

Recommendations from the RIA-AE Network in Adult Education

Position Paper 2025

The Importance of Adult Education in the European Context

Adult education plays a **vital role** in enabling participation, promoting qualification, and strengthening democratic engagement—also and especially at the European level.

In the face of shared challenges such as digitalisation, labour shortages, and social transformation, adult learning **empowers people** to update their skills and actively contribute to shaping society.

Within a **European framework**, it promotes cross-border learning, supports shared values, and fosters social inclusion and equal opportunities throughout the EU.

Erasmus+: A motivator for Innovation and Inclusion in Adult Education

The EU programme Erasmus+ is a **cornerstone for advancing adult education** in Europe. It facilitates international cooperation, enables mobility for both learners and staff, and strengthens the quality and innovation capacity of educational institutions.

Professionals in adult education benefit from training opportunities, job shadowing, and international collaboration—contributing to their professional development and the institutional advancement of adult learning providers.

Erasmus+ is particularly important for learners with fewer opportunities. The programme explicitly promotes inclusion and equity by supporting access to learning for people with limited educational backgrounds, migrant experiences, disabilities, or from disadvantaged socioeconomic contexts. Participation in Erasmus+ projects can be transformative: it boosts learners' confidence, fosters intercultural understanding, and reinforces a sense of belonging to a diverse and democratic Europe. In this way, Erasmus+ helps break down educational barriers and strengthens social cohesion across the continent.

To reach these learners, **targeted support is needed**—such as funding for outreach, preparatory measures, and tailored mobility formats. Flexibility and trust in providers are essential for lowering access barriers and ensuring Erasmus+ becomes a tool for real inclusion.

Evidence from Research: Achievements and Challenges

Initial findings from the RIA-AE network (*Research-based Impact Analysis of Erasmus+ Adult Education Programmes*) confirm the significant achievements of Erasmus+ in adult education, as well as areas where the programme can grow further.

Achievements include the **wide reach of Erasmus+** across diverse adult education organisations and learner groups, as well as strong programme loyalty among beneficiaries once experienced the programme. Internationalisation is increasingly embedded within organisational strategies, and outputs developed through Erasmus+ projects are often integrated into regular educational offerings.

There is clear evidence that the **KA2 projects have strengthened the innovation capacity** of the adult learning sector in partner countries, across a wide range of topics—enhancing their adult learning offerings—that would not have been possible without Erasmus+ funding. Structures and dedicated funding arrangements to further develop the quality and effectiveness of adult learning are often lacking in European countries, highlighting the added value of Erasmus+ support in contributing to innovation efforts.

Projects contribute significantly to the **programme's horizontal priorities**—such as inclusion, digital transformation, sustainability and especially participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement—and lead to measurable improvements in staff competencies and learner outcomes, including enhanced professional skills and social integration. Research shows that **Erasmus+ made a difference for adults in different life domains**, clearly showing progress, and provide opportunities to adult who never went abroad or have fewer opportunities.

At the same time, **challenges remain**. Certain types of organisations—particularly smaller or more informal providers—are still underrepresented. There is still potential in creating stronger synergies between KA1 and KA2 to maximise impact. Bringing these two key actions together could create more integrated and cohesive projects that strengthens both mobility (KA1) and strategic partnerships (KA2), to enable a more comprehensive and long-lasting impact on adult learners, organisations, and staff.

While **KA1 mobility for adult learners** shows promising developments, it faced initial implementation hurdles. Building structures to effectively include learners as a new target group within the adult education sector of Erasmus+ takes time and sustained effort, particularly for providers unfamiliar with mobility formats.

To make KA1 mobility successful, greater flexibility in funding mechanisms is essential.

This includes **targeted support for hosting organisations** and dedicated **funding for outreach activities** and preparatory measures. The adult learning sector cannot build on existing publicly funded structures that facilitate cross-border mobility or offer programmes for learners from other countries. The cross-border learning offer should therefore be strengthened by providing incentives for hosting organisation to be engaged in the programme, as well as by enhancing the synergy between KA1 and KA2 projects—to develop and sustain an attractive learning offer for learners across borders. It takes time to build structures and capacities to facilitate the mobility of adult learners, and patience is needed.

Many learners in adult education require **additional support to engage in European mobility**—whether through guidance, confidence-building, or logistical preparation. Without addressing these barriers, the full inclusion potential of KA1 mobility cannot be realised. When the above-mentioned conditions are met—strengthening both the demand for and supply of learning opportunities—results will follow.

Moreover, the **impact of Erasmus+ at the system level remains limited**, partly due to a lack of structured dialogue between programme implementation and adult education policy, and lack of knowledge management in the programme identifying lessons learned and feeding the mainstreaming potential of supported outputs. Strengthening this connection is essential for leveraging the full transformative potential of Erasmus+ across the adult learning ecosystem.

Finally, it is of great importance to continue **monitoring the impact of Erasmus+** on the adult learning sector and its learners. Therefore, in the coming year, the RIA-AE network will further develop a typology of impact based on qualitative research and plans to measure this impact on learners by conducting pre- and post-tests with adult learners. This typology could feed the questions in future participant reports, assuring better alignment with the specificity of the adult learning sector.

Erasmus+: Beyond Numbers – Recognising the Unique Character of Adult Education

Erasmus+ is more than just the number of funded participants or the efficient use of budgets. While all sectors within the programme should be treated coherently and equitably, it is essential to **consider the structural diversity and specific needs of adult education**. This sector is often characterised by non-formal learning environments, diverse provider types, and learners with highly individualised pathways—including those with fewer educational opportunities or complex life situations.

To unlock the full potential of Erasmus+ in adult education, the **programme must retain flexibility in its design and implementation**. This includes the ability to tailor funding, support structures, and outreach strategies to the realities of adult learners and providers. Flexibility is not a weakness—it is a condition for impact.

Erasmus+ changes lives. It strengthens not only individual learning and professional development but also has ripple effects on families, workplaces, communities, and societies. It builds confidence, fosters participation, and enhances social cohesion across Europe. Recognising and supporting this potential—especially for those who benefit most from a second chance at education—is crucial for a truly inclusive and forward-looking European education policy.

Conclusions

To fully realise the transformative potential of Erasmus+ in adult education, policymakers should **ensure greater flexibility in programme implementation**, including tailored funding instruments and support for outreach and preparation of disadvantaged learners. Stronger synergies between KA1 and KA2, sector-specific approaches, and improved dialogue between policy and practice are essential. Recognising the unique character of adult education and investing accordingly will strengthen participation, inclusion, and impact—at the individual, organisational, and societal level.

Connecting Research and Policy: The RIA-AE Network

To deepen the understanding of these impacts, the **RIA-AE network** was established in 2022. Initiated by the German National Agency at BIBB, the network brings together 20 partner countries and coordinates research activities related to international cooperation and mobility in adult education.

Its monitoring study systematically gathers data on the implementation and effects of Erasmus+, offering an evidence base for policymaking. The findings—compiled in national reports and a European-wide synthesis—shed light on outcomes for learners, staff, and organisations, and provide strategic insights for strengthening adult education policy in Europe.

[Click here](#) to find further information and reports.