achieved were articulated in a collegial manner.

1.2 Strategic partnerships for innovation in Erasmus+. A study on the impact (2018)

Domain or sector: School, Higher and Adult education sectors

Authors: Studies and Analysis Unit – INDIRE NA IT02

Link: <https://2014-2020.erasmusplus.it/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Erasmus-2-ENG-X-WEB.pdf>

Main findings:

This second Erasmus+ publication collects the first results of a qualitative investigation on the impact of strategic partnerships for innovation: development of new policies and teaching approaches, digital tools to integrate learning and cultural growth, new curricula and platforms for assessment, educational strategies for social inclusion and reduction of school dropout.



In 2017 the Agency started a series of qualitative monitoring activities of strategic partnerships. It studied the changes that occurred at individual, institutional – and systemic changes – for the sectors of INDIRE's concern, namely school education, higher education, and the education of adults.

Two lines of work were followed: 1) monitor and study the quality of the results of the funded projects to determine and analyse success and impact, 2) compare and measure the benefits that occurred at various levels, individual, institutional and systemic in the three areas, with a view to development and innovation in learning and teaching.

The investigation was then divided into three phases: 1. sampling of strategic partnerships. 2. creation of the survey tool for qualitative impact analysis: questionnaire and impact visits. 3. organisation of three specific focus groups for each sector of the investigation.

The selection criteria adopted were mainly inspired by the *thematic* approach. As regards the adult education sector, the themes chosen related to formal and non-formal learning for specific groups, migrants and prisoners, social inclusion and innovative methodologies for the enhancement of skills. As a tool for data collection and in-depth analysis of aspects related to the dissemination and impact of results, a questionnaire was prepared.

In addition to the tools used for this investigation, the final reports of the projects examined were analysed. For the qualitative in-depth analysis of strategic partnerships, on the spot impact visits were carried out.

1.3 Innovation in Erasmus+ Strategic Partnerships. Second impact study (2020)

Domain or sector: School, Higher and Adult education sectors

Authors: Studies and Analysis Unit – INDIRE NA IT02

Link: https://2014-2020.erasmusplus.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/erasmus_summary_q3_WEB.pdf

Main findings:

The main goal was to trial and document a comparative study, an analytical comparison of the effect and impact that have taken place at individual and institutional levels and in the national education



systems of the countries involved in these projects. Consequently, the analyses have a methodological importance, which exploits and delineates the affinities and similarities of this type of partnership, characterised by cooperation between institutes and organisations operating in different contexts – schools, universities, associations, training agencies, research institutes and companies, all of which bring both professionalism and experience to the table.

1.4 Erasmus+ for learning. The qualitative impact of staff mobility in KA104 projects.

Adult Education (2020)

Domain or sector: Adult education

Authors: Studies and Analysis Unit – INDIRE NA IT02

Link: https://2014-2020.erasmusplus.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Mobilita-KA104-dello-staff_DEF-1.pdf

Main findings:

This analysis covered two types of information, quantitative data and qualitative responses in the impact of staff training activities. The main sources of the investigation were the *DG EAC Erasmus+ Dashboard* and the *Mobility Tool*.

The Desk Analysis carried out in April 2020, illustrates the overall picture of the qualitative impact of the action on individual skills and in general on institutions and methodologies for adult learning.

The focus was on the 88 projects financed from 2015 to 2018.

Overall, the action shows a significant increase in terms of funded projects and involved participants. From 2015 to 2018, the projects financed went from 19 to 26, with relative increase in the budget allocated for the activities.



1.5 Survey on the activities of KA104 adult education staff mobility projects in Covid-19 emergency. Results from the online questionnaire. November - December 2020-(2021)

Domain or sector: Adult education

Authors: Studies and Analysis Unit – INDIRE NA IT02

Link: n/a

Main findings:

In January 2021, the Survey on the activities of mobility projects of adult education staff KA104 in the Covid-19 emergency was released. Results emerged from an online questionnaire during November - December 2020. To obtain feedback on the status of project implementation during the health emergency period of Covid-19, the Erasmus+ National Agency INDIRE conducted a survey dedicated to the beneficiaries of staff mobility projects for the education sectors school and adult education.

This report specifically illustrates the results of the questionnaires.

The processing of the data collected was important for the National Agency, as well as for the European Commission itself: it helped in better modulating the interventions of the coming months during a difficult period.

From a sample of 103 projects, 61 complete responses were collected, each relating to a single KA104 project.

The impact of the health emergency and the consequent restrictions on the carrying out of educational activities and on the mobility of people is evident in the answer to the first question of the questionnaire: 53 respondents (equal to 87%) declared that they had not been able to carry out any of the training activities and learning opportunities envisaged by the project for the staff, even in different modes (e.g. virtual), in the period from the beginning of the emergency to the compilation date (March-November 2020).

As expected, the health emergency had a significant impact on mobility, despite the constant commitment of the institutions and organisations involved in adult education.

The project representatives expressed their own assessment in relation to the progress of the project implementation. The weighted average of the values expressed from a minimum of 1 (insufficient) to a maximum of 5 (excellent) was **3**. A value that summarises all the difficulties encountered, but also



the desire and ability of the institutions and organisations involved in adult education to do everything possible to continue the European learning and training experiences.

1.6 Survey on the activities of strategic adult education partnerships KA204 in emergency Covid-19. Results emerged from the online questionnaire. December 2020-January 2021 (2021)

Domain or sector: Adult education

Authors: Studies and Analysis Unit – INDIRE NA IT02

Link: n/a

Main findings:

From a sample of 140 KA204 projects, 105 complete responses were collected, each relating to a single project: a participation that represents 75% of the partnerships involved in the survey.

The impact of the health emergency and the consequent restrictions on the implementation of the work plan, including mobility for training, teaching and learning, is evident in terms of how the activities could no longer be face-to-face.

The first question of the questionnaire, concerning the continuation of the activities, highlights a significant fact: 89 respondents (equal to 85%) declared that they were able to continue the activities, obviously with some changes to the work plan, in the period that it goes from the beginning of the emergency to the date of compilation (March-December 2020), while 16 representatives declare that they have interrupted and suspended project activities.

The impact of the health crisis on cooperation projects is noted, in particular, where physical mobilities for training, teaching and learning activities (LTTA) are envisaged; but there is no doubt that in the majority of cases alternative paths were adopted, with planning of virtual activities, consonant with the severity of the pandemic and the current state of technology.

Among the 89 respondents who expressed a yes, 79, equal to 85%, declared that they continued remote collaboration with their partners. 44 held transnational project meetings (TPM) online. 41 conducted activities on site and 37 then continued the creation of intellectual works 1 and other material and/or digital products (36).



In over 20 comments entered by participants, it is interesting to note that travel time saved served in terms of ad-hoc preparation, coordination, as well as training: there can be little

doubt that determined work was conducted in order to avoid what was possible, a loss of contacts and a void of collaboration.

Despite all the difficulties encountered in the implementation, the organisations and institutions of the strategic partnerships continue to cooperate and develop the projects. They worked with great commitment and flexibility to achieve the results originally conceived. As a network that demands “working together” even in the most complicated and uncertain moments, Erasmus+ remains an opportunity for education exchange and growth.

1.7 Erasmus+ Report 2023 (2023)

Domain or sector: School, Higher and Adult education sectors

Authors: Studies and Analysis Unit – INDIRE NA IT02

Link: https://www.erasmusplus.it/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/report-erasmus2023_web.pdf

Main findings:

The Erasmus 2023 Report published last December concludes the analyses currently conducted by INDIRE. The survey is broad and transversal to all sectors and precisely proposes participation data in light of the transversal and sectoral priorities of the new 2021-2027 programme, as well as the new initiatives born within the second seven-year period of Erasmus+ including those specifically aimed to adult education, for example the Epale platform and the Erasmus+ Ambassadors network made up of 120 adult learning professionals spread across (almost) all Italian regions. The final reports of the projects show unequivocally how the Erasmus experiences have radically changed the way in which Italian citizens perceive Europe, a space that allows them to move and live enriching and stimulating study and training experiences and a fundamental experience for the development of one's European identity, based on a culture of exchange of opinions and respect.



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The results make Italy the fourth country in Europe for the number of students mobility and the second for reception. As far as the adult sector is concerned, increasing data reflect the support of the Agency in promoting the strategic role that Erasmus+ plays in offering tools and opportunities for European citizens and beyond, taking into account the opening of programmes from 2015 to non-EU countries.

2. Methodological guidelines for the quantitative analysis of the survey

2.1 The research methodology

In the two main approaches to social research - the quantitative and qualitative methods - the relationship established between theory and research is fundamentally different.

In the case of neo positivist quantitative research¹, the relationship is structured in logically sequential phases, according to a substantially deductive approach (theory precedes observation), which moves in the context of justification, i.e. of support, through empirical data, of the previous theory formulated on the basis of the literature. In the case of interpretivist qualitative research², theoretical elaboration and empirical research proceed intertwined, as the researcher sees the initial formulation of a theory as possible conditioning that could inhibit his ability to understand the subject being studied. In this way the literature has less importance. The concepts are also used differently by the two approaches. Concepts are the building blocks of theory, and through their operationalisation (transformation into

¹ Positivism is aligned with the hypothetico-deductive model of science that builds on verifying a priori hypotheses and experimentation by operationalising variables and measures; results from hypothesis testing are used to inform and advance science. Studies aligned with positivism generally focus on identifying explanatory associations or causal relationships through quantitative approaches, where empirically based findings from large sample sizes are favoured

² Interpretivism, also known as interpretivist involves researchers to interpret elements of the study, thus interpretivism integrates human interest into a study. Accordingly, “interpretive researchers assume that access to reality (given or socially constructed) is only through social constructions such as language, consciousness, shared meanings, and instruments”. Development of interpretivist philosophy is based on the critique of positivism in social sciences. Accordingly, this philosophy emphasises qualitative analysis over quantitative analysis. Interpretivism is associated with the philosophical position of idealism, and is used to group together diverse approaches, including social constructivism, phenomenology and hermeneutics; approaches that reject the objectivist view that meaning resides within the world independently of consciousness.



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empirically observable variables) allow the theory to be subjected to empirical scrutiny. In the neopositivist approach the clarification of concepts and their operationalisation into variables take place before even starting the search. This method, on the one hand, offers the advantage of being able to detect empirically the concept, on the other hand it also involves the disadvantage of a strong reduction and impoverishment of the concept itself, with the further risk that the variable replaces the concept (reification).

A qualitative researcher would instead have used the concept as an orientation (sensitising concept), which predisposes to perception, still to be defined not only in operational terms, but also theoretically, in the course of research itself. The concepts therefore become a guide to approach empirical reality, not reductions of its reality in abstract variables.

As regards the general relationship with the studied environment, the neopositivist approach does not believe that the reactivity of the subject may represent a basic obstacle and believes that a certain degree of controlled manipulation is eligible. Conversely, qualitative research is based on the naturalistic approach, that is to say the researcher does not manipulate the reality under examination in any way. The two ways of doing research find illustrations typical and opposite in the experimental techniques and through participant observation. If we move on to the specific psychological interaction with the subjects involved, the quantitative researcher takes an external point of view of the subject studied, in a neutral and detached way; furthermore, he or she will study only what he or she will consider important. The qualitative researcher, on the other hand, immerses himself as completely as possible in the reality of the subject and therefore tends to develop a relationship of empathic identification with the subjects. In this way, the problem of research objectivity forcefully arises. Even the physical interaction with the individual subjects studied is different in the two approaches. Quantitative research often does not involve any physical contact between the researcher and the subject studied, whereas in qualitative research physical contact is an essential precondition for understanding. The subject studied is therefore passive in quantitative research, while he or she has an active role in qualitative research.

From the 1980s, in order to overcome the opposition between quantitative and qualitative research, the so-called mixed method research³ was born. In the field of educational science research methodology, in recent years, there has been the publication of an increasing number of studies based on mixed

³ Mixed methods research is an approach to inquiry that involves the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, the integration of the two forms of data and the use of distinct models that may involve different philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks.



methods that involve techniques for collecting, analysing and interpreting quantitative and qualitative data in various combinations, a global trend that is also well documented in other sectors and disciplines⁴. Such approaches allow for a broader and more multifaceted view of the phenomena being researched, consistent with the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the period that we are going through, characterised by a kind of fluid complexity in which it is important to choose a rigorous methodology in order not to risk slipping into false foundational myths. That's the methodology chosen by RIA-AE network to carry out the impact analysis in the field of adult education.

The RIA-AE network operates in accordance with guidelines established by the Dutch National Agency Ockham IPS in collaboration with Arteduc⁵, aimed at developing a transnational monitoring study for program evaluation. This monitoring initiative focuses on investigating the benefits derived from participation in Erasmus+ adult education projects. Specifically, it aims to identify factors contributing to positive or negative changes, whether short-term or enduring, across personal, organisational, and professional domains. Furthermore, the study seeks to assess the extent to which the objectives outlined by the EU within this framework, such as inclusion and diversity, digitization, sustainability/climate, and participation in democratic life, have been achieved⁶. Drawing from this insight, recommendations can be formulated to enhance the effectiveness of the program. To comprehensively address the impacts of Erasmus+ across various program levels—organisation, staff, and learners—it is suggested to situate the monitoring study within a multi-level model of adult education. This model distinguishes between micro, meso, and macro levels, which play pivotal roles in access, engagement, and the outcomes of international projects on individual, organisational, or systemic levels. Brüning and Kuwan (2002) emphasise the importance of aligning activity structures across macro, meso, and micro levels to effectively address the challenge of broadening learner participation. Establishing a foundation for interdependence among these levels necessitates mobilisation strategies and clusters of instruments aimed at increasing learning participation or engaging specific target groups in learning endeavours.

In order to contextualise the present report, it is crucial to mention again the factors which the framework connects together:

- the subjective and social barriers of the individual (micro level);

⁴ Creswell, J. W., & Clark, V. L. P.. *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*, (3rd ed.), Sage publications, 2018.

⁵ Ockham IPS & Institute for Innovation and Technology, *Impact measurement in Erasmus+ adult education*, Berlin: Institute for policy support, 2023.

⁶ Ockham IPS & Institute for Innovation and Technology, *Impact measurement in Erasmus+ adult education*, cit., 2023.



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- the provision of educational services by educators, educational institutions and other organisations (meso level), taking into account the above-mentioned barriers at the micro level;
- the framework conditions and development opportunities of adult education organisations through participation in mobility programmes (meso level);
- and political decision-making (macro level) to create the necessary conditions for the meso level⁷.

For each of these levels key factors can be identified to describe and analyse the specific influences of the impact of international cooperation and mobility projects in adult education within the Erasmus+ programme.

Accordingly, assessing the effectiveness of concrete policies requires data on concrete outputs of those policies and the outputs to have an impact on the system level.⁸

While Erasmus+ primarily focuses on the meso level (organisations) and micro level (staff and learners) through KA1 (Mobility of staff and learners) and KA2 (Strategic and small-scale partnerships), its impact is also influenced by the macro level. Conversely, Erasmus+ projects have the potential to influence education policies and initiatives by disseminating results and lessons learned from individual projects to the systemic level. These systemic-level effects are bolstered by another Erasmus+ program area: KA3 (Policy development and cooperation). Coordinated by the EACEA, this Key Action contributes to the formulation of new policies that can catalyse modernization and reform at the European Union level and within adult learning systems⁹.

At the macro level, Brüning and Kuwan (2002) contend that socio-political objectives, education systems, and legal and financial frameworks hold a degree of conditional significance for the other levels, and also influence the primary objectives of educational participation. At this level, stakeholders encompass representatives from educational providers, including companies, employers, and vocational associations (Brüning and Kuwan, 2002), who collaborate to enact educational policies and initiatives. On the macro level, Brüning and Kuwan (2002) assert that socio-political objectives, education systems, and legal and financial frameworks exert a conditional influence on the other levels, shaping the primary goals of educational participation. At this tier, stakeholders comprise representatives from educational providers, such as companies, employers, and vocational associations (Brüning and Kuwan, 2002), collaborating to implement educational policies and initiatives.

⁷ Ockham IPS & Institute for Innovation and Technology, *Impact measurement in Erasmus+ adult education*, cit., 2023.

⁸ European Commission, *An in-depth analysis of adult learning policies and their effectiveness in Europe*, 2015.

⁹ Ockham IPS & Institute for Innovation and Technology, *Impact measurement in Erasmus+ adult education*, cit., 2023.



Educational policies and initiatives at the macro level serve as conditional mechanisms for realising the educational infrastructure at the meso level. The following key factors are relevant to assess the prerequisites at macro level¹⁰:

- Policy and legal framework for adult education
- Governance of adult learning (centralised/decentralised)
- Financing of adult learning
- Quality Assurance framework
- Autonomy of adult learning providers
- Flexibility of learning paths

At the meso level, addressing specific learner groups effectively during international cooperation and mobility projects in adult education within the Erasmus+ program necessitates considering the "point of contact" between educational stakeholders and the target audience¹¹. While direct engagement with learners occurs at the micro level, the educational context—including the structure of educational delivery, the qualifications of educators, and the organisation of learning—shapes learners' participation in education and the impact of learning. Stakeholders at the meso level encompass educators (both professionals and volunteers) and administrative staff members, tasked with planning educational programs, coordinating logistics, and assuming pedagogical responsibilities (Brüning and Kuwan, 2002). Ultimately, they create learning environments tailored to the needs of a diverse group of learners. These environments, which encompass teacher support, teacher-learner interaction, learning materials and activities, learning context, and didactical strategies, are not standardised but rather adapted or customised to the specific contexts of learners, teachers, and the learning process. They are an integral component of innovative projects in international cooperation and mobility within the Erasmus+ program in adult education. The educational structure pertains to how learning opportunities in international educational cooperation are provided to learners, including the availability of drop-in access services, flexible scheduling, and education locations conveniently located for learners (Brüning and Kuwan, 2002). The significance of these structural conditions stems from their role as a crucial bridge between learners (micro level) and policies and initiatives (macro level). Brüning and Kuwan (2002) contend that engagement in education, including participation in international cooperation and mobility projects within the Erasmus+ program in adult education, is

¹⁰ Stein, D., Valters, C., *Understanding 'Theory of Change' in international development: a review of existing knowledge*, 2012, p. 2.

¹¹ Ockham IPS & Institute for Innovation and Technology, *Impact measurement in Erasmus+ adult education*, cit., 2023.



more probable when conditions at the policy level (macro level) enable education providers to establish educational structures, ensure professionalism among staff, and organise learning support in a manner that aligns with the needs of learners (micro level) at the meso level. The following key factors are relevant to assess the prerequisites at meso level¹²:

- The internationalisation strategies and visions as well as the financial and human resources of the respective organisation
- Curricula and learning materials
- The degree of professionalisation of teachers and volunteers
- Equipping education providers
- Public relations
- Customer orientation/learner orientation.

At the micro level, whether participation occurs or not in education, including international cooperation and mobility projects within the Erasmus+ program in adult education, is thought to be influenced in part by the social and subjective barriers experienced by learners¹³. These barriers encompass socio-demographic factors, attitudes and values, educational background, and motivations and interests in learning and application (Brüning and Kuwan, 2002, p.19). Von Hippel and Tippelt (2010) argue that a thorough understanding of these learning prerequisites and motivations is "essential for the professional work of tutors operating at the micro-didactic level" (Brüning and Kuwan, 2002, p.39). Socio-demographic factors and educational history are identified as key factors shaping participation in education within international projects (Brüning and Kuwan, 2002). These factors may negatively impact the participation of learners in international education projects. Several studies indicate that individuals with low educational attainment, the elderly, adults in low-skill jobs, and the unemployed are least likely to participate in education. One possible explanation is that learners from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds may perceive investing in skills as less attractive, as they may believe that updated knowledge and skills may not necessarily be applicable to their current living or employment situation¹⁴. This perception can lead to demotivation and disinterest in investing in learning, including participation in international cooperation and mobility projects within the

¹² Hippel, A. von & Tippelt, R., *The role of adult educators towards (potential) participants and their contribution to increasing participation in adult education - insights into existing research*. In: European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults (RELA), Issue 1 "Envisioning future research on the education and learning of adults", 1 (1-2), S. 33-51, 2010.

¹³ Ockham IPS & Institute for Innovation and Technology, *Impact measurement in Erasmus+ adult education*, cit., 2023.

¹⁴ Ockham IPS & Institute for Innovation and Technology, *Impact measurement in Erasmus+ adult education*, cit., 2023.



Erasmus+ program in adult education. Another explanation is that required basic competencies, particularly among the elderly, individuals with lower levels of education, children, young adults, and the unemployed, may be outdated, making it increasingly challenging for them to engage in education. Additionally, socioeconomic challenges such as poverty and unemployment can impact work attitudes and cognitive abilities required for success in education, potentially acting as demotivators for participation in international cooperation and mobility projects within the Erasmus+ program in adult education.

The core challenge posed by the social and subjective barriers faced by learners is that they serve as significant impediments to participation in education and learning. To develop effective strategies for expanding learner participation in mobility projects within the Erasmus+ program in adult education, efforts should be directed towards overcoming these barriers. While these barriers may hinder participation in education, engaging in educational activities, such as international cooperation and mobility projects within the Erasmus+ program, serves as a crucial means to address these challenges. For instance, enhancing basic competencies in mathematics, literacy, and digital skills is essential for learners to attain improved social standing. In essence, education can serve as a catalyst for enhancing social inclusion rates among vulnerable populations¹⁵. More tangibly, individuals who participate in education initiatives appear to exhibit increased engagement in their immediate communities, reduced isolation, and enhanced assertiveness. Similarly, learners report greater self-confidence, personal development, and improved interpersonal relationships. Additionally, some learners experience improved employment prospects as a result of their educational endeavours. The extent of this impact can be influenced by decisions made at the macro level, which determine which learners and types of programs are eligible for funding.

The following key factors are relevant to assess the prerequisites at micro level:

- Previous participation experience
- Self-confidence
- Opportunities to make new contacts through action
- Perspective to increase basic skills
- Prospective labour market opportunities
- Access to future learning opportunities.

¹⁵ Ockham IPS & Institute for Innovation and Technology, *Impact measurement in Erasmus+ adult education*, cit., 2023.



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The essential elements at macro, meso, and micro levels of education that shape the impact of international cooperation and mobility projects in adult education within the Erasmus+ program are intricately interconnected¹⁶. Hence, the network aims to contribute to an evidence-based framework illustrating the interaction among policy decisions and initiatives in education at the macro level, the delivery of educational services at the meso level, and the social and subjective barriers faced by learners at the micro level.

2.2 The quantitative method

The conceptual references connect the study of the learning and development processes of individuals, groups, and organisations¹⁷ and the attention to pragmatist¹⁸, popular¹⁹ and emancipatory²⁰ pedagogy. It is a constellation of constructs and orientations that seek methodological devices that can help actors and communities to produce profound and radical changes. In order to promote this, it is also necessary to observe the differences in the meaning each actor gives to terms, because:

Even where partners were speaking the same basic language (...) there was a hopeless confusion of terminologies at the beginning, and that international exchange had made the "whole project more dynamic"²¹.

The quantitative method measures quantifiable characteristics and illustrates facts in numerical terms. The results are evaluated with the help of contexts and statistical calculations. Standardised questionnaires or observations are based on already available knowledge and focus on specific aspects, which the questionnaire subjects to in-depth analysis and verification, for which it attempts to obtain further information. Quantitative methods, based on predefined questions, can leave out important aspects for the exhaustiveness of the research and therefore it is advisable to combine them with the

¹⁶ Ockham IPS & Institute for Innovation and Technology, *Impact measurement in Erasmus+ adult education*, cit., 2023.

¹⁷ Wenger E., *Comunità di pratica. Apprendimento, significato e identità*, Milano: Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2006.

¹⁸ Dewey J., *Comunità e potere* (ed. orig. *The Public and its problems*, 1927), Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1971.

¹⁹ Freire, P., *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Continuum, 1986.

²⁰ Brookfield S., *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*. Second Edition, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2017.

²¹ Nuissl, *Adult Education and Learning in Europe: Evaluation of the Adult Education Action within the SOCRATES Programme*, 1999



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use of qualitative methods, as the present research carries out. The tools used in quantitative research are standardised and therefore rigid.

To follow an approach to ranking the robustness of the evidence, the European Commission has carried out a in-depth analysis of the adult education policies and their effectiveness in Europe, finding out that:

Evaluation studies with counterfactual quantitative evidence of a significant causal impact provide more compelling evidence than studies which measure change before and after the policy action. Research studies which are sufficiently large in scale (for example adopting adequate sample sizes to enable robust statistical analysis, or based on sufficiently in depth case studies to allow full explanation of findings) and studies providing similar results in different contexts using mixed methods are stronger evidence than small scale studies dependent on qualitative data which has not been collected systematically. Thus different studies can be compared and ranked based on the quality/strength of evidence provided²².

An essential characteristic of quantitative analysis is the formalism of the procedures: the collection, processing of data, use of the data matrix and use of statistics follow defined and easily replicable protocols. This high formalisation allows the researcher to detect and store a large amount of information with highly standardised tools. The positivist paradigm²³ (the first to be used in the social sciences) studies social reality using the conceptual apparatus, the observation and measurement techniques, the mathematical analysis tools and the inference procedures of natural sciences. In this phase of the projects, the techniques used are quantitative (experiments, statistics, questionnaires) and variables are used. Quantitative research collects individual properties of each subject that seem relevant for the purpose of the research (variables) and limits itself to statistically analysing of variables. The subject does not recombine in his unity as a person. The goal of the analysis will be to explain the variance of the dependent variables, that is finding the causes that determine the variation of the dependent variables.

In order to collect evidence from a large group of beneficiary organisations on the impact of Erasmus+ on their organisation, staff, and learners, an online survey will be organised.

²² European Commission, *An in-depth analysis of adult learning policies and their effectiveness in Europe*, 2015.

²³ Émile Durkheim (Épinal, 15 April 1858 - Paris, 15 November 1917) was a French sociologist, philosopher and historian of religions. The founder of functionalism, a structuralist theory, his work was crucial in the construction of sociology and anthropology during the 20th century.



The matter of the impact is crucial to understand the trends which every country representatives live while implementing European programmes; for this reason the current report works also considering approaches implemented in the experiences of the senior SOCRATES programme, in which Nuissl considered as:

It is clear that the opportunity and challenge of working with other countries is much appreciated, leads to a better understanding of other countries and for some projects is seen as one of the major benefits²⁴.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of Erasmus+'s impact on adult education (AE) institutions, the proposal suggests inviting all AE institutions that have served as coordinators for KA1 and KA2 projects from 2018 onwards to participate in an online survey.

The survey is directed to the respective contact person known to the National Agency (NA), who is requested to provide responses on behalf of their institution. An additional option involving partners of KA2 projects is also considered: inviting organisations within your country that are partners of a KA2 project coordinated by a foreign partner (managed by another NA).²⁵ In instances where the NA lacks information about these organisations and contact persons involved in Erasmus+ projects coordinated by a foreign partner, additional efforts are needed to obtain this information (refer to the steps outlined below).

- Step 1: Begin by reviewing the Erasmus+ Project Results Platform. Identify the pertinent KA2 projects focused on adult education, and navigate to the "partners" section under the organisation heading, selecting the appropriate country. On the project page of the Erasmus+ Project Results Platform, you will find details of partners, including their name, address, website, phone number, and occasionally email address²⁶.
- Step 2: To obtain the email address of the relevant partner's contact person (rather than an info@ address), a targeted search is required, involving two sub-steps²⁷:

Step 2.1: Initially, explore the project website by following the link provided on the Erasmus+ Project Results Platform (under the project heading). Often, the project website contains additional

²⁴ Nuissl, *Adult Education and Learning in Europe: Evaluation of the Adult Education Action within the SOCRATES Programme*, 1999.

²⁵ Ockham IPS & Institute for Innovation and Technology, *Impact measurement in Erasmus+ adult education*, cit., 2023.

²⁶ Ockham IPS & Institute for Innovation and Technology, *Impact measurement in Erasmus+ adult education*, cit., 2023.

²⁷ Ockham IPS & Institute for Innovation and Technology, *Impact measurement in Erasmus+ adult education*, cit., 2023.



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information about the partners, including contact persons and their details. If the project link is unavailable, an alternative option is to conduct a Google search using the project's name²⁸. Step 2.2: If the previous step fails to produce results, visit the partner's website (often listed on the Erasmus+ Project Results Platform under the partners heading, or by searching the organisation's name on Google) and attempt to locate the email address of the contact person or director/manager. This ensures that our survey invitation reaches the appropriate individual within the organisation, enabling them to either forward the invitation or complete the questionnaire themselves. The survey primarily focuses on the outcomes and impact at the organisational level, examining how Erasmus+ has contributed to overall improvements in the quality of education, staff, and adult learners. The questionnaire comprises the following sections, as outlined in the box below:

- **Introduction:** Introduce the survey, outlining its purpose and data handling procedures in compliance with data protection regulations of the respective country. Provide contact information for study inquiries and specify the duration of the study's processing.
- **Characteristics of the organisation:** This section aims to gather background information about the beneficiary organisation and respondents through a limited number of questions.
- **Results and impacts on organisational development and provision:** This section includes inquiries about the organisational context and specific arrangements at the organisational and provision levels. Topics covered may include the internationalisation strategy, collaborative relationships and partnerships, learner engagement, innovation, outreach and involvement of adult learners, program accessibility and content, pedagogy and didactics, digitization, internationalisation, the European dimension, and specific impact objectives derived from each Erasmus+ project. Additionally, the evolution of these dimensions over time (whether they have improved or not) and the contribution of Erasmus+ in this regard will be examined. Subsequently, respondents will be asked to provide a qualitative description, in free-text format, to further elucidate and illustrate the results and effects²⁹.
- **Results and impact on staff and volunteer development:** This section will inquire about the current status of various impact dimensions, including the professionalization of staff/volunteers, enhancement of personal and professional skills, and adoption of new practices or approaches in learning and working. Additionally, the evolution of these dimensions over time (whether they have improved or not) and the contribution of Erasmus+ in this regard will be examined. Subsequently, respondents will

²⁸ Ockham IPS & Institute for Innovation and Technology, *Impact measurement in Erasmus+ adult education*, cit., 2023.

²⁹ Ockham IPS & Institute for Innovation and Technology, *Impact measurement in Erasmus+ adult education*, cit., 2023.



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be prompted to provide a qualitative description, in free-text format, to further elucidate and illustrate the results and effects.

- **Results and impact on adult learners:** This section will address various impact dimensions, such as competencies (including digital skills), self-efficacy, resilience, living environment, and socio-economic resilience. Respondents will be asked about the evolution of these dimensions over time (whether they have improved or not) and the contribution of Erasmus+. Subsequently, respondents will be invited to provide a qualitative description, in free-text format, to interpret and illustrate the results and effects³⁰.
- **Possible obstacles to project and program goals:** This section will feature an open-ended question, allowing respondents to articulate any obstacles they encountered.
- **Need for international mobility:** This section will inquire about the necessity of mobility, including any obstacles and reasons for applying (or not).
- **Conclusion and concluding remarks:** In this final section, respondents will have the opportunity to provide concluding remarks on the significance of the research. They will also be asked if they are willing to participate in in-depth case studies³¹.

As indicated, questions specifically tailored for accredited organisations involve monitoring progress on selected dimensions and applying progress markers, such as the internationalisation strategy and Erasmus+ priorities.

The survey will be centrally programmed at the EU level by the central research team. Each National Agency (NA) will supply a translation of the survey in their respective language, which will be uploaded by the central team into the online survey tool. Centralizing the survey organisation enables straightforward data control and management, facilitating the compilation of EU-wide analysis and reports.

There are two methods for inviting beneficiary organisations to participate in the survey³²:

- **Option 1:** The invitation to participate in the survey will be sent by the respective National Agency (NA) to increase response rates, leveraging the familiarity of project holders with their NA. An additional advantage is that the central research team will not need to sign processing agreements with individual NAs, as the NAs themselves will send out the invitations. However, a drawback is that individual NAs cannot track responses individually, hindering their ability to send targeted reminders

³⁰ Ockham IPS & Institute for Innovation and Technology, *Impact measurement in Erasmus+ adult education*, cit., 2023.

³¹ Ockham IPS & Institute for Innovation and Technology, *Impact measurement in Erasmus+ adult education*, cit., 2023.

³² Ockham IPS & Institute for Innovation and Technology, *Impact measurement in Erasmus+ adult education*, cit., 2023.



to those who have not yet completed the online questionnaire. A proposed solution to this issue is for the central research team to provide NAs with individualised links for the online survey, each linked to a respondent number. NAs can then associate these links with the email addresses of project beneficiaries' contact persons. This approach allows the central research team to track respondent numbers for incomplete surveys and inform the NAs accordingly, enabling them to send targeted reminders using the associated email addresses.

- Option 2 (not yet budgeted): The central research team sends out invitations at the central level. Consequently, a processing agreement must be established between the central research team and each National Agency (NA), as the research team receives email addresses of beneficiary organisations. In this scenario, the central research team can monitor responses, as beneficiary organisations receive unique links. This enables targeted reminders to be sent to those who have not completed or only partially completed the survey. Organising the invitations and reminders for each individual country requires one day per country (this aspect is not yet budgeted for in the project).

Each National Agency (NA) is tasked with translating the invitation email and reminder text into their respective language, using an English template provided by the central research team. NAs have the freedom to make slight adjustments to the invitation email based on their specific requirements³³.

As all organisations are beneficiaries of the Erasmus+ program, we anticipate a favourable response rate. To further boost response rates, two reminders will be sent, and NAs will be requested to promote the survey in their communications with program beneficiaries.

Data will be exported and transferred to the national research team for analysis and reporting at the national level. The information collected through the survey serves as the foundation of the country report, contributing to all relevant chapters³⁴.

2.3 Tools and techniques

In case of an actual questionnaire interview, a distinction must be made between face-to-face and remote administration, using the telephone or platforms of online communication. Furthermore, the

³³ Ockham IPS & Institute for Innovation and Technology, *Impact measurement in Erasmus+ adult education*, cit., 2023.

³⁴ Ockham IPS & Institute for Innovation and Technology, *Impact measurement in Erasmus+ adult education*, cit., 2023.



self-completion questionnaire can be sent by post, attached to a publication, inserted on a website, distributed in class, in a work group, in a supermarket or in a place where an event took place.

As with the traces used to support the discursive interview, some considerations regarding the structuring of the interview are also relevant for the questionnaires. A very structured questionnaire (with standardised questions and answers formulated in a directive way) is generally useful for investigating, on large population samples, attitudes, motivations and behaviours to some extent already known³⁵. To avoid the risk of crucial aspects being left out subjects, aimed to provide useful cognitive elements for developing the definitive survey instrument. The researcher must in fact be aware that, once the structure has been decided definitively by the questionnaire, "the game is over". In fact, nothing can be discovered with the "closed" questionnaire that is not already in the researcher's mind. The answers are all already given; it's only one question of frequencies³⁶. In addition to the administration of a questionnaire, the pre or post test may include a de-briefing session, i.e. a discussion (including groups) session useful for evaluate the clarity of the questions, the exhaustiveness and relevance of the answers, any compilation difficulties, as well as bringing out aspects that i pre or post test participants consider relevant and the questionnaire could instead ignored. However, the development of the questionnaire should mainly concern the semantic construction of the questions, to verify if they are at least understood by all those interviewed, without giving rise to interpretative misunderstandings.

The preliminary or postponed questionnaire is often not completely structured: it will contain a certain number of open questions to fully collect, for example, the wealth of motivations that the subjects are able to identify and verbalise regarding their behavioural choice. In the questionnaire it will be then possible to "close" these questions too, proposing to the interviewees: choose between the motivations that emerged during the pre or post-test, as well as in the mind of the researcher. The researcher's experience is obviously valuable, but it

can also be limiting if the researcher is satisfied with successfully used solutions in the past, but which may always be unsuitable for grasping a social reality in progress. We can therefore speak of closed or open questionnaires but, as we have seen, it is preferable to define them as directive or non-directive ones: it essentially depends on the number of questions which the interviewee can answer freely, in

³⁵ Guba E.G., Lincoln Y.S., *Fourth Generation Evaluation*, California: Newbury Park, Sage, 1989.

³⁶ Guba E.G., Lincoln Y.S., *Op. cit.*, 1989.



relation to those which can only be answered by choosing among answers that the researcher has defined in advance. We can also

talk about simple and complex questionnaires, as well as short and long, and these characteristics are not as trivial as they might seem³⁷.

Long questionnaires are generally more complex and therefore require more commitment to the interviewee and the interviewer. Use one or the other depends on the conditions of administration which will be discussed below. Generally, the researcher is attracted by the possibility of collecting as much as possible information; therefore, discard questions to reduce length of a questionnaire that could put your resistance to the test of the interviewee, it is a "painful renunciation". In fact, the researcher believes that all the questions are relevant and, this is often true, since in the study of social problems always equates with problems of interdependence of multiple causes. Furthermore, complex characteristics are often revealed with questionnaires and abstract using indicators which, to be detected, must be translated into specific questions. However, since the relationship between concepts and indicators is always imperfect, many are often used as indicators (questions), assuming in this way to be able to "centre" the concept that is intended to study.

Regarding the content aspects, it should be remembered that, in addition to questions which refer to the "focus" of the investigation (behaviours, opinions, motivations, judgments, etc. which constitute the dependent variables in the analysis models), it is essential to include others that will be used in the role of independent variables like hypothetical causes of those behaviours and attitudes. Usually, this role is played by individual characteristics, which are easy to detect such as gender, age, education, profession, etc.

The monitoring study encompasses both the period from 2018 to 2020 (covering Erasmus+ contracts from 2014 to 2020) and the period from 2021 to 2022 (covering Erasmus+ contracts from 2021 to 2027)³⁸. Our rationale for including projects from both the previous and current programming periods is rooted in the time required for projects to have an impact and for project outcomes to become ingrained at the organisational level, and potentially beyond, within other institutions or at the systemic level. Additionally, by participating in multiple Erasmus+ projects over time, adult education (AE) institutions accumulate experience with the program, leading to impacts that cannot be attributed to a single activity but rather to the collective sum of all activities in which they are involved. Another

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ Ockham IPS & Institute for Innovation and Technology, *Impact measurement in Erasmus+ adult education*, cit., 2023.



consideration for extending the investigation period is that the new program has only been operational for a short time, and many KA1 and KA2 projects have yet to be completed. Moreover, delays may be expected due to restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic³⁹. To ensure a comprehensive understanding, the approach includes desk research covering relevant research conducted on Erasmus+ over the past decade in the member states. This information will be supplemented by document analysis using data provided by participants and participating organisations, offering an overview of all activities in KA1 and KA2 during the specified period.

To ensure reliable assessments of the program's impact at the institutional level, considering the diverse contexts, target groups, and types of results and impacts of Erasmus+, we propose a methodologically comprehensive approach. This approach involves conducting a survey among all beneficiary organisations that have participated in an Erasmus+ project between 2018 and 2023, along with in-depth case studies at a selection of adult education (AE) institutions⁴⁰. We deem the period before 2018 less relevant due to the challenges associated with reaching out to beneficiary organisations that implemented Erasmus+ projects many years ago. Furthermore, respondents may encounter difficulties recalling specific autobiographical episodes, potentially affecting the accuracy of their responses. Therefore, focusing on the period from 2018 to 2023 allows for more reliable data collection and analysis.

Qualitative interviews will be conducted with adult learners who have engaged in mobility actions for adult learners (KA1) in the new Erasmus+ program. Additionally, interviews will be conducted with both applicants and non-applicants⁴¹. This approach is deemed highly beneficial for capturing the participation, experiences, and impact of mobility for adult learners, which is a new component in the current Erasmus+ program. For the survey of participants (partly online and partly on-site) we orient ourselves on the instrument SIT (Social Inclusion after Transfer)⁴². This tool is designed to evaluate the extent to which participation in an Erasmus+ project has contributed to social inclusion among participants, encompassing elements such as impact on the living environment and socio-economic resilience. Additionally, we propose engaging in discussions with a selection of applicant organisations to gain insights into the practical organisation of individual and group exchanges, improve the learning experience, and gather feedback from non-applicants on the reasons for not applying and their

³⁹ Ockham IPS & Institute for Innovation and Technology, *Impact measurement in Erasmus+ adult education*, cit., 2023.

⁴⁰ Ockham IPS & Institute for Innovation and Technology, *Impact measurement in Erasmus+ adult education*, cit., 2023.

⁴¹ Ockham IPS & Institute for Innovation and Technology, *Impact measurement in Erasmus+ adult education*, cit., 2023.

⁴² De Greef, M., Verté, D., and Segers, M., *Development of the SIT, an instrument to evaluate the transfer effects of adult education programme for social inclusion*. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 36(42–61), 2010.



experiences with "obstacles to mobility" for their organisations and target groups⁴³. These insights will inform future Erasmus+ funding decisions.

For subsequent survey rounds, the feasibility of conducting a quantitative survey among learners who have participated in Erasmus+ funded mobility programs (KA1) will be explored (not proposed for the first survey round). In countries where a significant number of adult learners participate in Erasmus+ mobility programs, an online survey will be conducted to gather information on the design of the Erasmus+ program, experiences, and the impact of the mobility program on learners, as well as their socio-demographic background and educational history. The survey will adapt items from the SIT instrument to align with the specifics of the Erasmus+ program. Access to learners will be facilitated through collaboration with National Agencies (NAs) and beneficiary organisations in the respective partner countries. If feasible, quantitative survey results will be validated through focus group interviews with adult learners⁴⁴.

Methodological triangulation will be employed, involving analysis of existing sources (Erasmus+ project database, final reports), interviews with beneficiary organisations, case studies at selected adult education (AE) institutions, and interviews with adult learners and organisations that have or have not participated in mobility actions. These various research methods will validate results and provide further interpretations of patterns found in terms of context, target group, outcomes, and impact.

The RIA-AE network endeavours to continuously monitor the impact of Erasmus on the adult education sector over time through various survey rounds. Each survey round will replicate the approach with minor adjustments. Primarily, the network aims to maintain flexibility to incorporate specific focuses in each research phase, contingent upon evolving policy priorities within the program or emerging societal and policy trends⁴⁵. Consequently, each survey round comprises a consistent set of questions and methodologies, with rotating questions addressing topics of interest to the network. Additionally, each survey round aims to evaluate the impact of Erasmus+ on projects finalised after the previous round, as well as to monitor the progress of Erasmus beneficiaries over time. This involves utilising progress markers for a selected set of indicators. Progress markers identify actions and interrelationships that will persist beyond the intervention's influence, capturing the ongoing behaviours and adaptations without further support from the time-bound intervention.

⁴³ Ockham IPS & Institute for Innovation and Technology, *Impact measurement in Erasmus+ adult education*, cit., 2023.

⁴⁴ Ockham IPS & Institute for Innovation and Technology, *Impact measurement in Erasmus+ adult education*, cit., 2023.

⁴⁵ Ockham IPS & Institute for Innovation and Technology, *Impact measurement in Erasmus+ adult education*, cit., 2023.



During the RIA-AE network meeting in February 2023, it was decided to monitor the progress of Erasmus+ accredited organisations, as this group of beneficiaries regularly utilises the program and must adhere to various quality standards to implement high-quality mobility activities⁴⁶. Furthermore, the decision was made to focus the progress markers on the organisational integration of internationalisation and the Erasmus+ priorities, including inclusion and diversity, digital transformation, environmental sustainability and combating climate change, and participation in democratic processes. Progress markers have been devised for the online survey to gauge the developmental stage, assessed by activities and behaviours categorised as "expect to see," "like to see," and "love to see." In subsequent survey rounds, the methodology can be enhanced with more scientifically rigorous research methods, bolstering the evidence base of the monitoring process. This may involve incorporating research modules with pre- and post-test designs among mobile learners and staff (KA1), participants of innovative adult education projects (KA2), scientific phenomenographic studies to assess impact among learners and staff (KA1 & 2), and employing policy trail methodology to identify system-level impact⁴⁷. These research activities are currently not incorporated into the survey round approach, nor are they budgeted for. However, if there is interest within the RIA-AE network to implement these activities in future survey rounds, separate guidelines will be developed and deliberated within the network meeting.

⁴⁶ Ockham IPS & Institute for Innovation and Technology, *Impact measurement in Erasmus+ adult education*, cit., 2023.

⁴⁷ Ockham IPS & Institute for Innovation and Technology, *Impact measurement in Erasmus+ adult education*, cit., 2023.

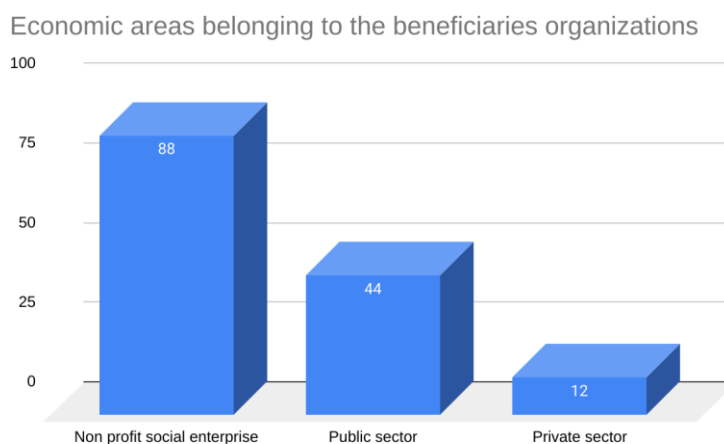
3. The survey: general descriptive analysis

3.1 The organisations participating in the research: an overview across typologies and dimensions

To get a comprehensive picture of the impact of Erasmus+ on AE institutions, all AE institutions which have concluded their Erasmus+ activities within 31st December 2022 as coordinators of KA1 and KA2 projects have been invited to participate in an online survey. In case of beneficiaries of multiple projects, it's taken into consideration the one expiring closest to 2018. This survey is addressed to the respective contact person known to the NA. This contact person is asked to answer the questions for their institutions.

As the graph below illustrates (Graphical representation 1), the majority of organisations involved in the Italian survey are represented by non-profit social enterprises (88 equal to 61% of the total), followed by organisations belonging to the public sector (44 equal to 30%). Only 12 organisations which participated in the Italian survey, equal to 9% of the total, come from the private sector.

Graphical representation 1. Economic areas belonging to the beneficiaries organisations

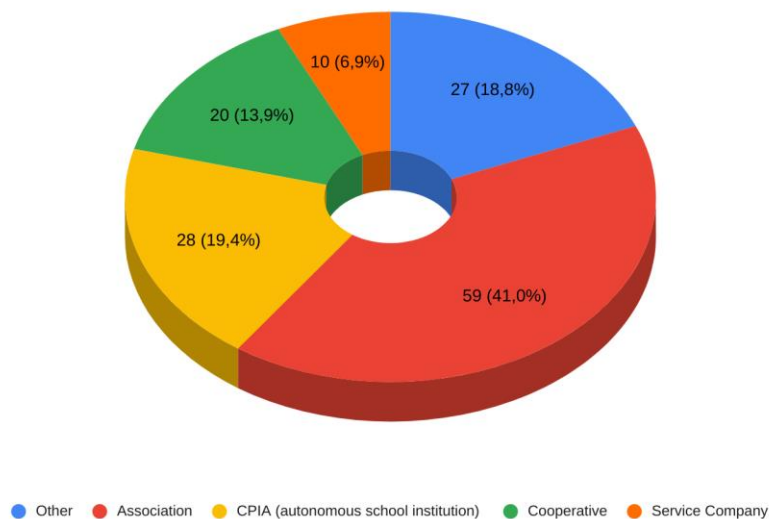


Delving into the specifics, the beneficiary organisations participating in the national survey are mostly associations and CPIAs (Italian autonomous school institutions) which together account for more than 60%. Almost 19%, otherwise, declare to belong to other types of organisations, not specified in the questionnaire. Specifically the section called “Other” comprehends foundations, cooperatives

consortium and private schools. The rest of the respondents, concurrently, define their organisations as single cooperative (20 equal to almost 14%) and service company (10 equal to almost 7%). In the graph below, we can see the summarised illustration.

Graphical representation 2. Types of beneficiaries organisations

Types of beneficiary organizations



Consistent with the Permanent Census of Italian Non-Profit Institution⁴⁸ and the National Institute for Public Policy Analysis (INAPP)⁴⁹, the majority of the Italian production profit and no profit fabric is composed by small and medium enterprises. As the graphic below represents, also in the national survey for RIA-AE networks mostly are formed from 1 to 50 employees (equal to 75% of the total) so that they can be identifiable with a small size.

⁴⁸<https://www.istat.it/it/files//2023/05/Censimento-non-profit-primi-risultati.pdf> (04/2024).

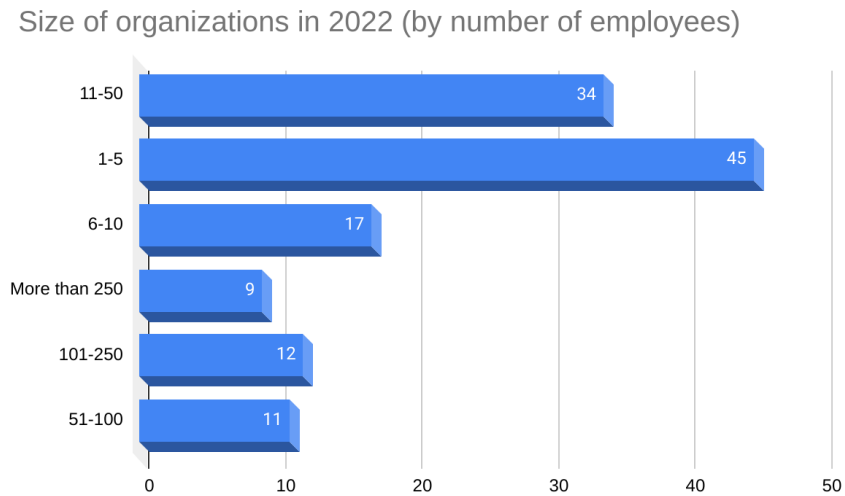
⁴⁹https://oa.inapp.org/xmlui/bitstream/handle/20.500.12916/4117/INAPP_Rapporto_2023.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y (04/2024).



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Graphical representation 3. Size of organisations in 2022 (by number of employees)



Out of a total of 145 respondents, only 32 organisations (equal to 22%) claim to employ more than 50 employees.

In order to give a general overview regarding the type of beneficiary organisations involved in the RIA network survey, we could define its preponderant identikit as a small non-profit association with an average of 30 employees.



3.2 The participation of the organisations involved

The survey submitted to the total 309 organisations was filled (either completely or partially, see section 2.3) by 145 of them. The overall response rate to the questionnaire was therefore 47%, as illustrated in Tab 1.

Tab 1. Distribution of organisations involved divided by key actions and response rate

Key Action	Total sample (a)	Complete surveys	Partial Surveys	Total answers (b)	Not received	Response rate (b)/(a) %
KA104	162	63	13	76	-86	47%
KA121	30	6	1	7	-23	23%
KA122	6	4		4	-2	67%
KA204	99	44	8	52	-47	53%
KA210	12	6		6	-6	50%
Total	309	123	22	145	-164	47%

Going into detail, the majority of both *total sample* (199) and *total answers* (87) of beneficiary organisations of RIA network are committed in KA1 activities in Erasmus+ programme. Specifically, KA104 registers a high level of spread (76 organisations equal to 52,4% of total): it consists of training opportunities abroad for all personnel involved in adult education, who can choose a learning activity linked to their own professional activity (Tab 1 and Graph 4). On the other hand, the same KA represents the part with most not received surveys (86), undermining the representativeness of the survey itself. At the same time, KA204 consists in the realisation of strategic partnerships for innovation and the exchange of good practices, and it also represents a very big part of the sample (almost $\frac{1}{3}$ equal to 99). In this case too, a low response rate is registered.

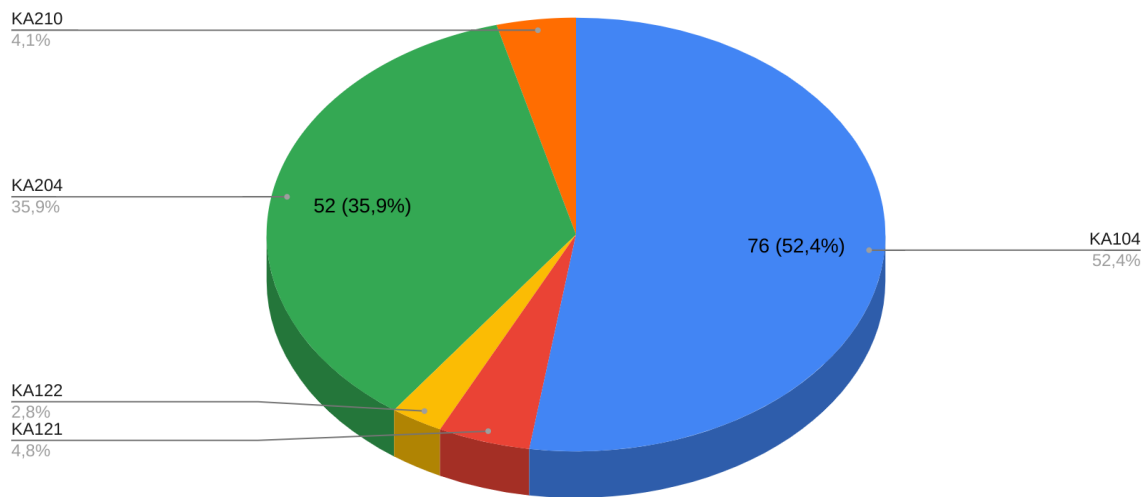


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Graphical representation 4. Percentage and number of responding organisations specified by Key Action

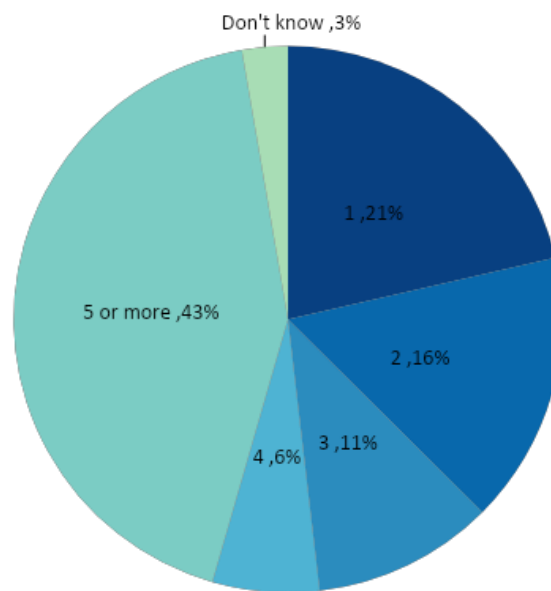
Percentage and number of responding organizations specified by Key Action





One of the points of strength of the Italian RIA network is, undoubtedly, the great experience the beneficiary organisations bring in Erasmus+ programmes. Graph 5 below shows 43% of them participated in at least 5 KA1 and KA2 projects from 2018 even though a big part is also represented by organisations with only 1 project on their shoulders.

Graphical representation 5. Number and percentage of KA1 and KA2 projects within the Erasmus+ programme have the organisations participated

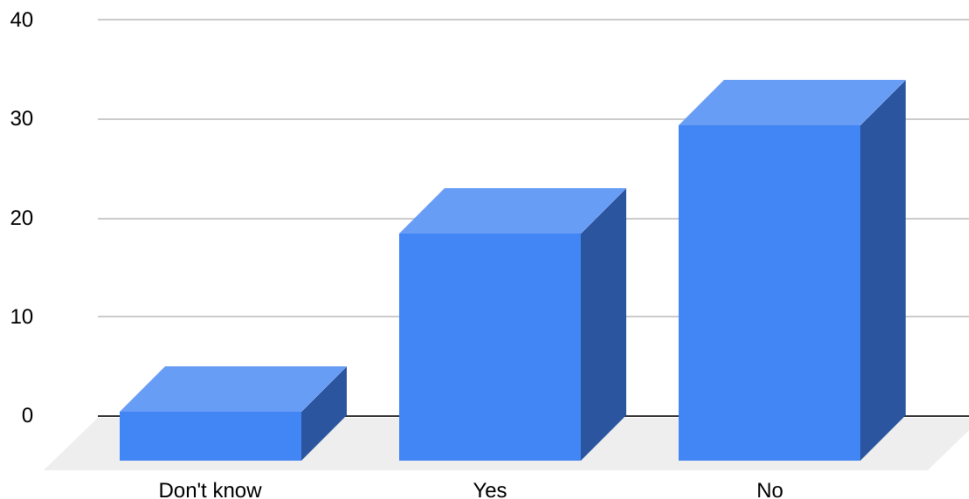


Value	Percent	Count
1	21.4%	30
2	16.1%	23
3	10.7%	15
4	6.3%	7
5 or more	42.9%	65
Don't know	2.7%	5
	Totals	145

On the other hand, despite the big experience spread through the Italian RIA network, nowadays only a few part of the respondents declare to currently hold an Erasmus+ accreditation for mobility in adult education (Graph 6). The largest part of non-respondents concerns consortium members (probably due to their lack of habit of responding on project management). Excluding the consortium members, 53 organisations responses out of 85, equal to 62%. This apparent contradiction is considered very important to deepen because the Italian expertise for mobility in adult education is not sufficiently enhanced in the formal dimension.

Graphical representation 6. Number of organisations currently hold an Erasmus+ accreditation for mobility in adult education

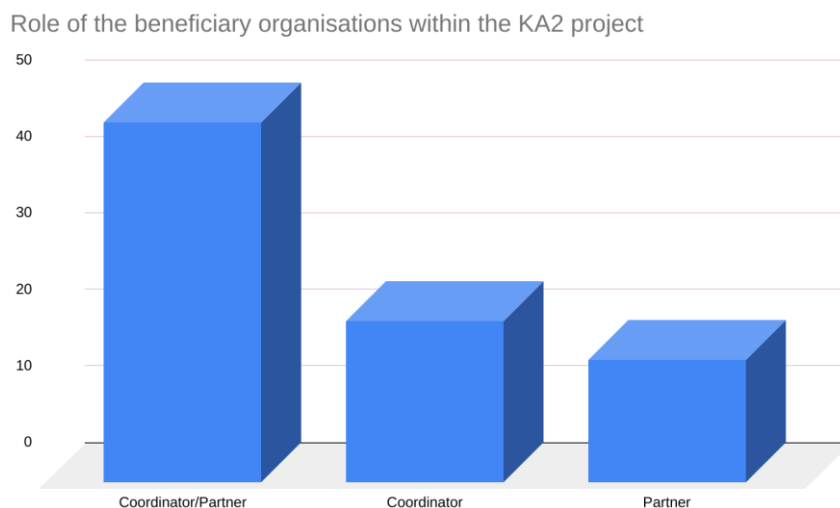
Number of organisations currently hold an Erasmus+ accreditation for mobility in adult education



The characteristics of leadership inherent to Italian sample in European adult education activities is confirmed by data illustrating the role of the beneficiary organisations within the KA2 project (Graph 7). Almost the totality of the organisations involved in the survey has developed their activities mainly as coordinator; this did not exclude the possibility of taking on the role of partner in other KA projects.

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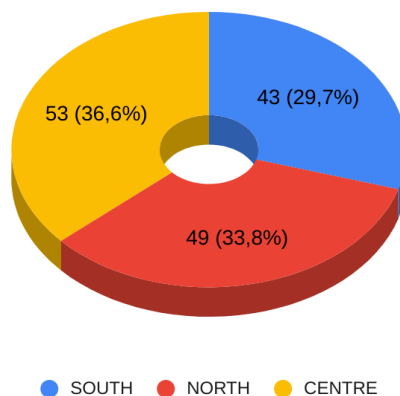
Graphical representation 7. Role of the beneficiary organisations within the KA2 project



From a geographical point of view (Graph 8), the spread of Erasmus+ Adult Education is quite balanced through the internal social, economical, and environmental diversity of Italy. The centre of the Country counts on some little more beneficiary organisations although the Northern part register for many years a relevant part of the associations existing in Italy.

Graphical representation 8. Percentage and number of organisations involved in Erasmus+ AE projects identified by geographical area in Italy

Percentage and Number of Organizations involved in Erasmus+ AE Projects identified by geographical area in Italy





3.3 Completeness and partiality of the submitted surveys

The survey spread through the RIA network, shared by email, is composed of 35 questions of which 21 are open ones. Some of the closed questions foresee the possibility to add comments and other useful elements for completing the response. That’s why, as illustrated in tab 2, the total number of possible responses is 49. Consistent with the aim of the survey, the majority of open questions focus on challenges and opportunities in participating in Erasmus+ projects.

Survey structure	
<i>Open questions</i>	
a. comments with reply (optional)	9
b. Section “Other” with answer (optional)	4
c. What factors hampered or stimulated the take up and use of outputs and products developed with the support of Erasmus+ since 2018?	1
d. Can you give a concrete example showing that participation in one or more Erasmus+ projects since 2018 has permanently strengthened your learning offer to adult learners/ participants?	1
e. Can you give a concrete example of how participation in one or more Erasmus+ projects since 2018 has improved the quality of staff in your organisation?	1
f. Can you give a concrete example that shows that participation in Erasmus+ has had an impact on learners?	1
g. What is the biggest obstacle or barrier for your organisation to participate in Erasmus+?	1
h. What prevents you from planning mobility activities for adult learners in the framework of a future KA1 project?	1
i. What has been the greatest benefit to yourself and/or your organisation after participating in Erasmus+?	1
l. Please provide your contact details below, so the research team can contact you for an interview	1
Total open questions	21
Total closed questions	28
Total possible responses	49

Tab 2. Survey structure



The survey was sent to the beneficiary organisations the RIA network 2 times 14 days apart. Tables 3 and 4, respectively, show the data cleaning of the first and second phase of the survey. From a general point of view, it can be seen that while the survey in the first wave, the total number of responses amounted to 128 (of which 105 were complete, 7 partial and 16 null), in the second wave these increased by almost 12% reaching a final total of 145 total responses (of which 117 were complete, 11 partial and 17 null).

Tab 3. Total responses 1st wave

Total responses 1st wave	128
1. number of completed surveys	105
2. number of null surveys	16
3. number of partial surveys	7
From partial surveys, focus on	
3.1. number of no filled questions/items (no answer)	153
3.2. average unfulfilled items per partial filled surveys	21,8
3.3. not applicable items per partial filled surveys	4
3.4. incomplete answers in partially filled surveys	1
4. Open questions items	
a. comments with answers (optional)	34
b. number of respondents entering at least 1 comment	23
c. Section “Other” (optional)	25
d. Number of organisations filling in at least in 1 section “Other”	22

Tab 4. Total responses 2nd wave

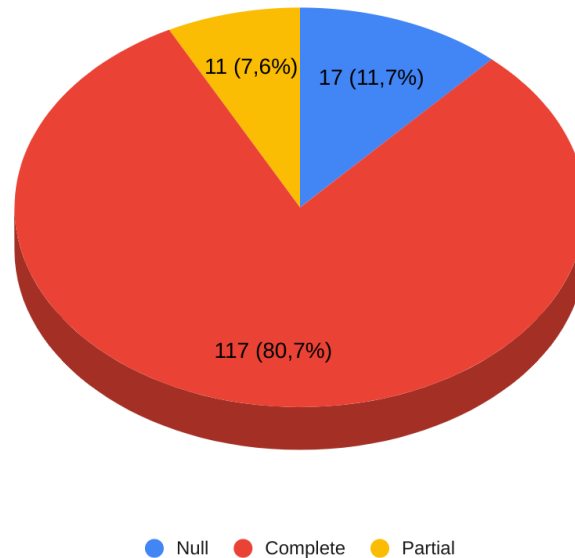
Total responses 2nd wave	17
1. number of completed surveys	12
2. number of null surveys	1
3. number of partial surveys	4
From partial surveys, focus on	
3.1. number of questions/items that are unfinished i.e. without any answers	83
3.2. average unfulfilled items per partial filled surveys	20,75
3.3. not applicable items per partial filled surveys	0
3.4. incomplete answers in partially filled surveys	0
4. Open questions items	
a. comments with answers (optional)	0
b. number of respondents entering at least 1 comment	0
c. Section “Other” (optional)	3
d. Number of organisations filling in at least in 1 section “Other”	2
e. Number of respondents entering new data from 1st to 2nd wave	23
e1. From null to partial	5
e2. From partial to complete	6
e.3. From null to complete	12

Specifically, it's easy to note from the two tables above, the average unfulfilled items per partial filled surveys remains stable in both surveys, despite the large difference of the single amounts. Deeping the analysis of the surveys, mostly unfilled items are represented by open questions. Infact, the number of open questions and the average of unfilled items per partial survey coincide. Lastly, it's important to underline that the number of respondents entering new data from the first to second survey are totally 23.

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Graphical representation 9. Completeness and partiality of the submitted surveys

Completeness and partiality of the submitted surveys



Of the 145 respondents, 117 (equal to 80,7%) completed the survey while only 11 partially filled it. Concurrently, 17 of them merely accessed the form without filling any field (called, in graph 9, null surveys equal to 11,7%). As regards the optional answers as comments and the so-called “Other” sections, 62 times have been totally filled (34 comments and 28 “Other” sections). From a general perspective, the majority of them have been filled in the first half of the survey while in the second one they have been often left empty.

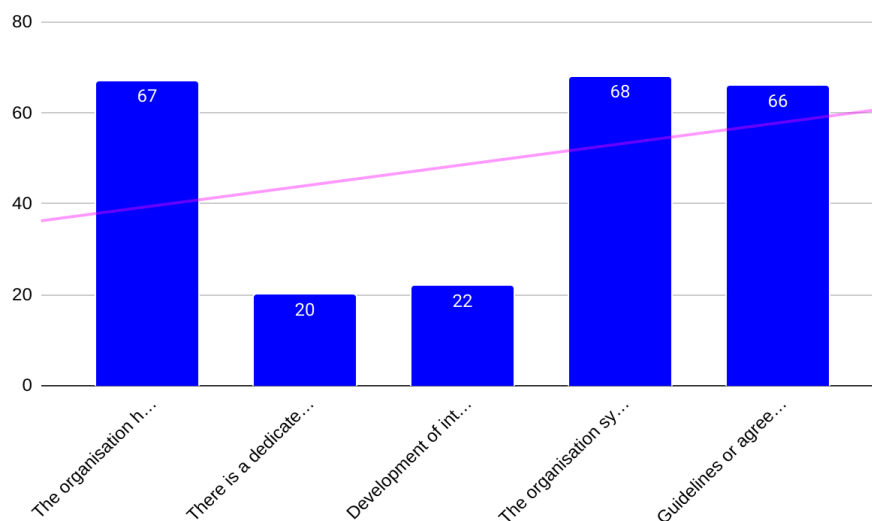


4. The organisations involved: an overview of the survey

4.1 Facilitating factors in the internationalisation process

Section 2 of the survey regards the Impact of Erasmus+ Projects on Internationalisation of the organisations involved in the RIA network. As it is shown both in graph 10 and tab 5, the Italian sample appears to be fairly homogeneous in identifying the main facilitating factors in the internationalisation process respectively in participation in international networks and internationalisation activities, having a policy/ strategy for internationalisation such as processes in place to manage international projects. Only a few of the Italian organisations involved in the network were declared, as main factors for their internationalisation process, a dedicated budget for internationalisation activities and development of international competences discussed in performance appraisals and career talks (respectively 20 and 22 selections). It's important to underline that multiple responses, in this part of the survey, are allowed.

Graphical representation 10. Main facilitating factors in the internationalisation process. Number of selections by organisation



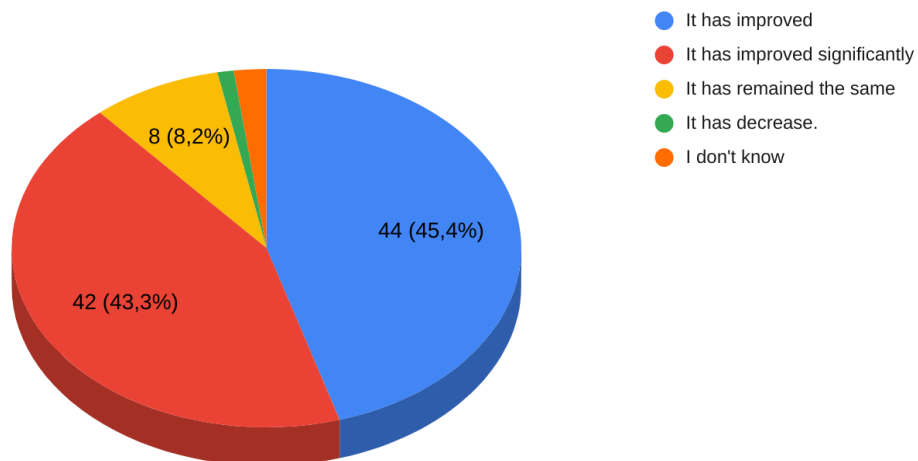
Tab 5. Main facilitating factors in the internationalisation process. Number of selections by organisation

Main facilitating factors in the internationalisation process	
The organisation has a policy/ strategy for internationalisation	67
There is a dedicated budget for internationalisation activities	20
Development of international competences is discussed in performance appraisals and career talks (e.g. as part of a personal development plan)	22
The organisation systemically participates in international networks and internationalisation activities	68
Guidelines or agreed processes are in place how to manage international projects (e.g. design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation)	66

By the way, according to the same sample their internal internationalisation processes are improved (88,7% of them declare that).

Graphical representation 11. Evaluation of conditions within organisations to facilitate internationalisation processes

Evaluation of conditions within organisations to facilitate internationalisation processes





Consistently with the previous data, almost the entirety of the Italian respondents state that their organisation is more aware of the added value of international projects by participating in Erasmus+ programme. Furthermore, a large part of them (89,8%) identifies the improvement in management of international projects as one of the main impacts of participating in Erasmus+. This is followed by having a better strategy for internationalisation within their organisation (88%).

Tab. 6. Response rate about impact of participation in Erasmus+ since 2018 on the organisational embedding of internationalisation within Italian organisations

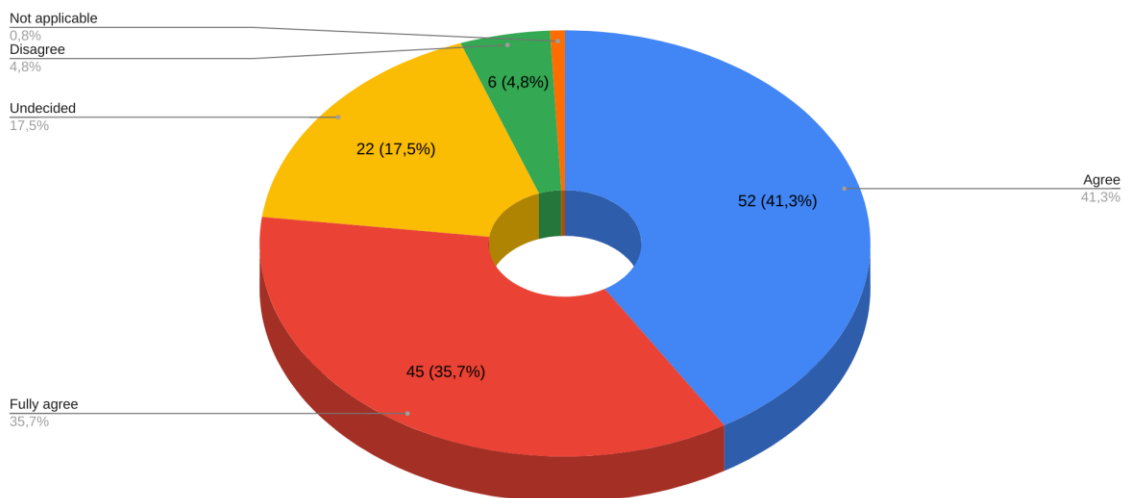
By participating in Erasmus+ ...	Response rate
our organisation is more aware of the added value of international projects	99,2% agrees
our organisation is more aware of the added value of international projects	77% agrees
there is a better strategy for internationalisation within our organisation	88% agrees
there is more support for internationalisation activities for our volunteers within our organisation	58,7% agrees
there is more support for internationalisation for our adult learners within our organisations	79,3% agrees
there is increased funding for internationalisation within our organisation	51,9% agrees
HR/ staff policy for internationalisation within our organisation has been strengthened	66,9% agrees
the management of international projects (design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation) has been improved	89,8% agrees
the international network of our organisation has been strengthened	88,2% agrees

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Specifically, it's important to note as the 77% of the respondents consider to have more awareness of the added value of international projects after participating in Erasmus+ Projects (graph 12).

Graphical representation 12. Italian organisations considering to have more awareness of the added value of international projects after participating in Erasmus+ Projects

Organisations are more aware of the added value of international projects



In the same way, a large number of the Italian organisations (about 89% of them) consider to have a better strategy for internationalisation after participating in Erasmus+ Projects (graph 13). 75% of them, in addition, think to have more support for adult learners once having acted as coordinator or partner in Erasmus+ (graph 15). A lower consensus is registered regarding the support for internalisation activities for their volunteers (graph 14).

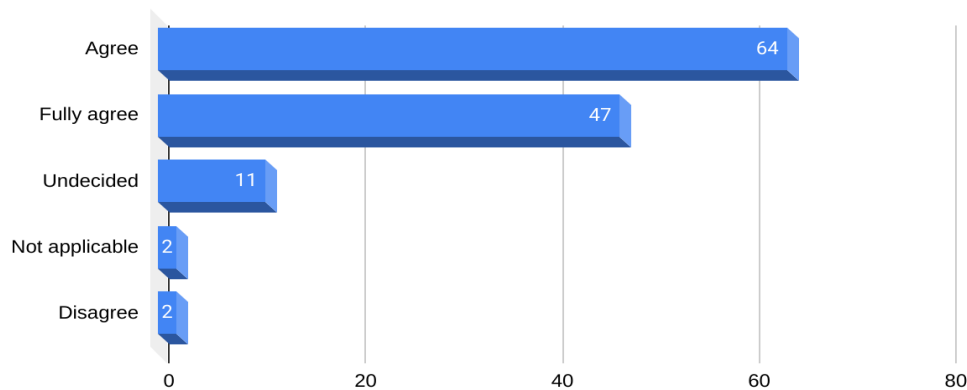


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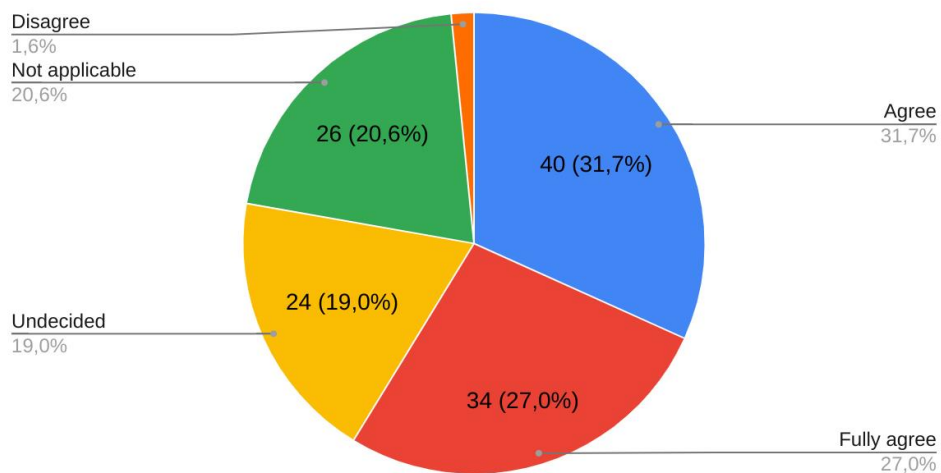
Graphical representation 13. Italian organisations considering to have a better strategy for internationalisation after participating in Erasmus+ Projects

There is a better strategy for internationalisation within Italian organisations



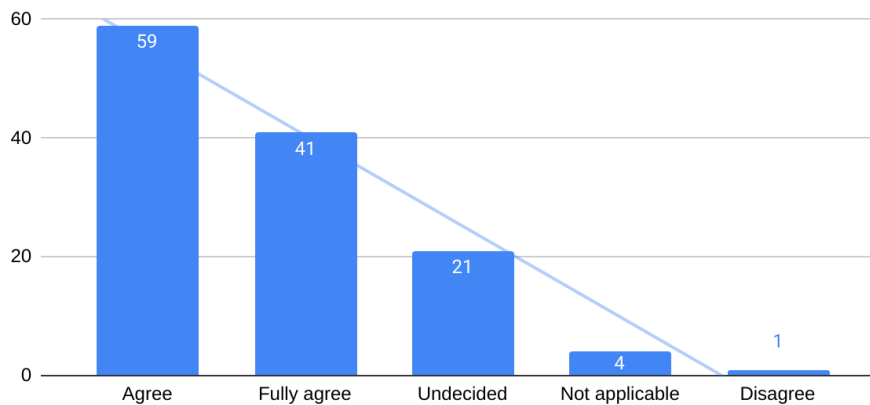
Graphical representation 14. Italian organisations considering to have more support for internationalisation activities for their volunteers after participating in Erasmus+ Projects

There is more support for internationalisation activities for our volunteers within Italian organisations



Graphical representation 15. Italian organisations considering to have more support for adult learners after participating in Erasmus+ Projects

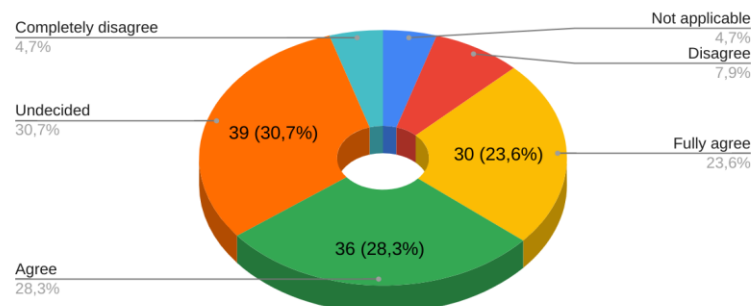
There is more support for internationalisation for our adult learners within Italian organisations



Represented below are all the results for the other statements selected by respondents regarding the presumed impact on their organisation as a result of participating in Erasmus+ projects (graph 16, 17, 18 and 19). Of these, improving the management of international projects (89,8%) and strengthening the international network (90%) resulting from participation in erasmus+ activities appear to have higher adherence among Italian respondents as the other main internal benefits. On the opposite side, a lower positive rate is registered regarding the item called “strengthening HR/staff policy” (graph 17).

Graphical representation 16. Italian organisations considering to have increased funding for internationalisation after participating in Erasmus+ Projects

There is increased funding for internationalisation within Italian organisations

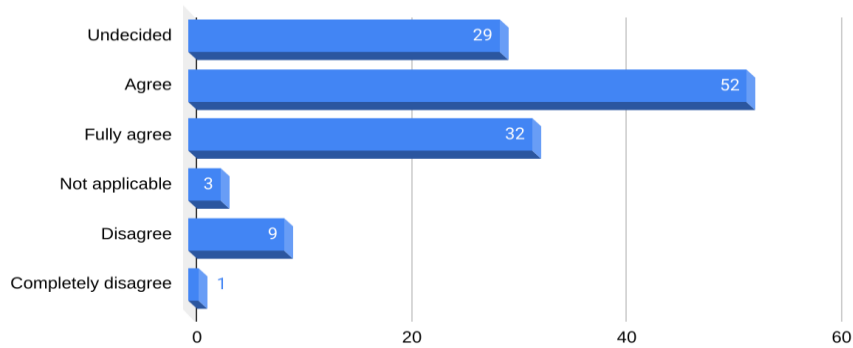




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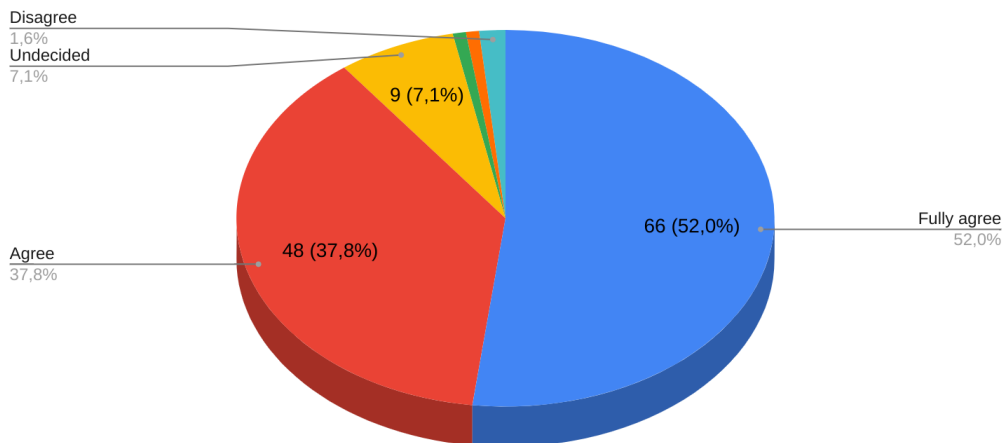
Graphical representation 17. Italian organisations considering to have strengthened HR/staff policy after participating in Erasmus+ Projects

HR/ staff policy for internationalisation within Italian organisations has been strengthened



Graphical representation 18. Italian organisations considering to have improved the management of international projects (design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation) after participating in Erasmus+ Projects.

The management of international projects has been improved

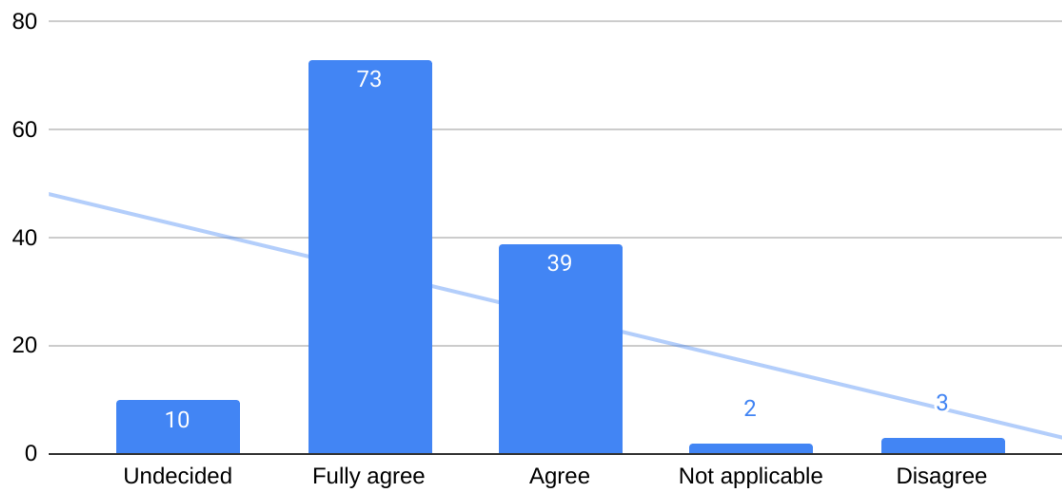




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Graphical representation 19. Italian organisations considering to have strengthened the international network after participating in Erasmus+ Projects

The international network of Italian organisations has been strengthened



4.2 Facilitating factors for horizontal priorities

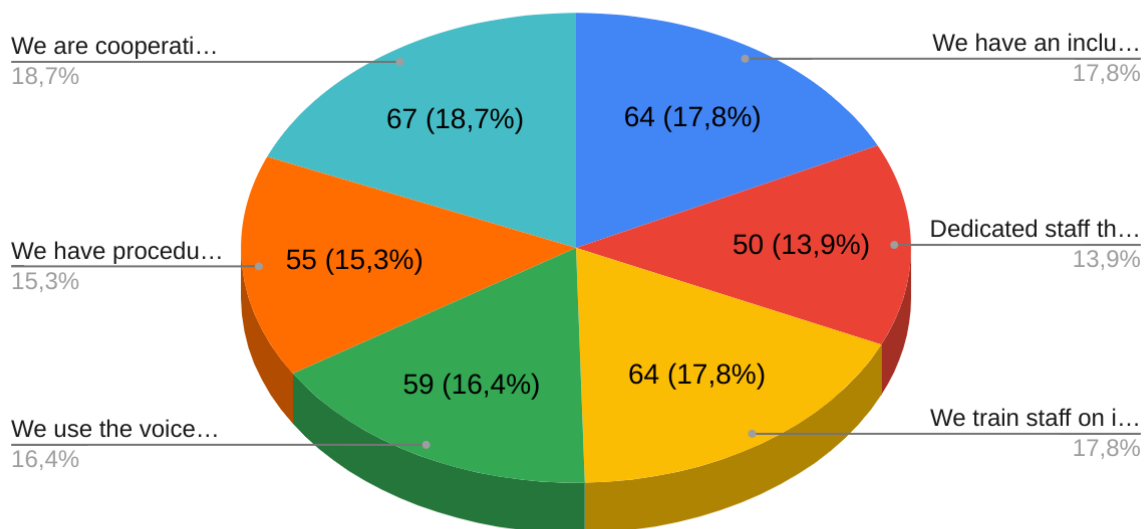
On the subject of the Impact of Erasmus+ Projects on Internationalisation of the organisations involved in the RIA network, it's important to underline the facilitating factor for horizontal priorities such as inclusion and diversity, digital transformation, green transition and participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement. As shown in the graphs and tabs represented below, digital resources for teaching and learning activities and offering activities that activate democratic participation of learners are the main facilitating factor for promoting the horizontal integration priorities among the organisations involved.

It's important to underline that multiple responses, in this part of the survey, are allowed.

Tab 7. organisational conditions in place facilitating inclusion and diversity. Number of selections by organisation

organisational conditions in place facilitating inclusion and diversity	
We have an inclusion and diversity strategy and action plan	64
Dedicated staff that is responsible for the coordination, communication and implementation of inclusion and diversity activities	50
We train staff on inclusion and diversity	64
We use the voice of the learners for developing, monitoring and evaluating our offer	59
We have procedures in place to assure our training offer is inclusive	55
We are cooperating with other organisations that support participants with fewer opportunity	67

Graphical representation 20. organisational conditions in place facilitating inclusion and diversity. Number of selections by organisation

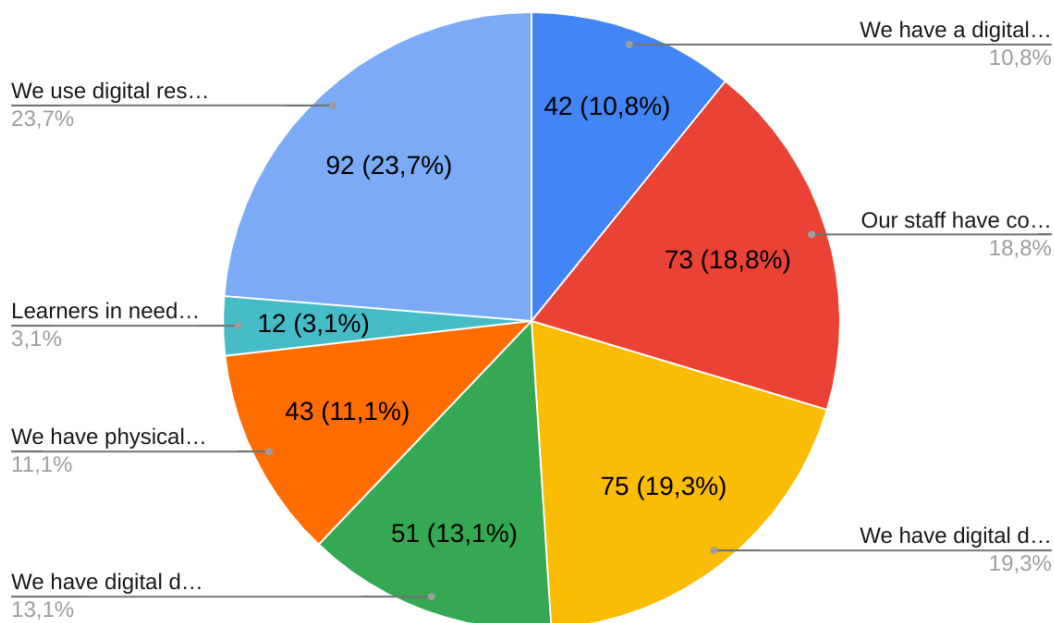




Tab 8. organisational conditions in place facilitating digital transformation. Number of selections by organisation

Organisational conditions in place facilitating digital transformation	
We have a digital strategy and action plan	42
Our staff have continuing professional development opportunities in the use of digital technologies	73
We have digital devices to use for teaching	75
We have digital devices for learners	51
We have physical spaces that support teaching and learning with digital technologies	43
Learners in need of special support have access to assistive technologies	12
We use digital resources for teaching and learning activities	92

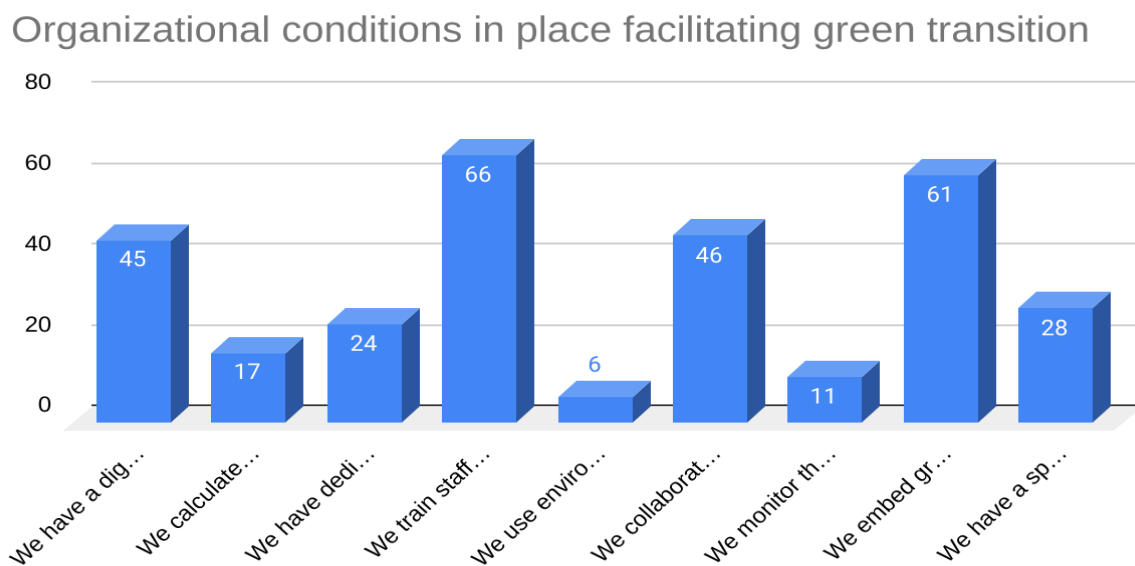
Graphical representation 21. organisational conditions in place facilitating digital transformation. Number of selections by organisation



Tab 9. organisational conditions in place facilitating green transition. Number of selections by organisation

organisational conditions in place facilitating green transition	
We have a digital strategy and action plan	45
We calculate our environmental footprint	17
We have dedicated staff that is responsible for the coordination, communication and implementation of the greening / sustainability strategy	24
We train staff on good environmental practices	66
We use environmental certifications/ecolabels	6
We collaborate with organisations/individuals to strengthen sectoral capacity to operate more sustainably	46
We monitor the implementation of greening strategy and plan	11
We embed green skills in our learning offer	61
We have a specific training offer for green skills	28

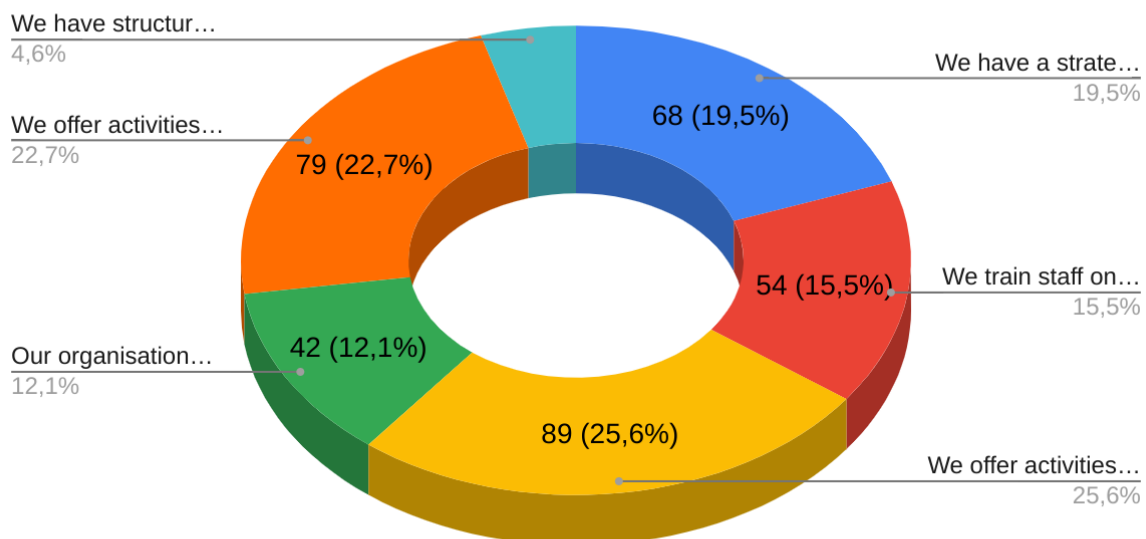
Graphical representation 22. organisational conditions in place facilitating green transition. Number of selections by organisation



Tab 10. organisational conditions in place facilitating participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement. Number of selections by organisation

organisational conditions in place facilitating participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement. Number of selections by organisation	
We have a strategy for promoting active citizenship and democracy	68
We train staff on active citizenship	54
We offer activities that empower learners to develop and express own opinions	89
Our organisation offers spaces to learners in which they can take/experience responsibility	42
We offer activities, that activate democratic participation of learners	79
We have structures in place that allow learners to influence the learning offer (e.g. learners council)	16

Graphical representation 23. organisational conditions in place facilitating participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement. Number of selections by organisation



4.3 Topics development and participation in Erasmus + projects

The participation of the organisations in Erasmus+ projects are a sort of watershed in the history and development of many of them, as seen in the previous graphical representations. This kind of experience offers the opportunity to make each participant organisation more aware about the international overview of adult education. This aspect facilitates, therefore, not only the development and growth of factors and characteristics already present in every single organisation but, above all, encourages and fosters the emerging of new issues of interest, till then left unknown.

Tab 11. Topics of interest after participating in Erasmus+ Projects

Topics of interest after participating in Erasmus+ Projects	
Digital skills	69
Greening and fight against climate change	49
Media literacy	35
Inclusion and diversity	91
Active citizenship, democratic participation, civic and social engagement	78
Preventing racism and discrimination	43
European values	68
Connection between education and the labour market	33
Outreach/ recruitment of learners	12
Inclusive learning environment	49
Differentiation while supervising or teaching	11
Teaching/ learning with digital technologies	282
Work-based learning and apprenticeships	18
Validation of prior learning	24
Assessment and examination learning outcomes	4
Motivation and well-being of learners	49
Quality assurance	18
Professional development of staff	51
Networking/ learning partnerships with other organisations	69



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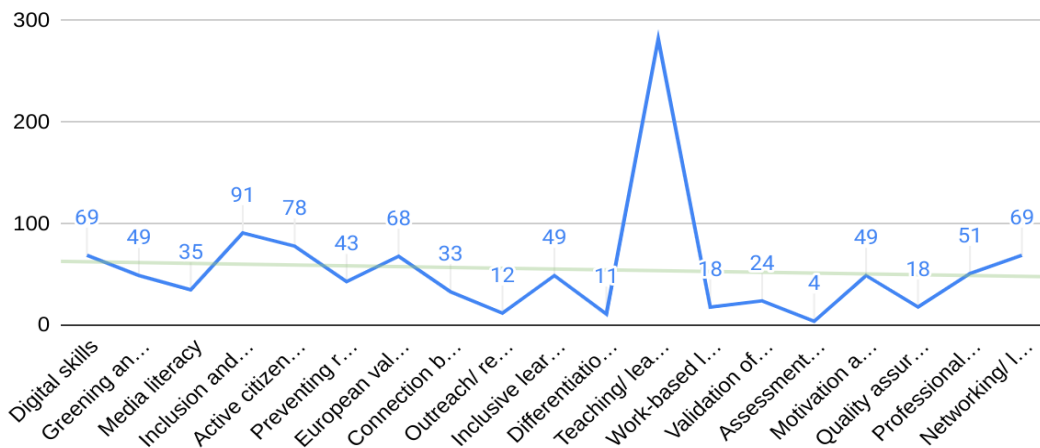
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As it clearly shows in tab 11 and graph 24, the main topic of interest arose after participating in Erasmus+ is represented by teaching/ learning with digital technologies (292 selections from the respondents). Also inclusion and diversity as well as active citizenship, democratic participation, civic and social engagement registered a high amount of selections, despite the big difference with the first topic mentioned above.

Graphical representation 24. Topics of interest after participating in Erasmus+ Project. Number of selections by organisation

Topics of interest after participating in Erasmus+ Project.
Number of selections by organization





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5. The *Adult learners* involved in the survey

5.1 Type, size and groups of adult learners involved

In order to specify the category of learners involved into the *Erasmus+* projects, it is necessary to underline the definition of adult learners, as highlighted in the questionnaire annex:

“An adult learner is any adult who, having completed or being no longer involved in initial education or training, returns to some forms of non-vocational continuing learning (formal, non-formal or informal)”.

The question number 12, in section 1 of the questionnaire, identifies the type of adult learners involved into the Erasmus+ research. On the basis of what is shown in the survey, the type of adult learners involved belong to heterogeneous categories:

From the Tab 12 and the graph 25 below reported, it is possible to count 22 different categories of adults who were targeted by the organisations Erasmus+ projects since 2018.

It is evident that young adults represent the main typology among them, followed by migrants and women.

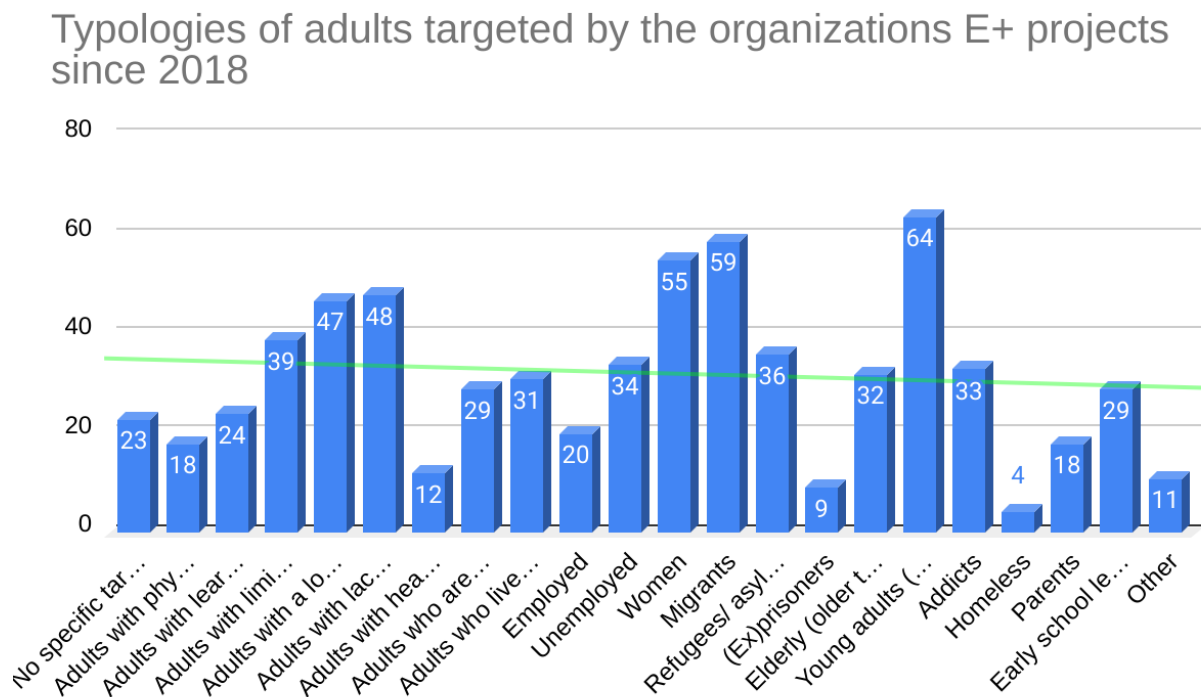


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Tab 12. Typologies of adults targeted by the organisations E+ projects since 2018

No specific target group adults	23
Adults with physical or mental disabilities	18
Adults with learning difficulties	24
Adults with limited income	39
Adults with a low level of education	47
Adults with lacking basic skills	48
Adults with health problems	12
Adults who are discriminated	29
Adults who live in a peripheral area	31
Employed	20
Unemployed	34
Women	55
Migrants	59
Refugees/ asylum seekers	36
(Ex)prisoners	9
Elderly (older then 65 years)	32
Young adults (15-29 years old)	64
Addicts	33
Homeless	4
Parents	18
Early school leavers, NEETs	29
Other	11

Graphical representation 25. Categories of adults who were targeted by the organisations Erasmus+ projects' since 2018.



5.2. Distribution, number of adult learners participating in KA1/KA2 activities promoted

The following graph (Graphical representation 26) shows the distribution of adult learners who took part in learning activities provided by organisations in 2022, according to the data reported in the questionnaire. In these terms, each organisation has provided the range numbers of adult learners who participated in learning activities, it includes a range between: 0, 1-10, 11-50, 51-100, 101-250, more than 250. As it is below illustrated, the majority of number of adults learners involved in the learning activities results within the range of *more than 250* participants, as 42 organisations responded (42 equal to 32,6%), followed by another large part of 39 respondents organisations which counted with the range between *11-50* adult learners



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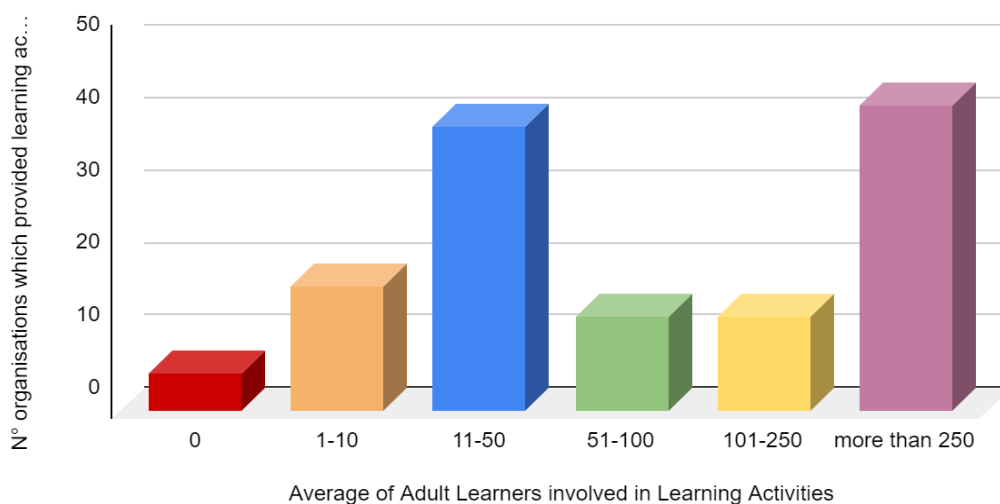
(39 equal to 30,2%). Other 17 organisations which have responded to the Italian survey included the range of 1-10 (17 equal to 13,2%). It was interesting to note that targeted group ranges of 51-100 and 101-250 showed the same sample of 13 organisations, equal to 10,1%. Last considered data, in terms of adult learners involved in learning activities, is related to the 5 organisations which responded that 0 adult learners took part in their learning activities, a number equal to 3,9% of the total.

Tab 13. Adult learners involved in learning activities and Number of Respondents Organisations which provided those in 2022.

Adult Learners involved in learning activities	Respondents Organisations which provided learning activities
0	5
1-10	17
11-50	39
51-100	13
101-250	13
more than 250	42

Graphical representation 26. Distribution of adult learners involved in learning activities provided by organisations in 2022

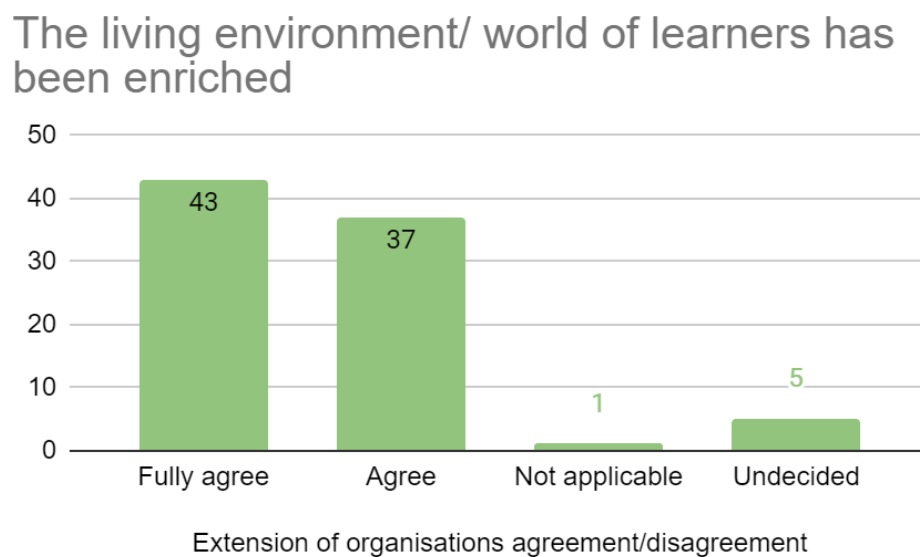
Distribution of adult learners involved in learning activities provided by organisations in 2022



5.3 Who are the Adult Learners of the research?

According to the data reported above, the identikit of adult learners involved in learning activities promoted by the Italian organisations participating in Erasmus + project is a young migrant woman lacking basic skills (see tab. 12 and graph 25). In fact, as it shows previously, the Erasmus + in Italy has attracted the currently economically disadvantaged social classes, who often don't enjoy the same political rights and opportunities compared with the rest of the citizens. In addition, the majority of the organisations participating in the Erasmus + projects, in spite of the majority of them, as seen previously, are composed of few personnel (see graph 3), have involved more than 250 adult learners (see graph 26), confirming the great potential the Erasmus + projects can have. Moreover, the research demonstrates that the impact of participation in Erasmus+ since 2018 on adult learners living conditions has been significant, as it showed below:

Graphical representation 27. The living environment/ world of the organisations learners has been enriched.



As it can be seen from the above graph, the majority of organisations (43) which responded to the survey *fully agreed* that since the Erasmus + project started their adult learners have benefited from the intellectual output(s) developed or insights and experiences gained from



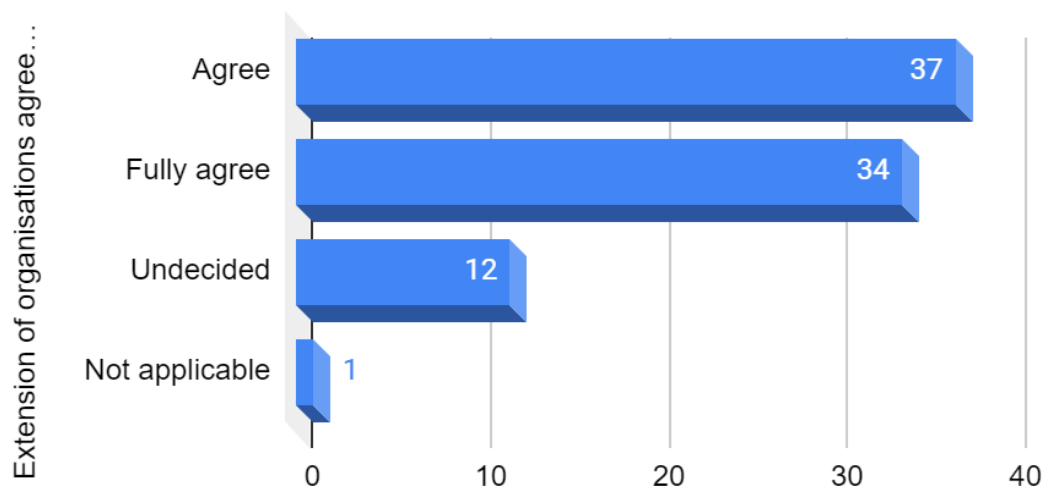
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Erasmus+ support. Nevertheless, 37 organisations *agreed* on the same statement. Among the Italian respondents, only 5 organisations stated to feel *undecided* in regard to this matter and only 1 organisation was deemed *not applicable* in response.

Considering the description of who adult learners have become after receiving the direct or indirect impact of the Erasmus+ projects, the following Graph. 28 illustrates how and if learners have gained new social contacts outside of their own environment. Almost the entire of the Italian respondents *agree* or *fully agree* on the requested statement (respectively 34 equal to 44% and 37 equal to 40,5%), whereas in this a considerable small portion felt *undecided* (12 equal to 14,3%) and only 1 organisation found it not applicable (equal to 1,2%).

Graphical representation 28. Learners have gained new social contacts outside of their own environment

Learners have gained new social contacts outside of their own environment



Taking into consideration the data collected in the survey, it can be noticed that the evolution of participation in activities in the Adult learners environment has improved, since more than half of the Italian respondents stated positively to the question. Indeed, of the 145 respondents, 54,8% *agree* or *fully agree* (20 equal to 23,8%) and, on this basis, it is evident the only few respondents were *undecided* or thought it wasn't *applicable*.

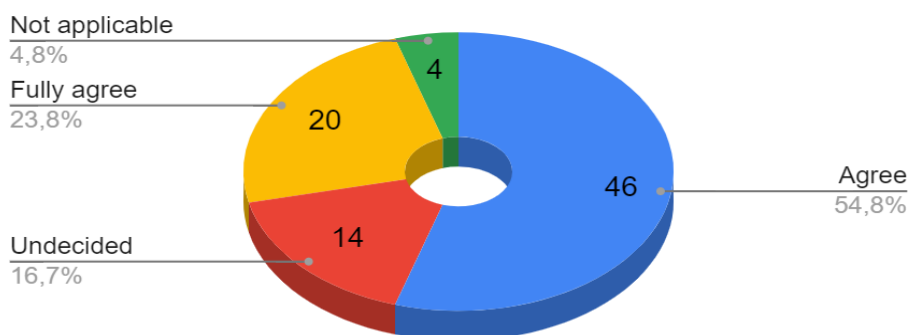


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In the following graphs represented below, are shown all the results for the other statement selected by the beneficiary organisations (graph 29, 30, 31, 32). Globally, the tendency of respondents has a majority in agreeing or fully agreeing on the statements, even though it shows a balance of 33% of both *undecided* and *agree* when among Italian respondents is contemplated the idea that adult learners have become more assertive after participating to Erasmus+ projects (see graph 30).

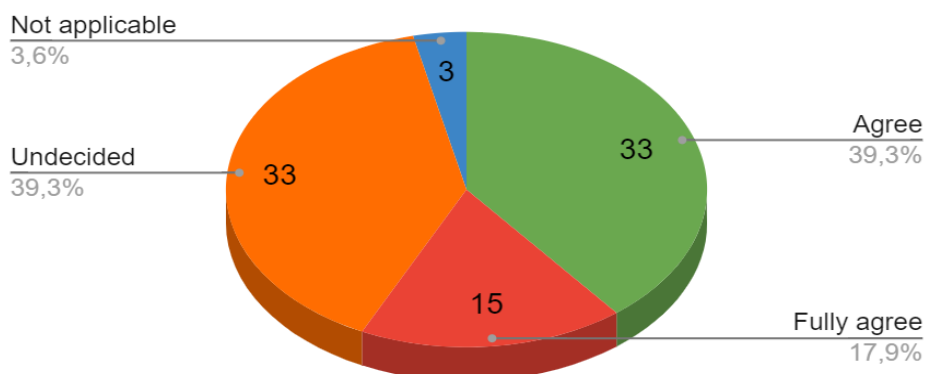
Graphical representation 29. Learners have started to participate more in activities in their own environment

Learners have started to participate more in activities in their own environment



Graphical representation 30. Learners have become more assertive

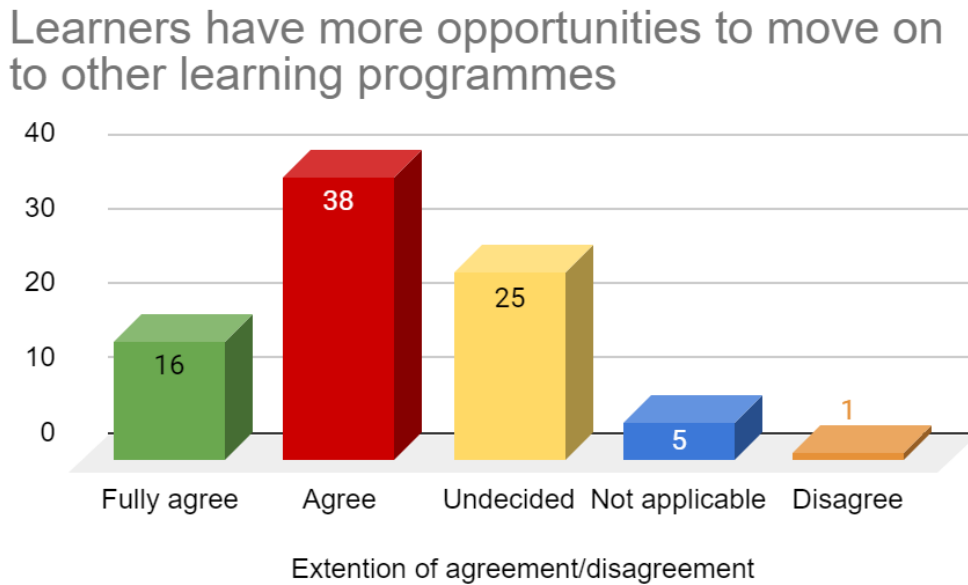
Learners have become more assertive



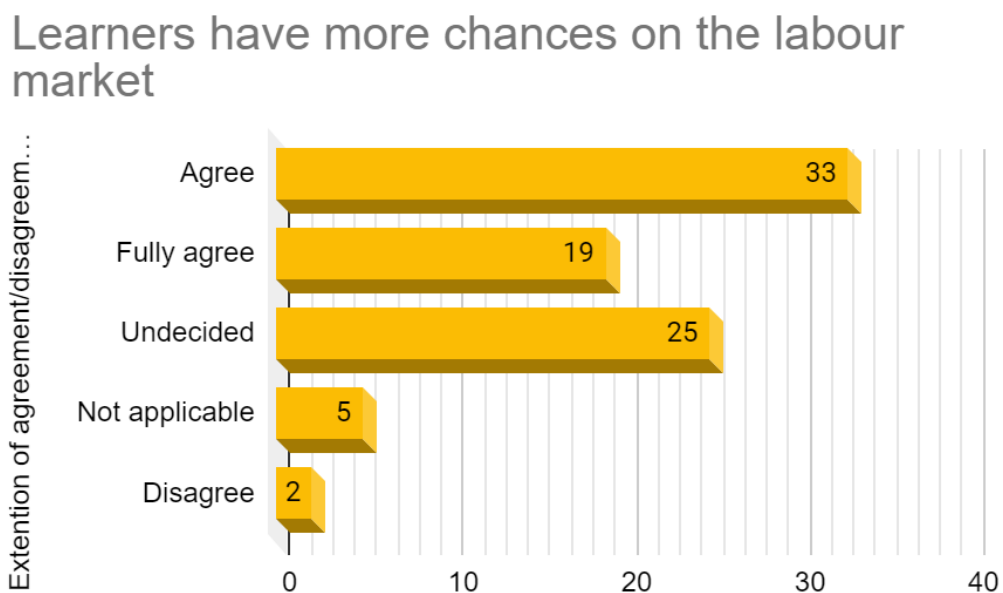


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Graphical representation 31. Learners have more opportunities to move on to other learning programmes



Graphical representation 32. Learners have more chances on the labour market





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6. Actions following the interpretative analysis

6.1 The description of the data: first obstacles and limits

The RIA-AE network projects aim's of establishing cooperation between National Agencies of the Erasmus+ from different European countries deserves to also set the intention of long-term improvement in the aspects in which could be presented natural and unavoidable limits and obstacles. With the purpose of bringing interest in developing and boosting a innovative approach to the programme, and in order to value the importance of the research itself, giving the contribution to the Erasmus+ programme is also an Italian responsibility by sharing an interpretative description to the analysis framework and ensure its long-term life and enrichment in all considerable terms.

First of all, it is necessary to consider that the survey submitted to the total 309 organisations was filled (either completely or partially, see section 2.3) by 145 of them. This data shows the limit of not having a wide perspective of the real impact of the Erasmus+ programme in Italian territory, because it keeps out all the cases which would actually have different results. At the same time, the same data creates a wonder regarding the reason why those unrespondent organisations haven't replied to the questionnaire. The Italian research group made some assumptions in respect to this matter, considering that the survey takes under consideration a range of time which goes from 2018 to 2022, a remarkable aspect which guides to think different obstacles that beneficiaries could have lived as a reason of no response, between which:

- The survey refers to the period 2018-2023: some organisations could have disbanded during these years or have changed their sources of funding;
- The pandemic period, which has created a era before and after between which many aspects regarding the management of the projects have changes or the knowledge of some information may have been lost or not detectable;



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- The possible turn over of the project managers in charge for the projects supervision which didn't allow organisations to provide exhaustive answers, leaving many part of the questionnaire incomplete;
- Contextualising the working environment of the organisations, it might be that the length of the questionnaire was elevated in order for the organisations to be able to respond in time;
- As Italian research group, the consideration of the limited time provided to involve the organisations, organise the amount of work and being able to respect the deadline for the submission of the requested documents.

This kind of awareness development can represent the intention to make future sound actions for the benefits of the Erasmus+ programme itself which at all levels (macro, meso and micro) establish constructive indicators which improve the experience as an opportunity to make each stakeholder more aware and with meaningful impact.

6.2 Towards the development of the qualitative survey

In addition to the analysis of the available information at the NA and the survey, it is planned to carry out case studies at beneficiary organisations. Institutions are selected based on diversity of organisational characteristics and the results and impact patterns resulting from the survey, provided that they have indicated their willingness to participate in the case studies (additional question in the survey). Also the NA's are asked to suggest interesting case studies, based on their experiences with monitoring Erasmus+ projects over the years.

We propose to organise a minimum of 5 case studies, and maximum 10 case studies, depending on the budget available for implementing the national research study. Five case studies are the minimum to tell a story about the diversity of impacts of the programme. While selecting the case studies one need to take into account:

- Representativeness of type of beneficiary organisations (formal, non-formal, publicly and privately funded organisations; schools/charities/cultural institutions)
- Focus areas (Erasmus+ priorities and specific EU and national priorities for adult education)



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- Preference will be given to beneficiary organisations that have participated in several Erasmus+ projects (as applicants, active partners or associated partners) and have also recently completed an Erasmus+ project, so that they have an active reminder of the project results.
- Beneficiary organisations implementing an ongoing KA1 mobility action for adult learners (from 2021 onwards)
- The extent the organisation has a clear internationalisation policy (vision; strategy and plan)
- Geographically appropriate distribution (urban/ rural).

The case studies should include organisations that have finalised an Erasmus+ project, since experiences show that Erasmus+ projects have a long tail impact, since it takes time to mainstream intellectual outputs in policies and practices. Since the case studies serve as examples of impact stories of Erasmus+, the selection is based towards organisations that are considered a good practice in terms of relevancy in intellectual outputs developed and impact.

The case studies include three research activities:

- Analysis of the existing documentation of the NA on the institutions: applications, interim and final report; project deliverables/ outputs; evaluations; and statistics, if available)
- Conducting individual interviews (possibly group interviews) with:
 - Management/facility management (1 person)
 - Staff /volunteers (4 persons)
 - Adult learners (if possible)

The deskresearch and interviews will be analysed integrally and reported in a short report, impact portrait or inspiration report of 2-3 pages, structured around the headings of the interview template.

- General characteristics of the organisation
- Experience with Erasmus+, challenges addressed, and outputs created
- Impact at organisation, staff and learners level
- Wider impact (other organisations and policy level)
- Added value of Erasmus+
- Success and fail factors
- Need for additional support strengthening the impact of the programme

The interview partners will be selected in dialogue with the project coordinator/ manager of the beneficiary organisation.



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Conclusions

The European Union supports the educational, professional and personal development of participants in Europe and beyond through Erasmus+ programme, which is constituted of several international lines of actions.

The purpose of the Erasmus+ programme in adult learning is to strengthen the socio-economic resilience of adults who live in difficult conditions for changing their personal situation through educational opportunities. The adult learning sector distinguishes itself from other programme areas of the Erasmus+ programme. Moreover, there is a lack of national strategies for adult learning in many EU Member States as well as the case with primary, secondary and higher education. Adult education addresses a wide range of different learning needs because of the high heterogeneity among the group of adult learners, which includes people with a lower level of education, little digital skills, a migration background, disabilities and older people.

All AE institutions that have participated as coordinators of KA1 and KA2 projects from 2018 onwards, have been invited to participate in an online survey in order to get a comprehensive picture of the impact of Erasmus+ on AE institutions.

The Italian survey involves a majority of organisations which belong to the category of non profit social enterprises (88 equal to 61% of the total), followed by organisations belonging to the public sector (44 equal to 30%). Among the Italian survey respondents, 12 organisations (equal to 9% of the total) come from the private sector. The beneficiary organisations participating in the national survey are mostly associations and CPIAs (Italian autonomous school institutions) which together account for more than 60%. Out of a total of 145 respondents, only 32 organisations (equal to 22%) assert to employ more than 50 employees.

The fillment of the survey submitted to the total 309 organisations came from 145 of them (either completely or partially, see section 2.3). In this respect, the overall response rate to the questionnaire was therefore 47% and, as Graph 5 shows, 43% of them participated in at least 5 KA1 and KA2 projects from 2018 even though a big part is also represented by organisations with only 1 project. Nevertheless, despite the big experience spread through the Italian RIA network, according to the data collected only a few part of the respondents declare to currently



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hold an Erasmus+ accreditation for mobility in adult education. The activities of the projects have been carried out by almost the totality of the organisations covering the position as coordinator; although this did not exclude the possibility of taking on the role of partner in other KA projects. The Graph 8 illustrates the geographical distribution of Erasmus+ Adult Education, which is quite balanced through the internal social, economical, and environmental diversity of Italy.

Comprehensively, the Italian sample appears to be fairly homogeneous in identifying the main facilitating factors in the internationalisation process respectively in participation, in international networks and internationalisation activities, having a policy/strategy for internationalisation such as processes in place to manage international projects. In this concern, according to the same sample their internal internationalisation processes are improved (88,7% of them declare that).

In accordance with the previous data, the added value of international projects by participating in Erasmus+ programme is positively perceived by almost the entirety of the Italian respondents. The internationalisation process in participation, in international networks and internationalisation activities represents the facilitating factors which in the survey resulted balanced, having a policy/ strategy for internationalisation such as processes in place to manage international projects. In general, also regarding the perception of the added value of international projects by participating in Erasmus+ programme, most Italian respondents state that their organisation is more aware. Specifically, it's important to stress as the 77% of the respondents consider to have more awareness of the added value of international projects after participating in Erasmus+ Projects. Certainly, taking into consideration the Italian respondents' perception about the importance of improving the management of international projects (89,8%) and strengthening the international network (90%) has a significant impact.

Another important factor which is valuable to mentioned again regards the subject of the Impact of Erasmus+ Projects on Internationalisation of the organisations involved in the Italian RIA network, because the facilitating factor for horizontal priorities such as inclusion and diversity, digital transformation, green transition and participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement. Not only this, but also peculiar to consider the digital resources for teaching and learning activities and offering activities, as elements which activate democratic participation of learners and being the main facilitating factor for promoting the horizontal integration priorities.



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It is highly remarkable what this kind of experience offers as a transnational impact which all stakeholders involved have to improve and facilitate in order to make the adult education sector the centre of a light that never ends, encouraging and fostering new interests and becoming a thicker net.

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