

What Difference does Erasmus+ Make?

Key Findings from the First National
Study on the Impact of Erasmus+ on
Adult Education in Ireland (2021-2024)

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RIA
ADULT EDUCATION

This paper presents the key findings from the first national research study of the impact of Erasmus+ in the Irish adult education sector between 2021 and 2024.

The research examined how participation in Erasmus+ affected adult education organisations, staff, learners, and the wider sector. It also explored the programme's contribution to democratic participation and civic engagement.

It draws on evidence from organisations across Ireland that received Erasmus+ funding during this period and examines how organisations, staff and learners experienced participation in international learner mobility and co-operation activities, and the outcomes they reported.

What is Erasmus+?

Erasmus+ is the European Union's programme for education, training, youth, volunteering, and sport. In adult education it supports lifelong learning, personal growth, professional development, social inclusion and international co-operation.

The main Erasmus+ opportunities for adult education organisations are:

- Key Action 1 (KA1): Supports staff and learner mobility activities.
- Key Action 2 (KA2): Cooperation Partnerships
 - supports organisations to work together across Europe to develop new practices, resources and approaches to adult learning.

Léargas is the Irish National Agency for Erasmus+ in Adult Education, School Education, Vocational Education and Training (VET), Youth, and Sport, and the European Solidarity Corps. Other European programmes and initiatives administered by Léargas include PEACEPLUS ASPIRE, eTwinning, EPALE, Eurodesk, Youth Wiki, and VET Team.

Profile of Adult Education Organisations Participating in Erasmus+ in Ireland (2021-2024)

Between 2021 and 2024, 155 adult education organisations received Erasmus+ funding. Participating organisations reflect the diversity of Ireland's adult education sector. They include non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community and voluntary organisations, State and Public bodies such as Education and Training Boards, private companies, adult education providers, and other institutions active in adult learning such as disability groups, organisations working with the long-term unemployed, libraries, museums and cultural organisations.

KEY FINDINGS INCLUDE:

- Most participating organisations were medium-sized organisations employing between 11 and 50 staff members.
- Most worked with more than 250 adult learners.
- Community and voluntary organisations played a leading role, accounting for 61% of organisations coordinating Erasmus+ projects.

- Public and semi-public education bodies (24%) and State Agencies accounted for 38% of organisations coordinating mobility projects (KA1).
- 75% of Education and Training Boards participated in Erasmus+ mobility projects.

The research examined how participation in Erasmus+ affected adult education organisations, staff, learners, and the wider sector. It also explored the programme's contribution to democratic participation and civic engagement. It draws on evidence from organisations across Ireland that received Erasmus+ funding during this period and examines how organisations, staff and learners experienced participation in international learner mobility and co-operation activities, and the outcomes they reported.

"So, I think that this project definitely allowed me to expand my skills in designing and delivering digital well-being and digital safety workshops. Especially these intergenerational ones. And I think that I'm happy to see that this project filled the gap here in, in our local community, so provided support for parents and children."

What Erasmus+ participation looks like for Adult Education Organisations

The study found that Erasmus+ funded a wide range of activities for adult education organisations across Ireland.

KEY FINDINGS INCLUDE:

- Non-formal adult education providers, including NGOs, made extensive use of Erasmus+ opportunities. NGOs participated in 43% of KA1 projects and 39% of KA2 projects.
- All survey respondents reported that participation gave them access to innovative teaching and learning materials and resources. More than three-quarters (76%) reported that their organisations continued to use these materials after the project ended.
- Many projects addressed democratic participation and civic engagement. These themes featured in 69% of KA1 and 74% of KA2 projects.
- Four in ten (40%) of organisations held KA1 accreditation, which enabled them to apply for Erasmus+ funding over multiple years.

All survey respondents agreed that participation in Erasmus+ contributed to:

- Better alignment between learning provision and the needs of adult learners.
- Greater accessibility of learning opportunities for a wider range of learners and groups.
- Changes to existing programmes and services based on project learning, resources and experience.

Figure 1: Topics receiving more attention after participating in Erasmus+ (2021-2024)

Source: 'Impact of Erasmus+ on the Adult Education Sector in Ireland (second survey round): National Report, 2026, 44.



Staff Experiences and Reported Outcomes

The study found that participation in Erasmus+ provided adult education staff with valued opportunities for professional learning and international exchange.

KEY FINDINGS INCLUDE:

- Most staff reported positive experiences of participation with 81% saying they were 'very satisfied' with their Erasmus+ experience.
- Many staff reported that they had acquired new teaching and pedagogical skills and knowledge from their Erasmus+ experience.
- Two-thirds of staff reported improved knowledge post-Erasmus+ of Europe, the European Union and European values.
- Many staff reported greater confidence working with diverse learner groups and in a diverse learning environment.
- Eighty per cent (80%) of adult educators reported a better understanding of the diversity of contemporary society.
- Seventy per cent (70%) reported a stronger commitment to addressing discrimination and intolerance.

Learners Experiences and Reported Outcomes

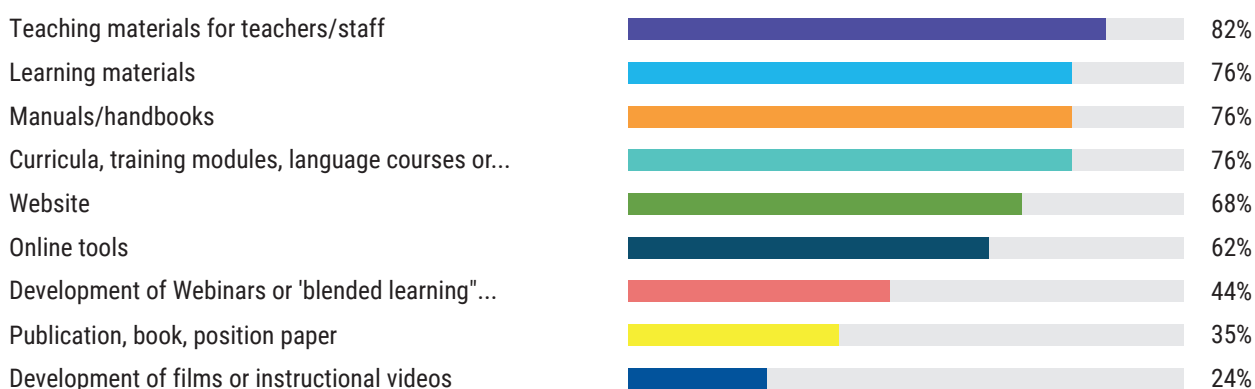
Learners who participated in Erasmus+ mobility activities reported a range of personal and educational outcomes.

KEY FINDINGS INCLUDE:

- All (100%) of learners surveyed reported being either 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with their mobility experience.
- All (100%) learners reported increased self-confidence, independence and responsibility.
- Ninety per cent (90%) reported greater clarity about their personal and professional goals.
- Seventy-nine per cent (79%) believed that participation improved their chances of accessing their preferred course of study or training.
- Sixty per cent (60%) believed it improved their employment prospects.
- Ninety per cent (90%) of learners reported having a better understanding of Europe, the European Union and European Values.

Figure 2: Types of outputs developed as part of Erasmus KA2 participation

Source: 'Impact of Erasmus+ on the Adult Education Sector in Ireland (second survey round): National Report, 2026, 47



Participation in Democratic Life, Common Values and Civic Engagement

The study examined how Erasmus+ projects addressed democratic participation, common values and civic engagement.

KEY FINDINGS INCLUDE:

- Eighty-one per cent (81%) of adult education projects addressed these themes either directly (55%) or indirectly (26%).
- These themes featured in 69% of KA1 and 74% of KA2 projects.
- Projects commonly aimed to promote European values, strengthen the European dimension of organisations, and encourage civic participation among learners.
- Staff reported enhanced confidence, capacity and skills to address these topics in their practice.
- Organisations reported developing more inclusive curricula, designing and delivering programmes that support community participation, and enhanced collaboration with civil society organisations.
- Learners reported greater confidence and motivation to participate in community life, increased awareness of diversity and inclusion issues, and stronger intercultural understanding.

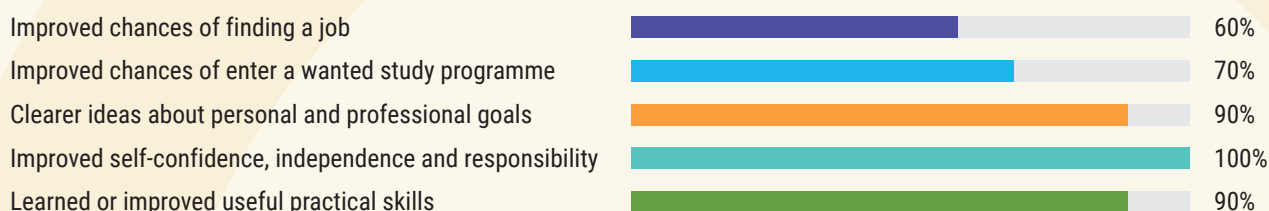
Key Achievements of Erasmus+ in Adult Education in Ireland

The study identified several notable features of Erasmus+ participation in adult education between 2021 and 2024.

KEY FINDINGS INCLUDE:

- Erasmus+ adult education projects reach a broad and diverse learner group. Thirty-two per cent (32%) of participants faced barriers to participation including unemployment, disability, migration-related challenges, and social or economic disadvantage.
- Participating organisations reflected the diversity of the adult and community education sector.
- Funding for KA1 projects increased substantially, from €55,315 in 2021 to €1,395,796 in 2024.
- Erasmus+ accreditation provided a route to multi-annual funding for international mobility and partnership opportunities for the sector. By 2024, 24 organisations had secured accreditation. This included 4 consortia with 62 member organisations.
- Participating organisations frequently highlighted and praised the accessibility and support provided by National Agency throughout the project life cycle.

Figure 3: Participant reported benefits of participation



"The innovative character of the products produced helped us modernise our teaching techniques, engage strongly our learners, and make learning a fun activity."

Challenges Identified by Adult Education Organisations

The study also identified several challenges affecting participation and engagement.

KEY FINDINGS INCLUDE:

- Smaller, community-based organisations reported limited capacity to apply for, manage and deliver Erasmus+ projects. Organisations that had not participated in Erasmus+ also identified this as a barrier.
- Some organisations reported difficulties identifying suitable European partners.
- Organisations highlighted the additional time, support and resources required to engage learners with fewer opportunities.
- Respondents noted that project learning, resources and innovations may not always reach the wider adult education sector despite their potential relevance. Limited opportunities for systematic knowledge exchange and sharing of resources across and within this diverse network were noted by some.

“Experiencing these participatory methods firsthand inspired staff to introduce similar approaches in Cork ETB programmes, such as learner-led planning of class projects, structured reflection circles, and group decision-making activities linked to local community issues and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.”

Implications for Policy and Practice

Lifelong Learning

The findings suggest that adult learner mobility activities enhance existing adult education provision by broadening learning experiences and opening doors to new opportunities for learners. These opportunities are valued by learners and providers alike and support greater participation in lifelong learning and community-based learning pathways. Participating organisations reported that Erasmus+ funding enabled educators and learners to take part in international learning and mobility activities that they might not otherwise have accessed. Organisations also reported developing new resources, materials, working methods and partnerships through participation.

The findings highlight the contribution of Erasmus+ mobility and co-operation partnerships towards several objectives set out in Ireland’s Further Education and Training Strategy 2026-2030 (‘the FET Strategy’), particularly those relating to lifelong learning, inclusion, social cohesion, learner engagement and access to high-quality learning experiences. Longitudinal research would strengthen understanding of the lasting impacts of Erasmus+ participation on learners, staff and organisations, and its contribution to broader educational, social, and community outcomes over time.

Inclusion, Access and Participation

The study found that Erasmus+ engaged many adult learners who face barriers to participation, a group prioritised within both the FET Strategy 2026-2030 and the Adult Literacy for Life Strategy (2021). The findings suggest that access to mobility opportunities is influenced by several factors including programme requirements, organisational structures and where projects are delivered.

Organisational capacity also appears to influence participation. Staffing levels, administrative requirements and project management demands may make it more difficult for small, community-based organisations to take part. The study also highlights the need to better understand the types of support that different learner groups may require to participate in international learning opportunities.

Organisational and Workforce Development

The findings indicate that Erasmus+ provides opportunities for adult education organisations, staff and volunteers to engage with practice and approaches developed through European co-operation.

Participating organisations reported using project learning, resources and partnerships to inform their work. Staff also reported opportunities to learn from international peers and gain exposure to different approaches to adult education. The findings suggest that wider dissemination of project learning, stronger peer learning mechanisms and more systematic knowledge-sharing could increase awareness and use of project outputs across the sector.

The study also indicated that broader participation in mobility opportunities, combined with stronger sharing of organisational learning, could increase the outreach of project outcomes beyond individual organisations.

“The sense of independence gained from the trip resulted in transferrable learning that can be brought home to everyday life.”

Democratic Participation and Civic Engagement

The findings show that Erasmus+ helps organisations strengthen their work on democratic participation and civic engagement, while also encouraging learners to take a more active role in their communities. They also show that Erasmus+ generates social benefits that extend beyond individual participants and can contribute to wider social impact goals at the national level as per the FET Strategy 2026-2030.

Respondents noted that outcomes related to civic participation and democratic engagement can take time to develop and may be more difficult to measure than educational, employment or organisational outcomes. The findings also suggest that a dedicated mechanism for sharing resources, project results and examples of practice could support learning and collaboration in this area beyond the lifetime of individual projects.

“Exposure to European best practice in sustainability, digital inclusion, active citizenship, intercultural learning, and non-formal pedagogy has been integrated into our service planning, quality assurance processes, and programme design, embedding a European dimension that did not previously exist. This has directly enhanced our learning offer.”

Looking Ahead

The study identifies several areas for consideration by adult education providers, funders, organisations and policymakers:

- How organisational capacity influences access to Erasmus+ opportunities, particularly for smaller and community-based organisations.
- How knowledge, resources and learning generated through mobility and cooperation projects can be shared more systematically across the adult education sector.
- How inclusion measures can best support learners who face complex or multiple barriers to participation.
- How learning and innovation arising from Erasmus+ can inform wider efforts to strengthen collaboration, organisational learning and responsiveness across the further education and training sector.
- How future research and evidence-gathering activities can improve understanding of the longer-term outcomes of participation for learners, staff and organisations.

“Experiencing these participatory methods firsthand inspired staff to introduce similar approaches in Cork ETB programmes, such as learner-led planning of class projects, structured reflection circles, and group decision-making activities linked to local community issues and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.”

About the Research

The research is part of the European research network RIA-AE (Research-based Impact Analysis of Erasmus+ Adult Education) Programmes. Ireland joined the RIA-AE network in 2024 enabling it to participate in the second survey round (2025–2026). The Irish researcher and study author was Nora Furlong.

The full report, ‘Impact of Erasmus+ on the Adult Education Sector in Ireland (second survey round): National Report RIA-AE Network’ (‘the National Study’) can be viewed using the QR code.



“I returned to education aged 47, I was doing a course with the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed. The Erasmus+ trip ignited my passion to keep going, it helped me to progress my confidence. It has transformed my life.”