

# National report on the implementation and impact of Erasmus+ in Sweden



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## **Background, summary, and conclusions**

Erasmus+ is the European Union's (EU) programme to support education, training, youth, and sport in Europe. According to Article 24(3) of Regulation (EU) 2021/817 that applies to Erasmus+, participating countries are to provide the European Commission (the Commission) with a national report on the implementation and impact of Erasmus+ by 31 May 2024. The national report constitutes a mid-term evaluation of the 2021–2027 period. The Government Offices of Sweden (the Ministry of Education and Research, and the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs) has been responsible for the preparation of this national report for Sweden.

Erasmus+ is of great importance for participating individuals and organisations in Sweden. Mobility of learners and staff as well as cooperation partnerships enable individuals to grow and gain valuable experience and knowledge about the EU and Europe. Erasmus+ contributes to increased internationalisation and the development of individuals and organisations. The international dimension in the form of mobility for staff and learners outside the countries participating in the programme is appreciated by beneficiary organisations, and there is an interest in expanding the international dimension to include mobility within the school sector. A success factor in the implementation of the programme is the flexibility in budget allocation at national level, which enables national needs being met and a more efficacious distribution of funds. Based on this mid-term evaluation, Sweden's main views on how Erasmus+ can be improved during the current period and in the future are the following:

- Maintain the current structure, objectives, and horizontal priorities of Erasmus+.
- Further develop accreditation and more flexible forms of mobility.
- Make the programme more user-friendly and simplify the administration.
- Ensure that the management support tools are reliable and support the administration.
- Make it more difficult for non-serious actors to apply for funding.
- Improve the cooperation between the National Agencies (NAs) and the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA).

### **Maintain the current structure, objectives, and horizontal priorities of Erasmus+**

The structure of the programme is appreciated, and its objectives and horizontal priorities are considered relevant. Sweden is thus of the view that any major changes in the structure and objectives of Erasmus+ should be avoided in the design of the 2028–2034 period. The programme should continue to focus on its current target groups and create good conditions for their participation.

### **Further develop accreditation and more flexible forms of mobility**

Many of the changes made in the current 2021-2027 period have been successful and should be further developed in the future. For example, Erasmus+ accreditation is an appreciated tool that facilitates long-term, strategic work. The introduction of more flexible forms of mobility such as blended mobility and group mobility has also been appreciated in Sweden.

### **Make the programme more user-friendly and simplify the administration**

The structure of the programme would benefit from further simplification and streamlining. It is important to continue to simplify the work required by applicants, beneficiary organisations and the National Agencies (NA) in the future. Simplification is essential in enabling the participation of new organisations and organisations with limited administrative capacity.

### **Ensure that the management support tools are reliable and support the administration**

Despite changes in the right direction, there are still considerable shortcomings in the functioning of the management support tools. Shortcomings in the management support tools increase the administrative burden, which ultimately increase costs. For the implementation of the programme, it is fundamental that the management support tools are reliable and support the administration.

### **Make it more difficult for non-serious actors to apply for funding**

Clearer constraints regarding which actors can apply for funding from Erasmus+ are needed, as there are currently risks that funds are being used by non-serious organisations with dubious purposes or with limited capacity to carry out projects. The Commission's efforts to tackle these problems are an important step in the right direction but are not considered to be sufficient.

### **Improve cooperation between the NAs and the EACEA**

While the cooperation between the NAs and the Commission is generally well-functioning, there is room for improvement in the cooperation between the NAs and the EACEA. The EACEA needs to share more information with the NAs in order for them to be able to successfully support organisations applying for, and implementing projects at, the central level.

## Method

To enable a broad and informed basis for this report, multiple actors have been involved in the data collection. By using method triangulation, which combines a variety of methods and actors, the reliability of results can be increased and the evaluation more nuanced. The primary data for this report was collected during seminars with beneficiary organisations in Sweden. In addition, interviews and reviews with both the NAs in Sweden have been conducted. The Swedish Council for Higher Education (UHR) is the NA for the Education and Training field (NA for Education and Training), and the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society (MUCF) is the NA for Youth (NA for Youth) and Sport (NA for the Sport). Document analysis of reports on the implementation of Erasmus+ initiated by the NA for Education and Training were also carried out.

The Government Offices of Sweden (The Government), which is the National Authority (NAU) in Sweden, organised seminars to which beneficiary organisations were invited. During the seminars, beneficiary organisations were given the opportunity to share their views on, and experiences of, implementing projects within the framework of the Erasmus+ programme. Separate seminars were held for the Education field and Youth field. This division was done in order for beneficiary organisations participating in the seminars to better understand and relate to each other's contexts and experiences of the programme. The same structure and questions were used to compare similarities and differences between the Education field and Youth field. To enable as many beneficiary organisations as possible to participate, seminars were held in different cities in Sweden. The seminars were held in Stockholm, Gothenburg, Lund, and Linköping. To enable the participation of beneficiary organisations not able to physically attend the seminars, four seminars were also held online.

Beneficiary organisations that had been responsible for Erasmus+ projects in all Key Actions during the period 2017–2023 were invited to the seminars. A total of 1 300 beneficiary organisations from the Education field and 217 beneficiary organisations from the Youth field were invited. A total of 246 people from 143 organisations participated in the seminars. The seminars for the Education field were attended by 199 people from 114 organisations, and the seminars for the Youth field were attended by 47 people from 29 organisations. Since few projects have been completed yet within the recently added decentralised Sport field of Erasmus+, it is not evaluated in this report. However, some participants had experiences of both Erasmus+ Sport and Youth. All target groups were well represented during the seminars. Regarding the Education field, the beneficiary organisations categorised themselves as belonging to the following sectors: 17% higher education, 44.5% schools (pre-school, compulsory and

upper secondary school), 27% vocational education and training (VET) (upper secondary school vocational programmes, higher vocational education, and other vocational education), 10% adult education (Folk high school, study associations, museums, libraries etc) and 1.5% no information provided. Many of the participants had experiences of the programme during both the 2014–2020 period and the 2021–2027 period and could thus identify similarities and differences between the two periods. The participants had varying roles such as school principals/Vice-Chancellors, teachers, researchers, youth workers, civil society actors, municipal employees, project managers, administrators, and coordinators. Thus, multiple perspectives on working with the programme were heard during the seminars.

In preparation for the interviews with the NAs and the seminars with beneficiary organisations, 20 of the 36 evaluation questions proposed in the Commission's guidelines were selected. The questions were selected in consultation between the NAU and the Nas, with the objective of selecting the questions that were regarded as the most relevant to include in a Swedish context, i.e., questions that could shed the most light on the successes and challenges of Erasmus+ implementation and its impact in Sweden. The questions that were selected are listed as an Appendix in the end of this report. During the seminars, in-depth discussions on all the questions were held. Other aspects of the programme that the seminar participants wished to share their views on were also discussed. Detailed minutes were written and subsequently compiled to be used as a basis for this national report. The examples mentioned in this report were brought up by beneficiary organisations during the seminars or by the NAs.

Alongside the seminars, views, and proposals for changes to the programme were obtained from the two NAs. The views and suggested changes put forward by the two NAs overlapped and, in most cases, reinforced what had emerged during the seminars. The NAs also used their extensive experience and considerable knowledge of Erasmus+ in helping to assess the relevance of the views put forward by the seminar participants and identified opinions that proved to be based on misunderstandings or inaccuracies. The NAs also provided valuable comments on the draft of this national report. The report was then processed within the Government Offices of Sweden.

The following sections set out Sweden's answers to the evaluation questions, and conclusions and suggestions for improvement regarding the Erasmus+ programme. The views are grouped based on the five evaluation criteria (Effectiveness, Efficiency, Relevance and European Added Value) with sub-headings for the main conclusions and views put forward.

## Effectiveness

### Increased interest in the programme, but barriers to participation persist

Participating actors and organisations in Sweden experience great added value through their participation in Erasmus+. In their view, the mobility activities and the cooperation partnerships would not have been possible to implement without Erasmus+.

There are some limitations in this report's discussions on the programme's effectiveness. Few projects during the current 2021–2027 period had been completed by autumn 2023 when the data collection for this report was conducted. The NAs have received a limited number of final reports for the 2021–2027 period, which makes it difficult to assess the attainment of the period's objectives thus far. From the data available to the NAs, positive trends can however be seen regarding the number of staff and learners travelling from Sweden within the framework of Erasmus+. The Erasmus+ Annual Report 2022 shows that in 2022, 14 575 Swedish students and pupils participated in mobilities, compared to the period 2017–2019 when 9 000–10 000 students and pupils participated. Mobility projects have thus increased in popularity in Sweden, primarily in the higher education, VET, school, and youth sectors, but to a lesser extent in adult education sector. Mobility projects have become especially popular in the school sector. In 2022, 307 mobility projects were carried out in Sweden, of which 45% were part of Erasmus+ Schools mobility.

While interest has increased, there are still some barriers to participation in the programme. The report *Hinder för svenska studenters mobilitet* (UHR, 2015) (Barriers to Swedish students' mobility) shows that there is a threshold for older higher education students, who more often have a family, to participate. The fact that older learners find it more difficult to participate in mobility activities for personal reasons may also be one reason why mobility projects in the sector of adult education is less popular than in other education sectors.

Other barriers to participation in the programme within higher education emerged both in reports and during the seminars held with beneficiary organisations. Erasmus+ students often study languages and social sciences programmes, such as political science, law, and economics. Fewer students from professional education programmes such as teacher education and medicine study programmes participate in Erasmus+. However, some professional education programmes, such as Master of Science in Engineering study programmes, have a high proportion of mobilities. Since many professional education programmes have a large proportion of compulsory components, there may be challenges in finding corresponding curricula or course components abroad. Some programmes are also adapted to the national system



and laws. Increasing teacher education students' participation in Erasmus+ is especially important since teacher students can take their contacts and experiences with them into their careers as teachers and in turn inspire increased participation in the school sector.

In terms of equality, in higher education the proportions of men and women who participate in Erasmus+ is largely equivalent to the proportions for all Swedish students. However, if more students from female-dominated study programmes (e.g., teacher education and nursing) were to participate, there is reason to believe that the proportion of women participating in Erasmus+ would increase (UHR, 2015, UHR 2018). A report by the Swedish Council for Higher Education also shows that men are under-represented in Erasmus+ VET mobility, where the figures were 40% men and 60% women (UHR, 2019).

One way to facilitate participation in the programme later in life is to allow Erasmus+ a greater scope in compulsory and upper secondary schools, and in non-formal learning, for example in civil society, municipal youth work activities, and in sports organisations. Participation earlier in life helps to increase self-confidence and capacity, which in turn facilitates participation later in life. Due to the cross-sectoral nature of Erasmus+, individuals can participate in different parts of the programme in different roles, for example in compulsory school as a pupil, as a youth worker or coach for a sports team, as a young person, as a higher education student or as school staff in their adult years. In this way, greater utilisation of the programme at an earlier age can facilitate participation later in life and thus lifelong learning for more people.

#### Visible impacts on participating individuals

Participating pupils, students, doctoral students, young people, teachers, and staff are generally very satisfied with their participation in Erasmus+ in Sweden. This was made clear during the seminars and confirmed by the NAs, during the interviews as well as in reports. To indicate the extent to which the objectives have been achieved at the individual level is difficult, however the fact that beneficiary organisations with ease can report visible effects on participating individuals is a positive indication that the objectives at the individual level are being reached.

The extensive surveys of all individuals who have participated in a mobility activity show that one of the great benefits of the programme is that participating individuals are able to experience the education system in other countries and learn about other cultures through non-formal and informal learning. These experiences contribute to new perspectives as well as greater reflection on, and understanding of, other cultures and people. In compulsory and upper secondary schools, an important component of the cultural exchange

is the possibility of being a host family or staying with a host family. Discovering similarities and differences ultimately leads to a greater sense of community across Europe. Encountering differences between cultures is an important part of developing an increased acceptance and tolerance for other cultures and people.

Staying, studying, or undertaking a traineeship in another country leads to personal growth and greater self-reliance and improves self-confidence. Being immersed in an international context further increases the participants' interest in studying and working abroad in the future. Meeting people of the same age from other countries also helps participants to discover their own strengths. For example, beneficiary organisations indicate that upper secondary school students discovered that they are better at English than they initially thought they were when meeting peers in other countries, which has positive effects on their confidence in speaking English. Participating individuals develop their language skills and gain an enhanced understanding of the benefits of being able to communicate in languages other than Swedish.

VET participants develop their occupational skills and pride in their occupations. International mobility also increases participants' inclination to seek work in other countries and emboldens them to do so. Participating VET students receive more job opportunities as a result of improving their international skills and become more sought after in the labour market both at home and abroad. A concrete example of how participation in the programme contributes to increased movement and employability is when VET participants gain employment where they completed their workplace-based learning (WBT).

Erasmus+ gives participating staff, youth workers, municipal representatives, and teachers opportunities for skills enhancement and to share experiences with colleagues in other countries. During seminars with beneficiary organisations and in reports, it is apparent that staff and teachers are often very satisfied with their participation. The report *Den akademiska personalens erfarenheter av internationell mobilitet inom ramen för Erasmus+* (UHR, 2023) (Academic staff's experiences of international mobility under Erasmus+) shows that 96% of academic staff who responded to survey questions about a completed exchange are very satisfied or quite satisfied with their participation. According to the report *Det goda exemplet makt* (UHR, 2021) (The power of the good example), nine out of ten teachers and school principals were partly or very satisfied with their skills enhancement. Job shadowing is reported by beneficiary organisations to be rewarding and enriching for teachers. It increases their knowledge about their own subject as well as other education systems in Europe. Teachers and academic staff implement new ideas in their teaching and become more open to including international perspectives in discussions in their teams and with

colleagues. The participation of staff, youth workers and teachers in exchanges also contributes to further international contacts and expanding networks in partner countries.

### **Organisational development occurs over time**

Beneficiary organisations voiced mainly positive experiences of strategic partnerships during the seminars. Participation in strategic partnerships contributes to the development, dissemination and implementation of teaching and learning methods, tools, and ways of working in their organisations. The participation of teachers and staff often leads to an increased interest among other staff members to participate. The report *Swedish Participation in Erasmus+ Strategic Partnerships* (UHR, 2018) also shows that combinations of partnerships between different education sectors and organisations broaden perspectives and widen the dissemination of results.

During the seminars, it became evident that organisational development takes a lot of time and resources. Therefore, organisational impacts and structures have developed mainly in beneficiary organisations that have been participating in Erasmus+ for a longer period. Organisational development takes time to implement, often due to demanding regular operations in terms of both time and human resources, which means that projects and organisational development cannot always be prioritised within the organisations. During the seminars, some beneficiary organisations stated that they have integrated Erasmus+ into their systematic quality management or merged the objectives of their Erasmus+ project with their own organisational objectives. Working towards similar objectives in the regular operations as in Erasmus+ was considered to make Erasmus+ a natural and integral part of the organisation.

There is potential to integrate Erasmus+ more widely into beneficiary organisations regular operations to generate sustainable organisational impacts over time. The report *Partnerskap, delaktighet och skolutveckling* (UHR, 2022) (Partnership, participation, and school development) mapped the participation of schools in partnership projects during the period 2014–2019. The report shows that there is potential to further integrate Erasmus+ into regular operations and link the programme to the school's vision and curriculum. It is also clear in the report *Academic staff's experiences of international mobility under Erasmus+* (UHR, 2023) that academic staff do not believe that their higher education institutions regard their learning from participation in Erasmus+ as part of quality improvement in general. While impacts at the organisational level can be discerned, challenges thus remain regarding the integration of Erasmus+ into regular organisational structures development in order to achieve greater impacts.

### **Policy-level impacts are difficult to assess and take time to implement**

Since the objectives at policy level are far from many organisations' project activities, it is often difficult for beneficiary organisations to assess impact at the policy level. The focus of many of the projects' activities is instead the achievement of the objectives at the individual and organisational level.

However, some structural changes can be found in the VET sector, as industry standards are being developed and employers are seen as having gained a greater understanding of foreign individuals' knowledge and experience, and now value traineeships undertaken abroad as meritorious to a greater extent.

As the majority of Erasmus+ projects with a policy focus are managed centrally by the Commission it also becomes difficult for the NAs to assess the impacts of projects at policy level, as they lack sufficient insight into the work of central projects. Impacts at policy level are thus difficult to assess and policy changes take time to implement and discern. However, some conclusions can be drawn based on the premise that widespread effects at the individual and organisational levels have structural effects over time. For example, individuals' enhancement of their professional or occupational skills through the participation in Erasmus+ creates a more competent and mobile workforce in Europe.

In higher education, changes are occurring at policy level largely through the implementation of the European Universities Initiative (EUI) and related initiatives. The EUI contribute to higher education institutions prioritising of internationalisation and mobility. While the EUI is a successful initiative for strengthening cooperation partnerships in higher education and for the development of the sector, Erasmus+ resources are needed to achieve the set objectives. As the initiative expands, the Government underline that ongoing funding for the EUI through Erasmus+ is important. However, care should be taken to ensure that the EUI does not displace other activities within the programme. It is also important that higher education institutions that are not part of the EUI continue to have good opportunities for obtaining funding within Erasmus+.

The development of PLINT (Platform for Internationalisation) is a concrete example of how the Swedish Government is prioritising internationalisation in higher education, research, and innovation. In spring 2022, five Swedish government agencies were tasked with forming a collaboration platform to facilitate the higher education institutions work regarding internationalisation. Through the government agencies' knowledge base and interfaces, PLINT will be able to assist the higher education institutions in identifying barriers, highlighting policy issues, solving common problems, and sharing ways of

working, knowledge, and insights. As the platform has only recently been established, it is too early to measure any results or impact of PLINT.

### **The application process has become easier but remains demanding**

During the 2021-2027 period, the NAs have seen high numbers of applications from organisations in the Education and Youth fields in Sweden. The increase in applications is deemed to be due in part to the introduction of accreditation applications in additional sectors.

Actors who have regularly submitted applications since the previous period claim that they have gradually become more skilled in writing applications, as well as more aware of what information an application should contain to generate high scores. The NAs also perceive that the applications coming from actors with prior experience of writing project applications generally are of a higher quality. A possible consequence is that new actors will find it more difficult to get their applications approved, as actors with previous experience of the project application process are rewarded. In the long run, it carries the risk that new organisations will be less likely to apply for funding after previous rejections. It is thus important that the NAs continue to work actively with widening participation and outreach to new organisations to not make established actors who have previously been successful in their applications too dominant in the programme.

During the seminars it became evident that the introduction of accreditation in the school, VET, youth, and adult education sectors has simplified the application process. However, despite the improvements and simplifications made, the accreditation application and the ordinary application to Erasmus+ could be further simplified. The application process continues to place high demands on those writing the applications. The applications also require much detailed information, as well as comparable questions that can be answered in similar ways. The fact that the application process is regarded by beneficiary organisations as complicated and time-consuming creates a barrier for small and new actors – such as schools in areas experiencing socio-economic challenges – to apply for projects. This carries the risk that mainly larger actors will apply for and have their Erasmus+ projects approved. A simplified application process therefore constitutes a tool to achieve greater inclusion and diversity in the programme.

Despite the ambition of simplifying the application, actors within the higher education sector experience that the application for Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility (ICM, KA171) is complex and requires a lot of work in relation to the potential funding the projects can generate. The fact that cooperation partnerships are applied for regionally is also seen as having made the

application process more difficult, as different departments at the higher education institutions have different preferences regarding the countries and higher education institutions they want to partner with.

### **Horizontal priorities**

The NAs considers the expectations for working with the Erasmus+ horizontal priorities to be clear. The horizontal priorities have become an integral part of the activities of the NAs and influence all of their work with the programme. Many of the beneficiary organisations that participated in the seminars also argued that most of the horizontal priorities are part of their regular organisational development work.

### **Inclusion and diversity**

The Government is of the view that there is still a need for greater inclusion of under-represented groups and groups with fewer opportunities in the Erasmus+ programme in Sweden. The NAs in Sweden work actively with the horizontal priority Inclusion and diversity to reach groups that are currently under-represented in the programme. The NAs actively recruit new and smaller actors who are currently under-represented. In 2023, 40% of the project applications to Erasmus+ Youth focused on inclusion and diversity. An example of a successful project focusing on inclusion and diversity is a DiscoverEU project targeting young people not in employment, education, or training (NEETs) who also have various disabilities. The project brought together five young people who travelled to Berlin and Paris for 10 days with a study counsellor. The project yielded good results in building self-confidence, a more optimistic view of the future, and motivation for these young people to move on to studies and traineeships. Another successful inclusion and diversity project is the Open Minds project. The project used technology, art, and culture as a method for social inclusion for young people with disabilities. A co-creation process was used to develop a toolbox to address barriers in everyday life for young people with an impairment.

A major challenge in working with inclusion and diversity is limitations on the collection and registration of sensitive data and background information, in part due to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Registering and listing individuals as belonging to groups with fewer opportunities is deemed to be processing of sensitive data, and beneficiary organisations are rarely inclined to report on the limitations and challenges of pupils, students, and young people. Since there are challenges in identifying such groups, there are also few beneficiary organisations who seek additional funding to work with inclusion and diversity. Moreover, there are few individuals participating in the programme who state that they have a need for increased support and funding, as it is often perceived as sensitive to disclose such information about oneself.

The lack of information on individuals belonging to groups with fewer opportunities or groups that are under-represented limits the use of targeted inclusivity initiatives. Instead, the strategy of treating everyone equally and ensuring that everyone has the same opportunities is often more common in Sweden.

The report *Breddad rekrytering till internationell mobilitet* (UHR, 2022) (Widening participation in international mobility) shows that there is a lack of uniform definitions and interpretations of terms relating to widening participation at Swedish higher education institutions. There are rarely explicit or general definitions, and as such widening participation can refer both to student groups in study programmes with structures that make participation difficult, as well as to students' personal backgrounds. However, a common definition might not always be desirable, as it could make it more difficult for higher education institutions to focus on their specific student populations and challenges.

### **The environment and fight against climate change**

In Sweden there is a high level of engagement concerning the green transition. Green travel and sustainable development are integrated into the operational goals of many beneficiary organisations. Sustainable travel is a concrete way for beneficiary organisations to work with the green transition. Train travel is viewed as a valuable part of pupils' and young people's mobility and can lead to positive experiences of green travel. Even though many projects in Sweden strive for green travel, many experience barriers to travelling by train. One of the biggest challenges is time. It takes a long time to travel to the rest of Europe by train, especially from northern Sweden. For teachers and other staff, many working hours are lost during train travel. In addition, youth workers feel less confident about being responsible for a group of young people on a train journey that involves many train changes.

Another challenge concerning green travel is the related costs. Travelling by train is usually more expensive than flying, and in projects with limited budgets, increased participation in numbers is often prioritised over train travelling. For teachers and other staff, salaries and overtime compensation are an additional cost, adding to the total cost of travelling by train. The grant offered is often insufficient to cover green travel from Sweden and is consequently not always sufficient to motivate and stimulate green travel. For volunteer youth workers, accompanying a group for youth mobility exchanges often entails a loss of income, and longer travel time increase personal costs.

In Erasmus+ Youth, a large proportion of beneficiary organisations state that they also work with the green transition through the entire design of their projects, for example by reducing waste and not using disposable products. A key success factor in the work with the green transition according to a project in

the school sector was the use of the Commission's GreenComp framework in developing tools for courses on sustainable development.

Beneficiary organisations believe that the horizontal priorities on the green transition and the digital transformation complement each other, as digitalisation can help to reduce travel through digital meetings and online courses. At the same time, there is a perceived conflict between the horizontal priorities on inclusion and diversity and the green transition. While short-term mobility is a successful initiative for increased inclusion, it can potentially result in an increase in travel, as participants participating in short-term mobility are argued to be more likely to fly than take trains. In the future, the programme may therefore need to weigh the benefits of physical mobility and short-term mobility periods against the negative impacts that air travel has on the climate. The added value of physical mobility compared to virtual mobility should be included into such a calculation.

### **Participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement**

Much of the work to increase participation in democratic life involves increasing the understanding of other European countries' cultures, labour markets and education systems. According to many beneficiary organisations, Swedish youth have large gaps in their knowledge about the EU. For example, during encounters with young people in other European countries it becomes apparent that Swedish youths have less knowledge about Europe and how the EU works compared to their peers in other European countries.

Questions relating to democracy and common values arise in encounters with pupils from countries with values that differ from Swedish values. According to the beneficiary organisations, it is important that Swedish pupils are able to discuss questions of democracy with pupils who may have different views and perspectives than their own. Such discussions require a lot of prior knowledge and preparation on questions of democracy from teachers and participating staff. Both visiting and receiving individuals from other countries also help to increase pupils' understanding and appreciation of Swedish society's values and what Sweden has to offer. Participating in the programme can thus make individuals, and especially young people, appreciate and not take for granted the freedoms and opportunities they have in Sweden. This, in turn, can lead to increased civic engagement and participation in democratic life.

### **Digital transformation**

Digital transformation in Sweden, and in the Swedish education system, has come a long way. Swedish organisations work extensively with digital tools both in their administration and in teaching. Thus, the priority of digital transformation has not had noticeable effects on beneficiary organisations in



Sweden. In Sweden there is instead a widespread debate on whether digitalisation in teaching has come too far and should be curtailed, with some claiming that there is reason to return to using physical teaching and learning materials.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the digitalisation of Erasmus+ projects in Sweden. Digital partnerships and cooperation partnerships have paved the way for mobility in digital and hybrid formats. Being able to cooperate online with actors in other countries allows for larger networks to take shape, as digital partnerships become easier and less time-consuming to develop and maintain than partnerships sustained through physical meetings. However, some beneficiary organisations believe that large, digital networks make partnerships less personal. In some projects, such as a project by a theatre in Malmö that carried out a youth project focusing on civil courage, digital meetings are not considered to be capable of replacing the informal learning and communication that occurs in physical meetings. Digital partnerships thus had both positive and somewhat negative consequences for the beneficiary organisations.

The NA for Youth experienced that many organisations and municipalities find it difficult to understand how to work with digital transformation in practice. The NA views the Commission's SALTO platform as a potential source of inspiration and information, for example on how projects can work with AI and other new technologies. But in the NA's experience that the information is not reaching the organisations.

### **Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic**

The COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on the implementation of the programme in Sweden. In the higher education sector, the number of mobilities fell dramatically, and almost no mobility activities occurred in the other Education sectors nor in the field of Youth.

The Commission was perceived by beneficiary organisations as having created flexible and helpful solutions during the pandemic. For example, that projects could be extended was greatly appreciated. The NAs have also provided vital support for the beneficiary organisations during the pandemic. For example, the NAs have shown great understanding that projects could not be implemented as planned and according to the normal schedule.

During the seminars, beneficiary organisations stated that virtual mobility and partnerships gathered momentum and to some extent was able to replace physical meetings and forms of cooperation during the pandemic. For example, VET projects organised digital WBT periods, in which the VET students received assignments from a workplace in another country to do at home and then reported back on the results. A key success factor was that funding could be

transferred from mobility projects to partnership projects for a period during the pandemic, due to partnership projects being easier to implement remote. Running partnership projects during the pandemic also had its challenges. Due to regular operations being greatly affected by the pandemic and requiring an immense focus and work, other development activities, such as project activities, in many cases ended up being sidelined within organisations.

After the pandemic, recovery has occurred regarding mobility activities. In the higher education sector, even more individuals are now participating in mobility activities than before the pandemic. Whether this increase will persist over time however remains to be seen. Beneficiary organisations in the higher education sector have found that an effect of the pandemic is that more students are now inclined to do their study exchanges in a European country, compared to previously when, for example, the United States was a very popular destination for Swedish students to study in. That more students are interested in studying in Europe is believed to be that after the pandemic, students want to be closer to Sweden in order to get home more easily should something unexpected occur which complicates travelling. In the school sector, several beneficiary organisations have instead experienced greater resistance from pupils to participating in mobility activities. This is thought to be due to travelling abroad becoming a big step within a short space of time for many pupils after having been taught at home. That pupils in compulsory and upper secondary schools once again start participating in Erasmus+ mobility is important, as beneficiary organisations from higher education institutions have stated that younger students coming directly from upper secondary school are showing resistance to embarking on exchanges during higher education.

## Efficiency

### Increased efficiency but the programme's administration is still time-consuming

The changes implemented with the intention to simplify the programme's administration, including the application process, are appreciated by both the beneficiary organisations and the NAs. The NAs see such changes as decisive in making the programme more cost-effective. The simplified administration and reporting within the programme, such as the introduction of Erasmus+ accreditation for beneficiary organisations, is seen as having led to increased cost-effectiveness. However, administration within the programme is still perceived as time-consuming and cumbersome by both the NAs and the beneficiary organisations.

Prefixed lump sum grants have been introduced in the 2021-2027 period. Beneficiary organisations can choose between prefixed lump sums based on the level of the activity they want to implement. As lump sums and unit costs have been in use for only a short period of time and few projects which have been allocated lump sums have yet to submit their final reports, the effects of this format are difficult to assess as of now. However, the NAs believe that lump sums could improve cost-effectiveness, as less time needs to be spent on administration and reporting on budget allocations. Lump sums also help to reduce the time the NAs need to spend on checking in precise detail how the funds have been managed within the projects. The NAs also note that the use of lump sums could be extended to the management of Training and Cooperation Activities (TCA). Most beneficiary organisations consider lump sums to be easier to manage than previous systems where the grant amount is based on a detailed budget of available costs per category. However, some beneficiary organisations see lump sums as making it more difficult to get a clear overview of the budget and to assess cost-effectiveness.

The fact that information, IT-systems, and procedures can change between calls during the current 2021-2027 period means that beneficiary organisations need to spend time keeping up to date on the most recent information. Beneficiary organisations therefore would like to see fewer changes during ongoing periods. The programme's administrative complexity and the introduction of changes within the programme also mean that some employees at the NAs experience that it takes a long time before they stop feeling like "new recruits". Employees at the NAs would like to see clearer information from the Commission and would prefer that new changes are not launched before there are templates and tools ready to manage them.

A large proportion of the beneficiary organisations who participated in the seminars experience that their project budgets are insufficient. Travel costs are increasing, and many experience that the allocated funds are not sufficient to cover the increased cost of travel. In the Youth field, beneficiary organisations argue that they find it difficult to cover living costs in Sweden, for example due to the relatively high costs in Sweden compared to other countries in the EU. This poses a challenge for youth organisations that lack access to a course centre or other accommodation at a lower cost. Increased costs for food and accommodation also mean that young people with limited resources find it more difficult to participate in the programme. Beneficiary organisations in the field of youth believes that it is very positive that there is some payment for worked hours within Key Action 2 and would like to see the same introduced into Key Action 1, as many accompanying youth workers lose income when participating in Erasmus+ as they must pay for their own travel expenses.

### **The need for monitoring differs between fields**

The ambition that the current 2021-2027 period should focus less on monitoring is supported by the NA for Education and Training. The NA argues that it is of importance that focus is placed on monitoring the most relevant organisations. Instead of focusing on the 15% of applicants allocated the most funding, which often involves checks of higher education institutions, risk-based monitoring should be the main effort.

The NA for Youth on the other hand claim that there is a need for increased resources for monitoring of projects to detect irregularities and non-serious actors at an early stage. This monitoring goes beyond the minimum required by the Commission but is regarded as being necessary based on the national context for awarding grants. In this work, the NA for Youth would like to see more tools able to deal with non-serious actors and organisations without active operations. The NA for Youth would also like to see a more coordinated approach when there are suspicions of financial abuse and fraud. Such an approach should also be coordinated between the decentralised and centralised actions within the programme. Some form of digital identification would also allow for the detection of irregularities.

The NAs are moreover of the opinion that clearer limitations on who can apply for funding for cooperation partnerships and small-scale partnerships are needed. Currently, there are risks that funds are being used in ways not intended by organisations with either poor capacity to implement projects or by non-serious organisations with dubious intents.

### **Management support tools create major administrative challenges**

Beneficiary organisations and NAs find that while the intention behind the Commission's new management support tools is good, there are still major

shortcomings in their functioning. Technical problems in the Beneficiary Module (BM) and Project Management Module (PMM) are common, and the tools sometimes crash with the result of information being lost. The modules also become overloaded and thus respond very slowly. Such technical issues create frustration, impair the implementation of projects, and make for a poorer work environment when information cannot be registered correctly or efficiently. When the BM does not function satisfactorily a lot of working hours need to be set aside to enter information in the tool. The fact that information risks being entered incorrectly or not entered in time also generates high stress and fear of adverse remarks within the beneficiary organisations.

Due to shortcomings in the management support tools, paper-based documentation needs to be used as a complement, resulting in duplication of effort for the NAs and beneficiary organisations as well as the International Audit Body. In the future, the focus should be on improving the performance of the existing management support tools, as the introduction of new management support tools that are not yet fully developed can create new administrative issues.

Other management support tools, such as the Funding and Tenders Portal (FTOP), are considered by beneficiary organisations as difficult to navigate and would benefit from being made more user-friendly. Erasmus Without Paper (EWP) is also regarded as unnecessarily complicated and time-consuming. The digitalisation of the Online Learning Agreement (OLA) and Individual Learning Agreement (ILA) has been smooth and has boosted efficiency, but difficulties arise when some higher education institutions have not progressed as far in the digitalisation process as others and continue to have paper-based documentation processes. Beneficiary organisations in the higher education sector also experience challenges with the EWP Dashboard and the commercial sister tools such as MoveOn and Mobility Online. Problems with communication between the tools remain and a concrete request is therefore that the different tools should support the same working methods and functions.

Beneficiary organisations and the NAs have submitted several proposals on how administration and reporting in the programme can be simplified and improved. One way of simplifying the administration for the NAs is to make the smaller contracts<sup>1</sup> such as eTwinning, EPALÉ, Europass, Euroguidance and EQF part of the Erasmus+ contract<sup>2</sup>. Combining these contracts with the Erasmus+ contract would help create synergies between different initiatives, with the purpose of facilitating movement. The work could also be simplified

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<sup>1</sup> Grant agreement

<sup>2</sup> Contribution agreement

by introducing lump sums for the management of the eTwinning, EPALE, Europass, Euroguidance and EQF contracts in the same way as for national VET teams. A request from beneficiary organisations is greater integration and synchronisation between the management support tools. Another measure that could simplify administration would be for the Learning Agreement and the Europass Mobility Document to reflect the information requirements in the BM.

### **Accreditation – a key success factor with development potential**

The introduction of accreditation in additional sectors creates good conditions for long-term planning. In Sweden, many organisations have chosen to apply for accreditation. For the NAs, the fact that more organisations have an accreditation means that fewer resources need to be spent on monitoring, which allows the NAs to focus more on providing support to beneficiary organisations.

The application process to become accredited is perceived by some organisations as difficult and administratively demanding, which can create barriers for smaller actors. In these cases, the application process requires a lot of support from the NAs. Being able to send in a simplified budget application as an accredited organisation has facilitated the administration of the programme to a large extent. At the same time, there is still a significant administrative burden for organisations with an accreditation due to the reporting required during the project's implementation.

Being able to apply for accreditation as a consortium creates a pathway into the programme for small and new organisations, thus increasing inclusion. Accreditation as a consortium also reduces the administrative burden for both the NA and for the individual actors that are part of a consortium.

### **Increased budget and increased competition**

The increased budget for the current 2021-2027 period has affected the implementation of the programme in Sweden in several ways. As mentioned earlier, the NA for Education and Training has experienced high numbers of project applications during the current period. An increased interest in the programme has led to increased competition between actors applying for funding. According to beneficiary organisations, the fact that more organisations are competing for funds has resulted in accredited organisations having been allocated a reduced budget year on year. Thus, the Erasmus+ has increased budget for the current period has paradoxically been noticed by many beneficiary organisations in terms of a decreased budget allocation.

In the higher education sector, some beneficiary organisations on the other hand claim that they are receiving budgets for their mobility projects that are almost too large. This is mainly due to the fact that while the budget has increased, different types of mobility (e.g., short-term forms of mobility) have been introduced during the current period. As different forms of mobility are managed differently, the combination of an increased budget and more forms of mobility is therefore seen as having the consequence of an increased administration for project coordinators and administrative officers at higher education institutions.

While the budget for the current period gradually increases from 2021 to 2027 within the agreed framework, the NAs would instead prefer a more balanced budget allocation in the future in order to avoid large fluctuations in ambition level and budget.

### **The NAs appreciate flexibility in budget allocation**

The increased budget flexibility within the current period is appreciated by the NAs. Being able to transfer up to 35% of the programme's budget between the Education sectors helps ensure that the funds can be used where they will be most effective. The NAs find that continued and increased flexibility at the national level is important if the programme is to remain relevant in the future. This will allow the implementation of the programme to adapt to changing national conditions as well as a changing external environment.

### **NAs are an important source of support for participating actors**

Beneficiary organisations are generally very satisfied with the support provided by the NAs. The employees at the NAs are described as service-oriented, professional, and very helpful. The beneficiary organisations also experience that the employees at the NAs want their projects to thrive and be successful and often show great understanding of the beneficiary organisations' problems and challenges. That beneficiary organisations are offered opportunities by the NAs to meet and share experiences with each other during seminars is greatly appreciated. During the pandemic, the NAs organised webinars and after the pandemic, online meetings have continued to be used widely. However, some beneficiary organisations would now like to see more physical meetings, such as application seminars, as they find that informal encounters contribute to increased experience sharing and networking.

In pace with the increased participation in the programme in Sweden, demands for the NAs' availability have also increased. Some beneficiary organisations are consequently experiencing a lack of availability of the NA for Education and Training. For example, during reporting periods some beneficiary organisations find it difficult to reach the NA by phone to deal with urgent issues that can

arise. Suggestions provided on how contact between the beneficiary organisations and the NA can be streamlined and improved include the development of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), as many beneficiary organisations often approach the NA with similar questions during the same periods.

The NA for Youth considers the youth sector to have a challenging target group. The target group consists of many small and often non-profit organisations that rely on receiving a lot of support and help from the NA to cope with the substantial administrative burden of the programme. Small errors in formalities in their applications risk leading to the applications being rejected, which can be a deterrent for non-profit organisations, who then may give up on applying for Erasmus+ grants. This places high demands on the NA and generates a high workload.

### **Effective cooperation between the NAs, the ministries, and the Commission**

Cooperation between the NAs, the National Authority and the Commission is found to be functioning well. The NAs and the Government Offices cooperate closely, and the cooperation is well established. According to the NAs, the Commission shows a great interest in the decentralised parts of the programme. Both the NAs experience that the Commission listens to proposals and requests regarding working methods and has made changes that have been appreciated. In the Youth field, however, some friction has been felt in the communication with the Commission, where it has been difficult to recognition for the problems in the management support tools area; problems that have existed for a long time.

### **NAs request more information on central level activities**

In order for the NAs to be able to support applicants applying for project on central level where Sweden's participation is currently low, for example *Centres of Vocational Excellence*, the NAs claim that more and earlier information needs to be communicated from the EACEA. The EACEA is regarded as being restrictive when information is shared with the NAs, including information about which Swedish actors have applied, and been granted funding for, projects at the central level. The NAs also consider it important that information about which organisations have not been granted funding is communicated by the EACEA, in order for the NAs to be able to provide support to such organisations during future application periods. Organisations who have been granted project funding centrally often expect the NAs to be able to provide them with assistance. The lack of information given to NAs by the EACEA makes them less able to offer the support they would like to provide to those organisations which have or have not been granted funding at the central level.



## Relevance

### Objectives highly relevant in today's society

The Government, the NAs and beneficiary organisations share the view that the objectives of Erasmus+ remain highly relevant and address the challenges of today's society. The importance of working for a cohesive Europe and a strengthened European identity is regarded as having been further highlighted in recent years as a consequence of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Erasmus+ has thus become more widely regarded by beneficiary organisations as an important peace-keeping initiative for Europe. A clear message that the beneficiary organisations and the NAs wish to convey is that, as the objectives of the programme become anchored over time, it is important that the current objectives and priorities are not changed. This will ensure continuity and a long-term focus on work towards the programme's objectives. The NAs are moreover of the view that, in order to ensure continuity in the programme, the focus on creating good conditions for the participation of current target groups should be maintained, and an expansion of the programme's target groups should be avoided.

To some extent, beneficiary organisations find that the objectives are written in a formal and vague language, making it more difficult to assess the fulfilment of the objectives. Many therefore seek greater clarity on how the objectives can be operationalised and achieved and at the right level for the beneficiary organisations. Other actors instead view the objectives as a vision or guideline to strive towards rather than something concrete to achieve.

The participating organisations and NAs are very supportive of the four horizontal priorities introduced during the current period. The horizontal priorities of Inclusion and diversity and Green transition are considered particularly relevant, and are assessed as being very important perspectives to include in projects in Sweden. The Government shares the view of the NAs and beneficiary organisations that inclusion and tolerance are important and topical issues in Sweden. Concerning Digital transformation, Sweden is already at the forefront of digitalisation processes, which means that the focus can be placed on other priorities. However, the beneficiary organisations and NAs feel that the purpose of the Digital transformation priority could be clarified, especially in relation to the emergence of AI in recent years.

During the seminars, both the NAs and the beneficiary organisations presented some proposals for perspectives that could be included in the programme's objectives. One such proposal from the NAs is an increased focus on the supply of teachers, as teacher shortage is a common challenge for many countries in Europe. An increased focus on the supply of teachers within the

framework of Erasmus+ is also in line with the European Education Area (EEA) initiative for teachers, trainers, and school leaders. Another proposal from some of the beneficiary organisations is to focus more on the prevention of mental health issues, as it is a widespread problem among young people today and can also influence the inclination and opportunities to participate in the programme.

### **Parts of Erasmus+ are well-known, but awareness could improve**

Erasmus+ has become a well-known brand with which many people have positive associations. However, awareness of Erasmus+ varies between and across sectors. Erasmus+ is primarily well-known in Sweden as a programme for higher education students' mobility during studies. The programme's activities within other sectors are however less well-known. This is most likely because Erasmus+ activities have been focused on other target groups for a shorter period than on higher education students. Key Action 1 is generally more well-known, while other parts of the programme, such as Key Action 2, is less well-known. This is also the case in the higher education sector. The Government is therefore of the view that more information about the different project opportunities offered within Erasmus+ could be needed.

The majority of actors who participated in the seminars for this report stated that school principals/Vice-Chancellors, organisers and management teams need more information about Erasmus+ activities and knowledge about the benefits of participating in the programme. The Government therefore concludes that not only does information about the programme need to be communicated more widely to organisations but also within organisations, to make organisers and management teams prioritise and attach greater value to the activities carried out in Erasmus+ projects.

The NAs work actively with initiatives to spread knowledge and increase participation in the programme. For example, they conduct digital campaigns and arrange meetings about the application process. The NAs also participate in conferences and network meetings and cooperate with sectoral associations such as the *Vuxenutbildning i samverkan* (adult education) network. There is great interest among participating beneficiary organisations in participating in seminars where organisations can share their experiences with each other. This can spread awareness of the programme more widely so that new actors can be inspired and become interested in participating in the programme. Beneficiary organisations also argue that they work to share successful project results in the media, but that there is low media's interest in such stories.

### **Erasmus+ Youth and Sport becoming better known in Sweden, but are still relatively unknown**

Erasmus+ Youth has become better known in Sweden, but the programmes activities within in the youth field is far from being as well-known as in the higher education sector. Organisations in the field of youth believes that awareness of the programme and the opportunities it offers needs to improve among young people, as well as in the civil society and within municipalities. The recently decentralised Sport field of Erasmus+ has been promoted through activities originating from the NA and through participating organisations, but the beneficiary organisations believes that more promotional activities are needed to spread knowledge about the programme.

The NA for Youth would also like to see more promotion campaigns at the central level from the Commission to highlight the less well-known parts of the programme. Participating organisations and municipalities propose that the programme could be marketed through youth ambassadors or through information adapted to young people on digital channels. Beneficiary organisations are of the opinion that opportunities for spreading the results of completed projects, for example through workshops or on the NA's website, would also improve the visibility of what the programme has achieved in Sweden.

### **Continued need for adaptation to include under-represented groups and young people with fewer opportunities**

The changes implemented in the programme to include under-represented groups and groups with fewer opportunities are regarded as steps in the right direction. Short-term and blended mobility options are a key success factor in the work to include more diverse groups in the programme's activities. Short-term mobility contributes to giving more individuals the opportunity to participate. However, as there are limitations in Sweden on the processing of sensitive personal data, it is difficult to identify the extent to which there has been an increase regarding individuals from under-represented groups and groups with fewer opportunities having participated in the programme. In the field of youth, beneficiary organisations and the NA for Youth considers their work with NEETs to have been very successful. Even after short-term projects, great individual development can be seen, which underlines that even short-term mobility periods can lead to major outcomes for the individuals.

Being able to implement group mobility to a greater extent is also a key success factor in including more groups in the programme. Young people who lack the courage, or for other reasons are unable to participate on their own in a mobility activity, are more willing to participate when they can do so together with other pupils, students, young people, staff, and teachers. Thus, continued

efforts within Erasmus+ to increase group mobility opportunities are encouraged by beneficiary organisations.

In the higher education sector, project coordinators inform students and staff about the top-up funding available to participants experiencing physical, mental health or other health-related barriers through Erasmus+ inclusion support. According to the beneficiary organisations, there may be some resistance to applying for this support, as participants may find it sensitive to identify themselves as having special needs. The same problem exists in the field of youth, where some young people do not disclose their needs for adjustments for a fear of being excluded. Often, the need for support is discovered after the project has started, which means that such needs have not been described in the project application. Several beneficiary organisations therefore indicate that adjustments need to be made during the project, but that there is no room for such adjustments in the budget. However, information about targeted grants such as inclusion grants for participants and organisations could be shared more widely by the NAs. Few organisations are today applying for extra funding, and during the seminars it emerged that not all beneficiary organisations were aware of the existence of such grants.

According to the NAs, direct outreach is a successful tool in reaching organisations representing under-represented groups and groups with fewer opportunities. A number of organisations in the field of youth use outreach activities to reach vulnerable young people such as NEETs and young people in socio-economic disadvantaged areas. While the NAs work actively to recruit new and under-represented actors, the administrative burden and complicated application processes continue to be a major barrier to participation in the programme for many actors. Simplified administration for participants could also facilitate increased participation, as some individuals are discouraged from participating in exchanges because the application and reporting after a completed activity requires a lot of time and effort. In the field of youth, beneficiary organisations experience a lack of flexibility and understanding that the target group may have different conditions and needs compared to, for example, university students.

Preparing participants with fewer opportunities to participate in the programme often takes time. For this reason, a longer period of preparation for such participation is desirable. As the programme is administratively burdensome, there is also limited time available for the work to prepare participants. A reduced administrative burden would therefore free up more time to work with the inclusion of more participants with fewer opportunities in the programme.

## Coherence

### Internal coherence with development potential

At the seminars, an uncertainty about the differences between the Key Actions 1 and 2 was apparent. According to the NAs, this is likely due to the fact that both Key Actions can entail both mobility and cooperation activities. Erasmus+ partnership is also less well-known than Erasmus+ mobility in Sweden.

Well-functioning partnerships can be developed through parallel projects. During interviews with the NAs, it emerged that a number of actors in Sweden are involved in parallel projects within Key Action 1 and Key Action 2. However, few such examples emerged during the seminars. The perception that it is difficult to coordinate different projects at the same time, especially in terms of reporting and administration, creates a barrier to the implementation of further parallel projects. The Government concludes that simplified administration and reporting could lead to more organisations being involved in parallel projects within Key Action 1 and Key Action 2.

In higher education, intra-European mobility (KA131), the EUI and Erasmus Mundus are seen as complementing each other well, as KA131 can co-finance mobility within the other activities. In order for co-financing from KA131 to International Credit Mobility (ICM) KA171 to function even better, beneficiary organisations propose that the time for applications is synchronised.

There are also some examples of actors who have had projects in both the Education and Youth fields. One such example is the Viksjöfors compulsory school and the Viksjöfors Ballet. They indicate that they have very successfully synergies between Education projects and Youth projects within Erasmus+ through creative learning processes focusing on dance. In Erasmus+ youth, it is also relatively common that organisations run Erasmus+ projects at the same time as they are receiving international or national volunteers through the European Solidarity Corps (ESC). This allows them to maintain an international profile in their organisations. Having experience of the application process for one programme also lowers the threshold for applying for funding within the other.

### Erasmus+ outcompetes similar programmes within the Education field, but synergies exist

The Government, the NA for Education and Training, and the beneficiary organisations are of the opinion that Erasmus+ has contributed to other national and regional programmes being outcompeted and thus have needed to adapt to complement Erasmus+. There are several reasons why other national and regional programmes are being outcompeted by Erasmus+. One key reason

is that Erasmus+ has a far larger budget. The funding amounts that actors can be granted by Erasmus+ cannot be matched by other similar programmes in Sweden. Some other programmes also require the organisations to co-finance the project. As many organisations do not have funds available for co-financing, they choose not to participate in such programmes. That other programmes provide less funding makes organisations more inclined to invest their time in applying for Erasmus+ funding.

Another reason why Erasmus+ is outcompeting other national and regional programmes is the programme's new initiatives and actions introduced during the 2021–2027 period. The combination of Erasmus+ being able to offer more funding as well as more flexible mobility options leads to other initiatives becoming less attractive. For example, the Nordplus programme has previously been used for short-term mobility periods, but since Erasmus+ also offers short-term mobilities, Nordplus has become less relevant. Another example is the Atlas programme, which enables mobility outside Europe for actors in schools and VET, and adult education. Due to Erasmus+ having created opportunities for mobility outside Europe for VET in the new programming period, many actors find it less relevant to apply to Atlas. However, the Nordplus programme is considered to be easy to use for partnerships and exchanges between the Nordic and Baltic countries. An advantage of the Nordplus programme is that its administration is perceived as easier than for Erasmus+ projects. The Nordplus application and administration can be viewed as a positive example that Erasmus+ can draw inspiration from in designing a simplified administration of the programme.

### **Synergies between EU Funds at national level**

The NA for Education and Training co-operates well with other government agencies that manage EU funds, such as the Swedish ESF Council, which manages the European Social Fund (ESF+) in Sweden. For example, there is a joint working group involving the Swedish Council for Higher Education (UHR), the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society (MUCF), and the Swedish ESF Council, whose purpose is to create synergies between the programmes and identify and highlight successful projects as good examples. However, the NA for Education and Training argues that there are challenges in meeting the expectations and complying with the instructions of the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC) concerning cooperation between the Erasmus+ and ESF+ programmes regarding the use of the Seal of Excellence. The NA for Education and Training sees a need for the European Commission to provide information to the national government agencies that would enable the use of the Seal of Excellence for synergies between Erasmus+ and ESF+. The ESF+ programme,

which was approved by the Commission in 2022, does not include information concerning the Seal of Excellence.

The NA for Youth has good experiences of cooperating with the Swedish ESF Council and is a member of the supervisory committee for the national programme for ESF+. It has also cooperated on a mobility programme called MOVES for young people who are NEETs. The aim of the programme is to help young people who are far from the labour market, for example due to mental health issues, to break out of a negative social context and take on new challenges. The NA for Youth reports that there is great value in cooperating at the national level with other government agencies and structures, and that this serves the objectives of the Erasmus+ Youth field in various ways.

In the higher education sector, there are synergies with Sweden's innovation agency Vinnova through enhanced cooperation around the EUI. It is also anticipated that PLINT can help to create increased synergies. A survey of various programmes and scholarships available for research and higher education is being carried out within PLINT, which is expected to contribute to increased knowledge of opportunities for partnerships.

#### **Few projects would be implemented without funding from Erasmus+ Youth**

In the field of youth there are no other national or regional programmes that enable international projects and mobility in the same way as Erasmus+. Municipalities and other participating actors point out that most of the projects that Erasmus+ enables would not exist without funding from the programme.

## European Added Value

### A Programme with a significant European Added Value

According to the Government, Erasmus+ has a significant European added value in Sweden. A majority of the mobilities and partnerships would not have been implemented without Erasmus+. This is particularly the case in the field of Youth, where there is no other earmarked funding for international exchanges and partnerships. Without the programme, the European dimension of the partnerships would also be lost. The fact that all EU Member States are working toward the same objectives is seen as contributing greatly to the sharing of knowledge and to a more coherent Education and Youth field in the EU. The funds allocated within the programme are also seen as contributing to increased equal opportunities within the EU.

Furthermore, the Government is of the view that an important added value of the programme is that Erasmus+ contributes to common denominators, structures, and references within the EU. This is seen as helping to increase trust between for example, higher education institutions, which in turn helps to simplify mobility activities and increase movement within the EU. The added value of common structures and regulatory frameworks also becomes apparent when international students come to Swedish higher education institutions outside the framework of the Erasmus+ programme. To increase European added value, the programme can be more clearly linked to the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy. The 11 European Youth Goals of the EU Youth Strategy could be more clearly reflected in the Programme Guide and linked to specific and concrete measures.

The programme underlines the importance of international cooperation and internationalisation in the Education and Youth fields. Erasmus+ is therefore seen as being a very important tool for greater internationalisation. Erasmus+ thus contributes to operational development in the area of internationalisation. The international and European character of the organisation is also seen as strengthening the attractiveness of activities in the Education and Youth fields.

### Increased knowledge about Europe but difficult to assess European sense of belonging

Erasmus+ contributes to an increased knowledge about Europe and the EU in Sweden. According to the beneficiary organisations, in Sweden there is a great need for such knowledge since, compared to young people in other countries, Swedish young people have limited knowledge about the EU and its institutions. Some beneficiary organisations in the upper secondary schools sector also argue that some Swedish young people have not previously travelled to other countries in Europe, and that their participation in Erasmus+ mobility



thus may be the first time visiting another European country.

An informal transfer of knowledge also occurs after completed projects when participants come home and share their experiences with peers. In the field of Youth, knowledge sharing can take place in the form of follow-up cultural evenings with parents and other young people, or through study circles where the project's implementation and results are discussed. Implemented projects thus have ripple effects, spreading knowledge about Europe to more than the participating young people and youth workers.

However, it is difficult to assess whether this increased knowledge about Europe contributes to a European sense of belonging. According to beneficiary organisations, Sweden's geographical location may be a contributing factor to why Swedes identifying themselves as Europeans to a lesser extent. Meeting people from other countries in Europe, on the other hand, can facilitate a greater understanding of similarities and common values, which in the long run can lead to an increased European sense of belonging. However, participating in an Erasmus+ project does lead to a sense of community and identification with others who have participated in the programme. Experiences from participating in Erasmus+ mobility projects are often similar across countries, and meeting others who have participated facilitates a greater sense of belonging to the Erasmus+ community. Participation in the programme also leads to a more positive attitude towards studying and working in other EU countries in the future, which in turn can lead to increased mobility of people from Sweden to Europe.

Participating staff, youth workers and teachers discover similarities in the challenges and problems when meeting their peers in other countries. European contacts are also important in the field of youth, especially for small, non-profit organisations or municipalities facing common challenges, for example in socio-economically vulnerable areas. International contacts are also very important in the VET sector, especially when there are few or no other national actors offering the same type of VET. Establishing international contacts can thus facilitate an important sharing of experiences and knowledge that could not have been possible in a national context.

During the seminars, it was apparent that encounters with other cultures and people from other countries can also lead to inequalities and differences being identified. This, in turn, has been found can lead to a strengthening of a Swedish identity. Beneficiary organisations from both upper secondary schools and the youth field have found that some young people born outside Europe who do not usually identify with the Swedish culture start to do so when they encounter other European cultures. The Government considers this to be an interesting, important, and unexpected effect of the programme in Sweden.

### Great interest in cooperation with third countries

The increased opportunities for cooperation with third countries have been well received and are much appreciated in Sweden. Many actors would like the opportunity to allocate an even larger part of the budget than 20% to partnerships with actors outside of Europe. The interest in partnerships with third countries within Erasmus+ is due in part to the fact that other programmes in Sweden facilitating such cooperation and mobility activities have been discontinued. For example, the Linnaeus-Palme programme, which aimed to strengthen partnerships between Swedish higher education institutions and higher education institutions in low- and middle-income countries. According to the NA for Education and Training, other possible reasons could be that some attractive countries are now defined as third countries, such as the United Kingdom and Switzerland.

In VET, the funds allocated are used in part to participate in occupational competitions held in third countries. Partnerships with third countries that are particularly successful in certain occupational fields, such as Japan in the technology field, are also considered to be of great importance and contribute to increased knowledge within some occupational fields. Furthermore, there is great interest in continued cooperation with the UK, particularly in VET, as the UK is at the forefront in several occupational categories. However, the cooperation with the UK has become more complicated after the UK's withdrawal from the EU and the programme, and a number of projects have chosen to end their partnerships with partners in the UK, as the demands on coordination imposed by the country's entry rules were deemed too time consuming. Within VET it is also perceived as difficult and time-consuming to organise visas for traineeships in third countries. In the school sector, there is great interest in cooperation partnerships with third countries, which is not currently possible within the programme. There is also an interest in cooperation partnerships with third countries in the field of youth. A greater focus could thus be placed on facilitating partnerships with third countries within the programme.

Higher education actors consider that there is great interest in cooperation with third countries. However, the budgets for the various regions within ICM are not considered to be completely aligned with the higher education institutions' interests regarding international cooperation partnerships. For example, the budget for mobility to the Western Balkans is large, but interest among Swedish higher education institutions is relatively low, while Latin America and parts of Africa are more popular regions for Swedish higher education institutions, but the budgets for these regions are low. It is therefore desirable to be able to adapt the budget allocations to those regions where there is the most interest.

### Improved conditions are needed for sustainable effects

The sustainability of impacts after the end of the projects is difficult to identify and assess at the individual level but is all the more apparent at the organisational level. Sustainable results within organisations are created through, for example, the creation of websites, the integration of working methods and the use of new educational tools in teaching. In the field of youth, there are also examples of projects that have developed games and other tools for working with young people, which are then used in the organisation after the project has ended. There are also examples of organisations that have integrated Erasmus+ objectives into their regular operational objectives and into their systematic quality management. Systematic quality management means that organisers, preschools, and schools must systematically and continuously monitor their operations. In contrast, the report *Partnership, participation and school development* (UHR, 2022) shows that when asked, organisers within the school sector stated that the direct effects of Erasmus+ on systematic quality management were limited. Organisers do however see great potential for further integration of Erasmus+ into their regular operations.

In order to create sustainable effects that remain after the projects have ended, the right organisational conditions must exist. An important key factor to create sustainable effects is engaged and committed managements and heads of organisations. In the organisations where the management shows commitment and engagement in the projects, structures are created that contribute to sustainable results. During the seminars, a number of beneficiary organisations spoke of issues with managements and organisers not seeing the value of working with internationalisation and international cooperation partnerships. In order to get more organisations to work with sustainable operational development, there is a need for increased knowledge about the value of internationalisation on the management level.

For the projects to have sustainable effects, time and resources must be set aside for development work. An important prerequisite when working with the programme is that staff are allocated designated time for working with the projects. A key success factor is the formation of international groups in the organization, where multiple people are involved in the work with Erasmus+. In organisations creating such groups, result become disseminated more widely within the organisation. In project where only one person is mainly involved with the activities within the project, there is a risk that contacts with partners become personal rather than organisational. The fact that individual enthusiasts with great commitment are leading a project also increases the risk that if such individuals disappear from the organisation, the established cooperation partnerships and project structures within the organisation will suffer.

As previously stated, organisational development takes time, and consequently conditions conducive to organisational development are created mainly with actors who have been conducting projects over a long period of time. The report *Partnership, participation and school development* (UHR, 2022) shows that projects with extensive experience (4+ projects) of Erasmus+ see greater effects on the school's development than projects with less experience (1 project). Cumulative experience thus helps organisations to create a more functional project organisation and operational development. Long-term planning and stability within the programme are therefore requested by both beneficiary organisations and NAs. In the case of major changes, time and resources need to be spent on understanding and implementing new objectives or tools, and this creates barriers to the efficient implementation of the programme. The introduction of the accreditation is considered to have contributed to facilitating more long-term planning. At the same time, a number of accredited beneficiary organisations believe that a decline in funding year on year makes long-term planning more difficult and limits opportunities for long-term cooperation partnerships.

In summary, there are good examples of sustainable results and organisational development. However, there is still great potential to further integrate and implement Erasmus+ into regular operations. For this to succeed, there needs to be clearer support at the management level, allocation of time and resources, and conditions conducive to long-term planning in the form of stability within the objectives and structure of the programme.

## References

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## Appendix 1. Evaluation questions

### Effectiveness

1. To what extent have the various programme fields both within Erasmus+ 2021–2027 and Erasmus+ 2014–2020 delivered the expected outputs, results and impacts in your country? What negative and positive factors seem to be influencing outputs, results and impacts? Do you consider that certain actions are more effective than others? Are there differences across fields? What are the determining factors for making these actions of the programme more effective?

2. What are the results and long-term impact of Erasmus+ 2014–2020 in your country? We are interested in the impact of all actions/elements of Erasmus+ 2014–2020, and with special attention to those actions/elements that are continued in Erasmus+ 2021–2027. We are also interested in the impact of actions/elements that have been discontinued to the extent that it might help design the future programme. What is your assessment of the quality of applications received in your country, and what measures could be taken to improve the quality of applications and awarded projects in your country taking into account the doubling of the budget for the 2021–2027 programme cycle?

4. To what extent has Erasmus+ 2021–2027 had a transformative effect in your country on systems, values and norms, in particular with respect to the four horizontal priorities of the programme: inclusion and diversity – digital transformation – green transition (environment and fight against climate change) – participation in democratic life and civic engagement? Could you identify the horizontal priorities the programme had the highest impact on through its actions?

5. What are the differences in impact of Erasmus+ 2021–2027 actions in your country on hard-to-reach groups, people with fewer opportunities or specific disadvantaged groups of the population who traditionally do not engage in transnational or international activities as compared to other groups that benefit from the programme? We are interested in the evaluation of the first effects of the Framework of Inclusion Measures and of the Inclusion and Diversity Strategy on promoting accessibility to funding for a wider range of organisations, and to better reach out to more participants with fewer opportunities.

7. To what extent have the forms of cooperation and the types of actions under Erasmus+ 2021–2027 and Erasmus+ 2014–2020 influenced policy developments in the fields of education and training, youth and sport in your country? Which actions of the programmes are the most effective considering the needs of your country? Are there marked differences between the different fields?

12. How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact the implementation of the two generations of the programme in your country, and what was the effect of the measures taken to react to the consequences of the pandemic?

### **Efficiency**

14. What is the cost-effectiveness of various actions (clusters of actions) of Erasmus+ 2021–2027 and Erasmus+ 2014–2020 in your country?

15. To what extent, compared to the previous programme, is the size of budget appropriate and proportionate to what Erasmus+ 2021–2027 is set out to achieve? To what extent is the distribution of funds across the programme fields and key actions appropriate in relation to their level of effectiveness and utility?

16. How efficient is the cooperation between the different actors involved in the implementation and supervision of the programme (Commission services – Erasmus+ Committee – Executive Agency – National Authorities – National Agencies – Independent Audit Bodies – International Organisations<sup>6</sup>) from the point of view of your country, and to what extent does the Commission fulfil its guiding role in the process? How has this changed between the two programming periods? What are the reasons for potential changes? What are the areas for possible improvement in the implementation of Erasmus 2021–2027 or a successor programme?

17. To what extent are the measures applied by your National Agency/ies for monitoring and supporting applicants, beneficiaries (including small and newcomer organisations) and participants effective and proportionate? What are the areas for improvement/simplification, considering the need for a smooth and effective implementation of the programme?

18. To what extent have simplification measures put in place, such as the system of simplified grants and accreditation system, resulted in a reduction of the administrative burden for National Agencies, programme beneficiaries and participants? Are there differences across actions or fields? What

elements of the programme could be changed to further reduce the administrative burden and simplify the programme's management and implementation, without unduly compromising its sound management, results and impact?

20. To what extent are the new management support tools consistent with the Erasmus+ programme needs and architecture? Which additional features would you recommend for future developments?

### **Relevance**

22. To what extent do the Erasmus+ 2021–2027 objectives as set up in Article 3.1 and 3.2 of the Erasmus+ regulation, in link with the EU policy agendas in the fields of education and training, youth and sport, continue to address the needs or challenges they are meant to help with? Are these needs or challenges (still) relevant in the context of your country? Have the needs or challenges evolved in such a way that the objectives of Erasmus+ 2021–2027 or its successor programme need to be adjusted?

23. To what extent are the needs of different stakeholders and sectors in your country addressed by the Erasmus+ 2021–2027 objectives? How successful is the programme in attracting and reaching target audiences and groups within different fields of the programme's scope? How well is the Erasmus+ programme known to the education and training, youth and sport communities in your country? In case some target groups are not sufficiently reached, what factors are limiting their access and what actions could be taken to remedy this? What are the reasons of limited participation of certain target groups? Are there target groups who chose not to participate or are there always external factors preventing them?

24. To what extent is the design of Erasmus+ 2021–2027 oriented and adapted towards the hard-to-reach groups, people with fewer opportunities or specific disadvantaged groups of the population who traditionally do not engage in transnational or international activities as compared to other groups that benefit from the programme? In case some target groups are not sufficiently reached in your country, what factors are limiting their access and what actions could be taken to remedy this?

### **Coherence**

27. To what extent are the objectives of different programme fields within Erasmus+ 2021-2027 consistent and mutually supportive? What evidence



exists of cooperation between the different programme fields, including those managed by different National Agencies, and actions? How well do different actions work together? To what extent there exist inconsistencies, overlaps, or other disadvantageous issues between the programme fields and how are they dealt with?

28. To what extent is Erasmus+ 2021–2027 coherent with other national or regional programmes, other forms of EU cooperation (bilateral programmes) as well as international programmes with similar objectives available in your country? Can you identify any inconsistencies, overlaps or other disadvantageous issues with other programmes?

### **European Added Value**

31. What is the additional value and benefit resulting from EU activities, compared to what could be achieved by similar actions initiated only at regional or national levels in your country? What does Erasmus+ 2021–2027 offer in addition to other education and training support schemes available at regional or national levels in your country? What possibilities do you see to adjust Erasmus+ or its successor programme in order to increase its European added value?

32. To what extent does the Erasmus+ programme contribute to developing knowledge in European integration matters, to raising awareness about the EU common values and to fostering a European sense of belonging in your country?

33. To what extent does Erasmus+ 2021–2027 promote cooperation between Member States and third countries associated to the programme? And between these countries and third countries not associated to the programme?

35. To what extent are the results of Erasmus+ 2021–2027 and Erasmus+ 2014–2020 sustainable beyond the project's duration in your country?