ERASMUS+ IMPLEMENTATION SURVEY RESULTS

2019

LIFELONG LEARNING PLATFORM

EUROPEAN CIVIL SOCIETY FOR EDUCATION

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Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

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GENERAL RESULTS

Following the success of the Erasmus+ implementation surveys from previous years, the Lifelong Learning Platform ran its 2019 Erasmus+ Implementation Survey from 6 September to 14 November 2019.

The purpose of this year's survey was to evaluate the experience of beneficiary representatives in the sixth round of applications for the Erasmus+ programme. In the same lines as last year's survey, only European level organisations were targeted and a total of 40 responses were collected. By targeting European networks exclusively the consultation aimed to gain views from stakeholders with a high-level of expertise and representing a large number of beneficiaries across the EU and at different levels (local, regional, national), as the vast majority of them have 5 or more years of experience working with Erasmus+ and its predecessor, the Lifelong Learning Programme.

Thus, the Lifelong Learning Platform seeks to provide decision-makers with an evaluation - from the direct experience of beneficiary representatives - on what is working well, what could be improved and what is lacking in the current programme, and thereby provide reflections that can be useful for the successor Erasmus+ programme.

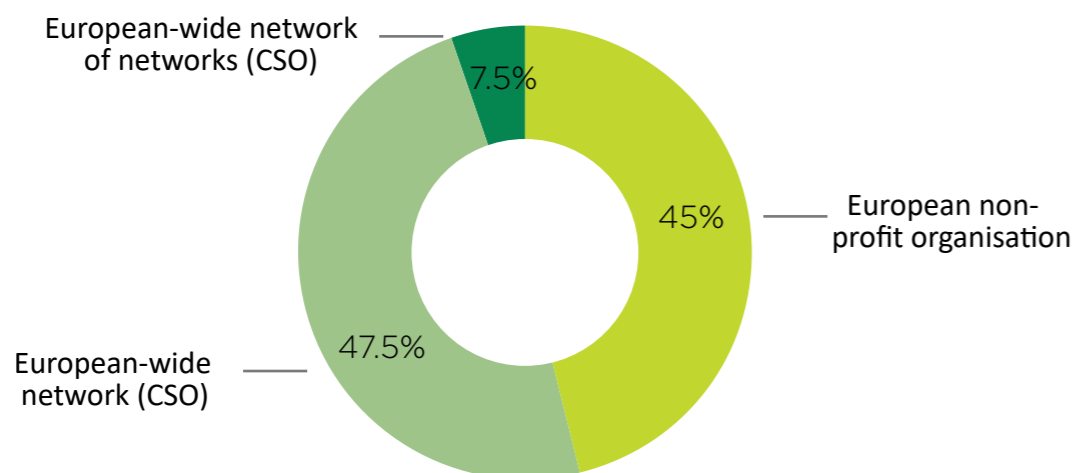Concerning the main results of the 2019 survey, these include:

◆ A vast majority of respondents (78%) have 5 and more years of experience with Erasmus+ and/or previous Lifelong Learning Programme. This suggests that most responses are based on a strong familiarity with how the programme operates.

◆ This year the most common way to build a consortium or find project partners for 67% of respondents is through their own membership. The proportion of respondents building consortiums or finding project partners through EU networks/organisations is 54%. These high percentages demonstrate their commitment to support their own members' and networks' work.

◆ The majority of respondents feel that it took them a lot of time to prepare the application (89%). **The data shows that for many organisations responding to the survey, who in large part already have many years of experience with the programme, the project application could be considerably simplified.** These results are in line with findings from previous years.

◆ **Sustainability is the less straightforward part of the application** with a clear majority (68%) finding it rather difficult (a score of more than 3 out of 5). This aspect is a consistent problem in application forms because it is often reported by beneficiaries that it is not entirely clear what sustainability means in the context of projects or how to prove it.

◆ **A majority of respondents (68%) reported that they encountered some kind of bureaucratic difficulty in implementing a project**, which is an increase from last year (52%). While implementation is unlikely to ever be a completely straight forward process, the high percentage reporting difficulties is nevertheless striking.

◆ Very similar to last year's results, **the user-friendliness of the Programme Guide remains an area for improvement.** A similar remark can be said about its clarity. However, respondents are largely satisfied with the relevance and extensiveness of the document.

◆ **The level of funding remains a problematic issue**, with a considerable 74% (last year 73%) of respondents finding it insufficient to cover their real needs. Given the profile of respondents this year as exclusively European-level organisations, it appears to show that their needs are insufficiently addressed by the funding available.

◆ The vast majority of respondents (94%) find that Erasmus+ allows them to implement cross-sector cooperation projects, an important increase from last year (55%). This suggests that, as we approach the end of this programming period, **diversity of cooperation within the programme has started to become more evident or put more into operation**. These results are satisfying overall considering the benefits that cross-sector cooperation can bring about for all stakeholders involved.

◆ The results obtained this year indicate that **there is clear room for improvement regarding social inclusion**. Only 39% of respondents have a positive perception of the programme's consideration of individuals' socio-economic needs and the needs of different learners.

◆ There is a **good level of satisfaction when it comes to feedback from the evaluation process for both applications and completed projects.** Similar to previous years dissatisfaction is expressed concerning confusion in the application of rules by different NAs or by the same NAs from one year to another.

◆ Regarding what should be the **priorities of the Erasmus+ successor programme, respondents once again emphasised social inclusion**. Many respondents also highlighted **environmental / sustainability** topics, cross-sector cooperation, citizenship, social entrepreneurship and digital skills.

◆ Much like last year, **a considerable number of respondents (55%) do not think the overall financial support for the programme is sufficient to meet its objectives.**

PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Type of organisation

Of the 40 answers received, the respondents are almost evenly divided between European non-profit organisations (45.00%) and European-wide network of civil society organisations (47.50%) and a few European umbrella organizations (or network of networks). This year, local and national organisations did not take part in the Erasmus+ survey.

Field of specialisation

The majority of respondents specialise in the non-formal education sector (47.50%), followed by the youth sector and vocational education and training with 40.00% and 32.50% respectively. The rest of the respondents comprises organisations belonging to: higher education (27.50%), citizenship education (20.00%), school education (15.00%), professional higher education (15.00%), teacher education (10.00%). Specialisation in sports and early childhood education remain lowest (both 2.50%).
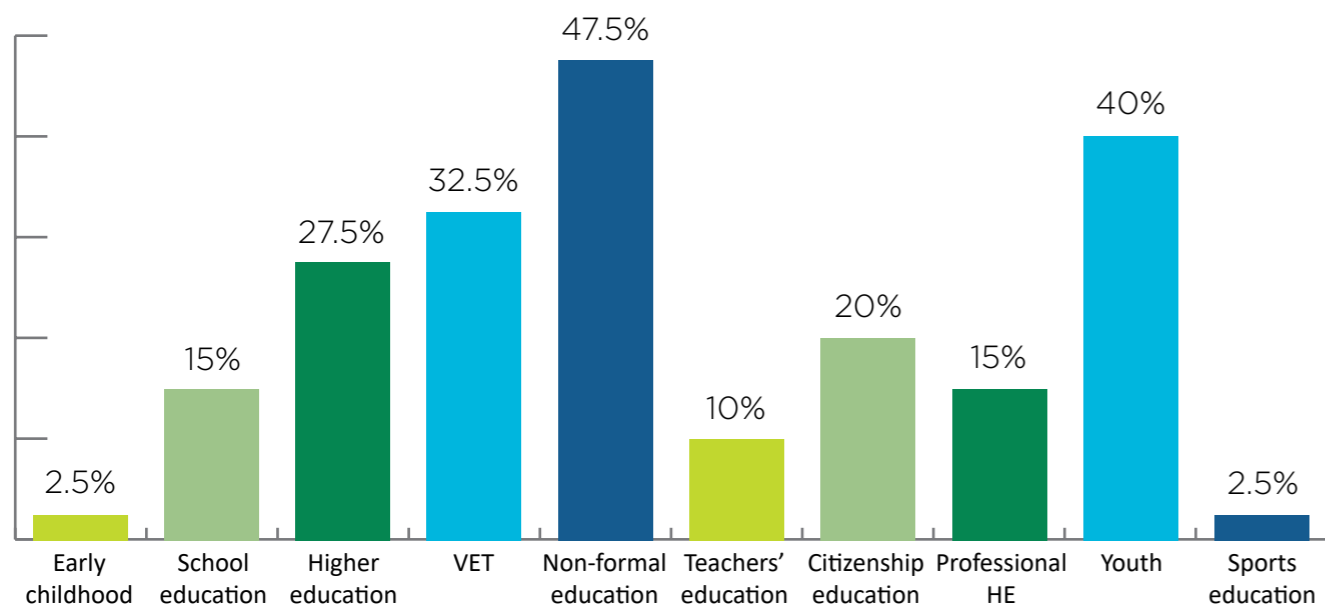

Respondents' experience with Erasmus+ and/or previous Lifelong Learning Programme

A vast majority of respondents (77.50%) have 5 and more years of experience with Erasmus+ and/or previous Lifelong Learning Programme. This suggests that most responses are based on a strong familiarity with how the programme operates. The percentage of newcomers (not applied yet but planning to) is at 7.50%, which makes it higher than last year (2.44%). The respondents with 1 and 1 to 4 years of experience represent 2.50% and 12.50% of the total respectively.

Respondents' role in Erasmus+ and/or previous Lifelong Learning Programme

The majority of respondents have experience both as coordinator and partner (65%), showing a diversity of experience and broadly similar to last year. The respondents who have had only the role of coordinator or only the role of partner represent 5% and 27.50% respectively. This is a change from last year's survey in which opposite results were obtained with 19.51% declaring having experience only as coordinator and 7.32% only as partner.
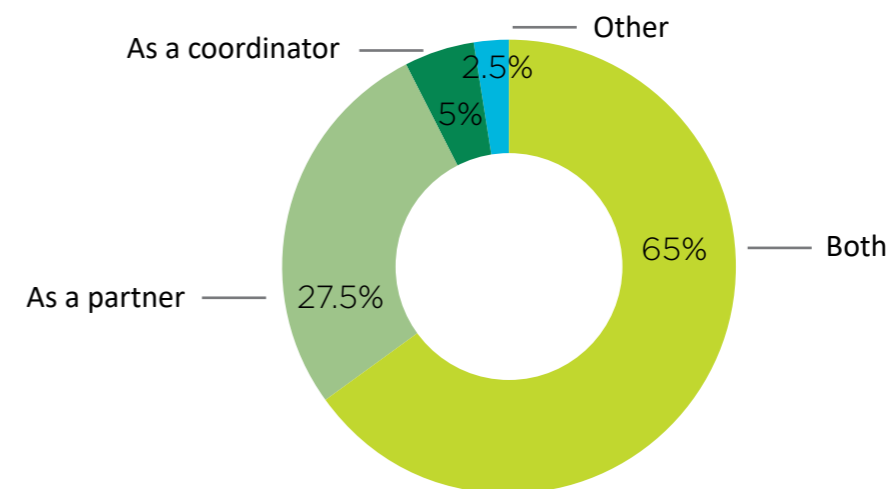
Respondents receiving operating grant from Erasmus+

As is shown in the chart below, half of the respondents receive an operating grant from Erasmus+ programme. This result differs from last year's survey where the organisations receiving an operating grant amounted to 63.41% of respondents. This year, 40% of organisations stated that they do not receive an operating grant from the programme while 10% of respondents mentioned that they are planning to apply for an operating grant.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Application for 2018-19 Erasmus+ Calls for proposals

The majority of respondents applied for 2018-19 Erasmus+ Calls for Proposals (84,62), while 15.38% indicated they did not apply (higher than last year 12.82%). There were no respondents who mentioned that they were still planning to apply.

Key Action(s) to which respondents applied

Within Key Action 1 (Mobility of Individuals), the field of youth had the highest number of applications representing 30.77% of respondents. In Key Action 2 (Cooperation for Innovation and the exchange of good practices), more than half of organisations (58.97%) applied for Strategic partnerships in the field of education, training and youth. Within Key Action 3 (Support for policy reform), the call for social inclusion in education, training and youth was the highest among respondents with 25.64%. Organisations also applied for the calls for Vocational Education and Training Mobility Charter and sport actions (2.56% and 5.13% respectively). Moreover, as it can be seen in the chart below, there are many more responses than participant organisations which indicates that some of them have applied to different actions/sections within each action in the same year.
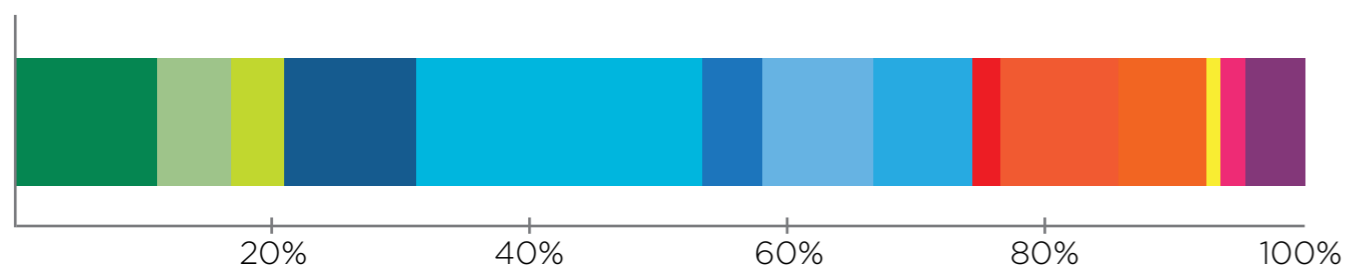

- ■ KA1 - Field of youth
- ■ KA1 - Field of education and training
- ■ KA1 - Large-scale European Voluntary Service events
- ■ KA2 - Strategic partnership in the field of youth
- ■ KA2 - Strategic partnership in the field of education and training
- ■ KA2 - Knowledge Alliances, Sector Skills Alliances
- ■ KA2 - Capacity-building in the field of youth
- ■ KA2 - Capacity-building in the field of higher education
- ■ KA3 - Meetings between young people and decision-makers
- ■ KA3 - Social inclusion through education, training and youth
- ■ KA3 - Forward-looking cooperation through education, training and youth
- ■ Call for Vocational Education and Training Mobility Charter
- ■ Sports Actions
- ■ Others

Success rate for respondents applying in 2018

This year the success rate was higher (82.05%) compared to last year (74.36%). This very high success rate could be explained by the expertise and familiarity of the organisations with the Erasmus+ programme as well as the yearly increase of available funding. As seen previously, the majority of organisations have over 5 years of experience applying to the various actions of Erasmus+.

Building consortia

As the chart below shows, the most common way to build a consortium or find project partners for 66.67% of respondents is through their own membership. This year, the proportion of respondents building consortiums or finding project partners through EU networks/organisations is 53.85% and though regular partners (not through membership or EU networks) is 56.41%. **The high percentage for own membership and EU networks year demonstrates their commitment to support their own members and networks' work. Similarly, the high percentage obtained by regular partners shows how EU networks draw from their expertise on the ground.**
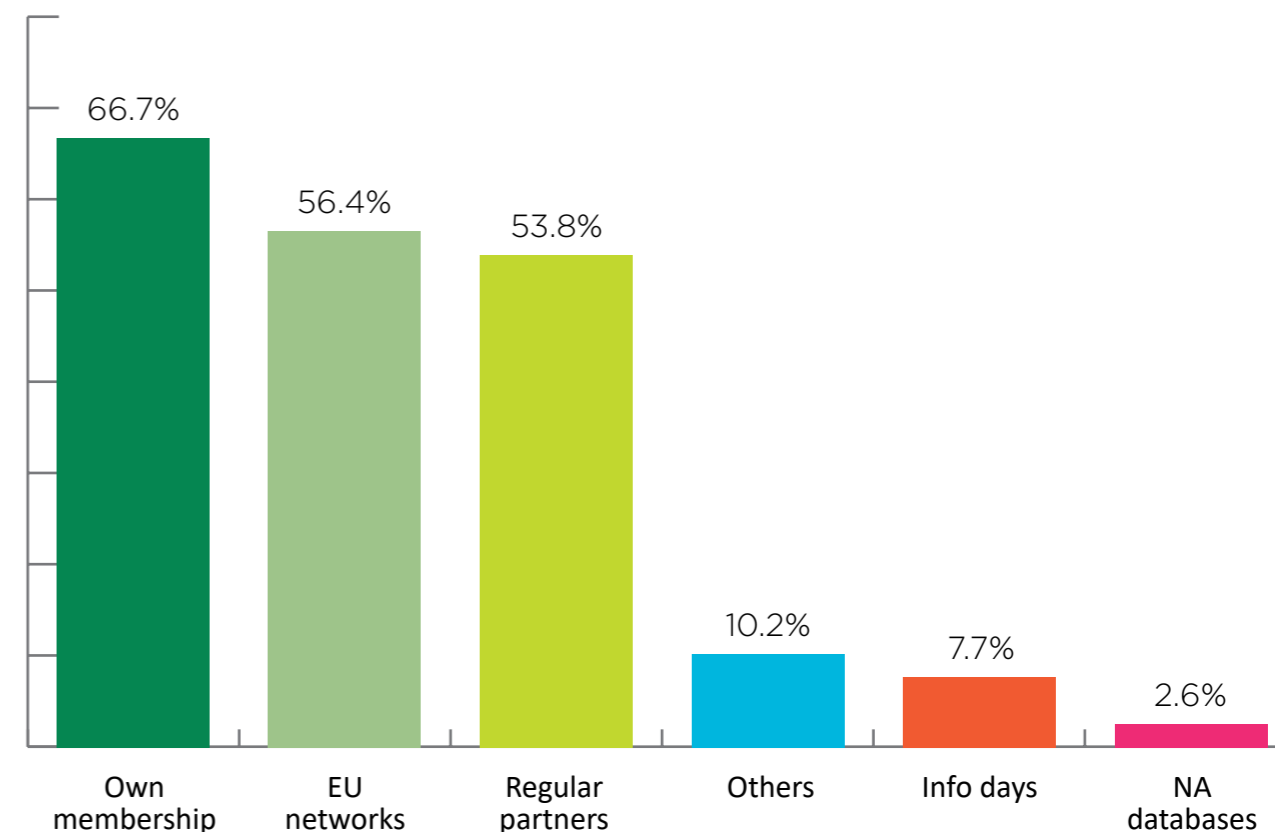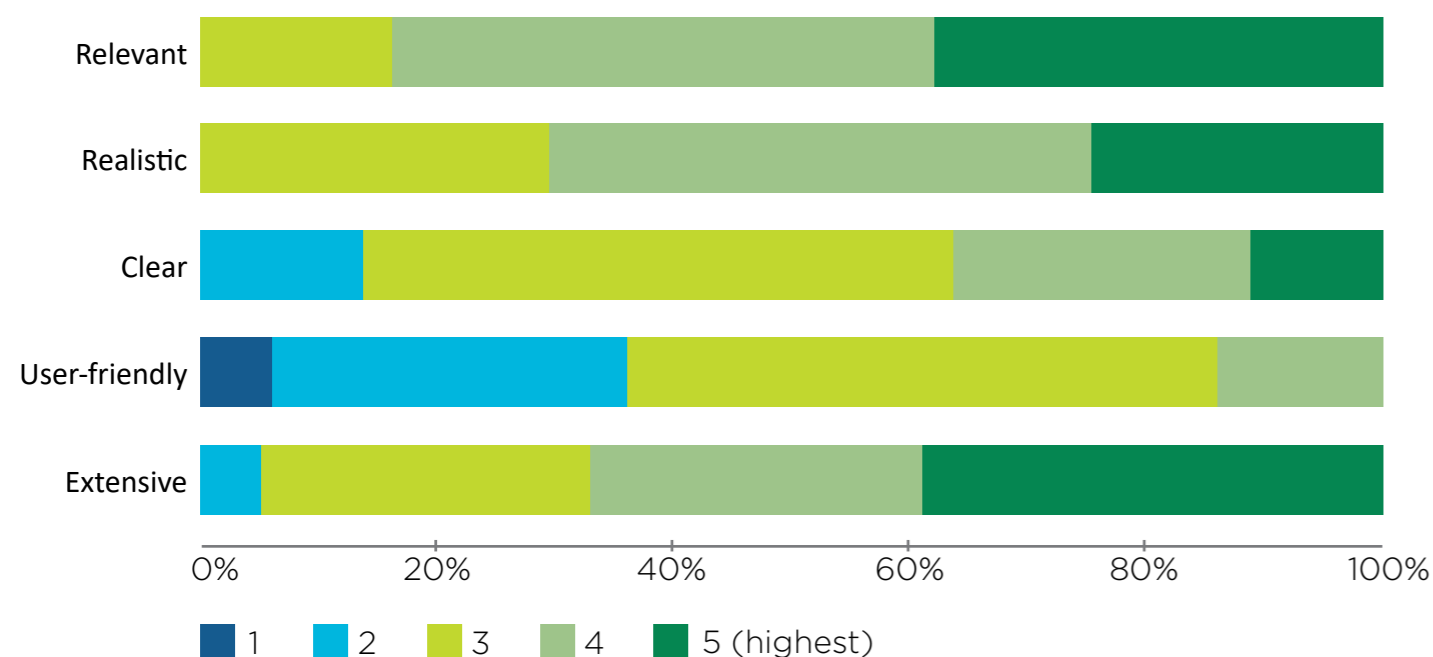
APPLICATION PROCESS

Geographical coverage

Regarding the countries where the survey respondents applied for Erasmus+, Belgium is the country with the most applications (36.84%), which can be explained by the fact that most European networks are based in Brussels. Member states receiving the second highest number of applications are Spain (23.68%) and Italy (23.68%). Regarding applications to EACEA, 26,32% of the respondents applied for civil society cooperation calls and 34.21% were directed to other centralised calls. As the results indicate, **a centralised solution at EU level for European networks would help to alleviate the burden on the Belgian NAs as currently they have to compete with local Belgian organisations.**

Erasmus+ programme user guide

Respondents were asked to rate a number of descriptions of the Erasmus+ programme guide, with 1 being the lowest score and 5 being the highest. As shown by the graph below, the **relevance** of the guide is particularly appreciated, as the percentage of respondents providing a score of 4 reaches 45.95% and 5 reaches 37.84%. Respondents also find the contents of the guide to be **realistic** (70,27% higher than 3). However, respondents doubt that the guide is **user-friendly**, as this receives a score of 4 from only 13.89% of them, while none of the respondents mark it 5. Moreover, there is still room for improvement for the **clarity** of the guide with half of respondents giving it only a 3 in the scale. Moreover, 66.67% give a score of 4 or 5 indicating that the **extensiveness** of the programme guide is appreciated.

National Agencies (NAs) and EACEA support to applicants

There is a reasonably good level of satisfaction with the support provided by NAs and EACEA in the application process, with 68.42% of respondents stating that this was sufficient. Those replying that it was not sufficient nevertheless reach a substantial figure (31.58%, 10% more than last year), so there clearly remains room for improvement. The comments from respondents also emphasised that although overall the NAs are very supportive, their practices vary from one to another which can be considered unfair in some cases. On the other hand, EACEA's procedures were perceived by a few respondents as rather complicated and time-consuming prompting organisations to require more support from them than they would if these procedures were simplified.

Application forms

Respondents were asked to rate a number of characteristics of the Erasmus+ application forms, with 1 being the lowest score and 5 being the highest. The responses suggest that the application forms are rather **comprehensive** with the scores of 4 and 5 in these categories exceeding 60%. However, they are considered **coherent**, **reliable** and **user-friendly** to a lesser extent. Indeed, a score of 3 or less is awarded by the majority of respondents for these categories, which suggests potential for improvement. More specifically, **reliability stands out slightly from the others for poor performance with 35.13% awarding a score of 1 or 2**, which indicates that solutions for technical issues could be further explored.
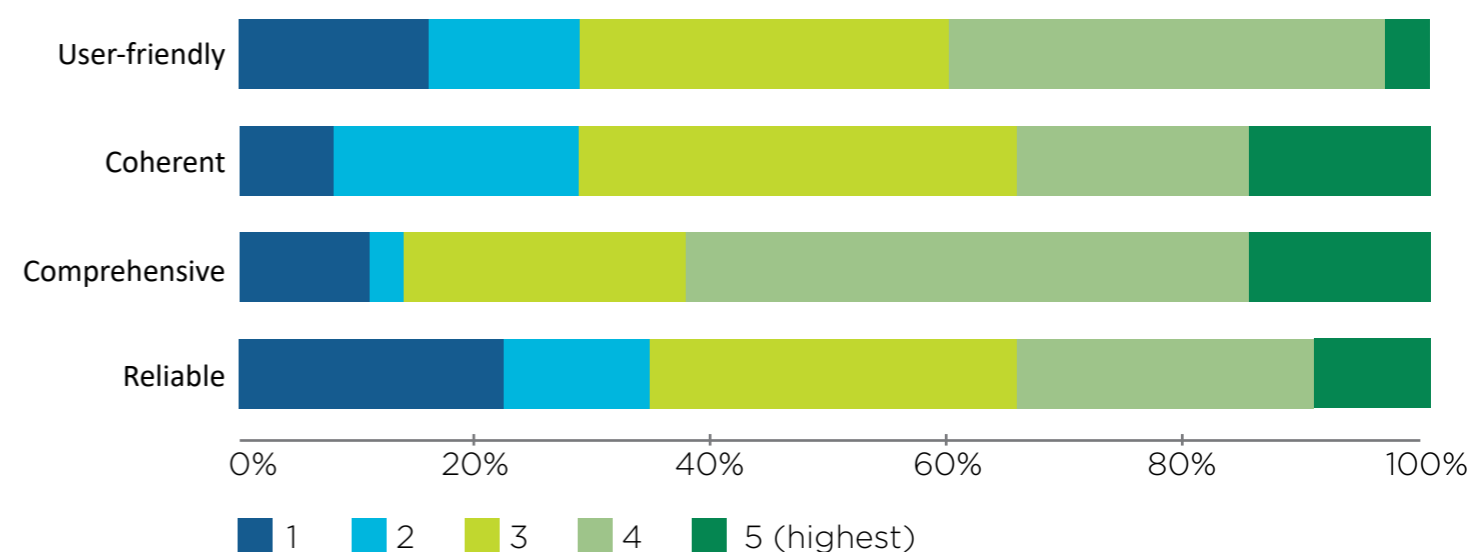
Individual parts of application form

Respondents were asked about the level of difficulty of the different parts of the application process, with 1 being the least difficult and 5 being the most difficult. The graph below suggests that **sustainability** is the less straightforward part of the application with a clear majority (67.57%) awarding a score of more than 3 (89.19% including 3). The part of the application process perceived as the less difficult is the **partner's description** with 49,7% awarding a score of less than 3 (76.06% including 3). The remaining parts of the process are all described as moderately to highly difficult with scores of 3 or higher reaching between 64% and 78%. These results indicate that there still remains space for improvement as highlighted in previous editions of the survey.
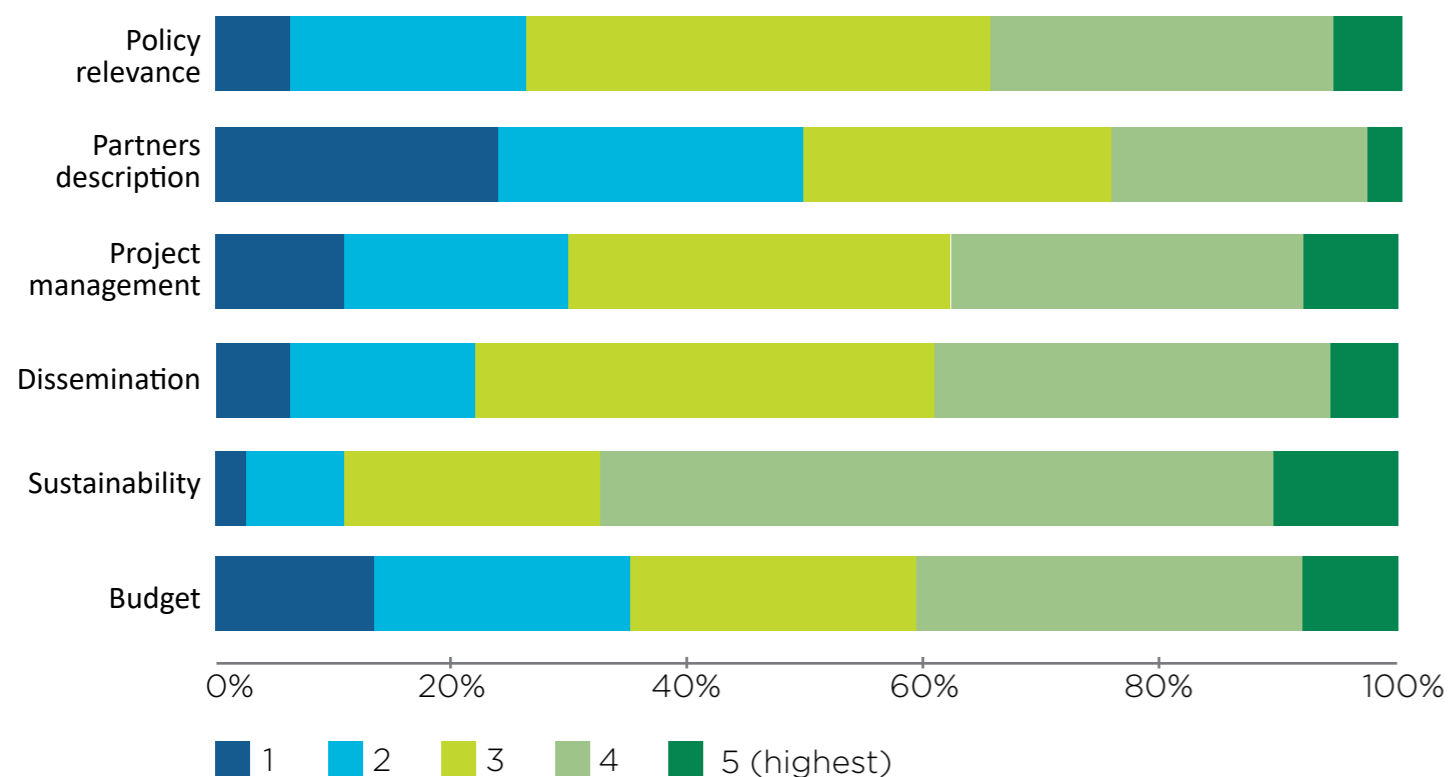

Application stages

Here respondents were asked to rate the different aspects of the application stage according to their level of difficulty, with 1 being the least difficult and 5 being the most difficult. The responses indicate that the level of difficulty is approximately similar in all aspects of the application stage. A considerable portion of the respondents (between 30% and 45%) evaluated the difficulty of the application stages with 4 and 5, suggesting that **they are rather complex overall.**
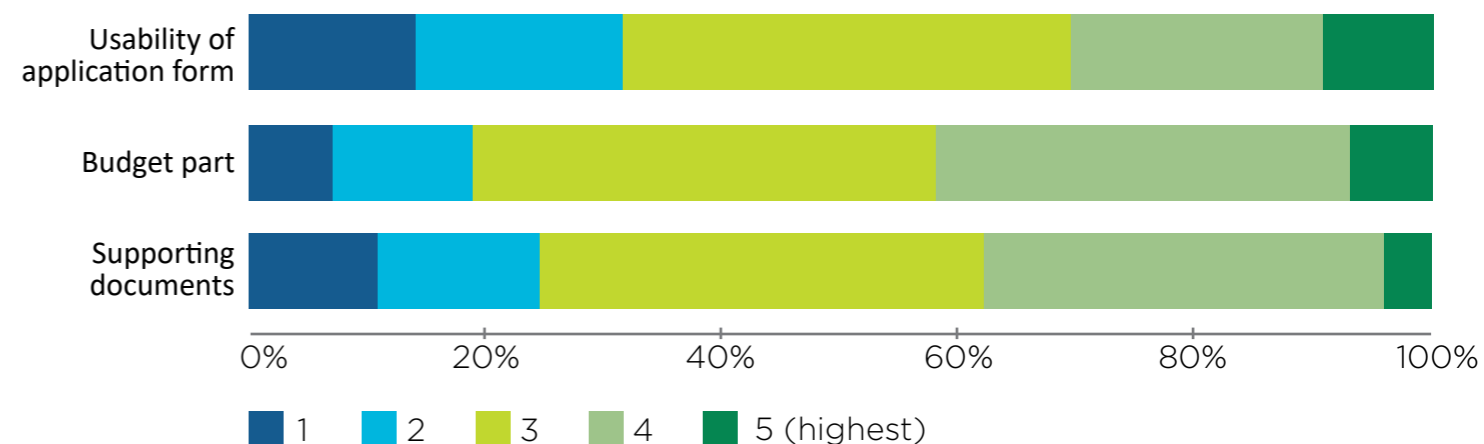
Time commitment to preparing applications

The majority of respondents feel that it took them a lot of time to prepare the application (89.48%), with 68.42% considering it rather time-consuming and 21.06% mentioning that it takes too much time. The data shows that for many organisations responding to the survey, who in large part already have many years of experience with the programme, the project application could be considerably simplified. More specifically, some comments highlighted the narrative part of the application as one area that could be made less redundant. Similarly, some consider that the level of complexity of some KA2 applications entail more time commitment from the organisations involved. This year's results are somewhat consistent with last year's findings, where 31.58% of respondents found that it took them too much time to prepare the application and 63.16% considered it rather time-consuming.
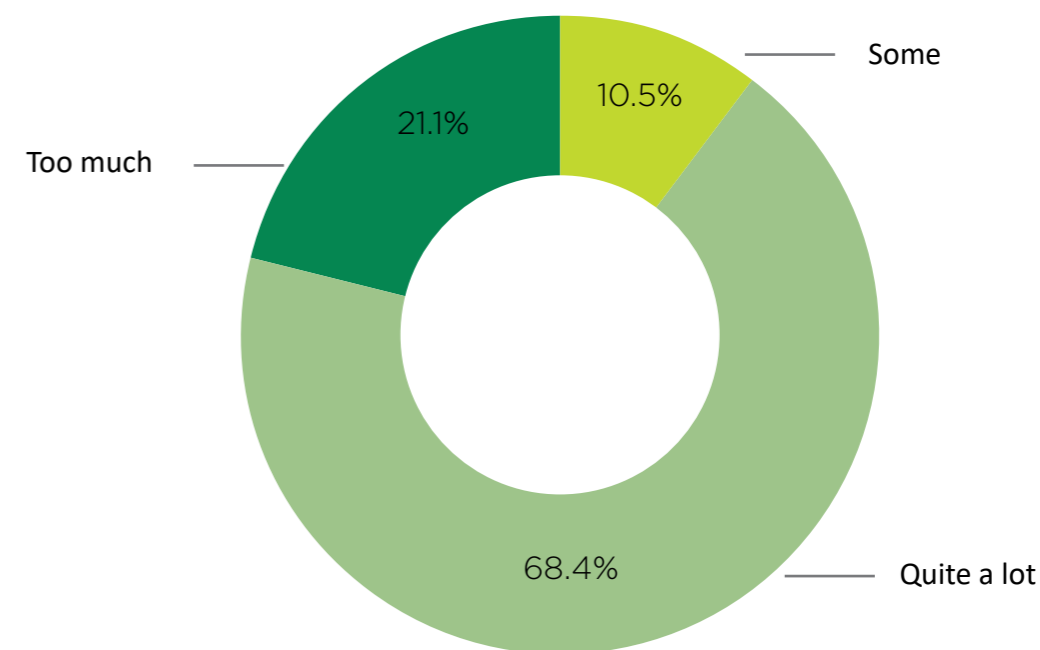
IMPLEMENTATION

Administrative burden

Respondents were asked about administrative hurdles in the process of project implementation. **A majority of respondents (68.42%) reported that they encountered some kind of bureaucratic difficulty in implementing a project, which is an increase from last year (51.52%).** While implementation is unlikely to ever be a completely straight forward process, the high percentage reporting difficulties is nevertheless remarkable. When it comes to NAs, respondents highlighted that they can have different levels of awareness regarding project rules, more specifically on secondment, costs reporting, subcontracting rules. Other hurdles encountered by respondents include visa and personal assistance applications, IT issues, delays in receiving funds or administrative assistance as well as some uncertainty regarding the situation with the UK.

Budget

Much like in last year's survey, results for this question are striking in the fact that a majority (73.68%, last year 72.73%) considers **the funding to be insufficient and unable to cover the real needs**, while only 26.32% consider the opposite. From this result it could be inferred that European-level organizations perceive their needs as not being sufficiently addressed by the funding available. Respondents expressed that the inclusion budget (specific needs support) is not flexible enough and dependent as well on the motivation of the NA. Overall, respondents highlighted the need to address the insufficient project management and implementation costs (such as low lump sums for staff costs, more realistic daily rates, more funding for involving volunteers part of ESC, low budget for dissemination and quality assurance as well as low travel grants). For some respondents the level of funding hinders the opportunity to have a truly European experience for project managers and participants. On the side of operating grants, respondents highlighted that there is too much of a focus on quantity of activities rather than on quality.

Centralised management

A majority (68.75%) of respondents give a **positive assessment of EACEA's implementation and management of centralised actions**. However, the figure of 31.25% giving a negative response remains substantial, so there is clear room for improvement. More specifically, aspects that could be improved include templates for budget and applications, the reporting done by each beneficiary organisation and the assistance provided to partners.

Lump sum system

The graphs below show that survey respondents mostly consider the lump sum system **suitable** and **simplified** which is similar to last year's results. Moreover, a high percentage of respondents (40.54%) perceive the lump sum system as **insufficient**. This year, respondents who consider the lump sum system to be **accurate** increased significantly with 40.54% as opposed to 24.24% from last year. Despite these positive results, there is still room from improvement regarding sufficiency and accuracy of the lump sum. Respondents mentioned that some aspects that could be improved are coverage of staff costs, dissemination costs and travel/accommodation rates for meetings.
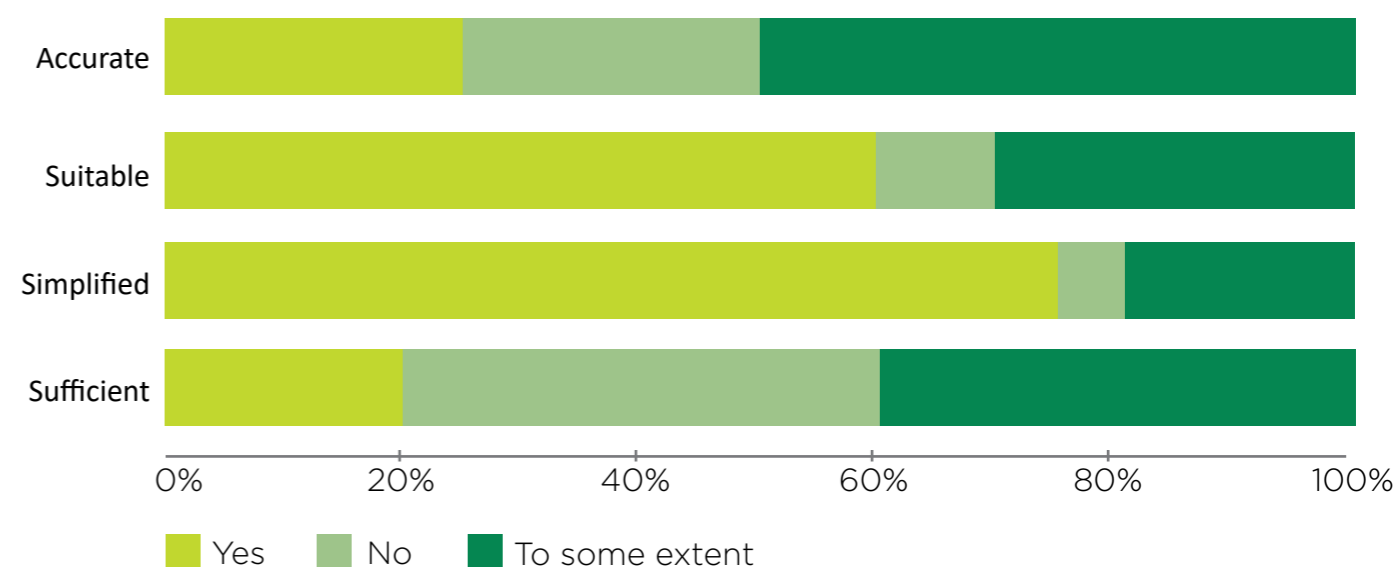
Administrative and financial handbook

Respondents were asked about their ease of understanding of the administrative and financial handbook, with a score of 1 being the lowest and a score of 5 being the highest. **As seen in the chart, a score of 3 or higher was given by the majority of respondents in all aspects** (supporting documents, reporting rules, eligible costs, reporting of project results, unit costs, real costs). Among them, the best understood (score of 4 and 5) were the **reporting rules** (61.29%) and the **reporting of project results** (63.33%). These results indicate that respondents understand well/very well the administrative and financial handbook. Given that a significant part of the respondents have been working with Erasmus+ for over five years this trend in the results were to be expected.

Legend: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 (highest)
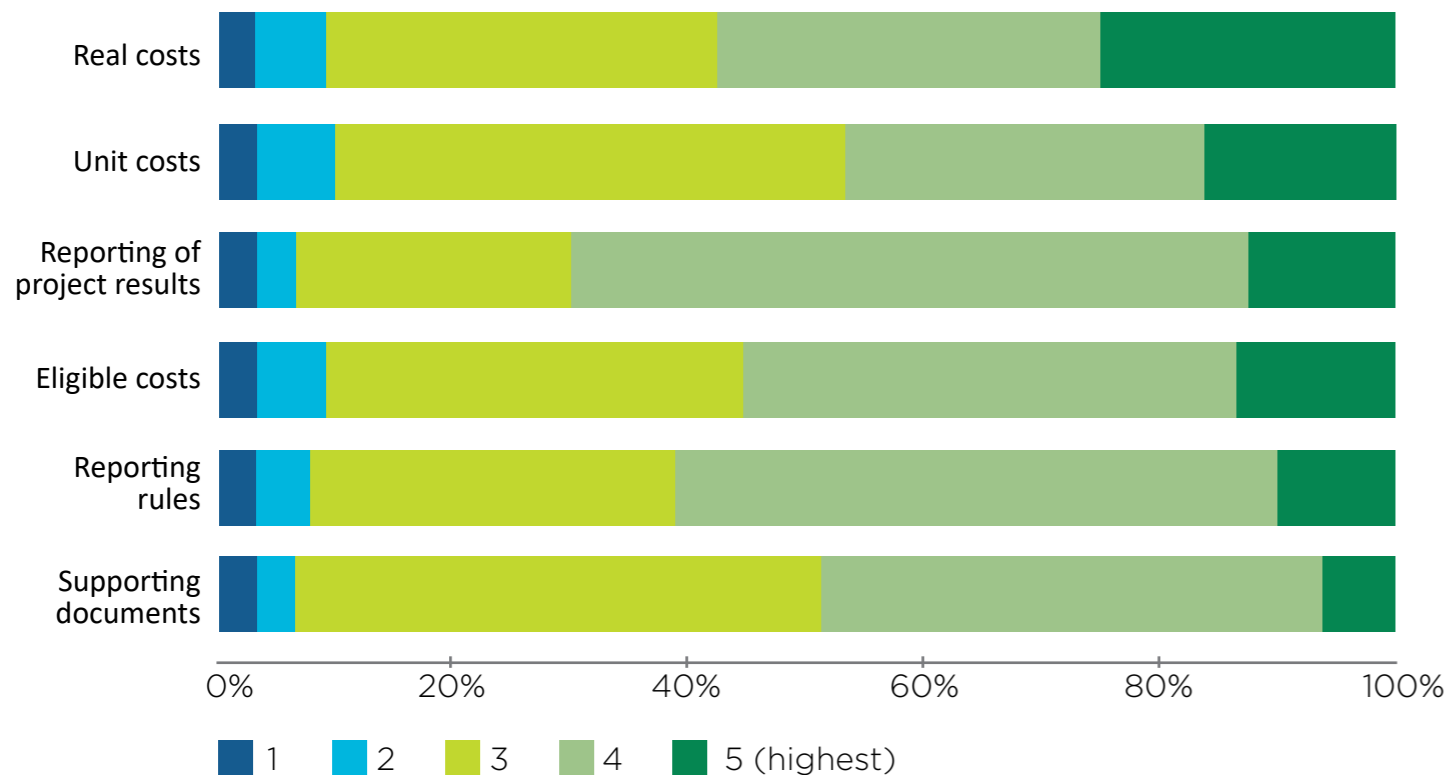
Procedures for project implementation

T**he majority of respondents find clear the procedures for project implementation** (kick-off, reporting, closing) at NA level (61.29% provided a score higher than 3). This is an interesting result given the many differences among the different NAs. However, although the results may hint that more clarity and coherence has been achieved among NAs, an alternative explanation could be that the years of experience of the respondent organisations has allowed them to navigate the procedures at NA level more easily. **The same can be said about the clarity of procedures at EACEA level (64.29% provide a score higher than 3).**

National Agencies   EACEA

1 2 3 4 5   1 2 3 4 5

1 being the poorest score, 5 being the best
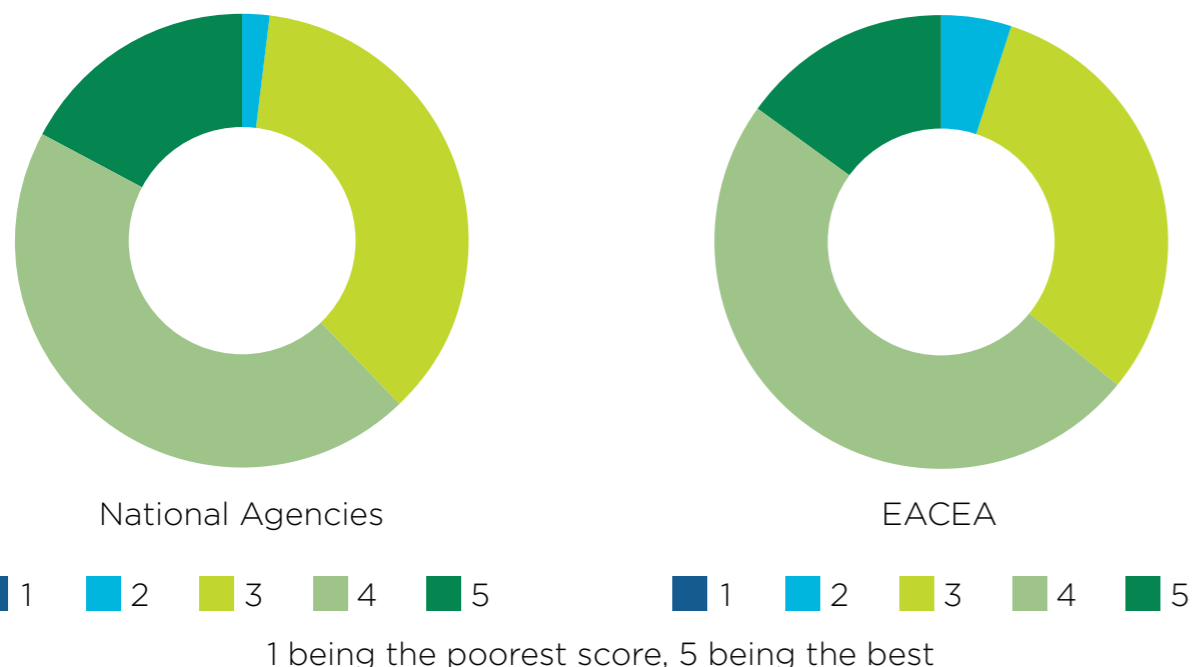
PROGRAMME RELEVANCE

Programme objectives and policy priorities

Responses here reveal that **the majority (80.56%) believe that the objectives and actions of the Erasmus+ programme are well aligned with policy priorities in their field of work.** This result follows the trend of previous years which is a positive sign of the relevance of the programme vis-a-vis the main concerns of its stakeholders. Some respondents nevertheless observed that some aspects could be improved. Namely, humanities do not appear to be a priority for Erasmus+ and that more focus on lifelong career guidance and sports is needed.

Social dimension of the programme

The programme's consideration of individuals' socio-economic needs and the needs of different learners is only perceived positively by 38.89% of respondents which is slightly lower than last year's results (48.48%). **The results clearly indicate room for improvement on social inclusion.** Some respondents stated that the budget level is insufficient to address this issue. Additionally, organisations would greatly appreciate more flexibility in budget allocation. Other respondents believe that the programme could be better addressed to engage groups that have not been engaged before.

Implementation of cross-sector cooperation

The vast majority of respondents (93,94%) find that Erasmus+ allows them to implement cross-sector cooperation projects despite the fact that some policy priorities are considered to be sometimes too specific. This is a considerable increase from last year when just over half (54.55%) replied positively. This suggests that over time diversity of cooperation within the programme has started to become more evident or put more into operation. These results are satisfying overall considering the benefits that cross-sector cooperation can bring about for all stakeholders involved. Future editions of the survey could explore more concretely what beneficiaries consider these benefits to be.

EVALUATION PROCESS

## Feedback on project applications

Respondents were asked for their opinion about the sufficiency of the feedback that they were given on their project application, if applicable. **For the NAs, the majority of respondents (69.23%) rated the feedback they received with scores higher than 3. The organisations who applied to EACEA also gave favourable scores to the feedback they received (61.91% higher than 3)**. While these results are very positive, and an improvement on last year, there is still a margin for improvement since both for NAs and EACEA the scores in the range of 1-3 remain above 30%.
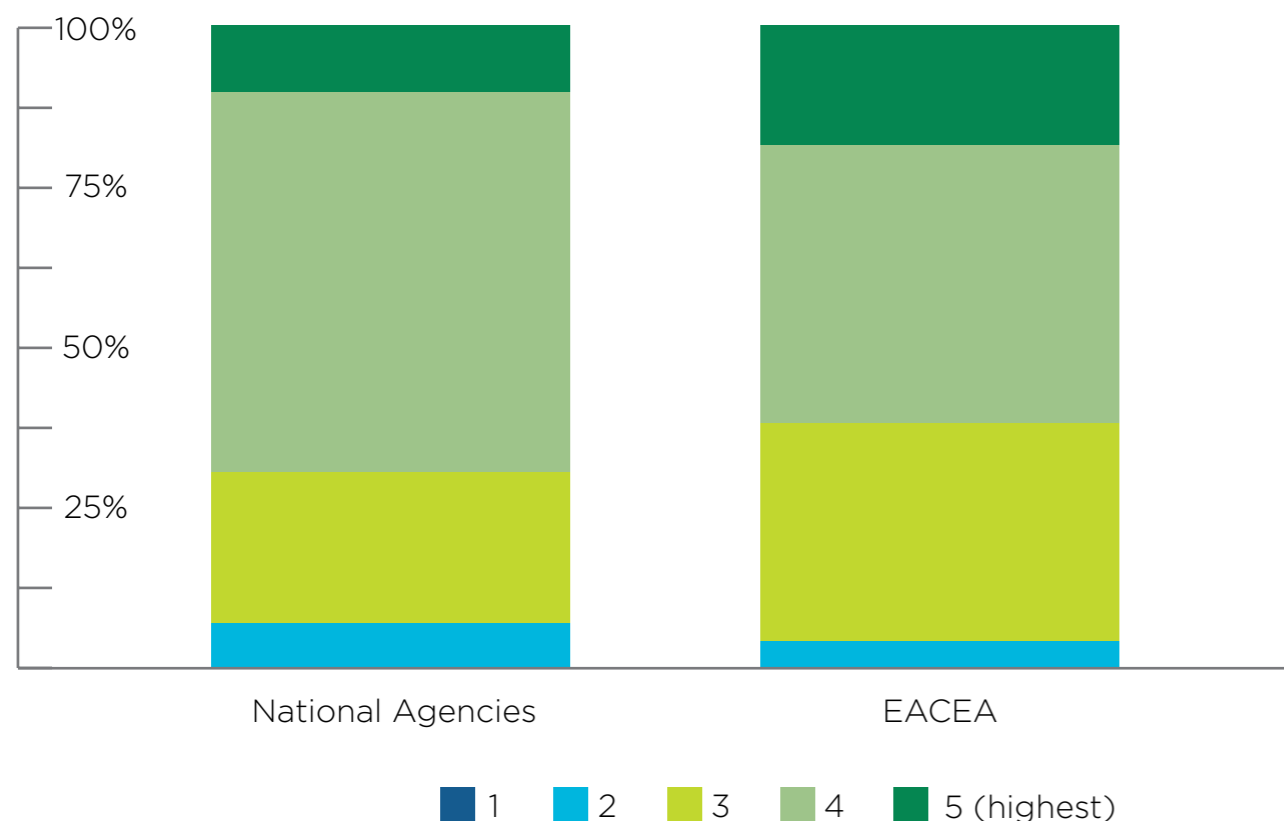
Feedback on completed projects

Feedback concerning the evaluation report on completed projects both from NAs and EACEA are given a rating higher than 3 by 68.96% and 71.43% of respondents respectively. These results indicate a high level of satisfaction (1 = lowest, 5 = highest). This is further solidified by the fact that no respondents awarded scores of less than 3 in both cases.
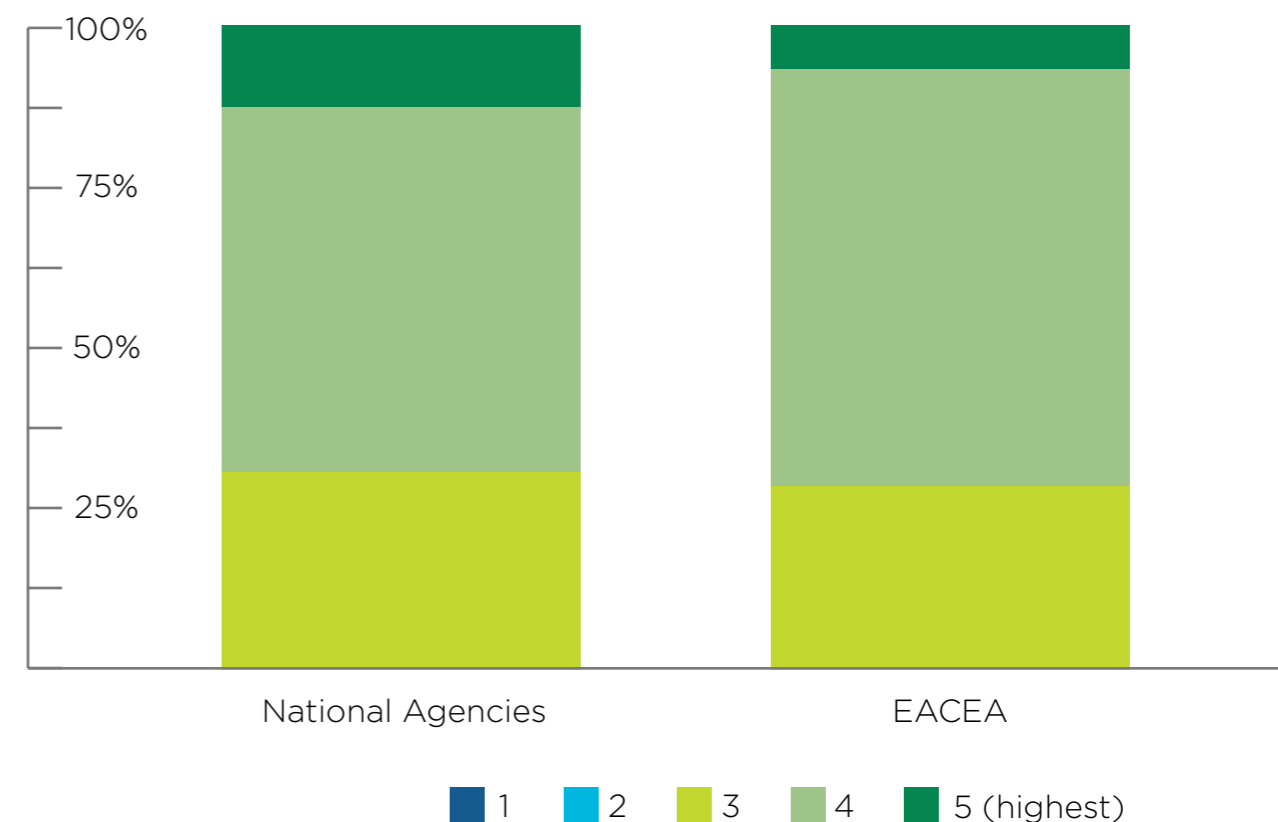
Main reason for dissatisfaction

Among the points raised by the respondents, one can find that more attention should be given to the content of the projects and more flexibility on administrative tasks since the focus given to the latter can take away from the work on project content itself. Regarding evaluation, some respondents feel that reports are not being thoroughly checked which then leads to having to clarify aspects which are already mentioned in them. A similar observation was that evaluators do not seem to cross check among them after reading the proposals, leading to confusing/unclear feedback. Another reason for dissatisfaction has to do with receiving different feedback from one year to the other regarding the same topic in the application causing confusion for the applicants.

FUTURE PROGRAMME

Priorities for future programme

Regarding what should be the priorities of the Erasmus+ successor programme, respondents brought to the table various topics. Among them, **the strongest priority is social inclusion** (same as in the previous survey), more specifically regarding youth, refugees, mental health and overall accessibility to the programme. Many respondents also highlighted **environmental/ sustainability** topics as another top priority for Erasmus+. This should include supporting projects that aim to engage young people in climate policy, develop green skills and overall provide sustainable development education. **Cross-sector cooperation** was also repeatedly mentioned by the respondents. Organisations stated that priority should be given to building bridges across different sectors of education as well as towards civil society organisations, businesses and industries. Furthermore, **digitalisation/digital skills** were also brought up by various respondents. Among other topics, this year respondents also placed emphasis on citizenship, social entrepreneurship, teaching and learning innovations, NEETS, VET and validation.

Structure of the programme

Regarding comments on the improvement of the programme's structure, **respondents appeared to be rather satisfied and were of the opinion that no major structural change is needed**. In their comments, respondents highlighted that some adjustments should be made regarding **flexibility** meaning that projects should be allowed to cover more specific needs and go more into depth than what is included in the bigger programme structure. The need for **simplification** of procedures was also emphasised by respondents. This would involve shortening some procedures to allow for a smoother implementation of the projects. Furthermore, allowing for more **openness and accessibility** is important for improving inclusion in the programme. Regarding **funding**, respondents pinpointed that the needs of European NGOs are not being fully met by current levels. Among other topics emphasised by respondents include the request for the programme to apply more of a **cross-sectorial approach** and enable **cross-over** between actions.

New initiatives/actions of the European Commission

Regarding new initiatives and actions coming from the EC, **respondents stated being concerned about the DiscoverEU initiative in which the learning and accessibility dimension need to be ensured** and the possibility of fostering elitism through the European Universities initiative. Additionally, regarding the "Erasmus goes green" idea, respondents highlighted that promotion of sustainable transport alternatives is needed to ensure an effective implementation.

Financial support

Concerning the views of respondents on the sufficiency of funding, **it is striking that 55.17% do not think the overall financial support is sufficient to meet the programme objectives**, while only 17.24% think it is. These figures are similar to the results obtained last year where 58.06% of respondents also did not find the financial support sufficient. It is in a way not coherent that on one hand Erasmus+ is touted as a flagship programme of the EU and on the other only a handful of Europe-wide organisations working with the programme find the financial support sufficient to meet its objectives.

«Do you think the overall financial support for the Erasmus+ programme is sufficient to meet its objectives?»

Doesn't know

No

Yes
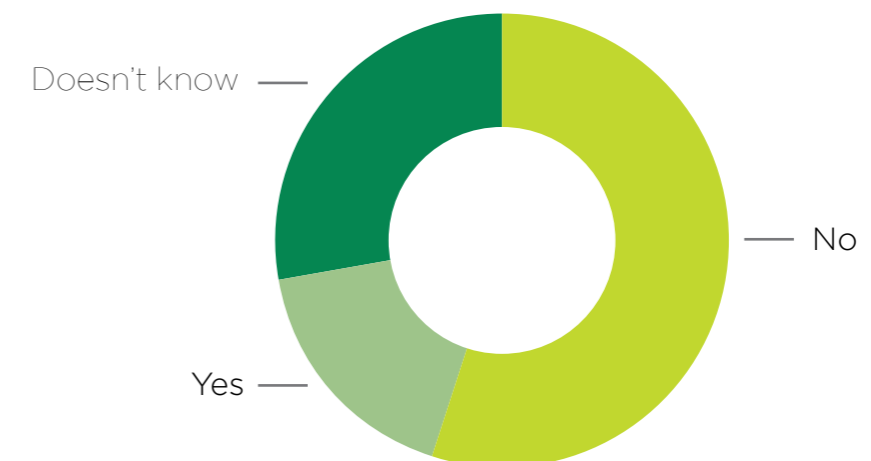
Synergies with other programmes

The majority of respondents (82.76%, similar to last year 80.65%) consider that the Erasmus+ programme would benefit from synergies with other EU programmes. The programmes that were suggested as the more likely to generate synergies with Erasmus+ were Horizon 2020 and ESF. Other programmes emphasised by the respondents were Interreg, Europe for Citizens, Digital Europe and EuropeAid. Connecting with the LIFE programme would for sure bring about synergies and more importantly would allow Erasmus+ to establish links with projects focused on environmental sustainability. The responses to this question resonate with the ongoing discourse at EU level about the need to foster closer synergies between programmes under the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework.

CONCLUSIONS

From the above findings the Lifelong Learning Platform gathers the following conclusions:

▶ **User-friendliness**

▶ There is room for improvement with regards to simplifying and making more flexible many aspects of the application and implementation procedures. Sustainability in particular is the less straightforward part of the application. It is often reported by organisations that it is not entirely clear what sustainability means in the context of projects or how to prove it.

▶ A clearer and more user-friendly Programme Guide would be very helpful for organisations who already consider the information in it to be realistic, relevant and are appreciative of its extensiveness

Evaluation

Although respondents have rather positive opinions on the received evaluators' feedback there is still room from improvement regarding the consistency and coherence of this feedback among and within NAs as well as EACEA, both for applications and completed projects.

▶ **Cross-sector cooperation**

▶ It is encouraging to see European networks perceiving that Erasmus+ allows them to implement cross-sector cooperation. This should be further incentivised and facilitated through the simplification of administrative procedures so that projects that engage several sectors, including non-formal and informal education can be implemented.

Support for EU networks

To better meet the needs of Europe-wide networks, a centralised solution for applications could prove beneficial since the vast majority are based in Brussels and must compete with local Belgian organisations when applying to the Belgian NAs.

These organisations also need further support in strengthening their members' engagement in the programme.

▶ **Budget**

▶ The lump sum system is considered suitable and simplified. However, an increase in the amount for the lump sum and in the overall funding levels for Europe-wide organisations would allow them to cover more accurately their real needs.

▶ Higher overall budget is needed for the successor Erasmus+ programme so that it has sufficient resources to meet its objectives.

Priorities for future programme

The strongest priority is enhancing social inclusion by improving the accessibility to the programme for all sections of the population and organisations coming from all sectors of education.

Priority should also be given to cross-sector cooperation, environmental/sustainability topics, digital skills and citizenship education.

Synergies should be fostered between Erasmus+ programme and other sectoral programmes such as Horizon 2020, ESF, Europe for Citizens and LIFE (for synergies on environmental/sustainability topics).

LIFELONG LEARNING PLATFORM

EUROPEAN CIVIL SOCIETY FOR EDUCATION

The Lifelong Learning Platform is an umbrella association that gathers 42 European organisations active in the field of education and training, coming from all EU Member States and beyond. Currently these networks represent more than 50 000 educational institutions (schools, universities, adult education and youth centres, etc.) or associations (involving students, teachers and trainers, parents, HRD professionals, etc.) covering all sectors of formal, non-formal and informal learning. Their members reach out to several millions of beneficiaries.

Lifelong Learning Platform
Rue de l'Industrie, 10 – 1000 Brussels – Belgium
Tel. : 02 893 25 16
info@lllplatform.eu