

Impact of Erasmus+ on the Adult Education sector in Ireland

National Report RIA-AE Network

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RIA
ADULT EDUCATION

COLOPHON

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

AE	Adult Education
AEGI	Adult Education Guidance Initiative
AEO	Adult Education Officer
AES	Adult Education Survey
ALL	Adult Literacy for Life
BTEI	Back to Education Initiative
CEF	Community Education Facilitators
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DFHERIS	The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
EPALE	Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe
ESC	European Solidarity Corps
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
ETB	Education and Training Boards
EU	European Union
FE	Further Education
FET	Further Education and Training
HSE	Health Service Executive
KA1	Key Action 1
KA2	Key Action 2
LLL	Lifelong Learning
MFF	Multiannual Financial Framework
NA	National Agency
NALA	New European Agenda for Adult Learning
NEAAL	National Adult and Literacy Agency
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
OER	Open educational resource
PLC	Post Leaving Certificate
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
RIA-AE	Research-based Impact Analysis of the Erasmus+ Adult Education Programme
SICAP	Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme
SR	Survey Round
VET	Vocational Education and Training

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PART A – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background to the study

This study is part of a transnational monitoring and research project of the Erasmus+ programme in adult education conducted by the Research-based Impact Analysis in Adult Education (RIA-AE) Network across 3 survey rounds. This research initiative was formed in 2022 to enhance the evidence base on adult learning within the Erasmus+ programme. As part of the initiative, national monitoring studies are conducted using identical methodology in parallel across the member countries of the network. The findings of the monitoring studies inform the National Agencies in charge of Erasmus+ on the implementation and impact of the programme in their respective country. The national studies feed into the overall transnational study which in turn highlights the effects of the programme at European level and provides impetus for its further development. Ireland joined the RIA-AE network in 2024, and this report is part of the second survey round focused upon projects active between 2021 – 2024.

The monitoring project focuses on the impact of 2 of the 3 key actions (KA) of the Erasmus+ programme: KA1 (learning mobility of individuals) and KA2 (cooperation of organisations and institutions). The impact on funded organisations and their staff, the learners and the adult education sector in the respective country is examined. The second survey round had an additional thematic focus upon the programme's impact on participation in democratic life and civic engagement.

The monitoring design agreed within the network is based on a mixed methods approach. It consists of a document analysis including project documents and data from EU databases, an online survey and case studies among funded organisations, as well as interviews with adult learners and non-participating organisations. The data collection for Ireland took place between September 2025 and March 2026 and was carried out by Léargas with the technical support of Ockham IPS.

Summary of findings

This study examined the impact of Erasmus+ on the adult education sector in Ireland, with particular attention to accessibility and inclusion, organisational and learner outcomes, and the programme priority of '*Participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement*'. Overall, the findings demonstrate that Erasmus+ makes a substantial contribution to strengthening adult education organisations, enhancing professional practice, supporting learner development and promoting active citizenship.

Accessibility and inclusion

With regards the accessibility and inclusiveness of the programme, the impact report highlights **strong participation and engagement**, especially from the NGO sector which accounts for the majority of coordinating roles across KA1 and KA2 programmes. Public bodies, private companies and higher education providers are also active in the programme, with the latter more likely to participate in KA2 projects only. 40% of organisations surveyed have accreditation.¹

Most participating organisations, from survey respondents, are mid-sized organisations (11–50 staff), typically working with >250 adult learners. A significant proportion of organisations identify as adult education providers and operate across a broad range of sectors including community development, employment and career guidance and environmental education.

A positive finding is the **increasing number of newcomer organisations**, particularly in KA1 mobility projects. A smaller group of experienced organisations continue to participate extensively especially in KA2 actions. Survey respondents indicated that 59% of organisations intend to apply for Erasmus+ funding (KA1) again in the future. A further 24% reported that they were unsure about applying again. This finding suggests a need for additional supports for beneficiary organisations particularly in the planning phase.

Despite these positive outcomes, barriers remain. The research results **identified obstacles** with regards the accessibility and inclusiveness of the programme. Administrative complexity, organisational capacity constraints and staffing pressures continue to affect participation, particularly for newcomer and smaller organisations. In addition to these more organisational level obstacles, the study identified individual-level learner barriers in terms of recruitment and participation. Reconciling work and caring responsibilities with participation in mobility activities proved difficult for learners, particularly for learners with fewer opportunities.

The geographical distribution of funded organisations in Erasmus+ completed in the period 2021–2024 reveals strong disparities between regions. The eastern and midland regions accounts for, by far, the largest share of the total, at 75%, for both KA1 and KA1 projects. The **geographical disparity** also highlights a need for a more targeted outreach in under-represented areas, i.e., southern, western, and northern regions of the country.

Organisational and staff impact

The impact of Erasmus+ in adult education was examined at the meso, micro and macro levels. At the meso level (organisations), the findings indicate that Erasmus+ participation had a strong impact. Evidence shows effective engagement of diverse target groups, reflecting the varied profiles of adult learners within participating organisations and aligning with the programme's key priority areas. This includes a broad age distribution, as well as specific groups such as unemployed adults, people with disabilities, people in recovery from addiction, people from migrant backgrounds and learners from marginalised and disadvantaged backgrounds.

Participation has strengthened organisations' capacity to innovate, collaborate and respond more effectively to the needs of diverse learners and staff. Respondents reported that participation in KA2 projects contributed to **the development of tangible and relevant outputs** including, curricula, training modules, teaching and learning materials, handbooks, pedagogical tools and websites. A notable finding is the continued use of these outputs beyond the project lifecycle, indicating their relevance and practical value. KA1 mobility projects have primarily supported staff mobility and their professional development: however, research respondents also

reported that participation in Erasmus+ increased the capacity of their organisation to support learner mobility.

At staff level, participation in Erasmus+ has led to clear and consistent **professional development** outcomes. One of the most significant impacts relates to the development of professional skills, particularly intercultural **competences**. Staff reported increased awareness and understanding of different cultural contexts, as well as greater confidence in working within diverse learning environments. Engagement with European peers was also reported to have facilitated the **exchange of ideas and good practices**, broadened professional perspectives and encouraged innovation.

In addition, there is strong evidence of **improved pedagogical and didactic skills**. Participation in mobility activities and project work was reported to have supported staff to adopt new teaching methods, tools and approaches. Examples of this includes the integration of more inclusive practices, learner-centred methodologies and innovative techniques into their work. Staff respondents also reported **increased confidence** and motivation in their areas of work.

However, several factors were identified as constraining the full realisation of these benefits. **Time pressures** and **increased workloads** were frequently cited, with project management responsibilities often reducing the time available for core activities such as teaching. Some participants also noted that the emphasis on developing new and innovative activities can limit opportunities to consolidate, replicate and refine existing approaches that have already proven effective. In addition, a general challenge across the sector namely, **staff retention**, was identified as a significant barrier, as the loss of experienced staff can hinder project continuity, reduce organisational learning and weaken long-standing partnerships.

Overall, participation in Erasmus+ was reported to have enhanced staff competences and professional capacity, contributing to improvements in the quality of learning provision within participating organisations.

Learner Impact

The impact on adult learners is equally significant. Respondents reported that Erasmus+ experiences are contributed to **increased confidence, motivation and a stronger sense of self-worth**. For some learners, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds or returning to education in later life, the experience can be part of a transformative process that encourages further engagement in learning, employment and community life.

Intercultural learning and awareness emerge as a significant impact area by the survey respondents, enabling learners to become more open-minded, challenge their own bias and develop a deeper understanding of diversity and inclusion. Learners also reported **skills development**, particularly in communication, presentation, and social skills, as well as increased confidence in 'moving out of their comfort zone' and increased willingness to take on new opportunities.

The findings also highlight the reported increase in **civic engagement and community participation** following mobility experiences. Learners describe becoming more active in their communities and more aware of the needs of others, particularly marginalised groups. In addition, there is strong evidence of **increased motivation for lifelong learning** among the survey respondents, with many learners expressing their desire to continue their educational journeys.

Participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement

The report highlights the significant contribution of Erasmus+ in promoting participation in democratic life, common values, and civic engagement. The characteristics of Erasmus+ projects demonstrate **strong alignment** with this priority area: 55% of projects directly address the theme and a further 26% address it indirectly. Only 22% of projects do not address this priority.

Specific to KA1 and KA2, both Key Actions demonstrate strong direct engagement with this priority: 69% of KA1 projects and 74% of KA2 projects address the theme directly. All organisation types are proportionally represented in their engagement with this priority, with non-governmental organisations emerging as the most active participants. Just over half of the projects have been completed or are nearing completion, while the remaining 45% are still ongoing.

The most frequently cited project objectives linked to this priority theme are the promotion of **European common values**, strengthening the **European dimension** of organisations, and **fostering civic engagement among learners**. Within KA1 activities are primarily targeted at staff, and job shadowing emerged as the most common activity type. In KA2 project activities are mainly focused on the development of curricula and training resources.

The findings demonstrate that engagement in the Erasmus+ programme provides an **effective framework** for supporting organisations in responding to and advancing this priority area of *Participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement* yielding significant impact on the learner offerings, staff and learners.

Participation in both KA1 and KA2 activities is complementary, contributing to capacity building at different levels. Staff mobility under KA1 strengthens the professional capacity of adult educators, while the outputs developed through KA2 projects enhance organisational capacity through the provision of innovative teaching approaches, methodologies, and tools. Learner mobility further supports capacity building by fostering intercultural understanding, promoting inclusion and diversity awareness, developing **critical thinking skills**, and **encouraging active participation in community life**.

In terms of the learning offer, participation in projects in cooperation with European partners and peers was reported to have supported the development of **more inclusive curricula**, increasing the numbers engaged in programmes. Learning offers were reported to have improved integration of activities that **foster critical thinking, media literacy and a shared understanding of European common values**. New programmes and training with a focus on advocacy and **participation in community life** have also been developed because of Erasmus+ funding.

Organisations also reported that participation supported the development of more inclusive, participatory, and **reflective approaches**, and strengthened collaboration with civil society partners.

Staff who have participated in projects, reported **enhanced capacity** and skills to integrate this priority into practice. Staff respondents described **increased confidence**, openness, and pedagogical innovation, particularly in facilitating community-based learning and supporting learners to act on local issues. While still positive, a slightly lower confidence is reported in teaching more complex aspects such as explaining democratic process and facilitating discussions on democratic participation.

For learners the reported impact is significant in terms of **empowerment** and engagement. Participation in Erasmus+ projects was reported to have contributed to increased confidence, a stronger sense of belonging to a European community, and greater willingness to engage in civic and democratic life. Intercultural exchange plays a key role in breaking down barriers and reducing bias, fostering more inclusive attitudes and active citizenship.¹

The creation of dedicated space and time for reflection on democratic participation and associated shared values emerges as a distinctive and valuable feature of Erasmus+ engagement. This experience creates space for **critical reflection**, the development of **critical thinking skills** and fosters greater civic responsibility and engagement at local and European levels.

Added value of Erasmus+

The findings clearly demonstrate the **critical added value of Erasmus+ funding** within the adult education sector. The majority of participating organisations reported that their projects would either not have taken place or would have been significantly reduced in scale and impact without Erasmus+ support. Respondent organisations indicated that participation in the programme **increased their capacity to collaborate, innovate, and respond more effectively and inclusively to staff and learner needs**.

¹ European Commission. (2025). *Report from the Commission on the interim evaluation of the 2021–2027 Erasmus+ programme and the final evaluation of the 2014–2020 Erasmus+ programme*. Brussels: European Commission.

PART B – INTRODUCTION

1 Introduction

1.1 The Erasmus+ programme and the RIA-AE network

With Erasmus+ the European Union (EU) supports the educational, professional, and personal development of participants in adult learning in Europe and beyond. To this end, several international lines of action operate within the programme. These concern the learning mobility of individuals (KA1), cooperation between organisations and institutions (KA2), and support for policy development and political cooperation (KA3). In Key Actions 1 and 2, funding measures are implemented in a decentralised manner by Erasmus+ National Agencies (NA). Léargas is the Irish National Agency for the European Solidarity Corps and Erasmus+ in Adult Education, School Education, Vocational Education and Training (VET), Youth, and Sport.

The impact of Erasmus+ on adult education learners, staff, teachers, volunteers, and organisations in the field of adult education has, to date, been little examined in Ireland and Europe. In 2022, the Erasmus+ programme funded the establishment of the transnational Research-based Impact Analysis of Erasmus+ Adult Education Programmes network (RIA-AE) to initiate and coordinate research and monitoring activities. Its aim is to foster transnational comparative research and thus provide evidence to strengthen the impact of international cooperation and mobility projects in adult education and contribute to the further development and quality improvement of the Erasmus+ programme (see mission statement in Annex I). The network is open to new members, and as of the beginning of 2026 includes NAs from 20 member states and Türkiye.² In 2023/2024, the RIA-AE network implemented the first coordinated transnational monitoring study on the impact of Erasmus+ in the field of adult education, leading to a bundle of national reports and EU synthesis report (first survey round).³ Ireland joined the RIA-AE network in 2024 enabling it to participate in the second survey round (2025–2026).

1.2 Aims and objectives of the second survey round (2025–2026)

The second survey round, implemented in 2025–2026, has a specific **thematic focus on the programmes' horizontal priority** 'participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement'. European policy frames adult learning as a catalyst for active citizenship, particularly for those under-represented in democratic processes or disconnected from formal education systems. Focusing on this theme

² Austria; Belgium (Wallonia); Croatia; Cyprus; Czechia; Estonia; Finland; France; Germany; Greece; Hungary; Ireland; Italy; Latvia; Liechtenstein; Luxembourg; Netherlands; Poland; Portugal; Romania; Slovakia; Slovenia; Spain; Türkiye.

³ Buiskool, B., Krichewsky-Wegener, L., & Erckrath, M. (2024). *Transnational analysis of the impact of Erasmus+ on the Adult Education Sector: Comparative research report, first survey round 2024*. https://epale.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2025-08/EU%20synthesis%20report%20RIA-AE%20network_first%20survey%20round%202024_final.pdf#

affirms the broader RIA-AE goal of enlarging the visibility of adult education benefits and Erasmus+’s contribution to building democratic, socially cohesive societies. In this way, the survey not only supports the policy relevance of civic engagement as a horizontal priority but also enables tangible improvements in programme quality and equity across Europe. Key questions guiding the thematic focus of the second survey round include:

- To what extent do Erasmus+ projects address the priority ‘participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement’?
- Which type of organisations implement projects directly addressing this priority?
- What type of activities are implemented within this thematic area?
- What goals are set for projects within this thematic area?
- What groups of adult learners are addressed by projects within this thematic area?
- What is the added value of Erasmus+ for the projects within this thematic area?
- What is the impact of Erasmus+ projects in this thematic area on the learning offer in adult education?
- What is the impact of Erasmus+ projects in this thematic area on staff and on learners?

1.3 Methodological approach

The methodological approach of the monitoring study includes 5 standardised research modules, implemented every 2 years over the 3 monitoring rounds in 2023, 2025 and 2027, enabling an update of the impact monitoring. Ireland participated for the first time in the second monitoring round which included recurring questions across the 3 monitoring rounds in addition to the specific thematic focus. Projects active between 2021–2024 were investigated as part of the research process.

Overview research modules Second Survey Round (SR2)

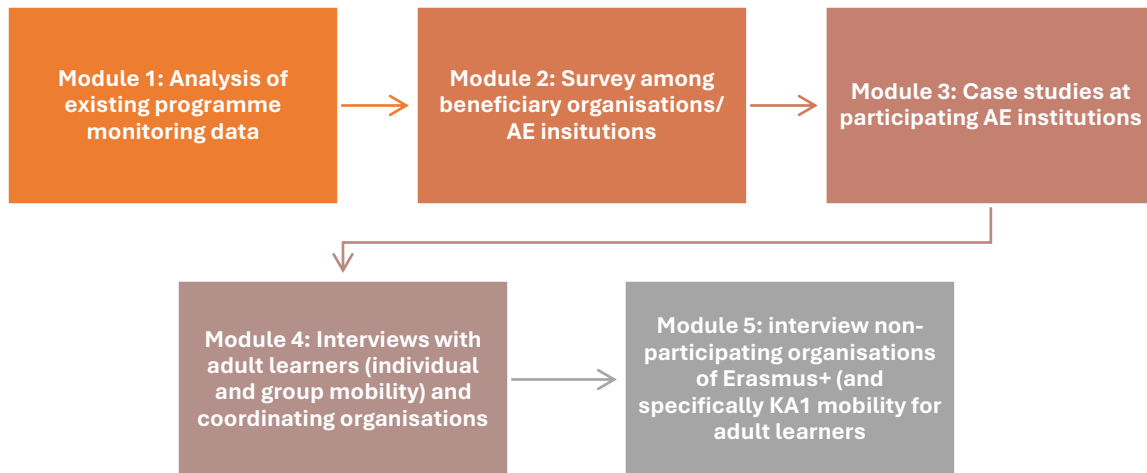


Figure 1

The inclusion of the thematic focus in the second RIA-AE research round required tailored research tools and analytical frameworks. Surveys, interviews and case studies were designed to capture learners' development in civic values, engagement behaviours, and perceived social inclusion. Basic questions from survey round 1 (SR1) are repeated to ensure comparability across the 3 monitoring rounds. It was decided not to repeat all questions from the SR1 survey, mainly those related to the progress markers, as there was limited time after the first survey round to identify major developments. These questions will be included again in the third survey, scheduled for 2027/2028, to more effectively measure progress over time.

As part of the second survey round, the Irish research implemented the following research activities;

Module 1 (Document analysis): analysis of existing national research on Erasmus+ in the field of adult education and data collected by the European Commission and the National Agency as part of the funding processes and for monitoring purposes. It interrogated the inclusiveness of the programme, mapped beneficiary organisations, and assessed the extent to which these organisations represent the diversity of the adult education sector.

Module 2 (Online survey of beneficiary organisations): this module consisted of an online survey of all organisations that implemented, and completed, at least one project in KA1 or KA2 under the current programme between 2021 and the end of 2024. It serves as the central survey instrument for assessing the impact of Erasmus+. For organisations that participated in more than one project, only one

person, usually the project coordinator of the most recent project, received an invitation to take part in the survey.

The survey was sent to a total of 155 beneficiary organisations and 68 partner organisations in Ireland. Of the first 155, 66 completed the survey (44 complete, 22 partial) and 13 partner organisations responded (10 complete, 3 partially). The remaining number of respondents for Ireland is 59. This corresponds to a response rate of 28%, or 43% including partials. Of the responding organisations (n = 59), 37% carried out at least one project in KA1, and 31.5% carried out at least one project in KA2. A further 31.5% of the organisations were active in both key actions. 40% of the organisations are accredited in KA1.

Module 3 (Case studies): this module consisted of 5 case studies of organisations who had coordinated at least one KA2 Erasmus+ project in the research period. The case studies focused on projects within the thematic area ‘Participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement’. They included desk research of project documentation, as well as interviews with project managers, staff, and learners. The case study reports are provided in Annex I.

Organisation	Participants
NGO (Career Guidance & Employment)	x1 Project Coordinator
NGO (Health Care - Older People)	x1 Project Coordinator x2 Adult Learners (Volunteers)
NGO (Community Development)	x1 Project Coordinator x3 Adult Educator
NGO (Community Development)	x1 Project Coordinator x1 Adult Educator x2 Adult Learners
NGO (Volunteering & Training)	x1 Project Coordinator
Total	x5 Project Coordinators x5 Staff x4 Adult Learners

Table 1: Interviews – KA2 Mobility Projects

Module 4 (Interviews with KA1 participants): this module included 5 interviews with adult learners who participated in a KA1 mobility and their project coordinators. The interviews with adult learners provide deeper insight into the impact of mobility on participants and inform the report’s reflections on the experience of organising KA1 mobility for different target groups and the identification of barriers to mobility.

This, in turn, may help enhance better organisation of KA1 mobility for future adult learner participants.

Organisation	Participants
NGO (Social Enterprise)	x1 Project Coordinator x4 Adult Learners
NGO (Adult Education)	x1 Project Coordinator x3 Adult Learners
NGO (Addiction and Recovery)	x1 Project Coordinator x2 Staff x3 Adult Learners
NGO (Human Rights)	x1 Project Coordinator x3 Adult Learners
Total	x4 Project Coordinators x2 Staff x13 Adult Learners

Table 2: Interviews – KA1 Mobility Projects

- **Module 5 (Interviews with non-participating organisations):** this module included interviews with 5 organisations that are not currently participating in the Erasmus+ programme. These interviews aim to better understand organisational level obstacles to participation in the programme and are intended to inform future Erasmus+ programmatic reform and implementation. The interviews explored the organisations potential interest in applying for Erasmus+ and their experiences with barriers for their organisations and their target learner groups.

Organisation	Participants
NGO (Disability)	x1 Project Coordinator
NGO (Volunteering)	x1 Project Coordinator
NGO (Migrant Support)	x1 Project Coordinator
NGO (Community Development)	x1 Project Coordinator
NGO (Artists Social Enterprise)	x1 Project Coordinator
Total	x5 Project Coordinator

Table 3: Interviews with non-participating organisations

PART C – General impact of Erasmus+

2 Short portrait of the adult education sector in Ireland

This chapter provides a short overview of the institutional framework conditions for adult education in Ireland, the provider structure, participation in adult education, and policy priorities in this area. It also provides an overview of existing research on the impact of Erasmus+ in the field of adult education.

2.1 Institutional framework conditions and providers' structure

National institutional frameworks and structures shape the context within which adult education, often referred to as Adult and Community Education, is developed and delivered in Ireland.

The government White Paper on Adult Education, *Learning for Life* (2000)³ defined adult education as 'systematic learning undertaken by adults who return to learning having concluded initial education or training.' The White Paper defined further education as education and training taking place between second and third level, continuing education and training as the professional or vocational development of individuals in, or re-entering, the workforce, and community education as a learner-centred and participatory process, particularly aimed at supporting marginalised groups. Collectively, these elements, as outlined in the White Paper, form the overarching architecture within which adult education in Ireland is situated.

In 2020, the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) assumed overall responsibility for policy development, strategic direction and funding of the tertiary education sector, including the further education and training (FET) sector. The DFHERIS sets national priorities for skills development, lifelong learning, adult education and workforce training, positioning adult education within the overall integrated tertiary framework. SOLAS, established in 2013 under the Further Education and Training Act, an agency of the DFHERIS, is responsible for the planning, funding, coordination and oversight of FET provision nationally and hosts the Adult Literacy for Life (ALL) National Programme Office. SOLAS develops national FET strategies, allocates funding, monitors performance, promotes quality and works with providers to ensure programmes meet national strategic priorities and outcomes in alignment with EU policy frameworks. The Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) authority quality assures adult education providers, validates programmes and awards qualifications within the National Framework of Qualifications. Several additional government departments such as the Department of Education and Youth, the Department of Rural and Community Development and Gaeltacht, and the Department of Social Protection offer defined support including funding for adult learning and community education and engagement activities.

Provision of Adult Education and Stakeholder Engagement

Publicly funded FET and adult education in Ireland is primarily coordinated by SOLAS working closely with Regional Skills Managers and delivered through the 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) established in 2013. The ETBs manage and deliver a broad range of post-primary, further education and training and youth services guided by local needs and national policy. Adult education provision also takes place in community-based Further Education (FE) Colleges, training centres, Youthreach centres and adult and further education centres. Adult Education Officers (AEOs) and Community Education Facilitators (CEF) are employed by the ETBs to provide technical and administrative help to community groups, assisting them in sourcing funding and developing educational initiatives for adult and community education locally. Education and training programmes supported by these providers and open to adult learners take a variety of forms including:

- Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) Courses; Full-time 1- or 2-year programmes at Levels 5 and 6, often used as a pathway to employment or higher education.
- Apprenticeships; Structured employer-led programmes combining on-the-job training with off-the-job learning. Traditional craft apprenticeships plus newer 'consortia-led' apprenticeships in areas like insurance, accounting, and ICT.
- Traineeships; Shorter occupational programmes with a significant work placement component, typically 6–12 months.
- Specific Skills Training: Targeted courses to develop skills for specific occupations or sectors.
- Adult Literacy and Numeracy: Free, flexible programmes delivered through ETBs, often 1-to-1 or small groups.
- English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL): Language support for migrants and refugees.
- Back to Education Initiative (BTEI): Part-time further education programmes for young people over the age of 16 years, and adults who left school with few or no qualifications or who want to return to learning, offered at Levels 1–6.
- Community Education: Locally based, often informal or non-formal learning, delivered by community groups, frequently funded through ETBs or SOLAS.

A wide variety of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) deliver non-formal and informal education for adult learners. Such learning is usually community-based and seeks to encourage groups with fewer opportunities to participate in educational and employment initiatives. Grassroots providers of adult learning and community education are typically voluntary, and/or not-for-profit organisations governed by local boards of management and committees. Supported by various agencies, such as local ETBs, and targeted Government funding linked to family support, social inclusion and community development goals, grassroots providers develop and offer programmes in response to local needs, e.g., training offered through Family

Resource Centres⁴, voluntary groups such as men's sheds, community garden groups, etc. Higher Education Institutions and employers also play a role in making lifelong learning accessible for adult learners.

Several NGO stakeholders, such as AONTAS and the National Adult and Literacy Agency (NALA), advocate for the adult learner voice and the adult education and community sector and seek to inform policy discussion and shape policy direction and practice. NALA⁵ also provides literacy, numeracy, and digital skills support, often through flexible and informal learning approaches. AONTAS, the National Adult Learning Organisation, is a representative members body that promotes lifelong learning and advocates for quality education for all adults. AONTAS manages the Community Education Network (CEN)⁶, bringing together independent community education providers to share information and resources. The Adult Education Guidance Initiative (AEGI)⁷ works closely with ETBs and AONTAS to support adult learners, providing guidance, encouragement and support on education, training and career options. Local development companies (LDCs)⁸ operate in every county and main urban centres and deliver a broad portfolio of programmes, including SICAP (social inclusion), LEADER (rural development), enterprise supports, training and upskilling, social farming, Tús and Rural Social Scheme placements, environmental projects, and health and wellbeing initiatives. Other key NGOs include:

- The Wheel⁹: a membership-based body and Ireland's national association of charities, community groups and social enterprises. It offers supports, advice, training and other opportunities to people working or volunteering in the charity and community sector.
- The Irish Countrywomen's Association (ICA)¹⁰: brings together rural and urban women and their communities and supports access to personal development, education and lifelong learning opportunities.
- Libraries Ireland and the GLAM sector (the collective group of libraries, archives museums and galleries in Ireland) offer a wide range of services online and in local libraries, museums and galleries, e.g., skills for life programme.
- Age Action Ireland¹¹, Ireland's leading organisation for older people, delivers programmes, e.g., digital literacy training, for older adults, often in informal learning settings.

⁴ <https://www.familyresource.ie>

⁵ <https://www.nala.ie>

⁶ <https://www.aontas.com/adult-learning/community-education/>

⁷ <https://www.etbi.ie/fet-guidance/contact-a-local-adult-guidance-service-2/>

⁸ <https://ldcn.ie>

⁹ <https://www.wheel.ie>

¹⁰ <https://www.ica.ie>

¹¹ <https://www.ageaction.ie>

- Volunteer Ireland¹² is a national organisation that promotes, supports and advocates for volunteering in Ireland. It works with a range of stakeholders to make volunteering accessible, inclusive and of high-quality, offering training to support capacity building and advocacy.
- The Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOU)¹³ provides a wide range of services and supports to unemployed people and people in receipt of specific social welfare payments.

Financing of adult learning

Public funding of adult education in Ireland is channelled through a range of government departments and agencies. The majority of Exchequer (public) funding for adult education and FET programmes is distributed by the DFHERIS through SOLAS which acts as the national funding and coordination body for FET, including the allocation of funding to the 16 ETBs and other approved adult education providers.

In addition, specific targeted initiatives such as the Reach Fund and Adult Literacy for Life (ALL) programme provide funding for adult and community education. The Reach Fund¹⁴ is intended to:

- Assist community education providers to widen and increase their capacity to deliver, support and encourage participation of educationally disadvantaged learners, particularly those on accredited programmes at NFQ levels 1–3.
- Support community education principles by including both formal and informal learning, addressing learners' personal development, and building skills while offering educational options through simplified pathways, and further opportunities to progress to other areas of FET and beyond.
- Tackle inequalities and support access to community education.
- Support community education projects where clear evidence of viability exists which ensures that the benefits of the investment are maintained beyond the funding period, enhancing the long-term impact of the funding.
- Address topics such as climate justice education, education for sustainable development and building climate literacy.

Originally introduced in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic to support access to and participation of the most disadvantaged learners (including learners under 25 years of age, long-term unemployed, people with disabilities, and migrants and refugees), the Reach Fund has continued to incrementally increase in budget, and in 2025 it allocated €4.5 million to 700 community-based projects.

¹² <https://www.volunteer.ie>

¹³ <https://www.inou.ie>

¹⁴ <https://www.solas.ie/pages/reach-fund/>

The Reach Fund is complimented by the national Collaboration and Innovation Fund (CIF)¹⁵ administered by the Adult Literacy for Life (ALL)¹⁶ National Programme Office. The ALL-CIF fund supports collaborative, locally organised and delivered organisational responses to the literacy groups of the target groups identified within the Adult Literacy for Life Strategy. In 2025, the fund allocated €1 million to support innovative, partnership-based projects addressing adult literacy, numeracy, digital and financial skills needs in Ireland. The Department of Social Protection funds several activation and labour market measures, such as training and education supports for unemployed adults; these programmes are often delivered in partnership with ETBs, SOLAS and community providers.

Outside of formal education structures, non-formal and informal learning may be supported by other ad-hoc project-based funding streams, such as specific funds to support people with disabilities, people experiencing homelessness, minority groups, youth programmes, Global citizenship education etc. European funding programmes, such as Erasmus+ administered in Ireland by Léargas¹⁷, also support adult education and lifelong learning initiatives. Pobal¹⁸ administers a range of European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) co-funded programmes that support lifelong learning, skills development, employability and social inclusion.

2.2 Adult Education Policies

While Ireland lacks a formal dedicated adult education policy framework, numerous white paper and policy frameworks, particularly within the field of further education and training, recognise and include the sector, primarily viewing adult education through the lens of lifelong learning. *Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025* (2020) included a specific commitment to improving adult and community education by working with government departments, state agencies and representative groups to promote an understanding of lifelong learning and its benefits to the economy, society and citizen.¹⁹ In 2024, SOLAS launched the Community Education Framework, which specifically recognises and sets out key principles for Community Education within the FET sector.²⁰

The 2026 national FET strategy, *Creating Futures: Further Education and Training Strategy 2026–2030* foregrounds the role of further education and training in 'creating opportunities for people through career development, upskilling and lifelong learning'. It sets out four strategic objectives: to provide future-ready

¹⁵ <https://www.adultliteracyforlife.ie/fund/>

¹⁶ <https://www.adultliteracyforlife.ie>

¹⁷ <https://www.leargas.ie>

¹⁸ <https://www.pobal.ie/about-pobal/>

¹⁹ Department of Education and Science, *Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025 – Ireland's Future*, 2020, p. 96

²⁰ SOLAS, *Community Education Framework: Transforming Learning*, 2024.

knowledge and skills; to build inclusion for prosperity and cohesion; to develop quality with innovation; and to collaborate for impact.²¹ It acknowledges that literacy and community-based education are essential to ‘create social cohesion, encourage active citizenship, and support diverse communities’ and identifies the increased participation of diverse learner groups through community-based and remote learning as key to placing learners ‘at the heart of decision-making’.²² Learning, is thus, positioned as a continuum extending across the life cycle of an individual rather than as a once-off educational experience. Adult literacy, numeracy and digital skills strategies, such as the *Adult Literacy for Life Strategy (ALL) (2021)*²³, also have a significant policy influence upon adult education. The ALL strategy sets out a cross-government, cross-economy, society approach and vision wherein every adult has the necessary literacy, numeracy and digital literacy to engage in society and realise their potential. Adult education provision in these areas remains a core component of the FET system and is viewed as key to addressing educational disadvantage and encouraging the attainment of numeracy, literacy and basic digital skills by groups with fewer opportunities and the educationally disadvantaged, and to making Ireland a better place to live and work.

While adult education is primarily framed within national strategy in the context of a broad lifelong learning agenda it has continued to maintain a distinctive social inclusion, citizenship and empowerment focus that differentiates it from mainstream FET goals and approaches. Adult learners are recognised as having diverse motivations and outcomes from participation that are not necessarily directly linked to the acquisition of specific workplace skills or training, including increased personal confidence, health and wellbeing, civic engagement and progression to further training and education²⁴. For adult and community education practitioners, facilitators and educators, the Charter for Community Education (‘the Charter’) is an important tool outlining the principles and values underpinning community education practice.²⁵ Launched in 2021, the Charter was created in consultation with practitioners (CEFA and CEN), advocates, and academics from across community education spaces in Ireland.²⁶ Practitioners are encouraged to put the charter on their walls to show learners what community education means. Practitioners are also encouraged to use the charter as a tool to reaffirm their own principles and stay steady in their commitment to community education.

²¹ SOLAS, *The Irish national FET strategy. Creating Futures: Further Education and Training Strategy 2026–2030*, 2026, 14.

²² SOLAS, *Creating Futures*, 2026, p. 14

²³ Government of Ireland, *Adult Literacy for Life. A 10-year Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy*, 2021.

²⁴ Department of Education and Science, *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education* July 2000, Dublin: Stationery Office, pp. 31–32.

²⁵ [Congratulations on the launch of the Charter for Community Education | Maynooth University](#)

²⁶ EPALE Ireland, 20 May 2021, [Reasserting the Politics of Community Education | EPALE](#)

European policies and strategies also play a significant role in shaping the direction of adult education in Ireland. Adult learning is a social right under Article 9 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and Principle 1 of the European Pillar of Social Rights. The New European Agenda for Adult Learning (NEAAL) 2021–2030²⁷ is particularly significant, it seeks to position adult learning as core to building a more inclusive, democratic, and future-oriented European society. It aims to increase adult participation in learning, with a strong focus on supporting the green and digital transitions and promoting social inclusion and equity. Irish FET strategy and policy goals are significantly informed by the European Skills Agenda (2020)²⁸ and Union of Skills strategy (2025)²⁹. Now marking its first anniversary, the Union of Skills emphasises the importance of lifelong learning with the strategic aim of ensuring that all individuals, regardless of location, can develop strong foundational skills and engage in ongoing upskilling and reskilling. It also links these priorities to EU funding instruments such as Erasmus+ and the European Social Fund Plus. In Ireland, AONTAS is the national coordinator of NEAAL and participates in collaborative initiatives such as the 2026–2027 EU National Coordinators Cluster on Innovative Learning Environments, which has a strong focus on basic skills. These initiatives align closely with NEAAL’s broader objectives and underscore the EU’s commitment to strengthening adult learning systems across member states.

Despite policy ambitions, participation in adult learning in Ireland remains relatively low. The 2026 FET strategy, *Creating Futures*, reported significant growth with 1 in 10 adults (438,000) learning via FET in 2024, up by 33.4% since 2018. However, this falls significantly short of the 60% target set under the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan.³⁰ There are also significantly lower participation rates in lifelong learning amongst adults with lower educational attainment. A Q4 2024 SOLAS Labour Market Skills unit report found that adults with third level qualifications at NFQ levels 6–8 were more than 3 times likely to participate in lifelong learning compared to those with at most a level 3 (e.g., junior certificate) qualification.³¹ One in four adults in Ireland continue to struggle with basic numeracy skills, one in five adults struggle with basic literacy, and there is a continuing persistent digital skills divide with older people, those with disabilities, and communities experiencing socio-economic disadvantage most affected.³² These gaps have prompted responses from organisations such as AONTAS, whose ‘Holding You Back’ campaign, launched in early 2025, highlights structural barriers to participation. The campaign calls for targeted policy reforms, including free access to basic

²⁷ <https://eaea.org/our-work/influencing-policy/monitoring-policies/european-agenda-for-adult-learning/>

²⁸ https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies-and-activities/skills-and-qualifications/european-skills-agenda_en

²⁹ https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies-and-activities/skills-and-qualifications/union-skills_en

³⁰ [European Pillar of Social Rights - Building a fairer and more inclusive European Union - Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion](#)

³¹ SOLAS (2025). [Lifelong learning amongst adults in Ireland](#), Quarter 4 2024, p. 6

³² SOLAS, *Creating Futures*, 2026, pp. 20, 36.

education, equitable access to apprenticeships, increased investment in adult literacy, and sustained funding for community education.³³

Overall, the relationship between European strategies and Irish adult education policy is both direct and influential. While ambitious targets and frameworks are in place, ongoing challenges—particularly around participation and access—highlight the need for continued alignment between policy and practice to ensure that adult learning opportunities are accessible, inclusive, and responsive to societal change.

2.3 Existing studies on the impact of Erasmus+ on the adult education sector

The impact of the 2021–2027 Erasmus+ programmes on adult education in Ireland has not previously been the subject of research or evaluation. A presentation to the 2020 Léargas Research Forum provided an overview of the adult education landscape and of Erasmus+ during 2014–2020, including the use of Erasmus+ activities to complement and underpin ETBs Continuing Professional Development (CPD) strategies informed by FET CPD Strategy. The presentation shared testimonials from ETB staff who had engaged in KA1 staff mobility activities during 2014–2020.³⁴

Some studies offer insight to the experience of adult learners in Ireland. The 2023 AONTAS ‘Learners Voices Across Ireland’ report found that 64% of people surveyed gained more self-confidence through participation in adult learning, 58% gained a more positive outlook on the future, and 31% had an increased sense of belonging, better health and wellbeing. The report is informed by approximately 1,716 contributions from adult learners engaged in FET courses or programmes across Ireland in the previous academic year.³⁵ Léargas has conducted research on the impact of participation on the professional development of staff in Irish schools (2022)³⁶ and are currently undertaking a VET impact study. This is the first study on the impact of Erasmus+ in the field of adult education in Ireland.

2.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, while adult education in Ireland is a key component of FET, its policy rationale remains distinct, albeit increasingly linked to lifelong learning goals within national policy frameworks. The 2026 FET national strategy explicitly targets

³³ [Campaigns | Aontas](#)

³⁴ Léargas Research Forum 2020: the Impact and experience of European Programmes in Ireland. Accessed at: <https://6742367.fs1.hubspotusercontent-na1.net/hubfs/6742367/Leargas%20School%20Education%20Report.pdf>

³⁵ [Learners’ Voices Across Ireland: New research findings from 2023 | AONTAS](#)

³⁶ Ivanna D’Arcy, *Erasmus+ School Education: the impact of mobility projects on the professional development of staff*. Dublin: Léargas, 2022. Accessed at: [Leargas School Education Report.pdf](#)

expanded participation in Erasmus+ to enhance shared learning and innovation amongst FET providers.³⁷ Adult education, however, continues to maintain a dual economic and social mission, extending beyond workplace skills acquisition to value literacy development, personal confidence and motivation development, active citizenship, and community participation outcomes. This is the first study on the impact of Erasmus+ in the field of adult education in Ireland.

³⁷ SOLAS, *Creating Futures*, 2026, p. 29

3 The accessibility and inclusiveness of Erasmus+

3.1 Introduction

Inclusion and diversity are one of the priorities of the Erasmus+ programme. Equal opportunities and equal access, inclusion, diversity, and fairness should be promoted in all programme actions.³⁸ Priority is given to organisations, as well as disadvantaged learners, who would otherwise not be likely to participate in internationalisation activities. This chapter discusses the characteristics of the organisations that participated in Erasmus+ between 2021 and 2024, and also the characteristics of the adult learners who benefit from the outcomes developed in KA2 and/or who take part in mobility activities in KA1. On this basis, statements can be made about the accessibility and inclusiveness of Erasmus+ in adult education in Ireland.

This chapter examines the types of organisations involved in the programme and what field of practice they are operating in. It also looks at the regional spread of organisations across the country, therefore highlighting emerging issues around access of learners to potential Erasmus+ opportunities.

3.2 Participating organisations in Erasmus+

The legal entities of organisations participating in Erasmus+ Adult Education in Ireland is quite diverse, comprising of a diverse mix of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), public bodies, private companies and other institutions active in adult learning. The survey results demonstrated that NGOs are the most active organisational types, representing 61% of coordinating organisations, both in KA1 and in KA2. Also, specific to the Irish context, the National Agency is working closely with the ETBs to support and strengthen their engagement in Erasmus+ Adult Education programmes. ETBs are public adult education providers operating at regional level and collectively reach a substantial proportion of adult educators and adult learners across Ireland. Currently, 7 of the 16 ETBs hold KA1 Adult Education accreditation.³⁹ A further 5 ETBs are participating in short-term projects. Collectively, these organisations represent 75% of all ETBs nationally, demonstrating a significant level of engagement with Erasmus+ Adult Education activities.

³⁸ EU Commission (2023). Erasmus+ programme guide. p.7

³⁹ Erasmus+ accreditation is open to all organisations that want to regularly organise mobility activities. Award of the accreditation confirms that the applicant has created an Erasmus+ to oversee the completion of high-quality mobility activities as part of a wider effort to develop their organisation. It gives accredited organisations simplified access to KA1 funding every year to implement their planned mobility activities and achieve their organisational Erasmus Plan objectives. Accessed at: [Erasmus accreditation - Erasmus+](#)

In KA1 projects, 24% also belonged to the Public/Semi-Public category and 14% belonged to the Public Authority/Government Agency category. In KA2 projects, 28% were private companies and 17% identified as private education institutes. Again, the greatest number of coordinating organisations active in KA1 were from the NGO sector (43%), followed by Public or Semi-Public education institutions (24%) and Public Authority state agencies (14%). Private companies and higher education institutions tend to be active in KA2 only. In the case of respondents selecting ‘Other’, the write in stated they categorised themselves as social enterprise.

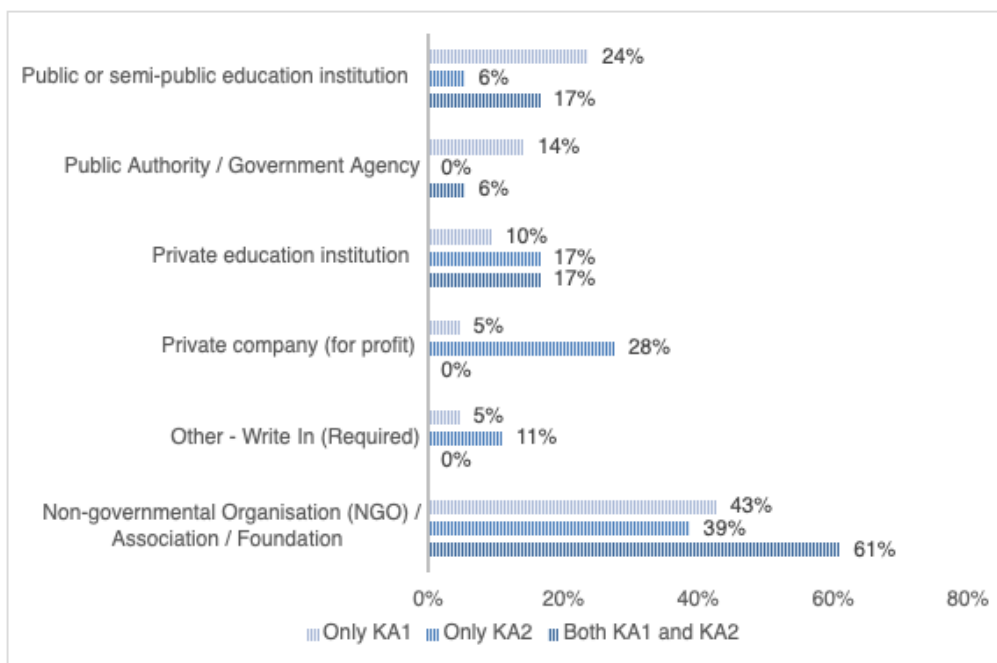


Figure 2: Legal status of beneficiary organisations that participated in Erasmus+ (2021–2024) only KA1 (n=21), only KA2 (n=18), both KA1 and KA2 (n=18)
Source: Online survey beneficiary organisations RIA-AE network (2025–2026)

Almost half of survey respondents categorised their organisation under ‘adult education provider’, followed by 15% who chose ‘Other’, in which case they categorised themselves under: environmental, employment, community education provider, rights-based organisation, English language education and community development.

Responses indicate that 40% of organisations surveyed reported to having Erasmus+ KA120 accreditation. Out of those who selected ‘Not Accredited’, several respondents indicated that they were in the process of applying or had an interest in applying.

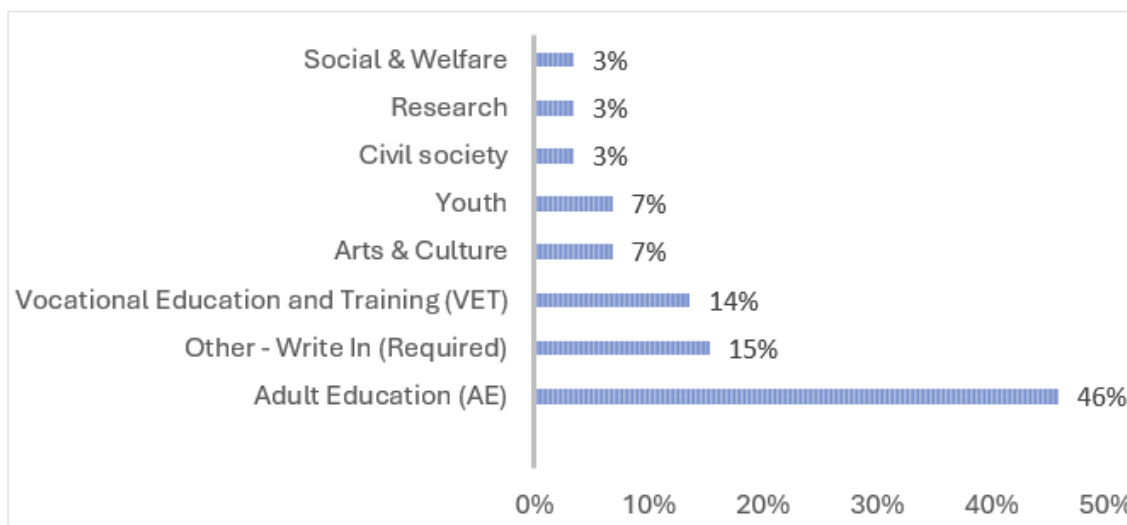


Figure 3: Sectors in which beneficiary organisations primarily operated in the period of 2021–2024 (n=59)
Source: Online survey beneficiary organisations RIA-AE network (2025–2026)

Geographical distribution

The geographical distribution of funded organisations in Erasmus+ completed in the period 2021–2024 reveals strong disparities between regions. The eastern and midland regions accounts for, by far, the largest share of the total, 75%, for both KA1 and KA2 projects.

The data suggests a strong concentration of projects in the eastern and midland region, which may reflect the concentration of national bodies and agencies in Dublin. It should be noted, however, that projects may be implemented in locations other than an organisation’s registered office. This pattern is also likely to reflect population distribution. According to the latest Central Statistics Office (CSO) census figures, the Greater Dublin Area has an estimated population of approximately 2.1 million people, accounting for more than 40% of Ireland’s total population.

Nonetheless, the data highlights significant potential for growth under the new programme in other regions and suggests a need for targeted outreach and capacity building initiatives in the southern, northern and western regions of the country.

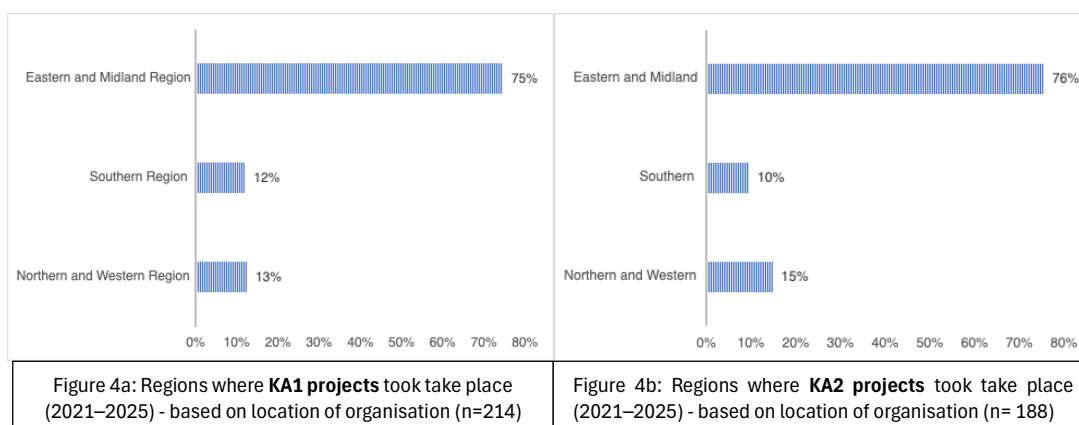


Figure 4a: Regions where **KA1 projects** took take place (2021–2025) - based on location of organisation (n=214)

Figure 4b: Regions where **KA2 projects** took take place (2021–2025) - based on location of organisation (n= 188)

Size of the participating organisations (KA1 and KA2)

The number of staff members and adult learners can be used to estimate the size of an organisation. In the survey of organisations, results indicate that most respondent organisations (34%) ranged in the middle size, i.e., 11–50 staff members. 20% of respondents represented organisations of a staff of 250 or more, while 19% of respondents had between 1–5 members of staff.

The majority of responding organisations (47%) had more than 250 adult learners in their organisation. A further 25% reach up to 50 learners, and 20% of organisations state that they have a reach of 51–250 learners. 3 organisations stated that they do not reach any learners. The likely rationale for this is that they participated in KA2 projects where learners were not directly involved in activities.

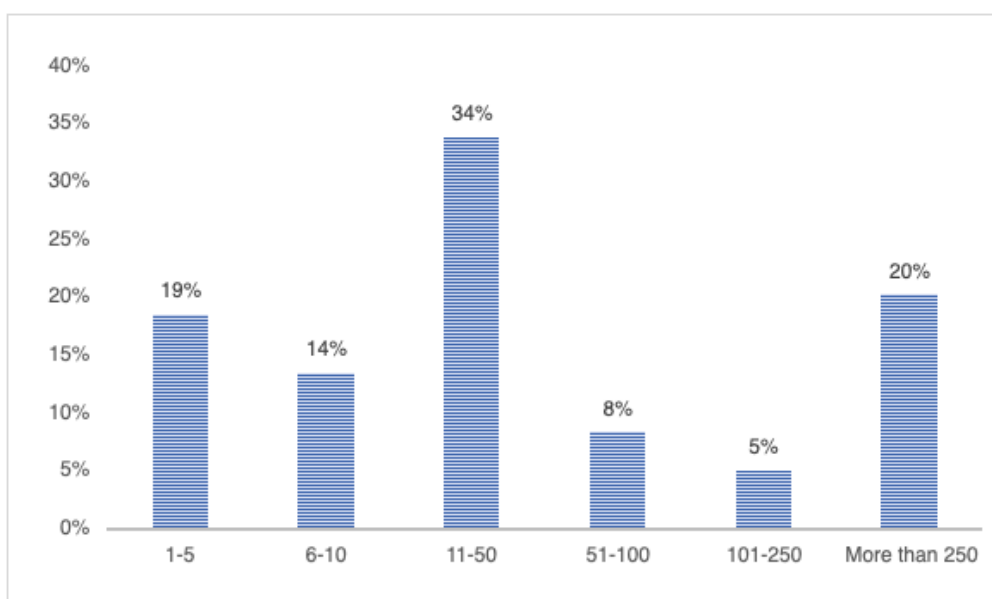


Figure 5: Number of staff working in the organisation (n= 59)
Source: Online survey beneficiary organisations RIA-AE network (2025–2026)

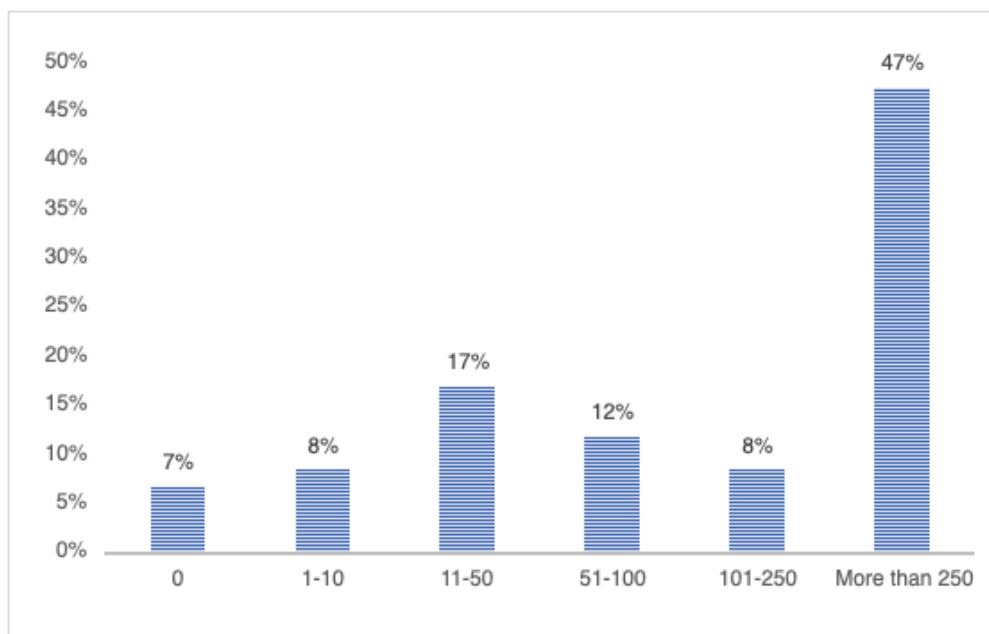


Figure 6: Number of adult learners that participated in learning activities in 2024 (n=59)
Source: Online survey beneficiary organisations RIA-AE network (2025–2026)

Number of projects involved and variety of roles

As the figures below indicate, a significant number of surveyed organisations were newcomers to the programme, having participated in only one Erasmus+ project in the programme period 2021–2024. The high number of new entrants to the programme, particularly in KA1, provides a welcome insight into the accessibility and inclusiveness of the programme. KA1 started from a low base in Ireland, with only one project funded in 2021 (when Léargas assumed administration of the adult education KA1 and KA2 actions), increasing to 47 in 2025. As such, the proportion of newcomers is to be expected, and it is hoped that they will be supported to continue to engage into the new post-2028 Erasmus+ programme. It is also encouraging to note that a smaller, but significant, group demonstrates substantial levels of experience, with 28% of participating KA2 organisations taking part in 5 or more projects.

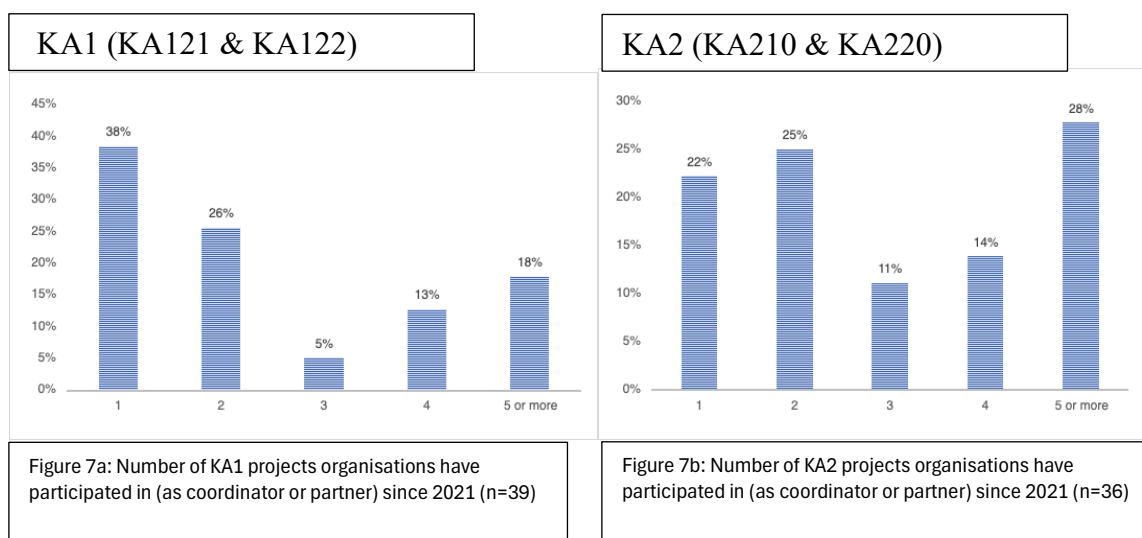


Figure 8 below shows that 66% of organisations have held a coordinating role, while a slightly smaller proportion (63%) have participated as project partners. Respondents were permitted to select multiple responses, therefore, the combined percentage exceeds 100%. The overlap between these categories is likely to reflect organisations that have participated in multiple projects and have undertaken both coordinating and partner roles.

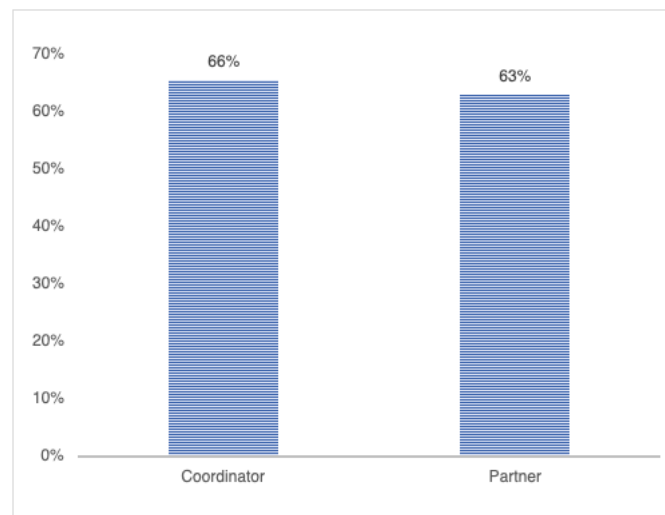


Figure 8: Role of organisations which participated in KA2 projects in the period of 2021–2024 (n=38)
Source: Online survey beneficiary organisations RIA-AE network (2025–2026)

3.3 Obstacles for participating in Erasmus+

General obstacles in KA1 and KA2

Survey respondents indicated encouragingly that 59% of organisations intend to apply for Erasmus+ funding again in the future. A further 24% reported that they were unsure about applying again. This finding suggests a need for additional supports, particularly at the planning phase, including targeted information sessions, guidance on application development, and assistance with partner identification to sustain these organisations engagement in the programme.

‘It is a new area of work for us, and we are somewhat unsure of the exact process involved.’

‘The resources required in the planning stage.’

‘We feel we are not prepared yet to be involved in a KA1 project.’

Source: Online survey beneficiary organisations RIA-AE network (2025–2026)

More broadly, the results highlight the need for continued capacity building initiatives within the adult education sector to strengthen participation in KA1 learner mobility activities.

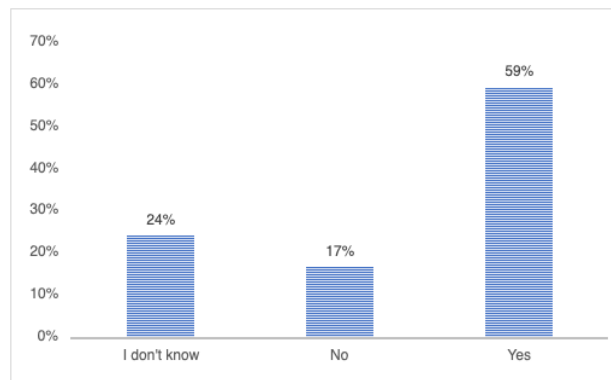


Figure 9: Intention of beneficiary organisations to apply to KA1 mobility for adult learners in the future (n=54)
Source: Online survey beneficiary organisations RIA-AE network (2025–2026)

In addition to the quantitative findings, respondents were invited to provide qualitative feedback through open-ended survey questions. Thematic analysis of these responses identified several recurring themes relating to participants' experiences, perceived obstacles, and challenges associated with programme participation. These findings were further corroborated by evidence gathered through the case study interviews, which reinforced many of the themes emerging from the survey responses.

Capacity related barriers

A **lack of time, capacity and human resources** was the most frequently identified significant issue/barrier by small and larger organisations. It was noted that in some cases, where staffing was already stretched, the time and capacity to complete needs analysis, develop an application form, etc., were just not feasible. In addition to this, some respondents' feedback indicated that it can be costly and difficult to find cover for the staff who are away on mobility and that this can cause disruption to the delivery of existing programmes and classes.

Other barriers included securing **management and staff buy-in** due to already existing high workloads, other priorities, and staff personal commitments. An issue that arose, and perhaps is specific to the Irish context, is a reluctance of staff to engage for environmental reasons. The only option to travel is by air which conflicts with the organisational aims to reduce airmiles.

Finding a suitable partner was also identified as a barrier by some. It can be a time-consuming process, and potential European partners are often voluntary and do not have the same scope/capacity to engage.

Issues related to **limited budgets** were also noted as a barrier by some respondents. One respondent commented that *‘The limited budgets for KA1 and time-consuming activities related to mobility, make our organisation prioritise KA2 type of projects.’* Another organisation stated that they would be very interested to work with partners in the Nordic countries, but it is not feasible for them as the costs associated are not covered in the grant.

Non-participating organisations interviewed also identified time and capacity as a barrier to their potential engagement with Erasmus+. **A lack of understanding** of where they fit into the programme and if they are relevant/suitable/eligible to the programme is also a big obstacle. It was mentioned that the administrative and application process seemed intimidating and they were unsure if the time invested would be worth the additional administrative burden and, if indeed, the experience would bring added value to their existing programmes.

Specific obstacles for KA1 mobility for adult education learners

17% of respondents indicated that they do not intend to apply for KA1 mobility funding for adult learners in the future. Both the survey respondents and case study interviewees provided insights into the challenges they face and identified several barriers to participation that are specific to adult learners.

Respondents frequently highlighted the substantial **resource demands associated with the planning and application stages of KA1 projects**. For organisations with small teams and demanding operational responsibilities, releasing staff to plan and manage mobility activities was perceived as particularly challenging. As a result, some organisations expressed a desire to participate in the future but felt that they currently lacked the capacity to do so.

In addition to **capacity constraints**, some organisations reported a lack of familiarity with Erasmus+ processes and requirements. For organisations that are new to adult learner mobility, uncertainty regarding application procedures and project implementation were identified as barriers to participation.

‘We are a small team of 5 people who each have very specific roles and demanding schedules. We would like to engage in mobility, but it is very challenging for a small company to do this. We certainly would like to engage in this in the near future and are working towards it.’

‘It is a new area of work for us, and we are somewhat unsure of the exact process involved.’

‘The resources required in the planning stage. We feel we are not prepared yet to be involved in a KA1 project.’

Source: Online survey beneficiary organisations RIA-AE network (2025–2026)

Selection of participants presented barriers for various reasons. The short-term nature of engagement with learners, in some cases, means that there is not sufficient time to sustain engagement to motivate participation in mobility. Family

and work commitments can also be a barrier to participation for both learner and staff mobility.

‘Many of our learners combine part-time education with work and, or, caring commitments. In addition, many of our learners dip in and out of programmes, sometimes with gaps of a year or more between modules. It is difficult to engage with a specific group long enough to work with them to build their interest and motivation to participate on a mobility.’

Source: Online survey beneficiary organisations RIA-AE network (2025–2026)

Insufficient inclusion supports were identified as a barrier by some organisations, particularly those operating in the disability sector, where participating adult learners often have additional needs and support requirements. Facilitating participation in mobility activities can be highly staff-intensive, placing significant demands on organisational resources and leaving limited capacity to maintain day-to-day operations.

The KA1 learners’ interviewees gave interesting insights into the learners who do not participate in KA1 opportunities, identifying low **confidence and self-belief** as the biggest barrier for some people. One interviewee shared that *‘sometimes the biggest barrier is yourself.’* The idea of ‘inner readiness’ to participate and the timing of the opportunities presented to the potential learners needs to be carefully considered.

These findings suggest that, alongside financial supports, continued guidance, targeted outreach and capacity building measures are important in supporting new and smaller organisations to participate in KA1 mobility activities.

3.4 Conclusion on accessibility and inclusiveness

The majority of the beneficiaries in both KA1 and KA2 are NGOs. Private companies and Higher Educational institutes are more likely to be active in KA2 only. Almost half of the responding organisations (43%) identified as operating primarily in the Adult Education sector, followed by VET (14%) and other (15%).

Organisations active in Erasmus+ in Adult Education are mostly mid-range in size, i.e., between 11–50 employees, and work with more than 250 learners. The most targeted group of mobility participants are staff, followed by adult learners with low levels of education/low basic skills, and young adults.

Data collected from both survey responses and interviews strongly concur that time, staffing and capacity are the greatest obstacles in participating in Erasmus+ projects. A particular challenge for the KA1 mobilities is finding suitable adult learners to take part in mobility projects. In situations where learners have more specific needs allocating sufficient inclusion supports is a challenge both in terms of personnel and associated costs.

The high proportion of new entrants to the programme, particularly within KA1, is a

positive indicator of the programme's accessibility and inclusiveness. It is also encouraging that a smaller, but still significant, cohort of organisations demonstrates sustained engagement: 28% of participating KA2 organisations have been involved in 5 or more projects. The most pronounced disparity in participation is geographical, highlighting the need for targeted outreach and support in under-represented regions.

KA1 participation was starting from a low base in Ireland, with only 1 project funded in 2021, increasing to 47 by 2025. Given this context, the high proportion of newcomer organisations is welcome, albeit unsurprising. Continued support will be important to ensure that these organisations remain engaged with the programme over the longer term.

NGOs and ETB providers demonstrate strong engagement across both learner mobility (KA1) and strategic cooperation and partnership (KA2) actions, while higher education institutions are more likely to focus on KA2 actions supporting staff mobility and organisational innovation. A smaller group of experienced organisations continue to participate extensively, particularly in KA2. Notably, 40% of participating organisations hold Erasmus+ accreditation, indicating a strategic commitment to sustained programme engagement.

Erasmus+ funding is highly additional, 85% of projects would either not have taken place or would have been implemented on a substantially reduced scale without programme support. This underlines the programme's importance in enabling participation in European mobility and cooperation activities within adult education. Finally, participant organisations frequently highlighted the proactive, professional, and responsive guidance provided by the National Agency as a key strength of programme delivery.

4 Impact of Erasmus+ at organisation and staff level

4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the outcomes and expected impact of Erasmus+ on the organisations. This includes the impact of Erasmus+ on the development and improvement of the quality of learning opportunities offered by the participating organisations. It begins by presenting the concrete project results and products, as well as the topics prioritised because of participation. Subsequently, findings on the effects of Erasmus+ participation on staff are reported.

4.2 Topics addressed and products developed in Erasmus+ projects

The Erasmus+ project results platform⁴⁰ is an online database that provides information on projects funded under the Erasmus+ Programme, including project details and outcomes. According to data obtained from the platform, a total of 187 Erasmus+ projects were coordinated by Irish organisations between 2021 and 2024. Of these, 126 were KA1 projects (71 of these projects have been completed, while 55 remain ongoing). 61 were KA2 projects (41 of these projects have been completed, while 20 remain ongoing).

The range of topics addressed across the different actions are broad, however primary topics addressed:

Topics KA2 (n=61)

Inclusion, promoting equality and non-discrimination (21%)
Bridging intercultural, inter-generational and social divide (16%)
Creating new, innovative, or joint curricula or courses (15%)
New innovative curricula/educational methods/ development of training courses (13%)
Active ageing (10%)

Topics KA1 (n=126)

Inclusion, promoting equality and non-discrimination (15%)
New learning and teaching methods and approaches (9.5%)
Bridging intercultural, inter-generational and social divide (9%)
Democracy and inclusive democratic participation (6%)
Environment and Climate Change (5%)

These results are consistent with the survey sample where the primary topic addressed by KA1 projects is 'inclusion, promoting equality and non-discrimination'.

⁴⁰ The Erasmus+ Project Results Platform

<https://erasmusplus.ec.europa.eu/projects#:~:text=About%20the%20Project%20Results%20Platform,officer%20to%20manage%20your%20project.>

The second most popular topic addressed is ‘new learning and teaching methods and approaches’ and the third most popular topic addressed is ‘bridging intercultural, inter-generational and social divide’.

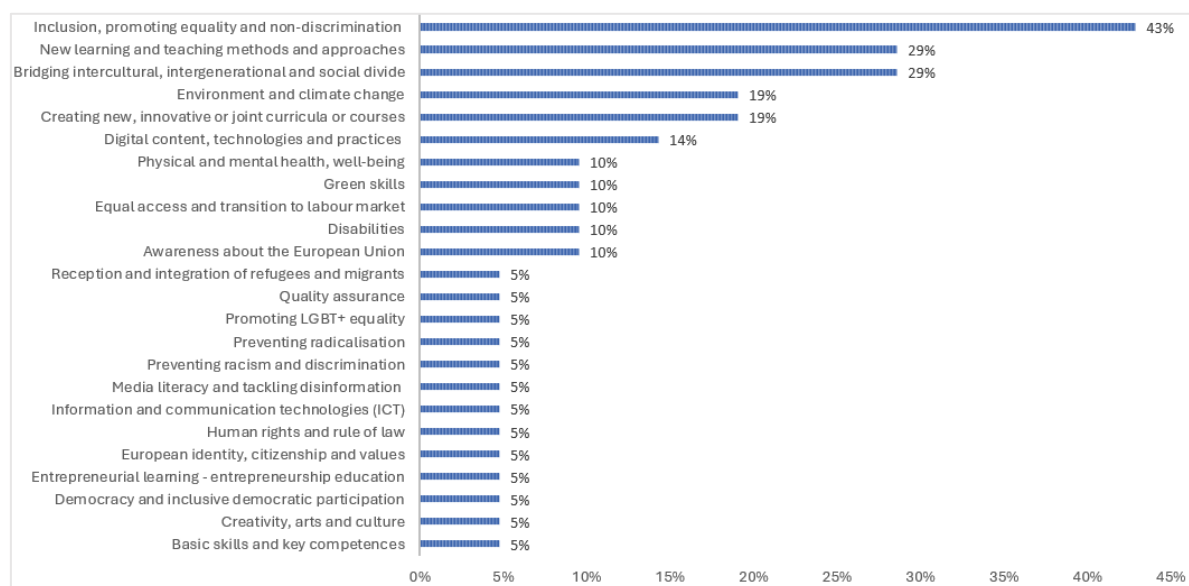


Figure 10: Topics of KA1 projects - 3 topics per project possible (n=21)
Source: European Commission monitoring data

Figure 11 below presents the proportion of organisations reporting how their Erasmus+ KA2 projects addressed specific horizontal and adult education priorities.

The findings show that *inclusion and diversity in all fields of education, training, youth and sport* is the most frequently addressed priority, identified by 38% of organisations (n=21). The second most addressed priority is *digital transformation through the development of digital readiness, resilience and capacity* cited by 19% of respondents. A further 14% of organisations reported addressing the priority of *environment and the fight against climate change*, indicating a growing recognition of the role of adult education in promoting sustainability and environmental awareness.

Among the adult education-specific priorities, creating upskilling pathways, improving accessibility, and increasing take-up of adult education, and creating and promoting learning opportunities among all citizens and generations were each identified by 10% of organisations. These findings reflect ongoing efforts to widen participation in adult learning and support lifelong learning opportunities across diverse population groups.

The least frequently cited priorities were *common values, civic engagement and participation*, and *improving the availability of high-quality learning opportunities for adults*, each reported by 5% of organisations. While these areas received lower levels of explicit focus, they are nevertheless addressed indirectly through activities undertaken under other priority themes.

Overall, the findings suggest that Erasmus+ projects in the adult education sector are primarily focused on advancing inclusion and diversity, while also supporting digital transformation, sustainability, and broader lifelong learning objectives.

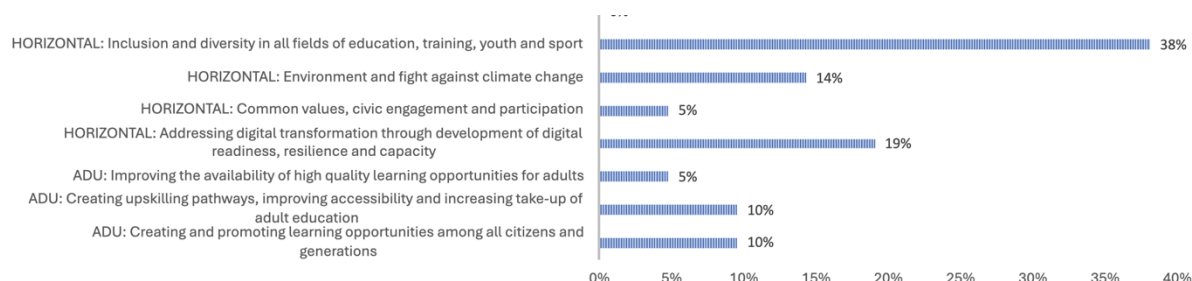


Figure 11: Priorities of KA2 projects - (n=21)
Source: European Commission monitoring data

Type of KA2 products developed

For the participating organisations, projects supported under KA2 are intended to develop outputs or products, examples include new curricula, pedagogical methodologies, educational materials, or IT platforms. Outputs are developed in proportion to the scale of the project, i.e., KA220 Cooperation Partnership projects will be expected to develop more significant results compared to the KA210 Small-Scale Partnership projects.

A large proportion of survey respondents (82%) said that *teaching materials for teachers and staff* were the most prevalent types of outputs developed in Erasmus+ KA2 projects (2021–2024). Learning materials, manuals and handbooks and curricula, training modules, language courses or pedagogical concepts were also prevalent. The case study interviews revealed more specific examples of outputs, such as digital CVs, online learning platforms, Volunteer training manuals, parents' handbooks etc.

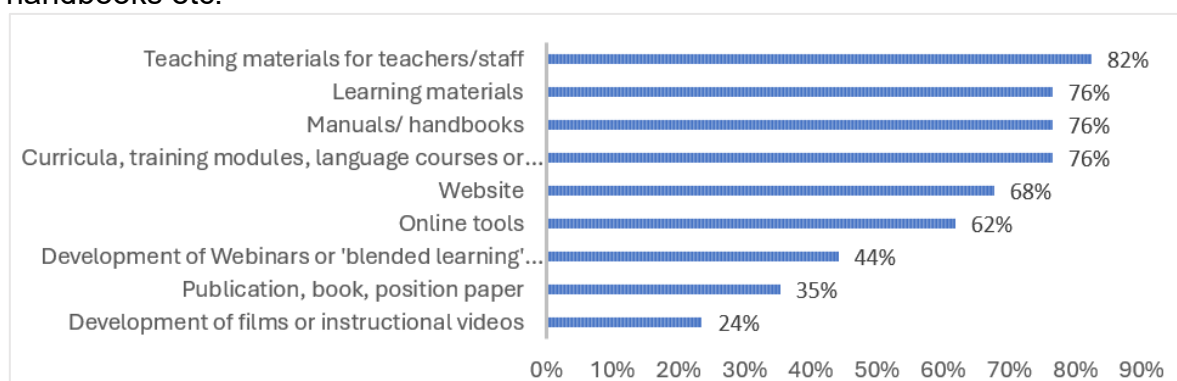


Figure 12: Type of outputs or products developed as part of participation in KA2 in Erasmus+ (2021–2024) (n=34)

The majority of survey respondents indicated that the outputs produced were still used after their participation in the project. Results state that 41% of outputs are still very much in use, 35% stating they are in use to some extent, and a further 21% stating they are in use more than was expected.

The way in which KA2 projects respond to local learner, staff, and organisational needs make the outputs highly relevant and can be practically applied. The importance of dissemination was mentioned several times.

‘The resource we developed is useful within our organisation, but will be even more beneficial when it is publicly published for more to use.’

Source: Online survey beneficiary organisations RIA-AE network (2025–2026)

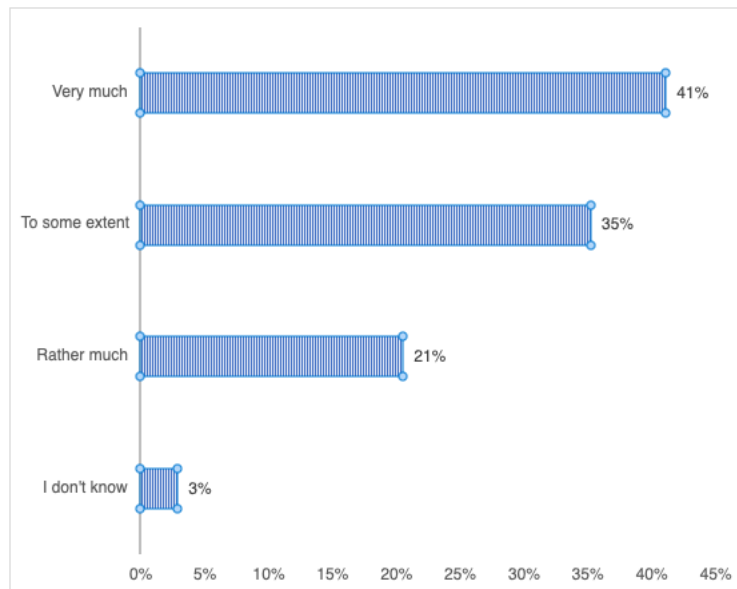


Figure 13: Extent to which KA2 outputs and products are still used after participation in Erasmus+ (n=34)
Source: Online survey beneficiary organisations RIA-AE network (2025–2026)

Qualitative data from the open-ended survey responses identified several factors that stimulated the uptake of Erasmus+ project outputs. The factor most frequently cited was the **relevance of the materials** produced to meet the needs of specific learner groups. Respondents highlighted that resources tailored to particular target groups, such as rural women and unemployed people, were perceived as highly relevant and applicable.

The alignment of project outputs with course objectives and staff interests was also identified as an important factor in encouraging engagement. In addition, the development of **practical and adaptable resources**, including handbooks, toolkits and learning materials, facilitated their integration into existing educational practice. As one respondent noted, *‘Many KA2 outputs (handbooks, learning materials, tools) were easy to integrate into our ongoing programmes.’*

Respondents also emphasised that the processes used to develop resources often **aligned closely with organisational values**, particularly those relating to community engagement and inclusion, thereby supporting their uptake. Furthermore, some respondents reported that the outputs increased both the motivation and capacity of staff to **support learner participation in KA1 mobility** activities. One respondent commented, *‘The innovative character of the products produced helped us **modernise our teaching techniques**, engage strongly our learners, and make learning a fun activity.’*

Hampering factors included **time pressure** and **staff feeling overworked**, and the process eating into time allocation for specific things, e.g., teaching time. It was noted that the onus to always create something innovative and new detracts from potential growth areas, i.e., to replicate and refine current methods and activities, it

also leads to an **oversaturation of products** available in the sector. **Difficulties in staff retention**, and associated knowledge and experience lost, is a deemed a hampering issue in the take-up of outputs also. One organisation stated they were in the process of creating a digital library for all outputs to be housed so that it can be easily accessible for new staff members. **COVID-19** was mentioned as a hampering factor in the early days by some. It is worth noting here that the importance (and quality) of dissemination was mentioned several times in determining how outputs are effectively used.

4.3 Impact at organisation level

Impact on the learning offer

There is significant evidence from the survey respondents to suggest that learning offers have changed because of an organisations' participation in Erasmus+ projects with almost full agreement amongst respondents on the 3 impact areas below:

100% of survey respondents agree, with the majority strongly agreeing, that developed outputs and insights have been incorporated into new or existing learning provision within the organisation. Examples from survey respondents included an embedded approach to organising art courses and exhibitions, a training course on ecosystem restoration, parenting supports, and intercultural learning offerings.

'This has directly enhanced our learning offer through new nature-based and sustainability activities, improved wellbeing and intercultural components and supported us to update digital learning pathways.'

Source: Online survey beneficiary organisations RIA-AE network (2025–2026)

Almost all respondents agree that learning offers align with the needs of their adult learners. In some cases, it was reported that the experience enabled a better *understanding* of learners and their needs, supporting organisations to be more proactive in the methods and approaches adopted, including a deeper understanding of inclusive practice.

'Our staff team has grown in expertise in the development of educational curricula for adult learning, with specific learning needs incorporating universal design and including stakeholders in the development of the outputs.'

Source: Online survey beneficiary organisations RIA-AE network (2025–2026)

There are several examples of where the accessibility of the learning offer has improved for different groups. Several respondents reported that the process has raised awareness about additional barriers faced by adult learners and how to overcome those barriers. One organisation has developed programmes specifically to work with visually impaired people. Another respondent states;

‘LGBTQIA+ learners are better included in their educational journey, from having the opportunity to provide their preferred pronouns to seeing themselves better represented in classroom.’

Source: Online survey beneficiary organisations RIA-AE network (2025–2026)

One organisation shared, that through their experiences as a partner in a KA2 project, staff developed the confidence and capacity to support their learners in KA1 mobility.

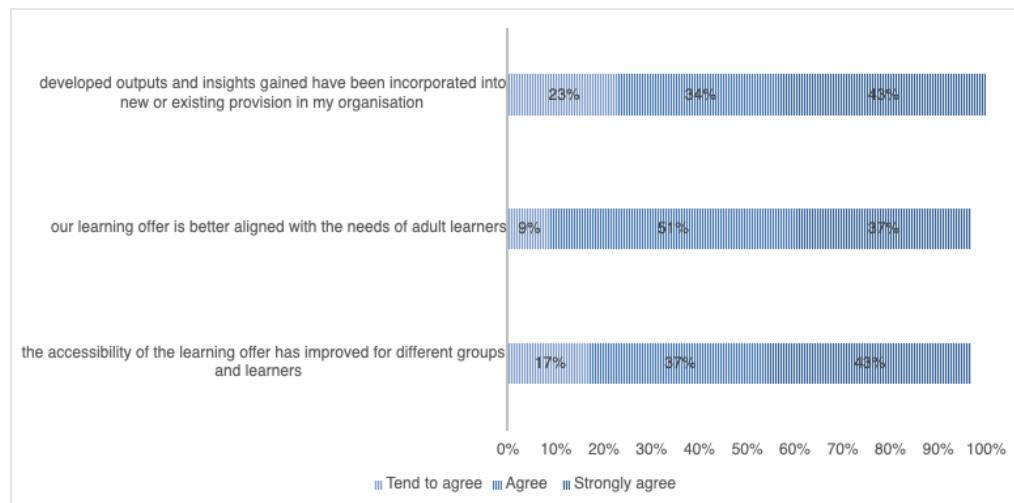


Figure 14: The impact of participation in Erasmus+ on the development of the learning offer (n=35) % of respondents agree

Source: Online survey beneficiary organisations RIA-AE network (2025–2026)

Impact on staff

Data on the impact on staff participating in Erasmus+ projects is compiled from 3 sources:

- Case Study interviews
- European Commission Questionnaires for all staff and volunteers who participate in mobility projects
- The RIA-AE online survey

Approximately 71% of participants who took part in staff mobility (n=298) during the period 2021–2024 were female and 28% were male. The most common destination countries for Irish staff mobility participants during this period were Spain (34%), Italy (12%), and Sweden and Germany (10%). For two-thirds of those surveyed it was their first time taking part in a staff mobility activity.

The most common mobility activities were participation in a course and training (57%) and participation in a job shadow (43%). 81% of respondents stated they were very satisfied with the experience, with the remaining 19% stating they were satisfied.

Across all data sources, there is strong evidence that participation in Erasmus+ projects has had a positive impact on staff. Survey findings indicate that the

greatest perceived benefits centre on the development of international competences, a finding that was consistently reinforced through interviews and case studies. Staff described gaining new knowledge, skills, and confidence through collaboration with European partners, while exposure to different approaches to adult education inspired new ideas and innovative ways of working.

A theme that emerged strongly from the qualitative data, and one that may be particularly relevant in the Irish context as an island on the western edge of Europe, was the strengthened sense of connection to Europe. Participants frequently reflected on how working alongside like-minded European peers broadened their perspectives, enhanced their intercultural awareness, and reinforced a sense of belonging to a wider European community.

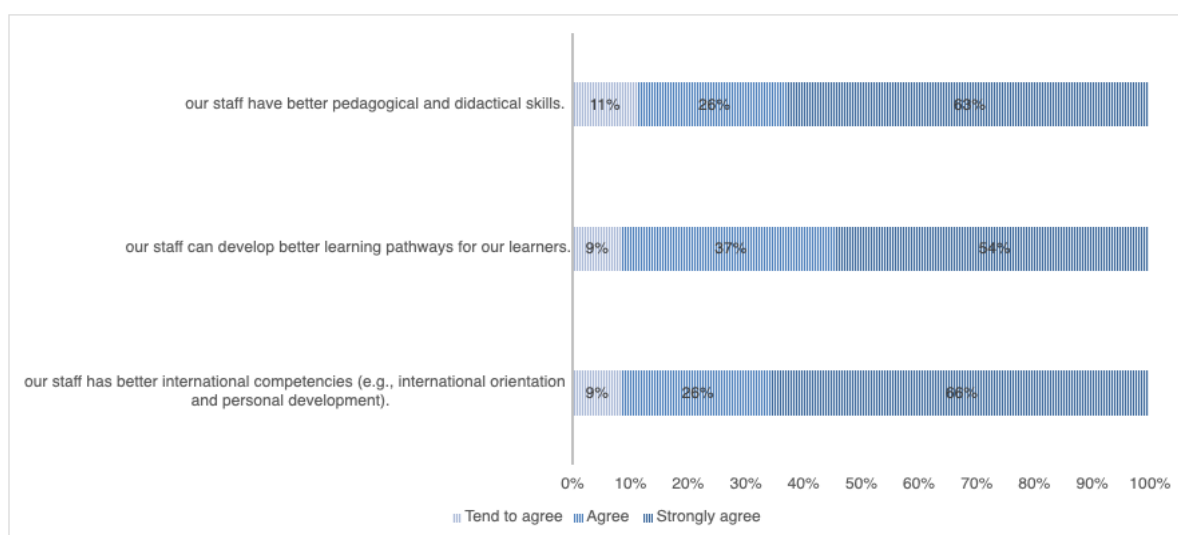


Figure 15: The impact of participation in Erasmus+ on working staff (n=35)
Source: Online survey beneficiary organisations RIA-AE network (2025–2026)

The case study interviews with project coordinators and staff mobility participants reinforced these findings.

Intercultural Awareness and Inclusive Practices: Respondents reported that staff developed a greater awareness of diverse cultural perspectives through collaboration with European peers. Several interviewees highlighted the insights and new ideas gained through collective learning experiences in an intercultural context. These experiences were reported to have enhanced staff understanding of learners' needs and contributed to a deeper appreciation of inclusive educational approaches.

Participation in Erasmus+ Projects supported the development of new curricula, the adoption of new tools, methodology and approaches. Interviewees refer to the experience of upskilling, some specific areas mentioned were facilitation skills, digital skills and increased confidence in their practices, enhancing overall **professional competence**.

‘Our staff team has grown in expertise in the development of educational curricula for adult learning with specific learning needs incorporating universal design and including stakeholders in the development of the outputs.’

Feeling more **confident and motivated** was a strong theme emerging from the interviews. Participants reflected on how engaging in the projects encouraged them to step outside their comfort zone and energised their commitment to their continuous learning and work practices.

‘Seeing my own practices being mirrored by people in other countries puts things in a different perspective, I definitely came back from the trip feeling more confident in my skills and my ability to facilitate groups and encourage their recovery.’

Another shared, *‘It also allowed for personal development and made our work more meaningful and impactful.’*

There were many references to **increased pedagogical and didactical skills** emerging from the case study interviews:

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

Another adult educator interviewee who went from a role of adult educator to coordinator of a national programme stated:

‘I wouldn’t have had the confidence to go for that job if I hadn’t been part of the Erasmus+ project because it threw huge responsibility at me, but also huge opportunity for growth and huge opportunity for learning.’

Interviewees also reported a stronger sense of connection to Europe, highlighting the value of European peer learning networks and the exchange of practices in fostering European identity.

Topics that received more attention as a result of the Erasmus+ projects.

Inclusion and diversity, developing inclusive learning environments, and digital skills received the most highly rated results in terms of the topics that received more attention after participation in Erasmus+ staff mobility.

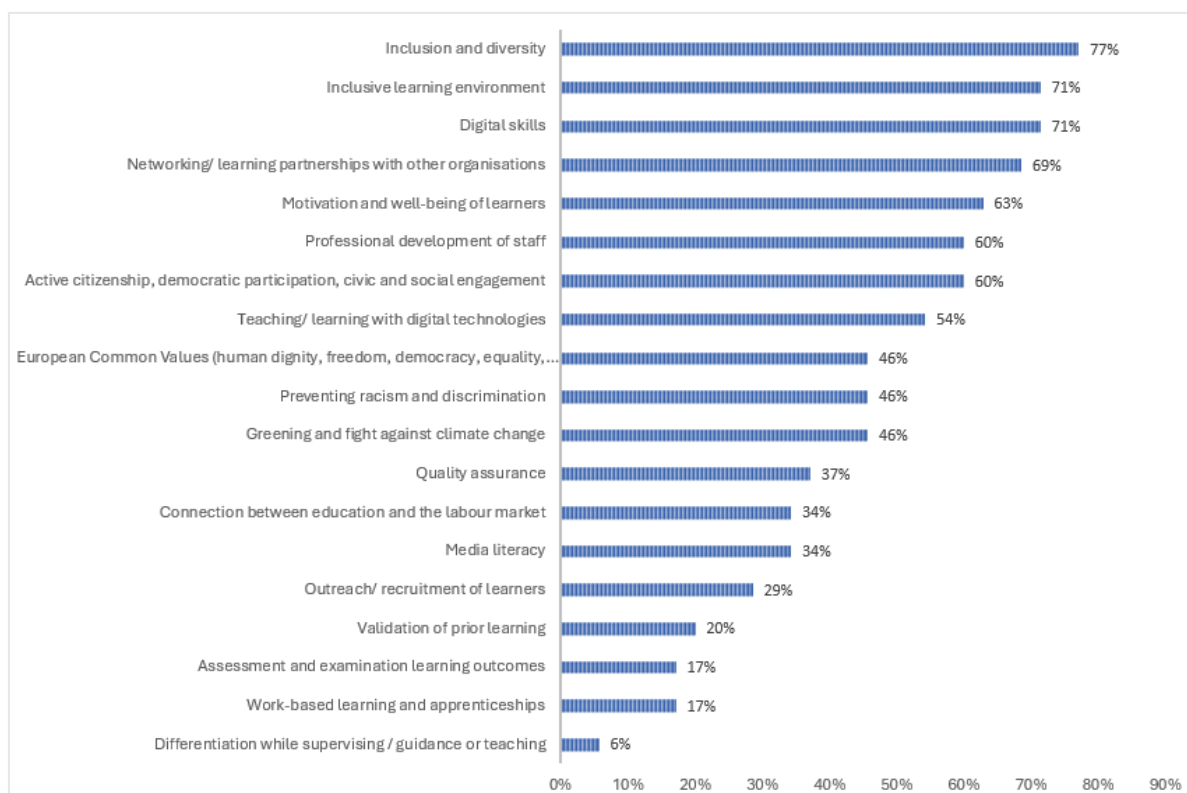


Figure 16: Topics receiving more attention after participating in Erasmus+ in the period 2021–2024 (n=35)
Source: Online survey beneficiary organisations RIA-AE network (2025–2026)

It is evident that engagement in Erasmus+ programmes plays a significant role in promoting organisational development, fostering innovation in adult education, and enhancing staff capacity across Europe. In this context, examining the long-term impact of participation in Erasmus+ projects is essential for understanding how international cooperation leads to sustainable change at the organisational level. The survey explored how participation in 1 or more Erasmus+ projects since 2021 has permanently strengthened organisations, enhanced their learning provision for adult learners and participants, and contributed to the professional development of staff.

Findings from the survey demonstrate that participation in Erasmus+ projects has generated lasting benefits, particularly in relation to the programme's horizontal priorities. Among the 29 staff members surveyed, 80% reported gaining a better understanding of the diversity of contemporary society, while 70% indicated that they had become more committed to combating discrimination, intolerance, and xenophobia. These findings suggest that participation in Erasmus+ has not only enhanced professional competencies but has also strengthened participants' awareness of social inclusion, equality, and democratic values.

Furthermore, 67% of respondents stated that they had learned more about Europe, the European Union and European values through their participation in Erasmus+ activities. This increased understanding has contributed to a stronger European dimension within participating organisations and has encouraged staff to incorporate European perspectives and values into their educational practices.

‘Since 2021, Cork ETB’s participation in multiple Erasmus+ projects has led to permanent organisational, pedagogical, and staff development improvements that have strengthened our Adult and Community Education Service. 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 through new nature-based and sustainability activities, improved wellbeing and intercultural components, updated digital learning pathways, and more flexible programme formats inspired by European partners. Staff who participated in mobilities have developed new facilitation methods, stronger digital confidence, improved teamwork across centres, and increased leadership capacity, which has resulted in more innovative, learner-centred practice across Cork ETB. Overall, the Erasmus+ experience since 2021 has contributed to lasting organisational capacity, higher-quality provision for adult learners, and a more skilled, motivated workforce.’

Source: Online survey beneficiary organisations RIA-AE network (2025–2026)

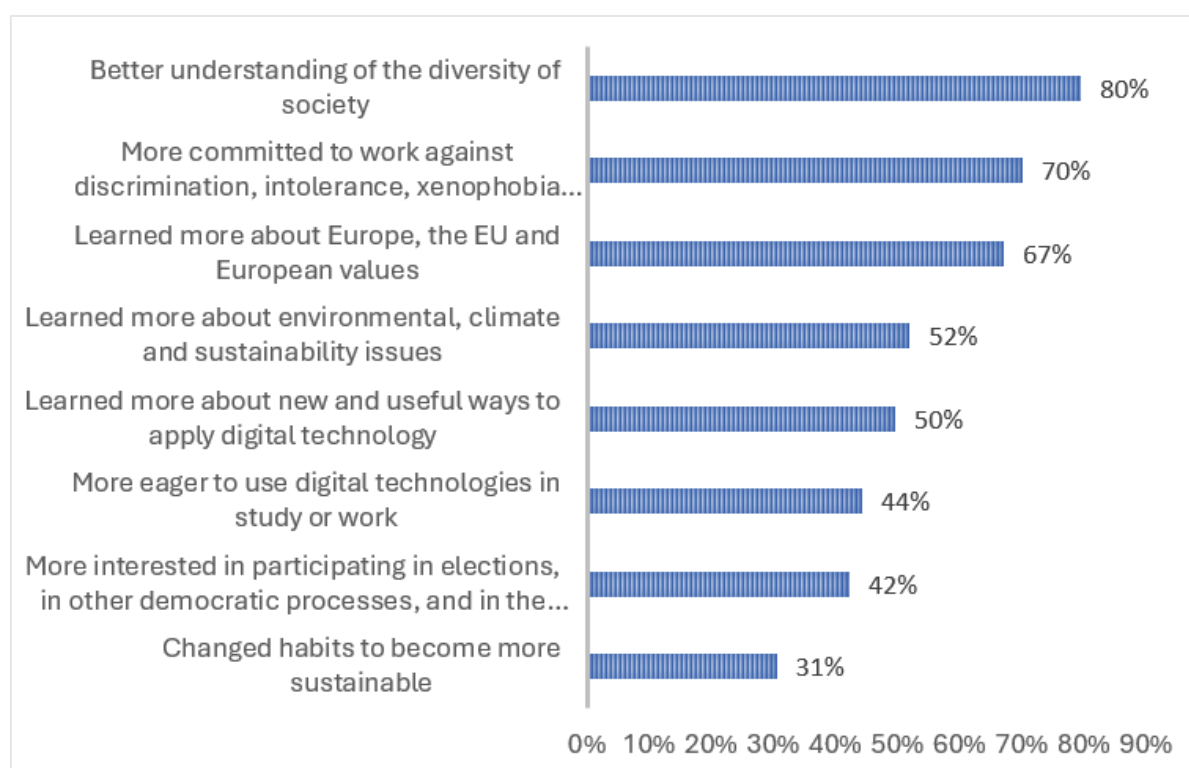


Figure 17: Ways in which participants gained knowledge about horizontal priorities - Staff (n=298)

4.4 Conclusion

Overall, research results demonstrate that participation in Erasmus+ projects has had a positive and lasting impact on both organisations and staff. At organisational level, Erasmus+ participation contributed to enhanced innovation and quality in learning supports and provision. Participation has also strengthened organisations’ capacity to respond more effectively to the diverse needs of adult learners. Increased awareness of barriers to participation led to the development of more targeted and inclusive programmes. In some cases, this has further led to the

development of targeted programmes for specific groups, as well as improvements in digital, intercultural, and wellbeing-focused provision.

Participation in Erasmus+ has also supported staff development in a meaningful and sustained way. Engagement in mobility activities and project work has enhanced professional competences, particularly in relation to intercultural awareness, inclusive practices, and the use of innovative teaching methodologies. Staff reported increased confidence, motivation, and a renewed sense of purpose in their roles. The opportunity to collaborate with European peers facilitated knowledge exchange, the development of new practices and has also fostered a stronger sense of European identity and connection.

While some challenges were identified, including time pressures, staff workload and issues related to sustainability of outputs, these do not outweigh the overall benefits, however, they highlight areas for further consideration in supporting participation in the programme. In conclusion, Erasmus+ has played a significant role in strengthening organisations, enhancing learning opportunities for adult learners, and supporting staff development. The focus on inclusion, collaboration and innovation is evident throughout and continues to shape practice within participating organisations.

5 Impact of KA1 mobility on Learners

5.1 Introduction

Learners in adult education are reached by Erasmus+ projects in different ways. On the one hand, they can participate directly in project activities, for example in mobility measures in KA1 projects or in events that are designed and implemented in their own country by KA2 projects. On the other hand, they can benefit indirectly from the results of the projects, especially in KA2, where courses and teaching/learning materials are often developed. This chapter solely focuses on the impact of KA1 mobility based on the interviews with adult learners that recently participated in KA1 mobility and their coordinating organisation.

5.2 Number and type of adult learners participating

Approximately 63% of participants involved in adult learner mobility between 2021 and 2024 were female, while 37% were male. Around one-third of learners were identified as having fewer opportunities. For just over two-thirds of respondents, this was their first experience participating in a mobility activity. In terms of age profile, 75% of learners were aged between 18 and 29, representing the largest age group among participants.

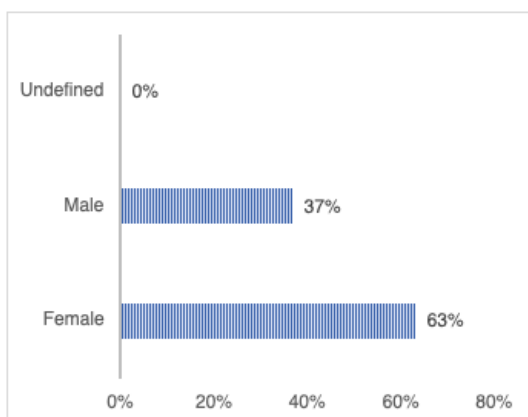


Figure 18: Gender division - Adult learners (n=76)

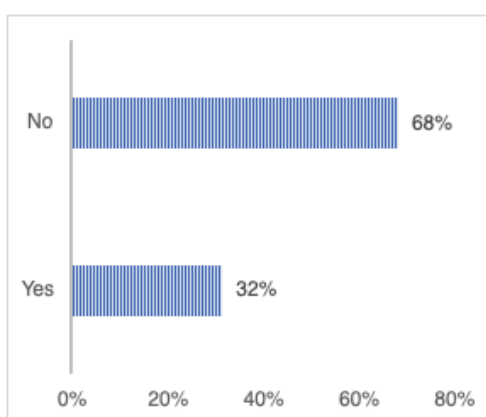


Figure 19: Adult learners with fewer opportunities (n=76)

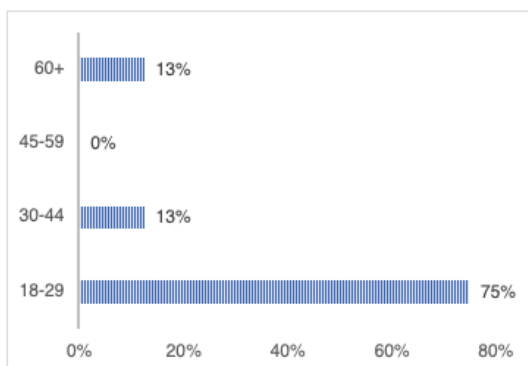


Figure 20: Age at start of programme - Adult learners (n=8)

Source: European Commission monitoring data

Figure 21 below visualises the numbers participating in mobility programmes (both planned and realised mobilities) in the period of 2021–2024. The trajectory for planned mobilities by both staff and learners has increased significantly since 2021. It is likely that the fall off in numbers for 2024 was due to many projects still being in progress at the time of the research. The 2024 data is not finalised as the final reports are still not completed. As a result, the number of realised mobilities in 2024 will likely increase as these projects are completed, and their reports submitted throughout 2026. It is also possible that the data on planned mobilities includes projects that were ultimately not funded. Therefore, these figures may not be fully representative in their current form.

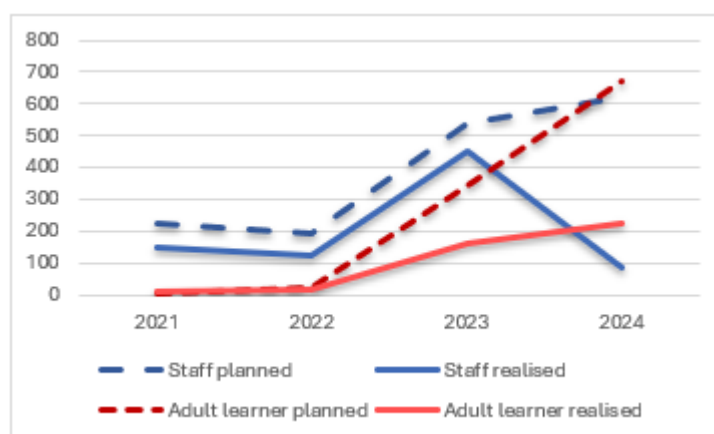


Figure 21: Planned and realised mobilities in the period of 2021–2024

5.3 Experiences with KA1 mobility

The general experience of adult learners in KA1 mobility is very positive. Analysis of the adult learners' responses (n=10) shows that all learners were 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with the overall experience.

Figure 22 below gives a more detailed breakdown of the various arrangements in place. The way in which questions or complaint were addressed was 'satisfactory' or 'very satisfactory' for all participants, as was the travel arrangements in place. Data suggests one-quarter of participants were very dissatisfied with arrangements, such as insurance cover, accommodation and overall organisation.

All learner responses agreed that they received sufficient preparation, training, and information from their supporting organisation in advance of their trip, as well as developing learning agreements that outlined expectations. All learners agreed that their host organisation made them feel welcome and that the teaching and training experience received was of good quality.

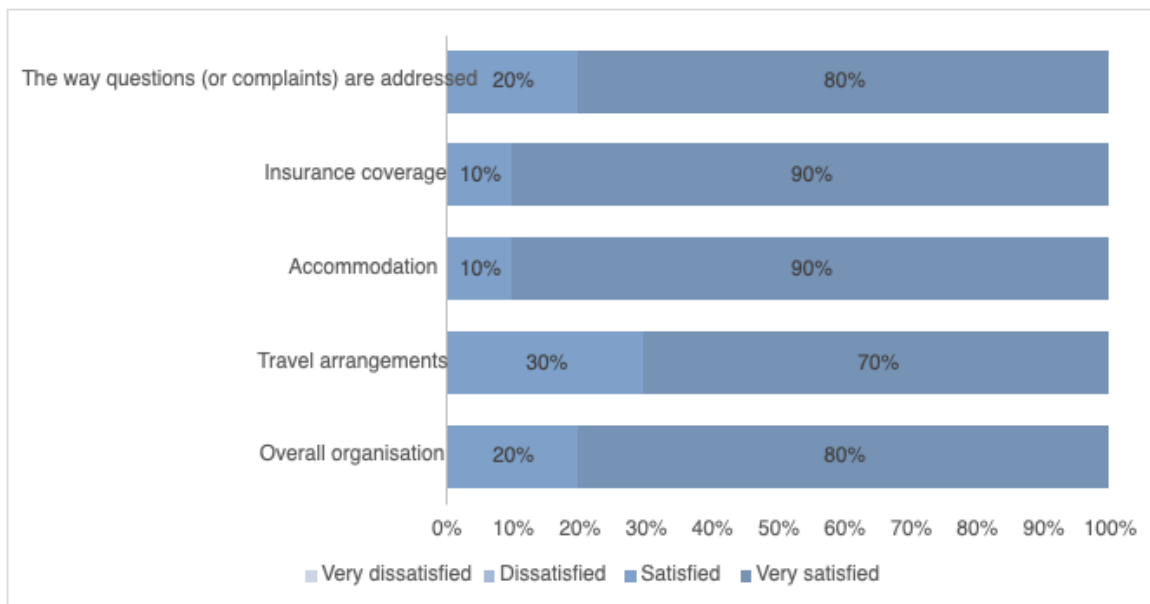


Figure 22: Satisfaction with various arrangements of mobility - Adult learners (n=10)

Figure 23 below highlights the positive impact of a learning or development programme on participants' personal, academic, and professional growth. The most significant outcome is the improvement in **self-confidence, independence, and responsibility**, with 100% of adult learner respondents reporting positive changes in this area.

90% of adult learner respondents reported they had developed **clearer ideas about their personal and professional goals**; equally, 90% reported that they **learned or improved useful practical skills**. 70% of respondents experienced **improved chances of entering their desired study programme**, demonstrating the programme's contribution to educational opportunities. Meanwhile, 60% believed that it enhanced their **chances of finding a job**, suggesting that the skills and confidence gained through the programme may increase employability.

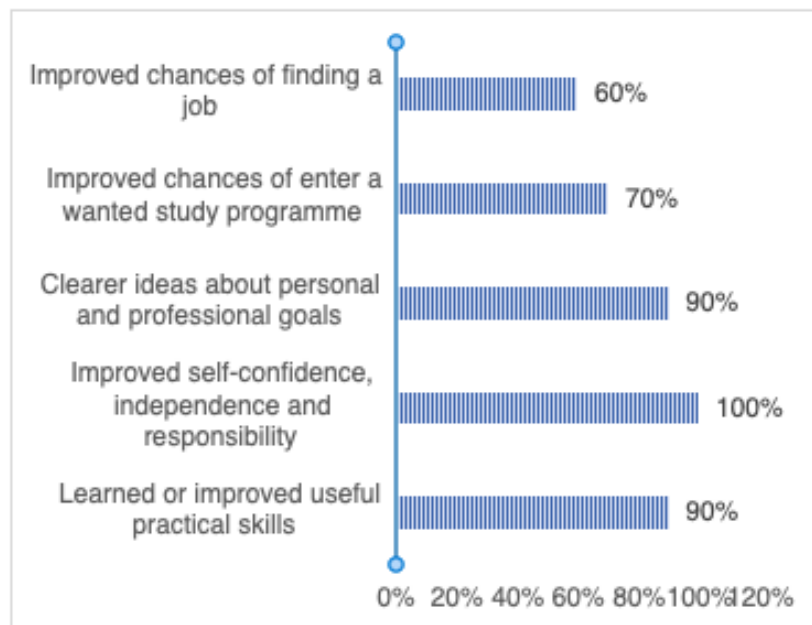


Figure 23: Ways in which participant benefited from participation - Adult learners (n=10)

Mobility participants were also asked to respond to a question on ways they gained knowledge about horizontal priorities. Figure 24 below presents the social, civic, environmental, and digital outcomes experienced by participants after completing a programme. The most notable result is that 100% of adult learner respondents reported having a **better understanding of the diversity of society**.

In addition, 90% stated that they **learned more about Europe, the European Union, and European values**. An equal number responded that they had become more interested in participating in elections and other democratic activities. Similarly, 90% reported being more committed to working against discrimination, intolerance, and xenophobia.

It also shows moderate improvements in digital engagement. 40% of participants became **more eager to use digital technologies in their studies or work**, while 30% learned new and useful ways to apply digital technology. These results suggest that although the programme contributed to digital literacy, its influence in this area was less pronounced than its impact on social and civic development.

Environmental awareness showed similar outcomes. 30% of participants reported **changing their habits to become more sustainable**, and another 30% indicated that they **learned more about environmental, climate, and sustainability issues**. This suggests participation in mobility actions has had less impact on knowledge gained in these priority areas.

Overall, the chart illustrates that the programme was particularly effective in fostering social inclusion, democratic values, and cultural understanding. Although improvements in digital skills and environmental awareness were more modest, the overall findings indicate that the programme successfully encouraged participants to become more informed, engaged and responsible members of society.

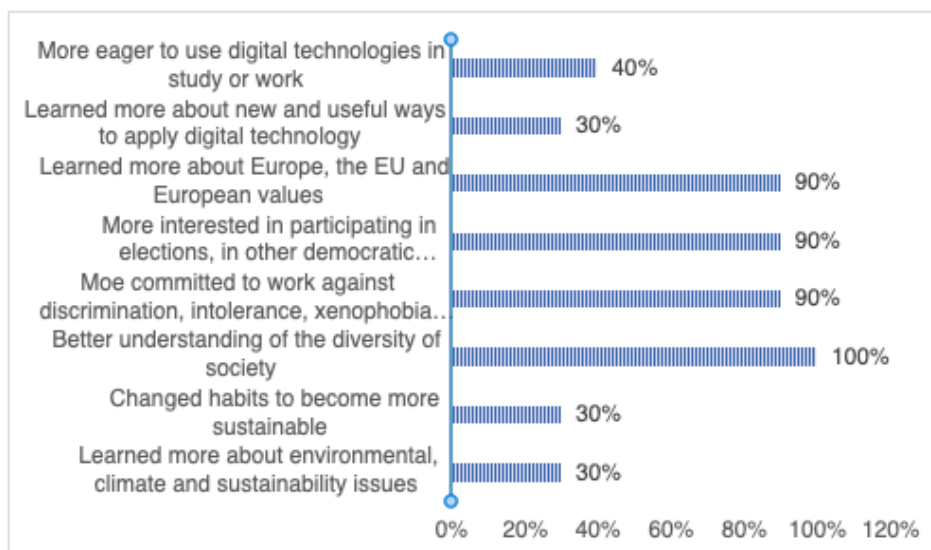


Figure 24: Ways in which participant gained knowledge about horizontal priorities - Adult learners (n=10)

It is important to note that for the group mobilities the surveys were filled in by the project leader, not by individual participants. This means that the total number of adult learners is much higher when compared to the number of respondents. Consequently, the information based on group mobilities is less informative compared to individual mobilities, since the group mobility will likely be more general, and the data on gender and participants with fewer opportunities has a higher sample. Nonetheless, the emerging data is complimented by the qualitative interview data.

As part of the impact research, interviews were carried out with adult learners who had previously taken part in adult learner mobilities. A total of 13 adult learners were interviewed representing a diversity of backgrounds, i.e., unemployed adults, young Traveller women, adult learners from migrant backgrounds, adult learners in recovery, and remote workers.

The interviews with the Irish adult learners supported the data, emerging prominent themes, and general satisfaction with the organisation of the trips. A couple of learners spoke about the schedule being 'too tight' and that 'a couple of extra days would have been nice'. 1 learner suggested that 'more time for reflection would have been good', especially when they came back, to have more time for peer reflection as a group.

Impact of mobility on persons attitudes and behaviour

In the case study interviews, the impact of the participation of adult learners in Erasmus+ project can be described as *transformational*. Various statements testify to this:

'I returned to education aged 47, I was doing a course with the INOU.⁴¹ The Erasmus+ trip ignited my passion to keep going, stated it helped me to progress my confidence. It has transformed my life.'

⁴¹ Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed, <https://www.inou.ie>

Another interview described the experience ‘as opening up a whole new world’, they commented that they thought they would never have imagined having such an experience. Thematic analysis of responses revealed the following key findings:

Intercultural learning and awareness

This emerged as the most significant area of learning across the interviews, with participants describing its impact in a variety of ways. Increased awareness of other countries and firsthand experience of different cultures contributed to a deeper understanding of cultural diversity and the challenges that migrants may encounter. Participants specifically linked this learning to a visit, included in the trip itinerary, to an organisation supporting migrant women. Interviewees frequently described the experience as ‘eye-opening’, explaining that it challenged their preconceived assumptions, encouraged them to confront personal biases, and fostered a more open-minded perspective towards people from different cultural backgrounds.

‘We visited a centre and got a real insight into what a sense of inclusion and what a safe space looks like. I keep this in mind now when I am working with young people.’

Skills development and enhanced employability prospects

Past participants spoke of experiencing an increase in confidence and skills development because of their participation in mobilities. This manifested in various ways, e.g., feeling less intimidated of working with different groups, developing communication and facilitation skills. The experience of making presentations and public speaking were also discussed as contributing to confidence building and skills development.

Knowledge and insights gained into Adult Education in the EU

Adult learners reflected on the value of learning about how adult education looks in other parts of Europe. 1 respondent stated that the experience ‘*Opened my eyes to see how other countries put as much value on adult education as we do, how other countries do things and I came home with so many ideas.*’

Enhanced opportunity for civic engagement

In some instances, the mobility experience motivated participants to be more active in their communities when they returned home. Examples include a participant volunteering to take part in casual English language conversation classes with migrants after the experience of meeting migrants on her mobility trip. Another participant on the same trip, who now works in childcare, described how she is now more aware of the challenges that migrant women face and, in her role, is able to direct parents to community supports or activities that she thinks they might be interested in.

In 1 case, a project coordinator stated, *'It was identified as an objective, at the planning stage of the programme, that the KA1 activity would be a space for the young people involved to develop a stronger sense of voice and participation by expressing their needs and being decision-makers and using their own voice within the project development.'*

Another key theme emerging from data sources is that participants experience a stronger **sense of European belonging**. This sense of belonging can support a deeper understanding of the rights and responsibilities of citizens and motivate individuals to actively contribute to social change in their local community, hence increasing civic contributions (see Figure 25 below).

Increased motivation for lifelong learning

A majority of the adult learners interviewed were still active in adult learning or were participating in employment related initiatives. The sentiment from the interviewees was that the experience in the Erasmus+ mobility had motivated them to continue to 'Go forward and do more learning'. 1 person expressed that they came back feeling really encouraged, and with 'an attitude to change' and to keep going with educational opportunities.

Increased sense of self-worth

Interviewees offered highly insightful remarks on the impact of participation on their sense of self-worth. Being chosen to participate in the mobility has an impact in itself. One interviewee stated, 'It gave me such a boost to be considered to go. It was nice to be seen, to be noticed.' Another described how happy it made her feel that her classmates and teachers were so proud of her for going: 'It gave me a real buzz.'

For one group of adult learners who took part in a learner interview there was significant impact and learner outcomes from their mobility experience. The young women spoke of the experience of facilitating a paper flower workshop with 40 afterschool children, and the noise and chaos of it all. One of the young women stated that she would *'be more confident going into school at home and facilitating workshops with smaller groups'* as a result of the experience. They reflected that they would be less intimidated to meet other groups, and have increased skills in communication, facilitation, and they learned how to be more patient.

The group reflected on how in Italy they felt accepted without judgement and without fear of discrimination. One of the girls stated it was because they could walk into bars and café without *fear or judgement*. *'We were able just walk in, no anxiety, no nerves and feeling comfortable because nobody really cared.'*

Another of the girls commented, *'We could just walk into somewhere and not be anxious. We were just able to relax and be ourselves. We were more comfortable going in places [be]cause nobody really cared.'*

The Project coordinator stated there was a noticeable growth in confidence throughout the project and that the project provided a safe environment where participants felt valued and heard. She stated that the primary aim of the project was to create meaningful opportunities for democratic participation, empowerment, and intercultural exchange among young Traveller women.

One of the initial barriers to participation in an Erasmus+ mobility project was, due to cultural reasons, the young women, could not travel independently away from their families. Under the inclusion priority of the Erasmus+ programme, they applied for additional funds to bring chaperones (older family members) to support the young women's participation. While the focus of the experience was on the young women, the older women also benefited from the whole experience and gained new perspectives because of their participation.

Wellbeing and healthy lifestyle

A stronger sense of wellbeing came up in a few different contexts. 1 learner described how her mobility experience gave her a deeper understanding of digital media and how to protect her kids online. 1 respondent commented that ‘The sense of independence gained for the trip resulted in transferrable learning that can be bought home to everyday life.’ 1 observation was around the learning in relation to different cultural perspectives, specifically related to rest and sleep.

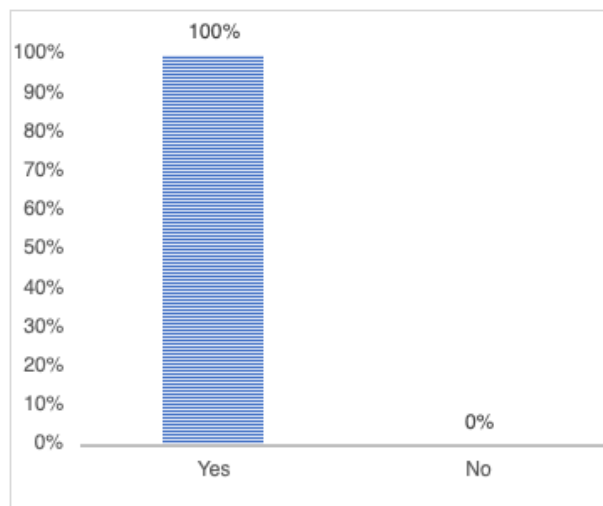


Figure 25: Participant increased European sense of belonging - Adult learners (n=10)
Source: Online survey beneficiary organisations RIA-AE network (2025–2026)

5.4 Conclusion

The findings suggest that adult learners who participate in Erasmus+ projects benefit from the experience in several meaningful ways. Intercultural learning emerged as one of the most significant outcomes, supporting participants to become more open-minded, challenge their own biases, and develop a greater understanding of cultural diversity and inclusion. For many learners, these experiences also contributed to a stronger sense of European identity and belonging. The evidence further indicates that participation can promote critical thinking, strengthen learners’ sense of active and responsible citizenship, and motivate greater engagement in local communities and civic society.

Participation also contributed to the development of a range of skills, including communication, presentation, and interpersonal skills. Interview findings suggest that, for some learners, the experience was transformational. Increased confidence, motivation, and a stronger sense of self-worth encouraged further engagement in education, enhanced employment opportunities, and greater participation in community life.

The data also indicates high levels of participant satisfaction with the organisation, preparation, and delivery of the mobility experiences. Learners reported feeling well supported by both the sending and host organisations. Although a small number of

challenges were identified, these were relatively minor and primarily related to time and duration constraints. These findings should, however, be interpreted with some caution due to the limitations of the sample size, and may, therefore, be influenced by positive response bias. Nevertheless, the qualitative interviews provide valuable insight into learners' lived experiences, adding depth and context to the Commission data by illustrating how participants understood and experienced the reported outcomes. While the interviews broadly support the positive trends identified in the survey data, they also enrich these findings by revealing the processes through which learners experienced personal and social development.

Overall, the findings suggest that Erasmus+ KA1 mobility provides adult learners with valuable opportunities for personal, social, and educational development. The programme appears to enhance participants' skills and competences, while also fostering confidence, inclusion, and active citizenship.

PART D – Impact of Erasmus+ on ‘Participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement’

6 Characteristics of Erasmus+ project(s) addressing ‘Participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement’

6.1 Introduction

Erasmus+ identifies the promotion of citizens’ right to participate in democratic life and the encouragement of active engagement at local, national, and European levels as one of its key priorities. For adult learners, strengthening the capacity to participate in democratic life is particularly important, alongside fostering European common values, supporting civic engagement, and developing critical thinking and literacy skills. This chapter examines the extent to which Erasmus+ projects address the programme priority of ‘Participation in democratic life, common values, and civic engagement’, and identifies the types of organisations implementing these projects. It also explores the characteristics of these projects, including their stated objectives and the activities they undertake to support this priority.

6.2 Type of organisations

The following analysis examines the types of organisations involved in delivering projects that directly address the priority *Participation in democratic life, common values, and civic engagement*. According to the survey findings, just over half of respondents (55%) indicated that 1 or more of their Erasmus+ projects, across both KA1 and KA2, directly address this priority. A further 26% reported that their projects address the theme indirectly, while 22% stated that none of their Erasmus+ projects address this priority.

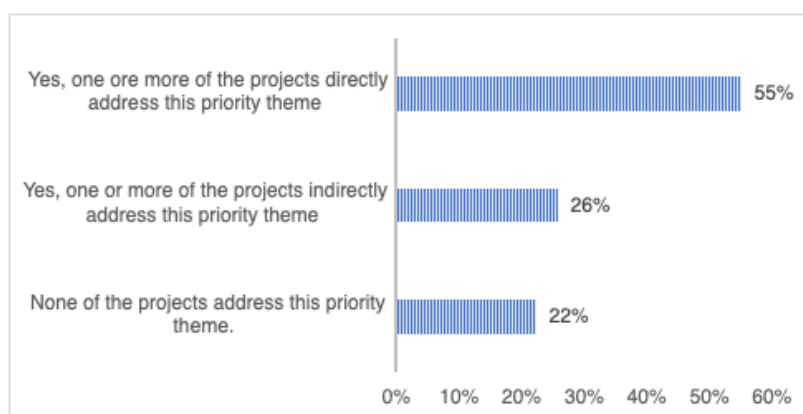


Figure 26: The extent projects (KA1 and KA2) are addressing the priority theme ‘Participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement’ (n=58)

Source: Online survey beneficiary organisations RIA-AE network (2025–2026)

The organisations most frequently addressing this priority are NGOs, across both KA1 and KA2 projects.

Among organisations delivering KA1 projects, 69% reported that their projects directly address the priority of ‘Participation in democratic life, common values, and

civic engagement’, while the remaining 31% indicated that they address the theme indirectly.

A similar pattern is evident among KA2 projects. Nearly three-quarters of organisations (74%) reported that their projects directly address this priority, while 26% indicated that they address it indirectly (see Figure 27).

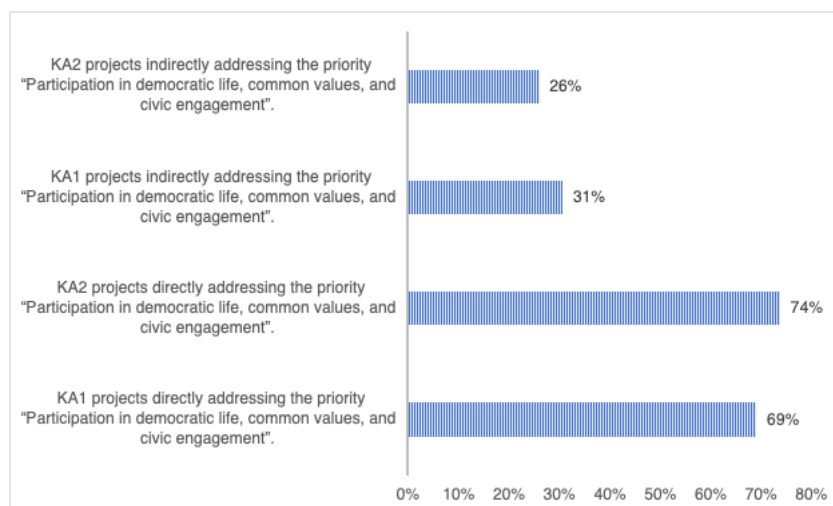


Figure 27: The extent KA1 and KA2 projects directly or indirectly address the priority ‘Participation in democratic life, common values, and civic engagement’ (n=26, 23)

Source: Online survey beneficiary organisations RIA-AE network (2025–2026)

As shown in Figure 28, more than half of both KA1 and KA2 projects that directly or indirectly address the priority of ‘Participation in democratic life, common values, and civic engagement’ have been completed or are close to completion. This provides a strong basis for examining the outcomes and impacts associated with these projects.

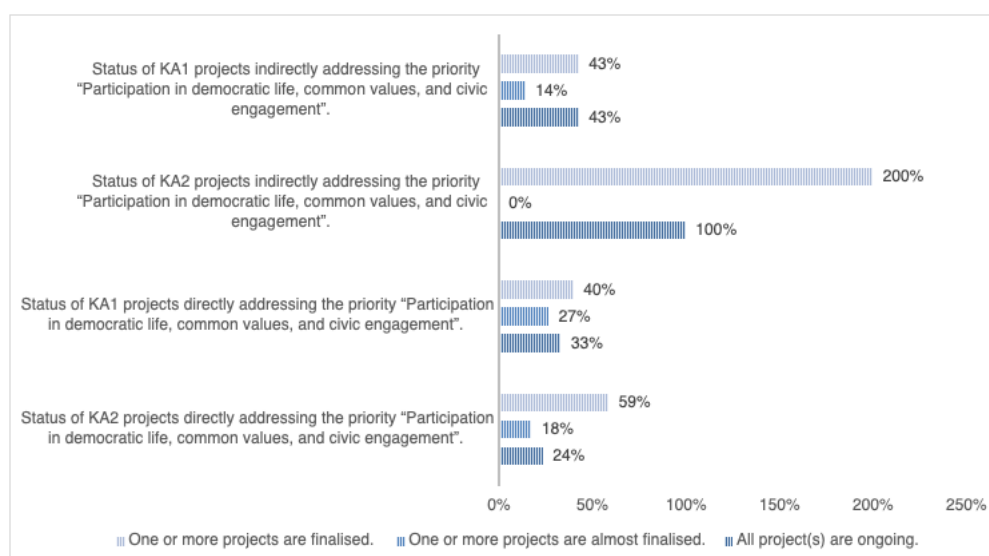


Figure 28: Status of KA1/KA2 projects that are directly or indirectly addressing the priority ‘Participation in democratic life, common values, and civic engagement’ (KA1 Indirect: n=17, KA1 Direct: n=2, KA2 Indirect: n=15, KA2 Direct: n=7)

Source: Online survey beneficiary organisations RIA-AE network (2025–2026)

6.3 Objectives and activities supported

Survey respondents indicated that the primary objective of both KA1 and KA2 projects addressing this priority theme was to promote European common values. This finding is reflected in the thematic analysis of the case studies, where participants described how their projects fostered a deeper understanding of intercultural awareness, strengthened their sense of connection to Europe and belonging within it, and encouraged greater openness to diversity. Adult learners also reported becoming more aware of their own biases, and more open-minded in their perspectives. Interviews with adult learners provided several examples of how their project experiences motivated them to become more actively involved in their local communities through volunteering.

The interviews with adult learners provided testimonials that support this data.

‘I couldn’t be a politician, but volunteering allows me to contribute in my own way.’

‘Volunteering here links you to society and allows me to contribute to positive change in other people’s lives.’

‘I began volunteering teaching English (casual conversation) to migrant women in my local community centre when I came home.’

This was closely followed by the goal of strengthening the ‘European dimension of their organisations’. In the context of the thematic priority, this goal contributes to creating the infrastructure for the other characteristics to happen, i.e., it supports organisations move beyond a national remit and collaborate with a shared European peer network and set of European values, including human rights and inclusion and diversity. This, in turn, results in the development of new insights and broader perspectives, as well as developing the critical thinking capacities of adult learners and staff. It also creates the infrastructure for mobilities and partnerships to happen.

The third most cited objective is fostering civic engagement among learners, which directly aligns with the Erasmus+ priority of ‘Participation in democratic life, common values, and civic engagement’.

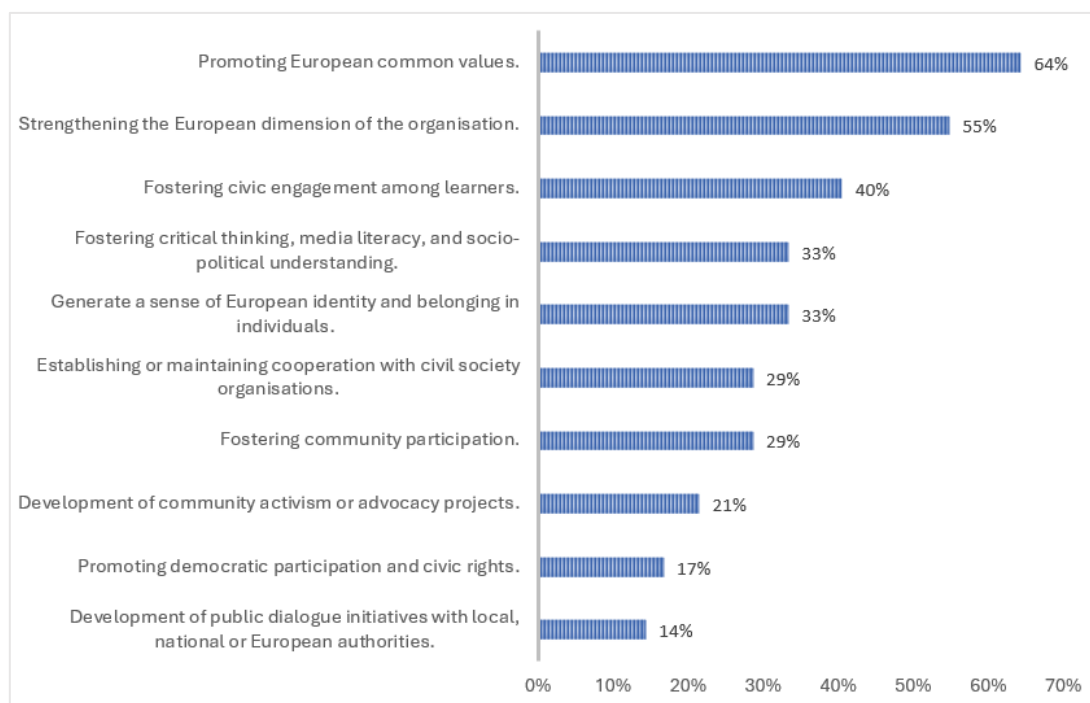


Figure 29: Goals of projects (KA1 and KA2) that addressed one or more elements of the priority 'Participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement' (n=42)
Source: Online survey beneficiary organisations RIA-AE network (2025–2026)

Figure 30 illustrates the range of activities undertaken by organisations to achieve these objectives. Within KA1 projects, job shadowing was the most used activity, with 70% of organisations incorporating it into their projects. This was followed by courses and training, which were also widely used and primarily targeted staff. Just under one-third of organisations reported using group mobility activities for adult learners.

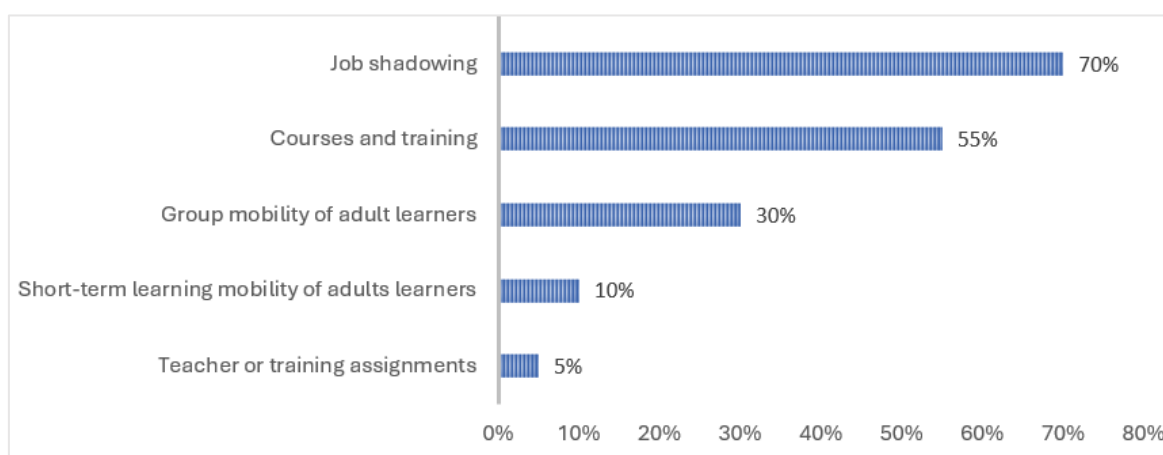


Figure 30: Activities of KA1 projects that addressed one or more elements of the priority 'Participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement' (n=20)
Source: Online survey beneficiary organisations RIA-AE network (2025–2026)

Just over 90% of KA2 projects used training workshops and short courses for educators or adult learners. 77% of organisations reported developing instruments, methods, or curricula for adult learning, and the use of research and needs analysis studies.

6.4 Target groups addressed

Adult learners represent the majority of target groups in projects addressing the priority theme of ‘Participation in democratic life, common values, and civic engagement’ accounting for 56% of all beneficiaries. Survey findings indicate that the most frequently targeted learner profiles are adults with low levels of education or low basic skills (34%), followed by the general adult population (20%), young adults (17%), and migrants (17%).

Staff constitute the remaining 44% of target groups involved in activities implemented under projects addressing one or more aspects of this priority. This highlights the dual focus of Erasmus+ projects on both enhancing learner participation and strengthening the capacity of adult education professionals to promote democratic engagement and European values.

Léargas continues to prioritise support for organisations working with learners with fewer opportunities, particularly those who may have limited access to international mobility experiences. Evidence suggests that organisations new to Erasmus+ are often reluctant to involve learners in mobility activities during their initial projects. Consequently, many choose to begin with staff mobility activities to build organisational confidence, develop staff competences, and establish European partnerships and networks. These experiences frequently serve as a foundation for the subsequent implementation of learner mobility activities in later projects.

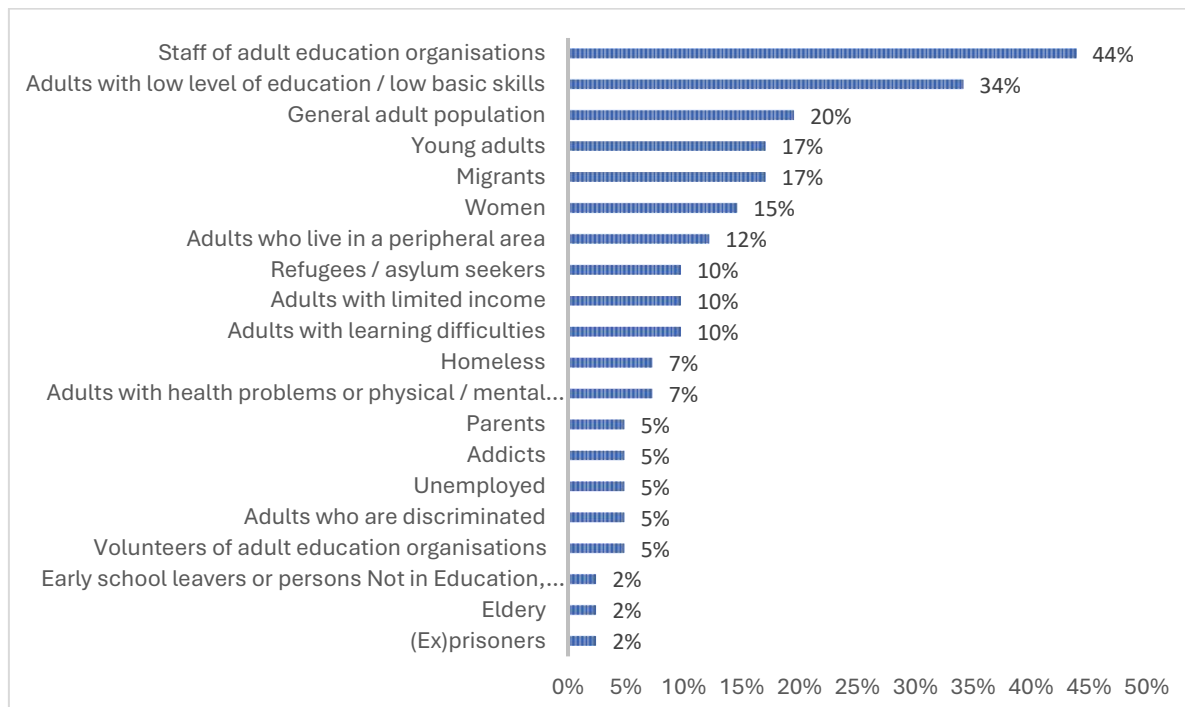


Figure 31: Groups of adult learners targeted by projects (KA1 and KA2) that addressed one or more elements of the priority ‘Participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement’ (n=41)
Source: Online survey beneficiary organisations RIA-AE network (2025–2026)

6.5 Conclusion

The findings indicate that Erasmus+ projects create a strong and meaningful infrastructure for organisations to address the priority '*Participation in democratic life, common values, and civic engagement.*' The majority of surveyed organisations, predominantly NGOs, report that their projects address this theme either directly or indirectly, with a particularly high level of direct engagement across both KA1 and KA2 actions.

Over half of KA1 and KA2 projects are completed or near completion, suggesting that evidence is based on tangible results and impact. Simultaneously, just less than half of projects are ongoing, and remain active in how goals and objectives addressing this thematic focus will be achieved. In terms of project goals and objectives, projects most strongly emphasise the promotion of 'European common values', followed by efforts to 'strengthen the European dimension of organisations and foster civic engagement among learners.' Adult Education staff are the largest beneficiary group (40%) with KA1 projects predominantly implementing job shadowing and training courses to support skills development in supporting civic engagement of adult learners.

These goals and activities are interconnected, activities targeting staff aim to increase staff and organisational capacity to create the conditions that effectively addresses this thematic priority. KA1 mobility that directly target learners are addressing the theme using the mobility experience itself to increase learners' capacity for critical reflection, etc. The targeted nature of learner groups, i.e., the inclusion of diverse and often under-represented adult learners, highlights the programme's contribution to making democratic participation more inclusive and accessible.

KA2 projects focus more on developing tangible and systemic approaches, including training workshops, curriculum development, and research activities, contributing to advancing the organisational capacity and increasing the quality of an inclusive learner experience. Together, these approaches demonstrate a complementary dynamic between individual learning, both staff and learners, as well as broader organisational development.

Evidence demonstrates that Erasmus+ projects address civic engagement, not only as a direct outcome, e.g., increased participation of learners in democratic process, but also through indirect ways that underpin civic engagement, including an enhanced intercultural understanding, increased awareness of diversity and inclusion, development of critical thinking, and European identity.

7 Impact in the thematic area

This chapter describes the impact of Erasmus+ projects addressing the priority ‘Participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement’ on different aspects of the learning offer of the beneficiary organisations, their staff, and learners. It discusses whether Erasmus+ enhanced the focus of provision on democratic process and political rights, volunteering activities, learners’ influence on training offer, European citizenship, European common values, civic competences, media literacy, critical thinking, and strengthening partnership with civil society organisations.

7.1 Impact on the learning offer

The survey presented a list of 11 statements describing ways in which Erasmus+ projects addressing the priority ‘Participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement’ could enhance the learning offer for adult learners. Respondents could select varying levels of agreement. The learning opportunities offered by beneficiaries have been enhanced across a range of different areas (see Figure 32 below).

The areas in which respondents are in most agreement are:

- strengthened cooperation and partnership with civil society,
- enhanced focus on critical thinking skills and media literacy competences, and
- improved alignment of mission with European common values.

Areas that were lower in agreement, but still overall positive were:

- strengthened adult learners’ influence on courses and policies, and
- increased support for local/international volunteering

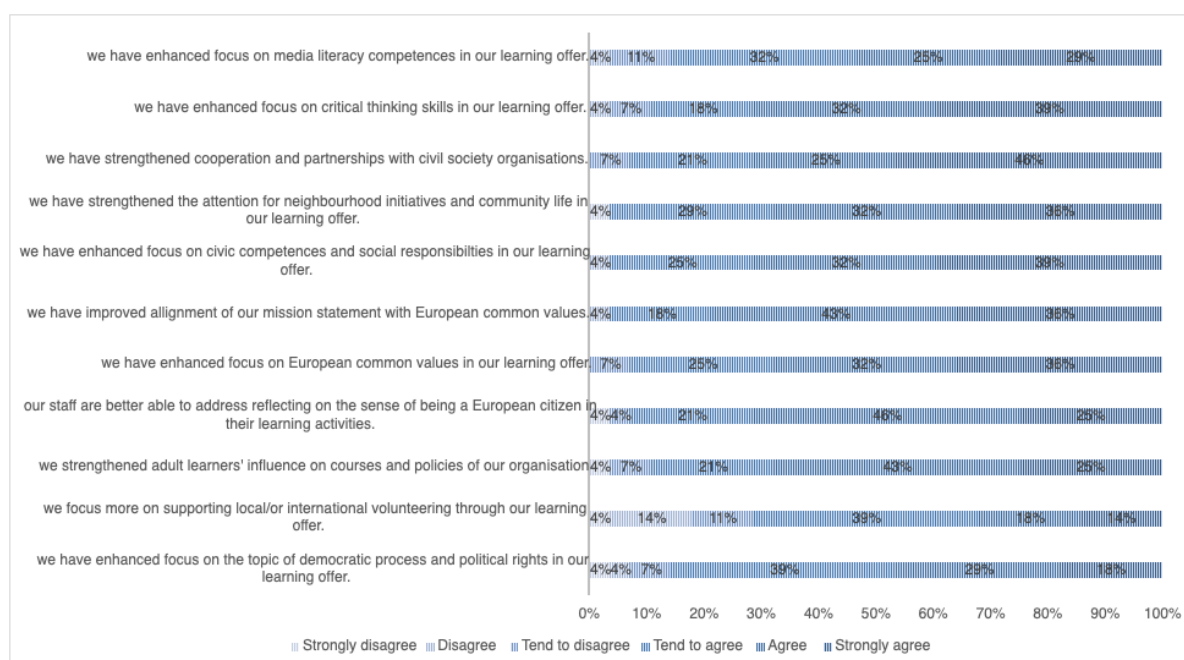


Figure 32: Impact of Erasmus+ on learning offer – ‘Participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement’ (n=28)

Source: Online survey beneficiary organisations RIA-AE network (2025–2026)

An open-ended question asking respondents to give concrete examples of changes that happened as a result of participating in an Erasmus+ project addressing the priority 'Participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement' yielded interesting insights.

New programmes and training initiatives were developed, including a QQI Level 6 advocacy module which supported the training of people from migrant backgrounds as volunteer cultural champions. Another organisation developed an active citizenship campaign and course. 1 respondent described the development of a peer-to-peer support programme for migrants that aimed to connect newcomers with more established migrants that had been adapted from the job shadowing mobility they participated in at Belgium.

'Based on learnings in Belgium on Job Shadowing, we have overhauled our Civic Integration and Social/Cultural Orientation course which is delivered to Refugees in the Ballaghaderreen Reception and Orientation Centre. We have also worked to embed norms and values into our offerings. We are also piloting a peer-to-peer support workshop which is directly adapted from a similar offering in Belgium, linking newcomers with more established migrants who have been in Ireland for several years.'

Respondents described 'Staff are **more open** ... It opens up the doors of the organisations to others.' Another example states that 'Previous to this fund, we did not engage Erasmus+ students at the organisation. Now we have had 10–15 + students learn and be mentored in the organisation in the last 12 months.'

Testimonials also describe staff as being more open **to innovative and participatory teaching methods**, examples include learner-led project planning and reflection circles. The impact is that organisations become more inclusive in terms of its learning offers, engagement with learners, and in its teaching methodologies as a result of engaging in Erasmus+ projects.

1 respondent highlighted that participation in Erasmus+ projects creates **the space and time to think about democratic life**, common values and what being European means. The creative process of project planning and implementation creates the time and space for staff and learners to stop, reflect and discuss with peers. The importance of space and time for reflection on these issues is an important and unique space created by engaging in Erasmus+ projects.

7.2 Impact at staff level

The survey also presented a list of 8 statements that described ways in which Erasmus+ projects addressing the priority 'Participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement' impacted on staff. Again, the results indicate a consistent positive response for all statements (see Figure 33 below).

The areas in which respondents are in most agreement are:

- Better able to foster local community development through their learning activities, and
- Better able to guide learners to design, and carry out, small-scale community actions that respond to local needs.

Areas that were lower in agreement, but still overall positive were:

- Better able to explain democratic processes, and
- Better able to lead discussions on the topic of democratic participation in their learning activities.

Testimonials from project coordinators reflect that staff **have increased motivation and confidence** to innovate and deliver learning activities that address the priority ‘Participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement’ at local level.

‘Participation in Erasmus+ has strengthened Cork ETB’s ability to promote democratic participation, common values, and civic engagement by embedding European approaches that encourage dialogue, inclusion, and active citizenship within our adult learning provision. A clear example is the learner mobility to Groningen, where participants engaged in intercultural dialogue, collaborative problem-solving, and nature-based community projects during the International SDG/IDG Week. 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.’

Source: Online survey beneficiary organisations RIA-AE network (2025–2026)

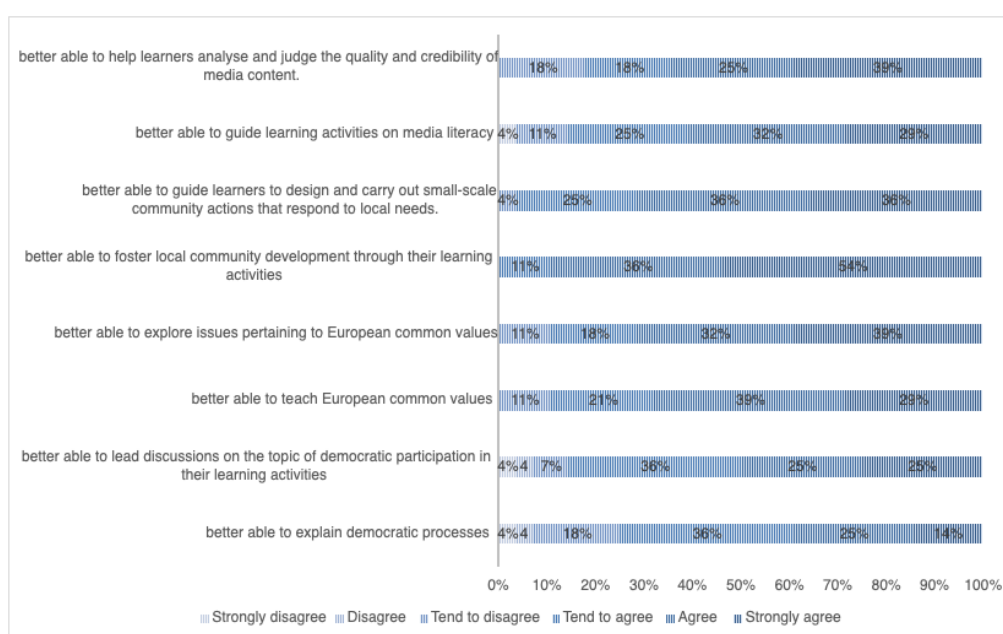


Figure 33: Impact of Erasmus+ on staff – ‘Participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement’ (n=28)
Source: Online survey beneficiary organisations RIA-AE network (2025–2026)

7.3 Impact at learners' level

Survey respondents suggest that engaging in Erasmus+ projects built **capacity for supporting civic participation** by supporting 'participants to play a more active role in the community and have more confidence'. The European context further enhances this because participants gain a stronger sense of European identity and belonging and develop a broader intercultural awareness which makes them more likely to engage in democratic processes.

'... the main change is in the way in which our learners see themselves within the larger European context and the barriers of bias which are broken down as a result of partnerships/exchanges/interactions. The 'fear of the other' can be diminished when you put people from different backgrounds together in an educational, non-formal, non-threatening setting. We would have noticed a relaxation in bias throughout the communal events/classes we organised as part of our learner mobilities'

Source: Online survey beneficiary organisations RIA-AE network (2025–2026)

Survey respondents suggest that participation in Erasmus+ projects strengthened **capacity for civic participation**, increasing participants' confidence and encouraging them to take a more active role in their communities. The case studies and learner interviews provide strong qualitative evidence to support this finding. Across several projects, learners described becoming more willing to volunteer and engage with people from different backgrounds. Participants reported that the experience helped them recognise that the need for volunteering in the community and the valuable contribution they could make. The mobility experiences also increased their confidence to become involved.

The European dimension of Erasmus+ appears to further reinforce these outcomes. Learners frequently spoke about developing a stronger sense of European identity and belonging through exchanges, partnerships, and interactions with participants from other countries. This broader perspective was often accompanied by greater intercultural awareness, becoming more open-minded, and more aware of their own biases. These findings are echoed in the testimony of 1 beneficiary organisation, which observed that the most significant change was in how learners understood themselves within a wider European context and in the way that intercultural contact helped reduce fear and prejudice:

'... the main change is in the way in which our learners see themselves within the larger European context and the barriers of bias which are broken down as a result of partnerships/exchanges/interactions. The 'fear of the other' can be diminished when you put people from different backgrounds together in an educational, non-formal, non-threatening setting. We would have noticed a relaxation in bias throughout the communal events/classes we organised as part of our learner mobilities.'

Source: Online survey of beneficiary organisations, RIA-AE network (2025–2026)

As previously presented in chapter 5, adult learners' accounts of increased confidence, civic engagement, and a stronger sense of European identity further strengthen these themes.

7.4 Added value of Erasmus+ support

The evidence suggests that Erasmus+ support has provided critical added value, enabling projects that would otherwise not have taken place or would have been significantly reduced in scope.

- 85% of respondents stated that their project would not have taken place at all without Erasmus+ funding, indicating a high level of dependency on the programme's support (see Figure 34).
- 12% reported that the project would have proceeded without Erasmus+ funding, but on a smaller scale and/or with fewer participants, partners, and participating countries. In these cases, Erasmus+ funding enabled projects to be delivered at a larger scale and with greater impact.
- Only 2% indicated that the project would have taken place exactly as planned without Erasmus+ support.

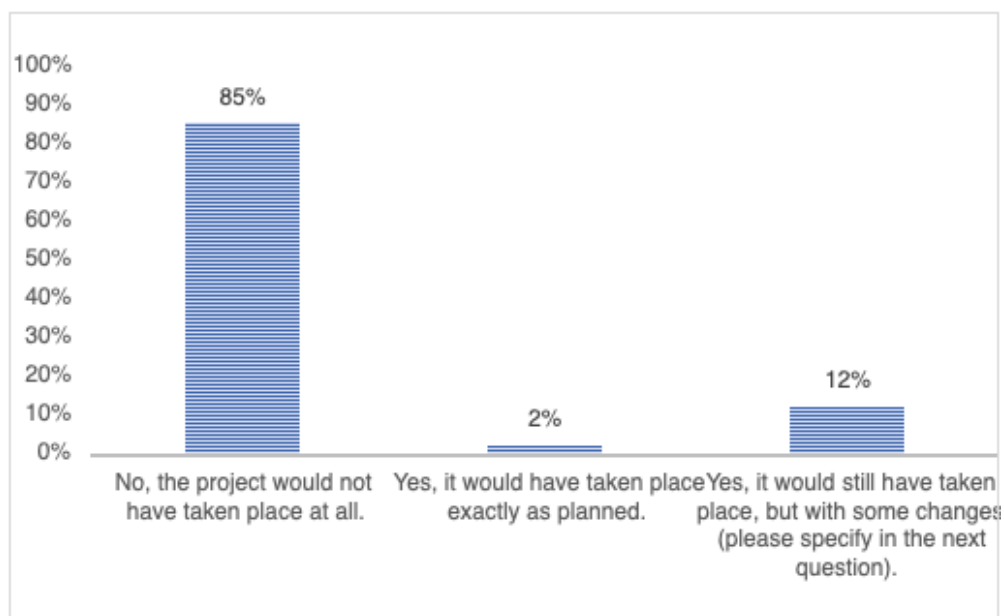


Figure 34: Added value of Erasmus+ support (n=41)
Source: Online survey beneficiary organisations RIA-AE network (2025–2026)

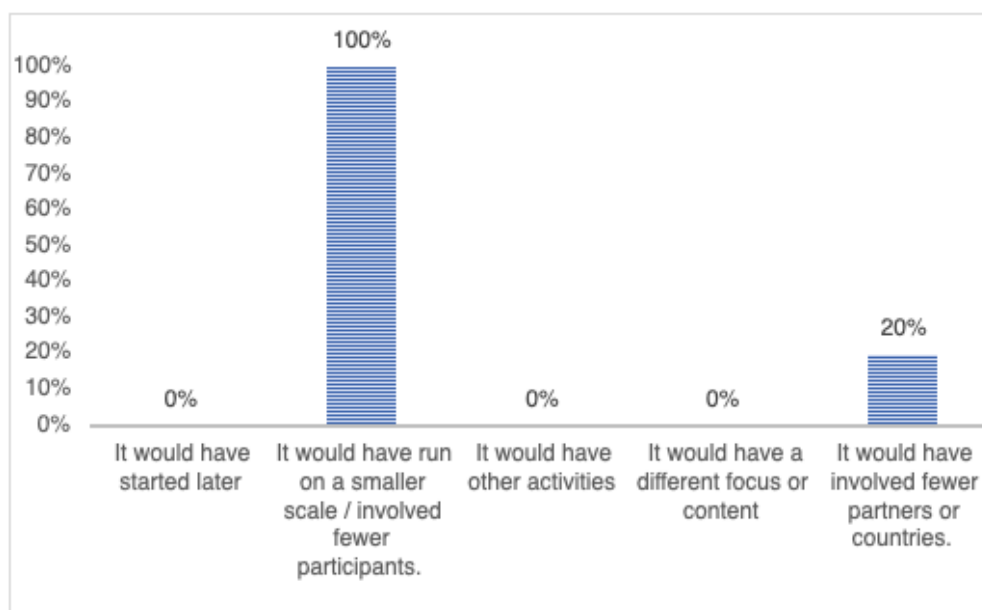


Figure 35: Which aspects of the project would have been different without Erasmus+ (n=5)
Multiple answers possible*
Source: Online survey beneficiary organisations RIA-AE network (2025–2026)

7.5 Sectoral Level Impact

While the research questions did not explicitly examine sectoral or systemic impact, the findings suggest that impacts are emerging at this level. Exploring these broader effects could be a valuable focus for future rounds of research.

One such example that emerged in the KA2 case study interviews was an output from a project that aimed to share and exchange expertise and best practice in developing quality volunteer programmes that support people living with dementia. The programme created ‘moments that matter’ using song and singing for people living with dementia and their families through engagement, connections, and socialisation. The lead organisation subsequently created training they are piloting with HSE nurses who primarily work in dementia care. Much of the content of the training was informed by the handbook created during the Erasmus+ project. (Read full project description in Annex 1).

Furthermore, a mechanism that appears to be particularly effective in generating sector-wide impact is the use of KA1 Mobility Consortia. Under this model, a lead organisation coordinates a consortium of partner organisations to achieve shared objectives. In 2026, 25% of accredited organisations in Ireland were part of a consortium. As a result, the 7 KA121 budget requests submitted by consortium leaders in 2021 represented almost 100 organisations. These consortia include all public libraries in Ireland, all ETBs, and many small community education providers that may not have the capacity to apply independently. By enabling participation across a wide range of organisations, the consortium model helps build experience of European projects throughout the sector while supporting strategic capacity building at system level.

7.6 Conclusion

The findings presented in this chapter demonstrate that Erasmus+ projects addressing the priority 'Participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement' have had a significant impact on the learner offerings, staff, and learners.

In terms of the learning offer, participation in projects in cooperation with European partners and peers has supported the development of more inclusive curricula, increasing the numbers engaged in programmes. Learning offers have improved integration of activities that foster critical thinking, media literacy, and European common values. New programmes and training with a focus on advocacy and participation in community life were also developed because of Erasmus+ funding. Organisations also developed more inclusive, participatory, and reflective approaches, while strengthening collaboration with civil society partners.

Staff who have participated in projects have experienced enhanced capacity to integrate this priority into practice. Staff experienced increased confidence, openness, and pedagogical innovation, particularly in facilitating community-based learning, and supporting learners to act on local issues. While still positive, a slightly lower confidence is reported in teaching more complex aspects, such as explaining democratic process, and facilitating discussions on democratic participation.

For learners the impact is significant in terms of empowerment and engagement. Participation in Erasmus+ projects contributes to increased confidence, a stronger sense of belonging to a European community, and greater willingness to engage in civic and democratic life. Intercultural exchange plays a key role in breaking down barriers and reducing bias, fostering more inclusive attitudes and active citizenship. The creation of 'dedicated space and time for reflection on democratic life and shared values' emerges as a distinctive and valuable feature of Erasmus+ engagement. The added value of Erasmus+ funding is critical to the existence of 85% of the projects. Most projects would either not have taken place or would have been significantly smaller in scale and scope without Erasmus+ support.

PART E – Conclusion and policy pointers

8 Conclusions and Policy Pointers

This chapter summaries the main findings of the Irish national report and highlights the principal strengths and challenges of Erasmus+ in the adult education sector.

8.1 Key findings and recommendations

Unlocking the potential of unreached adult education providers and learners

The study highlights a diverse adult education sector in Ireland with increasing participation from newcomer organisations, particularly in KA1 mobility projects. NGO and ETB providers show strong engagement across both learner mobility (KA1) and strategic cooperation and partnership (KA2) actions, while higher education institutions are more likely to focus on KA2 actions that support staff mobility and organisational innovation. Notably, 40% of participating organisations hold Erasmus+ accreditation, indicating a strategic commitment to sustained programme engagement.⁴² Erasmus+ funding is highly critical to the project work undertaken in this area: 85% of projects report that these would either not have happened or would have operated on a substantially reduced scale without the programme's support, underlining its importance for supporting adult education participation in European mobility actions.

Despite this progress, significant untapped potential remains particularly among organisations in the southern, northern, and western regions. The study identified several barriers that continue to limit participation:

- The complexity of application and reporting requirements, especially for newcomer organisations.
- Limited staffing, time and organisational capacity to develop, apply for and manage projects.
- The intensive staff support required to enable the participation of learners with high support needs in mobility actions can reduce organisational capacity to fulfil other core responsibilities.

In addition to these organisational level obstacles, the study identified individual-level learner barriers in terms of recruitment and participation. Addressing these challenges will be critical to achieving greater inclusiveness within Erasmus+, reducing regional disparities, and improving access for adult learners with fewer opportunities.

To increase the attractiveness of the programme for new organisations, address geographical disparities in participation, and encourage greater participation by learners with fewer opportunities, the following policy pointers can be identified from the study:

- **Target under-represented regions:** implement focused outreach, regional information campaigns and develop peer-networking and mentoring hubs in

⁴² European Commission. (2025). *Report from the Commission on the interim evaluation of the 2021–2027 Erasmus+ programme and the final evaluation of the 2014–2020 Erasmus+ programme*. Brussels: European Commission.

the southern, western, and northern regions to address geographical imbalances in participation. National Agencies should be adequately resourced to grow participation from inclusion organisations.

- **Resource Léargas to grow newcomer participation and awareness of the value of Erasmus+ participation:** through intensive outreach and engagement, contact seminars to identify potential partners, and dissemination of project results to local, national, and European policy and practice communities.
- **Strengthen capacity building supports:** provide targeted funding and capacity building grants to help organisations with limited staffing and resourcing to develop and deliver Erasmus+ projects.
- **Simplify access and application processes:** streamline application and reporting processes and provide tailored mentoring for first-time applicants to reduce administrative barriers and increase participation from newcomer organisations. Smaller organisations may particularly benefit from targeted additional support at the application and reporting stages.
- **Address the affordability and flexibility of Erasmus+:** for adult learners: offer targeted financial and non-financial supports to enable greater participation by learners with fewer opportunities and under-represented groups within the programme.
- **Communicate the value of Erasmus+ as a driver of inclusion:** national policies, strategy and programmes should recognise and integrate the value of Erasmus+ as a key driver of inclusive practice, innovation and international collaboration.

Increasing Impact at Organisational and Staff Level

Maximising the impact of Erasmus+ at organisational and staff level requires **sustained investment, strategic commitment, and the development of organisational capacity** across the adult education sector. While Erasmus+ has demonstrated significant benefits for learners, staff, and organisations, realising its full potential depends on creating the conditions that enable organisations to engage meaningfully and sustainably in European cooperation activities.

For Adult and Community Education providers, participation in Erasmus+ projects requires significant staff time and organisational commitment. Engagement with European projects was frequently perceived as administratively complex and burdensome. To address this challenge, national capacity building initiatives and funding supports should incorporate opportunities for organisations to develop skills in EU project management, financial administration, and reporting. Building confidence and competence in these areas, alongside recognising the value of European engagement, will help reduce barriers to participation and improve accessibility for smaller organisations and community-based providers.

Organisations should also be supported to develop internal policies and strategies relating to European mobility and international cooperation. Establishing clear organisational frameworks, including dedicated repositories or library spaces, and good practice guidelines, can help create supportive environments that encourage staff participation in Erasmus+ activities and embed European engagement within organisational culture. Guidelines and policies could address practical issues

including staff release, workload management, succession planning, and the dissemination of learning outcomes.

A stronger focus is also required on communicating and evidencing the impact of Erasmus+ participation to organisational leadership and management. Demonstrating the added value of European partnerships is critical in securing management buy-in and long-term commitment to European engagement. Increased understanding among senior management can help ensure that participation in Erasmus+ is viewed as a strategic investment that contributes to organisational development and quality improvement.

Existing Erasmus+ monitoring, evaluation, and dissemination tools should be reviewed, updated, and more actively promoted to enable organisations to demonstrate impact more effectively. There is also a need to better capture, document, and showcase the outputs and outcomes arising from Erasmus+ KA2 projects. Many valuable resources, methodologies and innovative practices have been developed through these projects, however, their visibility and long-term utilisation remain limited. Greater efforts should be made to highlight the contribution of KA2 outputs to improving the quality and inclusiveness of adult learning provision in Ireland.

To maximise the organisational and staff level impact of Erasmus+, a more strategic and sustainable approach is required. The following policy pointers can be identified from the study to strengthen participation, enhance capacity, and ensure that the benefits of European cooperation are embedded across the adult education sector.

- Strengthen organisational capacity and resourcing for Erasmus+ participation. **Ensure sustained investment in adult education** organisations, including adequate staffing, dedicated staff time and management support for the planning, implementation, and administration of European projects.
- Provide professional development opportunities for Adult Educators (potentially through KA3, Training and Cooperation Activities)⁴³ for the development of **EU project management skills**, particularly within the community and voluntary sector, specifically targeting newcomer organisations.
- Build national and organisational capacity for European engagement by supporting organisations to **develop internal policies and strategies that embed European mobility within organisational operational workplans**, including good practice guidance for supporting staff to engage in Erasmus+ projects.
- Enhance the visibility, dissemination, and sustainability of Erasmus+ outcomes. **Improve mechanisms for capturing and demonstrating the impact of Erasmus+ projects, particularly KA2 outputs.** There should be an **opportunity for national sharing and dissemination** that

⁴³ Training and Cooperation Activities (TCAs) are organised by Erasmus+ National Agencies with the objective of bringing added value and increasing the overall quality of the Erasmus+ programme, such as workshops, seminars and other types of events or activities such as research that focus on sharing good practices, lessons learnt and provide networking opportunities amongst Erasmus+ stakeholders. European Commission, *Erasmus+ Programme Guide*, 2026, p. 20.

contributes to the broader field of adult and community education in Ireland.

- Dedicated resources and funding should be made available to support the continued integration, adaptation, and dissemination of Erasmus+ project outputs **beyond the formal completion of the project cycle**. Opportunities for national level sharing and dissemination should be established to ensure that learning, resources, and innovations generated through Erasmus+ projects contribute more broadly to policy and practice across the adult and community education sector in Ireland.

Capturing the magic of mobility experiences on learners

The research evidence demonstrates that the impact of KA1 mobility on learners is significant. However, the findings indicate that increasing impact requires planning and careful consideration at every stage of the project cycle. Additional attention is needed to ensure that adequate supports are in place to overcome barriers for participants with fewer opportunities. Learners' levels of confidence and self-worth were noted as important factors influencing their 'readiness' to participate in a mobility project. It was recommended that there should be **pre-development work** delivered with groups of learners prior to the invitation to participate in a mobility project. Highlighting positive and inspirational testimonials from learners who have previously participated in Erasmus+ mobility opportunities can support in motivating peers to become involved in this pre-development work phase.

Another key theme emerging is the importance of providing space for learner reflection at all stages of the project cycle. Ideally, there would be opportunities for peer reflection also. Adult Educators should be competent in facilitating reflective practice and have access to resources and toolkits on how to nurture the development of participants' **capacity for reflection**. This will ensure that learners can be supported and guided in peer exchange and reflection as part of the evaluation process to really enhance, harness, deepen, and articulate the impact experienced.

To increase the impact of KA1 mobility on learners, the broader context must consider how to enhance the capacity of organisations and adult educators to deliver the foundational work in practice and pedagogical approaches. The following policy pointers consider how to further enhance the impact of Erasmus+ participation on adult learners:

- **Strengthen preparatory and capacity building supports** for learners from backgrounds with fewer opportunities. Additional resources should be provided to build learners' confidence and motivation to participate in mobility opportunities. This **pre-development work** could include preparatory workshops, peer mentoring, and the sharing of testimonials from previous participants.
- Equip adult educators with the **time, training, and tools to support learner reflection**. Reflection is essential in helping learners recognise and apply the knowledge, skills and attitudes gained through mobility experiences. Providing educators with appropriate training and practical toolkits can help.

- Maximise learning outcomes. It must be acknowledged that very often the adult educators are fully equipped with the training and tools but lack the time and capacity to create space in programmes for adequate learner reflection.
- Monitor the **long-term outcomes of learner mobility**. More systematic tracking of learners following their Erasmus+ experience would help to evidence the sustained impact of mobility and understand how participation influences progression into further learning, employment, and community engagement.

Highlighting the impact of Erasmus+ on democratic participation and civic engagement

The study shows that engagement with Erasmus+ can promote understanding and awareness of common values, civic engagement, and democratic participation within adult education in Ireland. Erasmus+ projects enabled participant organisations to create dedicated space and time for reflection on these issues, develop more inclusive curricula, strengthen critical thinking and media literacy provision, and introduce programmes that promote active participation in community life. Erasmus+ also encouraged more participatory and reflective organisational cultures and strengthened collaboration with civil society partners. For adult educators, Erasmus+ enhanced their confidence, skills, and pedagogical practice, particularly in facilitating community-based learning and supporting learners to act on local issues. However, adult educators reported lower confidence when addressing more complex democratic concepts and facilitating discussions on democratic participation.

The impact on learners' **empowerment** and engagement is particularly notable. Erasmus+ participation increased learners' confidence, strengthened their sense of European citizenship and belonging, and encouraged greater engagement in civic and democratic life. Intercultural exchange helped reduce bias, foster inclusion, and create valuable opportunities for reflection, critical thinking, and active citizenship.

The creation of dedicated space and time for reflection on democratic participation and associated shared values emerges as a distinctive and valuable feature of Erasmus+ engagement. This experience creates space for **critical reflection**, the development of **critical thinking skills** and fosters greater civic responsibility and engagement at local and European levels.

This study demonstrates the value of Erasmus+ in enhancing democratic resilience. The following policy pointers are offered in support of a continued focus on democratic participation, common values and civic engagement learning and activities within adult education:

- **Strengthen democratic engagement capacity within adult education:**
Create a dedicated online space with a specific thematic focus on democratic participation and civic engagement for the sharing and dissemination of toolkits, resources, curricula, and project results.

- **Embed Erasmus+ within wider lifelong learning and civic participation strategies:** Recognise and strengthen the alignment between Erasmus+ and national lifelong learning, further education and training, and social inclusion strategies.
- **Increased support for Erasmus+ adult education learner mobility opportunities:** Direct learner participation in mobility is strongly linked with enhanced democratic participation, reduction in bias, and appreciation of European values. Erasmus+ actions should prioritise investment to expand adult learner mobility opportunities, particularly for those with fewer opportunities and those from marginalised backgrounds.
- **Retain the thematic focus** on democratic participation, common values and civic engagement with Erasmus+ programming, reflecting the continued importance of targeted actions to enhance European democracy.

The continuation of the positive impacts derived from participation in Erasmus+ actions on the adult education sector requires that the programme be strengthened at the European and national level. The Erasmus+ budget within the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) should be increased to respond to rising demand, maintain accessibility and inclusivity, and address increasing costs and inflation, particularly in relation to mobility to Nordic countries.

The increasing levels of participation, investment and engagement in Ireland highlighted in this report should be reflected in national programming and through the provision of additional resourcing and enhanced staffing capacity within the Erasmus+ National Agencies. National policies, strategies, and programmes should recognise the value of Erasmus+ in driving inclusive practice, innovation, and the building of international networks with the adult education sector. Embedding Erasmus+ within national frameworks will encourage greater participation, support alignment with wider European priorities, facilitate the exchange of best practices, and enhance quality across the adult education sector in Ireland and throughout Europe. Finally, administrative processes, including digital application and reporting procedures, should be simplified to improve accessibility and reduce barriers to participation.

Annex I: Short case study portraits

Small contributions make big changes!

KA220-ADU - Cooperation partnerships in adult education

Project Status: Mid-Implementation

About the organisation:

[Volunteer Ireland](#) is the national volunteer development organisation in Ireland and works to support, promote, celebrate, and advocate for volunteering across the Republic of Ireland. Volunteer Ireland believe that volunteering is a force for good, and central to creating and sustaining an inclusive society. Their purpose is to value, support, and strengthen volunteering where they work with a range of key stakeholders to make volunteering accessible, inclusive, and of high-quality. They support a network of 29 local Volunteer Centres and work closely with them to ensure volunteering thrives at local and national level and to build capacity in organisations and companies to create meaningful volunteering experiences.

Volunteer Ireland currently have 15 staff members whose work is guided by their strategic plan 2023–2027, where they have identified 5 strategic goals:

- Advocate for volunteering
- Support the Volunteer Centres
- Develop meaningful volunteering
- Raise the profile of volunteering
- Grow and sustain an excellent organisation, consistent with our values

Volunteer Ireland provide support for:

- Volunteers: by promoting and celebrating volunteering in Ireland through campaigns such as National Volunteering Week and the Volunteer Ireland Awards. Along with Volunteer Centres across the country, they manage I-VOL (the national database of Irish volunteering opportunities and listings).

- Charities and Not-For-Profit Organisations: they support national volunteering involving organisations by offering bespoke training, consultancy, and an extensive range of online guides and resources on engaging volunteers.

- Corporates: support companies interested in volunteering by facilitating partnerships between business and community groups through their 'Invest in volunteering programme'.

- Events and Festivals: volunteer management services for large-scale public events and festivals as well as supporting volunteer ambassadors' programmes.

- Student Abroad Service-Learning Programmes: volunteer placement programmes for third level students.

Volunteer Ireland hosts an annual Volunteer Ireland awards ceremony to celebrate the impact of individual volunteers across various categories like arts, environment, and social inclusion.

Stuart Garland, interviewee and Erasmus+ Project Manager is Volunteer Ireland's Learning and Capacity building manager, whose work focuses on building the capacity of organisations to run quality and inclusive volunteer programmes. This is Volunteer Ireland first KA2 application as lead partner.

Erasmus+ project(s) (problem statement; objective and change processes; activities; outputs developed)

Volunteer Ireland is the coordinating organisation for the Erasmus+ KA220 Cooperation Partnership project, *Training European Active Mentors for Inclusive Volunteering (TEAM IV)*, working alongside 4 European partners from Romania, Spain, Bulgaria, and Belgium.

The project primarily addresses the Erasmus+ horizontal priority *Common Values, Civic Engagement and Participation*. Its main objective is to increase volunteering opportunities for people with disabilities by tackling the barriers that often prevent their participation. These barriers include:

- Inaccessible physical and digital environments
- Transport and other accessibility challenges
- Limited organisational knowledge, capacity, and preparedness to support inclusive volunteering
- Negative attitudes and misconceptions about the capabilities of people with disabilities

The project aims to train 250 mentors (adult learners) specialised in supporting people with disabilities who are volunteers or who wish to be volunteers. Activities include a research phase, a training and capacity building phase, and a dissemination phase over a 36-month project duration, and expected outputs include:

- a training course and framework suitable for developing and strengthening the capacity for people (adult learners) to act as volunteers.
- provide trained 'mentors' through a European mentoring programme. The mentoring programme will be aimed at supporting 'mentees' who will be people with disabilities (physical, sensory, and organic disabilities), to involve themselves in acts of solidarity and active participation as volunteers.
- An open-source user-friendly platform that can be used for matching mentors and mentees. It will also include training materials in different languages making it easier to provide quality mentoring for people with disabilities (physical, sensory, and organic disabilities).

Benefits/impact of Erasmus+ at organisation, staff, learners' level, and wider environment

Although this project is still in implementation phase, the momentum and partnerships are already seeing impact, particularly around participation and inclusion. Stuart states 'anything we do within these projects leads to learning, and any of the learning that we get is like, really, I suppose, fundamentally changing the work that we do.'

The project supports organisations to create an environment where people with disabilities can have the opportunity to volunteer and contribute to social change in their own way. The project aims to change organisations' perception of disability and 'to try to smooth the pathway, so that more people have access to volunteering opportunities and to contribute to their own communities.' The training element intends to equip the mentees with the skills to support people with disabilities, so that they can identify what role they can play in society and what difference can they make, increasing their civic and democratic engagement.

At an organisational level, the project aims to strengthen the capacity of participating organisations through the development of innovative methodologies and practical tools that enhance the quality of mentoring services. These resources will support the delivery of high-quality, innovative, and community-oriented mentoring programmes, while also contributing to the development of more inclusive volunteering policies and practices. The project further aims to support organisations in designing volunteering programmes, in collaboration with volunteer-involving organisations, that create greater opportunities for people with disabilities to develop civic competences and participate actively in their communities.

Staff benefit through skills development, increased confidence, and exposure to diverse European approaches. For learners and participants, particularly people with disabilities, it creates more accessible pathways to volunteering, fostering confidence, independence, and active civic engagement.

Additionally for adult learners, in this case the trained mentees; the impact is the new knowledge and methodology about mentoring as a tool for civic engagement and inclusive practices that support opportunities for people with disabilities to be active contributors to society.

Lessons learned

According to Stuart, the Project Manager, one of the key lessons learned from the programme to date is the value of collaborating with European partners and gaining a deeper understanding of the diverse contexts in which volunteering takes place. Historically and culturally, volunteering has served different purposes across Europe and continues to be perceived differently from one country to another. While some countries have well-established volunteering infrastructures, others face historical, cultural, or political barriers that have limited the development of volunteering.

These differences have highlighted the importance of ensuring that the project's methodologies and training resources are context-sensitive and adaptable to

national circumstances. A one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to be effective; instead, mentoring approaches and training programmes must reflect local realities while promoting inclusive volunteering and strengthening civic engagement among people with disabilities.

The project places an emphasis on every contribution a person can make to society and that that contribution can be made ‘in their own way’. The approach advocates those small contributions matter and that ‘being a small cog on big wheels contribute to collective impact and bigger systems change.’ This approach increases a person’s sense of agency and is key to supporting participation and increasing civic engagement.

A key aspect of this project is challenging perceptions of disability and addressing the organisational mindsets that can act as barriers to participation. By creating opportunities for dialogue between organisations and people with disabilities—often for the first time – the project is fostering a deeper understanding of the valuable contributions that people with disabilities can make as volunteers. The project demonstrates that inclusive civic participation is about more than improving access. It requires building meaningful relationships, developing mutual understanding, challenging assumptions, and rethinking how volunteering is designed and experienced to ensure it is genuinely inclusive.

Reflecting on the project’s progress, Stuart noted that no significant obstacles have arisen to date and that the available supports and resources have been effective. He emphasised that one of the key lessons from managing European projects is that the most significant impacts often emerge over time. While projects begin with clearly defined objectives, the collaborative process frequently generates unexpected learning, new partnerships, and outcomes that extend beyond the original scope. These unforeseen developments often enhance the overall impact and long-term value of the project.

Community Radio Empowering Unheard Voices!

KA220-ADU - Cooperation partnerships in adult education

Project Status: Completed November 2024

About the organisation:

[Roscommon LEADER Partnership](#) (RLP, also known as RIDC – Roscommon Integrated Development Company Ltd) is a local and rural development partnership organisation that promotes innovative responses to key challenges through community development, social inclusion, rural enterprise, and people development that work for the betterment of the people of County Roscommon, including key target groups, e.g., those distant from employment or learning, young people, persons with disability issues and migrant communities.

RIDC's main objective is to promote, support, assist and engage in:

- social development
- enterprise development to facilitate rural and urban regeneration
- community development, designed to benefit and promote the welfare of local communities or to deal with the causes and consequences of social and economic disadvantage or poverty

Current programmes include the delivery of the Rural Development Programme (LEADER) and the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP). Other initiatives, funded by various government departments and agencies/bodies in Ireland and the EU, are also delivered by the company, including the Rural Social Scheme, Tús, and the Traveller Health Programme.

RIDC is also very rooted in education and is a founding member of the Roscommon Learning Network of adult education providers, community groups, as well as statutory and non-statutory agencies that provide a wide range of both accredited and non-accredited training and education opportunities. They have an experienced team of over 60 staff, including educators, researchers, mentors, and community development staff and are considered experienced as a lead partner in Erasmus+ projects.

Erasmus+ project(s) (problem statement; objective and change processes; activities; outputs developed)

This project proposal was in direct response to supporting the migrant community in Roscommon, particularly the recent arrival of the Ukrainian community who expressed feeling isolated and detached from community life. It also responded to the needs of adult educators and the challenges they were facing in supporting migrants who were feeling excluded in local community and civic life, and to support them in creating a platform for migrant's voices being heard.

The overall objective was to empower community radio organisations and volunteers to become an influential pillar of adult education, and in supporting civic engagement of diverse and vulnerable groups. The project aimed to foster inclusion

and diversity and promote active citizenship through learning opportunities created by community radio. It aimed to develop participation skills, soft skills and contribute to employment opportunities for the adult learners involved.

Activities included a research and development phase for a community radio inclusion and learning programme that aimed to upskill adult educators and community radio teams in communication, storytelling, digital broadcasting (community radio and podcasting), marketing skills. It aimed to teach how community radio can be utilised as a tool for inclusion, community wellbeing, democracy and human rights, a testing phase that engages adult learners in a podcasting/broadcasting programme, and digital publication phase.

Outputs produced included a community placement guide – a framework for adult educators and community radios to apply the learning, a digital badge system that connects learners and recognises competence development, and an online platform of pedagogical tools and resources for adult educators and community radio teams.

Benefits/Impact of Erasmus+ at organisation, staff, learners' level and wider environment

The case study interview evidenced significant impact for the organisation, learners, and adult educators, with a strong focus on inclusion and civic engagement. Both adult learners interviewed, Tetiana and Olena, are Ukrainian and had been located in an IPAS centre in Roscommon. They gave powerful testimonials on the impact of their participation in this project. The project empowered them by building their confidence, communication skills, and a sense of belonging. They gained a platform to express themselves, shared stories of their experience, and used their voice to engage with society:

‘Your voice is important... you are equal, we delivered our voice to others in Irish society.’

‘Voice for us was very important because we have opportunities, a lot of opportunities, talk about our culture, Ukrainian culture, Ukrainian situation, what happened with us right now.’

‘We started to understand that everybody are friendly. They really were like that. And then it was the opportunity to start our broadcast, and we started to write the scripts. So, it was like Tatiana said before, it's a chance to be heard.’

Both women interviewed stated they had progressed into further volunteering, training, and employment because of their participation in this programme.

For the staff involved there has been much learning gained, mainly centred around inclusive education, media-based learning, and intercultural facilitation. Staff member, Deirdre, who took part in the interview spoke of the increased confidence and skills development she gained from the Erasmus+ project. Deirdre also experienced career progression and is now the national coordinator for community radio in Ireland.

‘I wouldn't have had the confidence to go for that job if I hadn't been part of the Erasmus+ project.’

Project coordinator, Michaela, stated that the greatest impact at organisational level has been their increased capacity for the integration of refugees. The project facilitated the organisation to develop a strong and trusting relationship with the women and other participants. As a result, the women wanted to engage in more training, they were very motivated to learn and get jobs. RIDC have also found a way to create these courses so that they can be adapted to other departments, for example their work with early school leavers or people who have no access to education.

‘We have included podcasting as a way of teaching across our other departments... it’s easier for learners and everyone is included. Podcasting is an effective method in overcoming barriers, it doesn’t require writing or strong literacy skills and participants with lower levels of English can record in their own language and use translation captions for local audiences to engage with.’

Michaela also referenced how partner organisations have also enhanced their capacity for inclusion and innovation through the integration of podcasting and community radio into their programmes.

The podcasts were not only a space for the women to find their voice and tell their stories, but it was also a space for listeners to hear their experiences and learn about migrants’ experiences and the history and culture of other countries. The community radio podcasts strengthened intercultural understanding, connecting diverse communities and making global issues more relatable. It promoted conversation and further integration into the community at local level.

‘Ukrainian news became personal... when you start to meet people from this country.’

Lessons Learned

Reaching the learners was the biggest barrier that this project faced and indicated that the Erasmus+ funds need to consider the need for personnel and people power for the purposes of the groundwork required for initially connecting with the learners and building trust. Traditional recruitment methods, i.e., email, social media, were not effective in reaching marginalised groups. It required getting out on the ground and meeting people face-to-face in order to build relationships and develop trust and allow time for confidence building. This is particularly important when working with refugees and people from migrant backgrounds, they are often lost, frustrated, scared, and face emotional and psychological barriers that are barriers to participation.

‘We did have think outside the box, sometimes traditional media or traditional pathways don’t work. So, we were really trying to brainstorm and the piece around relationship building is critical.’

Making Moments Matter: Empowering volunteers to support people living with dementia in care home settings

KA210-ADU – Small-scale partnerships in adult education (12months)

Project Status: Completed 1 January 2024

About the organisation:

[Saint John of God Hospital CLG](#) (SJoG) is an NGO in Shankill, Dublin and is the largest home in Ireland solely dedicated to dementia care. The services provide dementia specific, person-centred, rights-based care in a homely environment, where people living with dementia and their families can enjoy a good quality-of-life.

Services include residential care for 60 residents, support for 2 people in respite care weekly, and a day care service with 120 places per week for people in the local community with a diagnosis of dementia. With just over 100 staff members, SJoG also work with 120 volunteers each week to assist in service delivery and to enhance people's day-to-day lives through special connections and activities developed for people living with dementia.

SJoG works closely with the HSE (Health Service Executive) [Understand Together Programme](#), [Alzheimer's Society of Ireland](#), [Engaging Dementia](#), [Volunteer Ireland](#) and corporate Ireland to raise awareness and foster understanding and acceptance of dementia in our community.

Erasmus+ project(s) (problem statement; objective and change processes; activities; outputs developed)

This small-scale partnership project, *Making Moments Matter: Empowering volunteers to support people living with dementia in care home settings* was SJoG's first time applying as a lead applicant where they worked with one Portuguese partner.

The project aimed to share and exchange expertise and best practice in developing quality volunteer programmes that support people living with dementia. It was about creating moments that matter, using song and singing, for people living with dementia and their families through engagement, connections, and socialisation. Project outputs included the development of a Volunteer Programme Charter, a training manual for volunteers, and a pilot volunteer training session to support volunteers in 'making moments matter' with partner organisations in Portugal.

Benefits/impact of Erasmus+ at organisation, staff, learners' level, and wider environment

The volunteers (adult learners) involved were already volunteering in one of the residential homes. They started a gentle sing along, or singing circles, for residents and their families. They reported developing skills in flexibility and adaptability around the needs of the residents, the ability to 'read the room' as well as a deeper

understanding of how to care for people with dementia. They learned to observe and be mindful of how music can trigger memories and emotions.

One of the volunteers spoke about how much her volunteering experience means to her and how important it is to her in her life. 'The singing circles bring huge value to the families that are in the room. It relieves the burden of the visits, which are sometimes challenging when their family member is unresponsive. The singing makes it an enjoyable and meaningful experience for everyone.'

She also spoke of how she brings her volunteering experiences into conversation in daily life. She feels she is bringing an awareness of the work of SJoG and 'addressing the stigma of dementia' to the wider community. She also spoke of the importance of volunteering and has lots of conversations about the importance of music in bringing joy to community life. The volunteers interviewed stated that volunteering in SJoG is their way of contributing and being civically engaged with community. 'It allows you to walk the talk'. They spoke of how the experience links them to society and how it creates a space for them to build relationships with other volunteers. 'There are over 100 volunteers from all over the world. You are also part of the families' lives of the people living there. This is a private and personal thing, and you are privileged to be trusted to be there and part of it.'

For the volunteers the highlight was 'When people are just singing and enjoying themselves, you know, having their minds taking off things for half an hour.'

Nicola, Project Coordinator, talks about the impact that this project has had on volunteers from her perspective. She states that the project created space for the volunteers to really show their potential, and to hone their own interests and skills in making things happen. For the organisation, she stated the impact is so important and shared that it is the volunteers that make their service feel like a home, and that their presence and contributions are invaluable. She also stated that volunteering not only supports an individual's sense of civic participation, but that they have undertaken research that evidences that volunteering also enhances that individual's sense of wellbeing. SJoG advocate that volunteering and civic participation should become part of everyone's lives for the personal positive health outcomes, as well as the positive outcomes for the organisation and the wider community.

Nicola states that the mobility element of the trip was a significant and inspiring experience. 'It was great getting to spend the time face-to-face time with like-minded people there... they inspired us by what they're doing, and we were able to take that back and try new things here.' She continues to say that the project created space for them to stop, pause and focus more on what they were doing and consider a more sustained and innovative approach going forward.

The funding has resourced the organisation to better support volunteer engagement, and the handbook developed has played a significant role in this, as well as staff having more space and time to focus on this element of their work. The experience has given SJoG a taste of the potential of the Erasmus+ programme and now they are also hosting ESC volunteers, they are linking with new partners and have plans for a staff mobility.

For Nicola, the highlight of the project was the connections made with their partner organisation in Portugal. 'I think the engagement of our partner organisation has probably been the most meaningful part of it, you know like I said before, we've met like-minded people, but we saw what they were doing, and that gave us great inspiration.' She states it was a refreshing and positive experience.

SJoG are currently piloting a training with HSE for nurse managers involved in dementia care, and a lot of content developed in the handbook informed this training.

Lessons Learned

This was SJoG's first time applying for Erasmus+ and they found the bureaucratic element challenging, but because their partner was already experienced in Erasmus+ projects they felt very supported. Their key recommendation was for Léargas to consider how they might facilitate connecting newcomer organisations (locally here in Ireland) with more experienced projects so that they could pick up the phone and ask questions in a more informal manner, as opposed to always having to ask the National Agency. It was also stated that Léargas provided a lot of information and that there was a lot of support during the application process. SJoG continue to participate in the programme as a partner organisation.

Digital Empow(H)er

KA220-ADU – Cooperation partnerships in adult education

Project Status: Completed December 2024

About the organisation:

Ballymun Job Centre Co-Op Society Limited (BJC) is a community-based non-profit charity, which provides employment services to local job seekers. The overall objective of the BJC is to provide individuals with a greater labour market choice and the opportunity to improve their employability, increase their earnings and reduce their vulnerability to poverty. The BJC works to reduce levels of poverty by providing unemployed individuals with access to career guidance, education and training, which leads to job placement and thus to quality employment and increased income and job security.

Ballymun Job Centre, established in the 1990s in response to a chronic unemployment and social exclusion problem, has developed a reputation in the provision of client-centred career guidance, and employability skills development for those facing multiple and complex barriers to social inclusion, mobility and sustained employment. It has extensive experience in designing and developing innovative responses to 'market failure', including Internet (web-based) guidance tools and the design of continuous and in-service training provisions for the guidance practitioners in Ireland and in EU projects. Almost half of the registered clients are female. The women that engage with BJC services are often lone parents, women looking to return to work, and women facing barriers as a result of being from/living in a disadvantaged area. Each guidance practitioner has their own case load of clients and regularly assists in piloting activities for numerous projects.

BJC had previous experience as a partner organisation in Adult Education and VET partnerships, but this was their first time applying for KA220 cooperation. They worked with partners from Spain, Italy, Germany and Sweden in this project. BJC has made determined efforts to ensure the lessons and work of the EU projects improve the delivery of services and the way they work with clients.

Erasmus+ project(s) (problem statement; objective and change processes; activities; outputs developed)

Digital Empow(H)er focused on the inclusion of low skilled women from disadvantaged backgrounds within the labour market, by empowering them to overcome barriers to employment, through the development of their digital literacy. The proposal aims were to:

1. Develop an adult guidance framework to empower women in the digital sector, validate, and integrate it in guidance services.
2. Equip guidance practitioners to identify relevant digital competences and address digital literacy needs.
3. Upskill and implement innovative approaches to support women to access learning and work opportunities.

The project directly addressed:

- the priority of inclusion and participation
- the development of critical skills and digital literacy

And indirectly addressed the priority

- of democratic participation and civic engagement.

All the women learners that took part were unemployed and low-skilled in terms of qualifications. The learners took part with a goal of finding sustainable employment.

Outputs developed included a training/learning online platform assessable through the BJC website. A competence framework; a blueprint for empowerment, lifelong learning, and employability of women was developed to inform the training curriculum which targeted guidance practitioners focusing on women competencies and including digital tools to embed in local settings.

Dissemination included a multiplier final conference that was supported by the City of Dublin ETB, who also shared the project results in their newsletter. The Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed supported in the dissemination of results as well as a published article on the Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe (EPALE).

Benefits/impact of Erasmus+ at organisation, staff, learners' level, and wider environment

Interviewee Tomás Bulnes is the Innovation Project Manager and the EU Projects Coordinator and principal contact point for the majority of EU projects that BJC are currently partnering in.

Tomás reflects that, because of participating in the project, the organisation gained insights and learning in terms of what are the most contemporary challenges unemployed people are facing in the context of new and fast-moving labour markets. They also developed a better understanding of the expectations of employers in a digital context, the challenges that people are facing in their job search and in having the skills to start a new job. Tomás explains that younger generations come to the labour market with a digital literacy that adult learners do not have and this is an area that the BJC can really provide support in.

Tomás also states that because of participating in this project, BJC have become 'more daring' in how they design projects, and the funding they are applying for.

'As an organisation we have become more innovative in how we can support people to find jobs. The Erasmus+ funding supports the organisation to develop proposals in response to learners' specific needs. And now, since the initiation of Digital EmpowHer in 2022, we started applying to European programmes such as the INTERACT programme. Taking part in Erasmus programmes has become

a stepping stone to other European Grants, and BCJ are become more aware of opportunities and have more confidence to apply for them.'

Tomás explains that working on this project has also taken them in new thematic directions. They are now more focused on supporting inclusive migration and feel increasingly connected to a broader European movement that challenges anti-migration rhetoric.

For staff, this project has increased their capacity to deliver a more effective service that better meets the needs of the women. They have developed their own digital skills and are also more confident in working with women remotely. As a result, there is a greater willingness of staff to adopt blended approaches developed during COVID-19 and apply them to career guidance services. Staff have increased confidence in supporting clients to overcome digital access and administration challenges to platforms, such as GOV.ie, by increased use of tools such screen sharing to support clients with completing forms, CVs and accessing digital services. Tomás emphasised that embracing digital counselling was one of the biggest organisational shifts.

'In the organisation, most of our colleagues are career guidance counsellors, and they are used to working with disadvantaged groups and disadvantaged low-skilled women. However, they're not necessarily used to the digital tools, or counselling, using digital media. This Project has encouraged a more blended approach, which better meets the needs of our target groups.'

Lessons Learned

Tomás shares that the diversity of partners and services participating was a huge contributing factor to the success of this project. Some were education and training networks, some were guidance services with more focus on employment, and others were organisations with expertise with digital tools. The varied organisational types also took different approaches to the delivery of the curriculum and dissemination of the outputs. He stated that there was strong partner cooperation and partners contributed equally in terms of expertise and workloads. He stated that the blended approach worked well between face-to-face and online supports. There was a willingness from all partners to sustain cooperation, and they have since submitted another successful application.

Tomás spoke positively about the application process overall. He recognised that the organisation's experience and the presence of a dedicated Erasmus+ project role contributed to the smoothness of the process. According to Tomás, Léargas responded promptly to all queries, and he described their Project Management training days as highly beneficial. He also reflected on a subsequent audit conducted by Léargas, noting that the experience was unexpectedly positive and reassuring.

Digital Upbringing: Supporting Families through Digital Literacy, Wellbeing, and Inter-generational Learning

KA220-ADU - Cooperation partnerships in adult education

Project Status: Completed August 2024

About the organisation:

Meath Partnership is a well-established Local Development Company in operation since 1995. As a not-for-profit entity with charitable status, Meath Partnership maintains a primary focus on applying the entirety of its resources to the specific needs of its target groups, and in meeting the requirements of contracting authorities with whom the company engages.

Specialising in the fields of social inclusion, rural development, and training and education, Meath Partnership strives to support, assist and engage in social progression, the facilitation of rural and urban regeneration, the promotion of wellbeing across local communities, and to support actions that address the causes and consequences of social and economic deprivation and poverty.

Meath Partnership is responsible for the implementation of their LEADER – Rural Development Programme, Erasmus+ Programmes, Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme, Meath Volunteer Centre, Tús Work Placement Scheme and the Rural Social Scheme. It has a highly trained staff of 40 persons with specific and relevant skill sets.

In international terms, Meath Partnership has extensive experience of EU Programmes, gained through such initiatives as the EU Lifelong Learning Programme, the EQUAL Community Initiative, DG Asylum and Migrant Integration Programme, Interreg, DG Justice, the Norway Fund and the Erasmus+ Programme. MP have a long-standing history of delivering Erasmus+ projects that focus on social inclusion, health and wellbeing, sustainability, and community engagement, with extensive expertise in curriculum and training development. They are an accredited VET provider in Ireland.

Interviewee Stephanie is the Senior Education and Training Manager with Meath Partnership and leads the development of Erasmus+ Projects.

Erasmus+ project(s) (problem statement; objective and change processes; activities; outputs developed)

This KA2 project was led by MP with partners in Romania, Croatia, Hungary, Netherlands, and Cyprus. The Digital Upbringing project was developed in response to a growing need for accessible, practical, and confidence building supports for parents navigating the digital world. Across partner countries, parents consistently identified the digital environment as one of the most challenging aspects of modern parenting. Rapid technological change, misinformation, social media pressures, and limited opportunities for dialogue, left many parents feeling overwhelmed and lacking in confidence in dealing with digital devices within a family context. Specific needs identified, and responded to, limited parent-focused

digital education, particularly outside urban centres, a predominance of lecture-based or fear-driven approaches and a lack of safe spaces for parents and children to engage together. The project was also developed in response to growing risks to civic participation and democratic engagement through misinformation and poor media literacy. Key target groups engaged included parents and children, as well as adult educators, teachers, and family support practitioners.

The project aimed to:

- Increase parents' digital literacy, confidence, and critical thinking
- Promote positive digital wellbeing rather than fear-based narratives
- Support practitioners and educators to confidently deliver digital parenting programmes
- Strengthen inter-generational dialogue between parents and children
- Contribute to civic engagement and democratic participation through media literacy and critical engagement with online information

The project developed a participatory, inter-generational learning model creating shared learning environments for parents, children, and practitioners. Activities included inter-generational workshops for families, practitioner training programmes, podcasts and webinars with digital experts, and development of high-quality learning resources and toolkits. Resources were translated into national and minority languages and a community-based delivery through schools, Family Resource Centres and NGOs was supported. A strong emphasis was placed on trust, safety, and dialogue, enabling families to engage openly with digital challenges.

Benefits/impact of Erasmus+ at organisation, staff, learners' level, and wider environment

Interviewees gave strong testimonies on the impact of this project.

Parents reported increased confidence in navigating digital tools, social media, and online safety. As a result of the learning spaces created, families were able to share perspectives and build trust. In some of the partner countries, it was the first time that parents were accessing digital parental support, particularly in rural settings. The intercultural element of the programme enhanced the learning for parents:

'The project had quite a big impact on, you know, building parents confidence in how they parent, and particularly how they parent around mobile phone use and social media use. But, also, I suppose creating a space where they could come together and talk to their peers both from Ukraine and from Ireland about their parenting style.'

Parents learned about concepts such as digital wellbeing and also gained new perspectives on the opportunities within digital media and the prospect that digital media is creating new career paths for people.

'It is important for parents to understand that this is a reality, and this is a good career path for their children and to not kind of be afraid of it.'

For staff, adult education practitioners gained confidence in delivering digital literacy content. The project addressed practitioner anxiety around 'not knowing enough' by providing tested, adaptable tools. Interviewee Ivone states, 'I think that this project definitely allowed me to expand my skills in designing and delivering digital wellbeing and digital safety workshops. Especially these inter-generational ones.'

As the programmes were delivered in schools and other non-formal settings, teachers, family support workers, and non-formal educators became indirect beneficiaries through school and community-based parent sessions.

A significant outcome of the project was its contribution to critical thinking and democratic participation through its media literacy content. This element facilitated learning around understanding misinformation, fake news, and algorithmic influence and their threats to democracy. Discussions took place on how social media impacts political opinions and elections. It is supporting parents, to support their children to question online content more critically.

'And obviously in these discussions, often political things or issues came up. In this country, we had a serious issue around this, how the media influences, or how the social media specifically can influence, the outcome of the elections and who's running. There is a mechanism behind this social media thing. So yes, it's been a constant issue on these parent meetings, and from what I've seen that there's not too many other occasions for parents to discuss this.'

Lessons Learned

Lessons learned during the project were related to reaching parents with lower digital confidence. Advertised workshops were attracting parents that were already somewhat informed, but project organisers were struggling to reach more targeted groups. Establishing strong relationships, and being hosted by local schools, family projects etc., supported the project to go deep into the community and connect with parents who had no previous access to such resources.

A strong recommendation from project organisers is for the Erasmus+ programme to consider a post-project dissemination phase. This would allow for a more structured time for organisations to share resources more widely and embed outcomes beyond partner organisations.

'I'd love if there was a stipulation of 6 months afterwards of just purely getting it into the right hands, getting the materials out to the right people so that it is reaching beyond and outside of your organisation. It is something that I think every project attempts to do, but the reality is the timing doesn't always allow meaningful dissemination in the end, and I don't think it does justice to the amount of good material produced. You can put it up on the results platform, and on your social media post, but additional support with a focus on this outreach piece would be very beneficial. The end of a 2-year project cycle is too short and rushed for meaningful dissemination.'

Annex II: RIA-AE Network mission statement

RIA-AE Network mission statement

Adult education provides skills development opportunities that help EU citizens find better jobs and improve their wellbeing. As an education sector, adult education is largely disconnected from the rest of the education system and receives limited funding and policy attention compared to other sectors. However, research shows that adult education is important and that it can contribute significantly to the personal, social and economic wellbeing of individuals and the social cohesion of a society.

The impact of Erasmus+ on adult learners and on the field of adult education has been little researched to date. To better coordinate research activities on the impact of international cooperation and mobility projects in adult education and to enable the further development and quality improvement of the Erasmus+ programme, a transnational research network is being set up: the Network for Research-based Impact Analysis of the Erasmus+ Programme in Adult Education (RIA-AE Network).

The aims of the RIA-AE network

The RIA-AE network pursues the following objectives:

- contributing to a better understanding of the impact of international cooperation and mobility projects in adult education under the Erasmus+ programme.
- strengthening cooperation and dialogue between research, politics, and practice.
- contributing to the further development and quality improvement of the Erasmus+ programme by enabling high-quality and practice-oriented evaluation and impact research.
- increasing the visibility of the benefits of adult education and the Erasmus+ programme in the EU and the Member States.

Procedure

To achieve these goals, the RIA-AE network brings together the National Agencies for Erasmus+ from different European countries to work together on the development of a new approach to programme evaluation and impact assessment of Erasmus+.

The starting point for the joint activities is an inventory of existing research and knowledge on the benefits and effects of mobility projects and international partnerships in adult education. Building on this, a research concept with a multi-level approach and coordinated research methods offers the opportunity to investigate the effects of Erasmus+ at an individual, organisational, and systemic level in the respective countries, and on an international comparative basis.

Principles of cooperation

Cooperation within the network is based on shared responsibility and is always open to new members. The cooperation framework includes several National Agencies and external research partner organisations (e.g., universities, research institutes). Each NA involved in the network can decide whether to carry out the research projects itself or to commission a research partner.

Values

To achieve the goal of high-quality research, the network partners adhere to common standards of social and educational research. The methods used for the research activities can include all methods commonly used in empirical social research - quantitative, qualitative or a mixture of different methods.

Annex III: Literature List

Literature List

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