

ESF TRANSNATIONAL PLATFORM

Synergies between the ESF and Erasmus programmes: making it happen

ESF Transnational Platform networks
on Youth Employment and Learning and Skills

Final Paper

June 2019

Acknowledgments:

This paper has been a collaborative effort. We would like to thank members of the ESF Transnational Platform's Youth Employment and Learning and Skills networks for their input and contributions. We would particularly like to thank the Erasmus Student Network for its contribution, as well as the input from the European Lifelong Learning Platform. Finally, thanks go to **Resa Koleva-Demonty**, **Ioana Dewandeler** and **Maeva Roulette** from the European Commission.

Authors: **Eddy Adams** (Youth Employment Network Thematic Expert) and **Armelle Ledan** (Learning and Skills Network Thematic Expert)

The ESF Transnational Platform is managed by AEIDL on behalf of the European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.

The content, analysis, opinions and policy recommendations contained in this paper do not necessarily reflect the views of the contractor and funding authority.

ESF Transnational Platform
AEIDL, Chaussée St-Pierre 260, B-1040 Belgium

esf@aeidl.eu

Table of Contents

1: EXPLORING SYNERGIES BETWEEN THE ESF AND ERASMUS	4
1.1 Introduction	4
1.2 How did we get here?	4
1.3: The purpose and format of this paper	5
2: THE POLICY CONTEXT	6
2.1: Policy and legal context for synergies and complementarities in the current and future EU Multiannual Financial Framework	6
3: THE OPPORTUNITIES	8
3.1: Building on experience	8
3.2: Where are the examples of good practice?	8
3.2.1: Lithuania	8
3.2.2: Spain	10
3.2.3: Bulgaria	11
3.2.4 Poland	12
3.3: Other possible synergies between the ESF and Erasmus+	13
3.3.1 Germany	13
4: THE CHALLENGES	15
4.1: The starting point	15
4.2 The survey of ESF Managing Authorities	15
4.3. The survey headlines	15
4.4: What can we take from this?	17
5: MAKING IT HAPPEN – POTENTIAL ACTIONS	18
5.1 What steps can we take to build synergies on the ground?	18
5.2 Political support and commitment	18
5.3 Technical support	20
5.4 Build a collaborative culture	20
5.5: The emerging priority actions	21
5.5.1: Political support	21
5.5.2: Technical support	22
5.5.3: Build a collaborative culture	22
6: NEXT STEPS	23
6.1: An opportunity	23

1: EXPLORING SYNERGIES BETWEEN THE ESF AND ERASMUS

1.1 Introduction

This paper explores the potential for operational synergies between the ESF and Erasmus funding programmes. It was produced as part of the work conducted by the ESF Transnational Platform (ESF TP). Specifically, it has been jointly developed by two of the networks of the ESF TP - Youth Employment, together with Learning and Skills.

The work has been undertaken in response to the emerging high-level policy commitment to enhance synergies between these two programmes in the next EU programming period (2021-2027). Although this policy aspiration is widely appreciated by stakeholders, and despite a number of good practice examples across Member States, there is a need to enhance awareness and enable cooperation on a practical level. While each instrument has its distinct objectives, structures and regulations, both of them support the overall policy goal of investing in people. This makes it useful to explore converging objectives and actions.

The aim of this paper is to examine the perceived barriers, identify potential opportunities and – most crucially – identify actions required to help operationalise this policy objective.

1.2 How did we get here?

In early 2019, the ESF TP undertook steps to gather a better understanding of the ways in which closer collaboration between these programmes might add value. It also explored the obstacles – perceived and actual – which will require attention if synergy on the ground is to be achieved.

The activities that contributed to this information-gathering process included:

- discussions amongst ESF Managing Authorities (MAs) at the transnational network meetings of the Youth Employment and Learning and Skills Partnerships;
- a survey of ESF MAs involved in these two partnerships;
- a workshop involving ESF MAs and Erasmus+ National Agencies in Barcelona in March 2019; and

- a workshop involving ESF MAs, Erasmus+ National Agencies and other relevant stakeholders (e.g. regional authorities, NGOs, civil society, etc.) in Brussels in May 2019, during the final conference of the ESF Transnational Platform.



The results of this research give an informed and informative picture which is set out in the following sections of this paper.

1.3: The purpose and format of this paper

This paper's main objective is to propose actions to promote operational synergy between the ESF and Erasmus+ programmes.

To this end the key sections cover:

- the policy background to discussions of ESF/Erasmus+ synergies and complementarities;
- the barriers to operational synergy between these programmes;
- opportunities and relevant examples to learn from; and
- potential actions for stakeholders to consider.

2: THE POLICY CONTEXT

2.1: Policy and legal context for synergies and complementarities in the current and future EU Multiannual Financial Framework

In the current programming period (2014-2020), there is already a strong policy and legal basis for cooperation across different EU funding instruments. Given that cohesion policy funding together with other Union programmes was designed to contribute to the policy objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy, the Common Provisions Regulation for the European Structural and Investment Funds (Annex I) states that Member States shall seek to use ESI Funds to mainstream tools and methods developed and tested successfully under Erasmus+. They should furthermore establish appropriate cooperation mechanisms between Managing Authorities and the Erasmus+ National agencies. The current Erasmus+ Regulation also calls on Member States to ensure overall consistency and complementarity with other relevant Union programmes, notably the ESF.

Building on the experience from the 2014-2020 programming period, one of the guiding principles underlying the preparation of the Commission's legislative proposals for the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2021-2027 has been to create a legislative framework that is more conducive to synergies and complementarities between the different EU funding programmes. The aim is to unlock additional impact on the ground.

In the Commission proposals for the next MFF, complementarities are seen as instrumental to ensure coherence and increased horizontal consistency between EU programmes and instruments, avoiding overlaps and increasing the efficiency of EU public funding. The 2018 Communication 'A new, modern Multiannual Financial Framework¹ for a Union that delivers efficiently on its priorities post-2020' offers a solid ground for synergies and complementarities and confirms the inbuilt flexibility of the MFF, aiming to ensure critical mass and effective implementation of the programmes.

Along these lines, the Commission has increased the horizontal consistency of the post-2020 legislative proposals with a view to contributing effectively to the general and specific objectives of the respective instruments and enhancing synergies across programmes and funds. Simplification is paramount to underpinning this effort and generating economies of scale.

1 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX%3A52018DC0098&from=EN>

The MFF cluster 'Investing in people' has a proposed €140 billion budget allocation. Significant potential for complementarities and synergies has been identified regarding common objectives such as qualitative development of education, training and youth systems, and human capital development.

In this context, the European Commission's regulatory proposals for the future Erasmus² programme and the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)³ offer a number of legal provisions aimed to enable concrete implementation of such synergies and complementarities.

2 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2018%3A367%3AFIN>

3 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1540387032605&uri=CELEX%3A52018PC0382>

3: THE OPPORTUNITIES

3.1: Building on experience

Discussions with the participating ESF Managing Authorities, members of the two transnational networks and a number of Erasmus+ National Agencies reveal a number of examples of collaboration already taking place in the current programming period, utilising funds from both the ESF and Erasmus+. These come from a variety of Member States and illustrate the range of spaces where operational synergy is already happening. Raising the awareness of key stakeholders by sharing such examples more widely is a key factor in enhancing synergies and increasing the potential for cooperation of the two instruments in the Member States.

Disseminating good practice will not lead to joint activities and synergy by itself. Differences in the funding capabilities and management modes of the ESF and Erasmus+ across the Member States are important barriers to consider.

3.2: Where are the examples of good practice?

The work of the ESF transnational networks has identified **four ways in which ESF and Erasmus+ funding are currently combined**:

- topping up Erasmus mobility grants through the ESF;
- upscaling/mainstreaming successful Erasmus+ projects through the ESF;
- awarding a quality label (following an Erasmus+ evaluation); and
- complementary funding.

The following examples give a concrete illustration of these practices. It is hoped that they can inspire stakeholders in other countries wishing to reinforce synergies and complementarity between those European sources of funds, to achieve a greater impact and tackle common challenges.

One common feature of and an important underlying condition for these good practice examples is the existing cooperation arrangements between Erasmus National Agencies and ESF Managing Authorities in a country/region which tend to facilitate coordination and cooperation despite the different rules for both programmes.

3.2.1: Lithuania

The Lithuanian Ministry of Education, Science and Sport has contributed to supporting Erasmus+ and ESF activities in the field of higher education (HE), by

significantly increasing the number of transnational student mobility opportunities. In Lithuania, this Ministry is responsible for the entities managing both the ESF (ESFA) and Erasmus+ (NA - Education Exchanges Support Foundation).

A large-scale project on the “Internationalisation of higher education” is funded by the ESF at national level. The Erasmus+ NA applied to be one of the implementing organisations of this national project and received €4.9 million under this ESF action for the period 2010-2015. This investment helped achieve the objectives of the ESF operational programme in Lithuania, while also increasing the number of Erasmus+ student mobility grants by 10.3%.

The ESF support was subsequently renewed and increased to €10.2 million for the second stage of the project, which runs from 2016-2021. This focuses on raising international awareness of Lithuanian higher education institutions, by presenting them at international education fairs. The goal is to attract more foreign students (in particular from Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Turkey and China). The ESF funding has also been used to organise events in cooperation with Lithuanian embassies, and to set up an online [portal](#) and social media campaigns to promote student mobility through:

- participation in an Erasmus+ mobility exchange, enabling 3 758 students from 36 Lithuanian higher education institutions (HEI) to spend a study period abroad at a partner HEI; and 780 students to do a work placement abroad;
- a joint study programme period (from 1 to 3 semesters) at a partner HEI; and
- student practice in Lithuanian schools, cultural centres and communities outside Lithuania.

Factors for successful synergy

The measure promoting student mobility is seen by the Lithuanian authorities as an opportunity to use the ESF and Erasmus+ in synergy. While the funding is provided by the ESF, a Decree from the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport has authorised the application of Erasmus+ rules concerning simplified costs, as they are already well established and standardised for activities such as student mobility grants.

Until 2018, Erasmus+ calls were launched separately depending on the origin of the EU financial support. Since then, single calls for projects are launched whereby selected projects may qualify for funding from either instrument: Erasmus+ or the ESF.

Furthermore, the ESF-funded “Internationalisation of Higher Education” project is managed by the Erasmus+ National Agency, which reinforces coordination and synergies of goals and tasks. However, due to the different legal frameworks and management modalities of the two instruments, reporting requirements differ substantially, and amendment procedures of such actions are quite complex.

3.2.2: Spain

Promoting youth employment has been a major political priority in the Asturias region of Spain in recent years. Youth unemployment stood at 40% in 2014. Large numbers of school-leavers not in employment, education or training (NEET), highlight a mismatch between the educational system, the labour market and the business world. This is exacerbated by low levels of labour mobility in the region (for cultural reasons).

Consequently, in 2014, the city of Gijón decided to set up a local Youth Employment and Activation Agency. This was first established as a pilot project funded by the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), and has now become a permanent structure.

The Agency is a complex and fully integrated administration, with 70 employees. All the key local and regional stakeholders⁴ offering support to young people signed a collaboration agreement and work in partnership in a Steering Committee. They design tailor-made itineraries for a group of 100 NEETs (16-30 years old) every six months.

The objectives of the project are mainly to:

- initiate a collaboration between local and regional stakeholders to offer personalised orientation and guidance to young NEETs with the aim of “activating” them, pooling together the set of already existing resources and competencies, **with a particular emphasis on the programmes which favour labour mobility and training in Europe**; and
- Create a mechanism with local companies, using the seal “Companies for our Youth” which can provide internships, work contracts, apprenticeships, work placements for recent graduates, training and apprenticeship contracts and other kinds of agreements.

The project helped bridge gaps, especially the link between employment guidance professionals and young people in the education system, job search for opportunities provided by local companies, and the joint coordinated work of key agents in this field.

Factors for successful synergy

The main actions are covered by the municipal budget, complemented by ESF/YEI. Participants in the programme have the option to join a mobility project (activation pathways), using Erasmus+. Going abroad can enhance their intercultural integration skills and ultimately support labour market integration

⁴ The Local Agency of Economic Promotion and Employment of Gijón City Council (ALPEE); the Public Service of Regional Employment; the Department of Regional Education; the Asturian Business Federation; and Federation of Youth Associations in Gijón; Council of Mucedá (CMX).

back home. In addition, the programme implemented at local level also uses Erasmus+ for the mobility of teachers and learners from second chance schools, and for cooperation between schools.

The Asturian case study illustrates true interaction and coordination of activity through a single implementing structure drawing on different funding sources, while at the same time achieving the expected policy results for a difficult target group requiring a comprehensive set of measures.



3.2.3: Bulgaria

NEWTT (New Way for New Talents in Teaching) is an Erasmus+ Key Action 3 project funded by the European Commission for three years from 2016 to 2019. NEWTT was defined as a 'policy experiment' and was designed to find a solution to the current challenges facing European education systems, including teacher shortages and teacher retention. It set out to do this by investigating alternative pathway programmes in five Member States (Bulgaria; Romania; Austria; Latvia; and the Basque Country of Spain).

This project illustrates that relevant partnerships, policy experimentation and innovation actions developed under Erasmus+ have the potential to be upscaled through the ESF/ESF+ with a view to mainstreaming them in national policy, where this is relevant for addressing long-term systemic policy challenges at national and regional level.

An important achievement of the project has been the mainstreaming of its method and results into national education policy, notably in Bulgaria where the Ministry of Education has launched a nationally-funded programme for teacher training based on the NEWTT approach. In Latvia the NEWTT project has become instrumental in the revision of the national curriculum for the training of teachers in higher education. In addition, the intention is to use the positive results of this same pilot to attract people to the teaching profession, using ESF funding.

3.2.4 Poland

The Foundation for the Development of the Education System (FRSE) has 20 years of experience of managing European educational programmes. FRSE is the Polish National Agency for Erasmus+ for 2014-2020 and an Intermediary Body (IB) for the ESF Managing Authority (FDES).

FRSE has used the ESF to finance Erasmus+ mobility projects that would not be funded otherwise.

Mobility projects for higher education (HE): FRSE manages the submission and assessment of applications under Erasmus+ rules. The ESF is used to specifically finance mobility projects for students with disabilities and those in financial hardship. The use of the ESF has enabled FRSE to award higher grants to these target groups than would be possible through Erasmus+ funding. This better addresses their specific needs.

Mobility project for vocational education and training (VET) learners and staff, school staff (SE) and adult education staff (AE): FRSE manages the submission and assessment made of applications in compliance with Erasmus+ rules. It then draws up two lists: a primary list funded with Erasmus+, and a reserve list eligible for support from the ESF when Erasmus+ budget limits are reached. This second list mainly consists of projects from schools based in rural and disadvantaged areas.

Mobility project for pupils: projects developed under Erasmus+ and the LLP (Comenius, Youth) are submitted to the ESF MA (FDES), and therefore assessed and selected according to the rules of the ESF. This approach leads to upscaling and mainstreaming of successful smaller-scale projects developed under the other programmes.

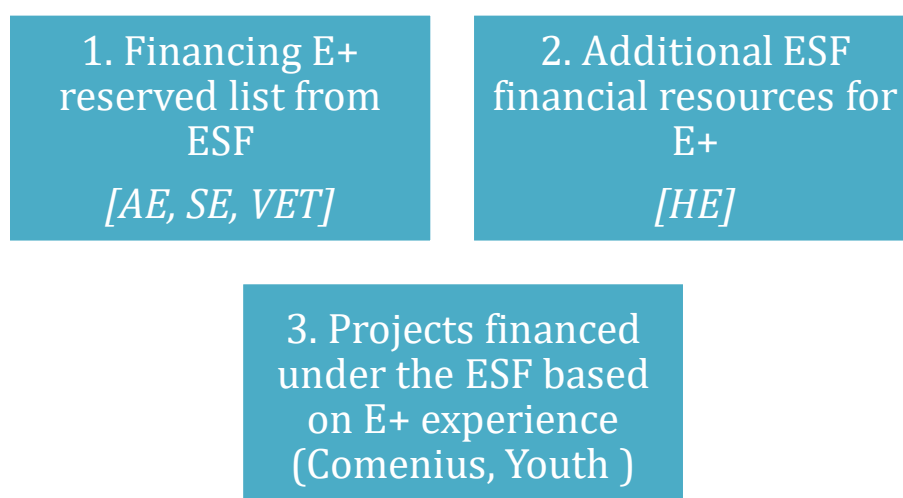


Figure 1 Types of synergies between ESF and Erasmus+

Factors for successful synergy

The Polish example shows three ways of combining ESF and Erasmus+ funding. Crucial to the smart combination of the two programmes was the decision to appoint the Erasmus+ National Agency to be an ESF Intermediary Body. While recognising that not every ESF+ NA has the management capacity to do this, the Polish example illustrates the opportunities presented by cooperation between the two programmes, depending on the Member State context.

3.3: Other possible synergies between the ESF and Erasmus+

3.3.1 Germany

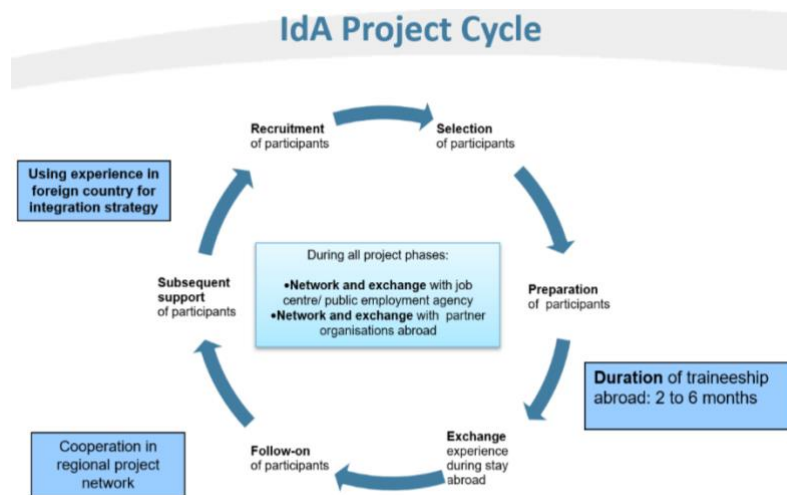
Europe has a long-standing tradition of mobility exchange programmes for students, young people or apprentices, teachers and staff (Comenius, Leonardo, Erasmus.). However, the mobility component of these programmes does not comprehensively address the needs of specific and significantly disadvantaged participants. Nor do the existing mobility exchange programmes support the labour market integration of disadvantaged youths far from the labour market, who often come from socially- and economically-disadvantaged backgrounds.

[IdA](#), a pilot ESF programme (2008-2014) in Germany demonstrated that it is possible to considerably increase the chances for integration into work or training of this particularly vulnerable target group. Disadvantaged young people far from the labour market include:

- school drop outs;
- youngsters with only basic education;
- young people with psychological/mental health problems;
- single mothers; and
- people with disabilities.

Typically, people facing these barriers do not take up exchange opportunities abroad, unless appropriate support is provided.

The IdA project adapted the Erasmus programme experience (including the costing aspects related to the mobility exchange element) to the very specific needs of the target group. Unlike most Erasmus applicants, these beneficiaries require targeted interventions. Thus, the ESF was used to fund comprehensive support projects consisting of four phases of which learning mobility abroad is one element.



The IdA programme reached about 18 000 participants (of which 4 700 were disabled youngsters). Results were astonishing, with an integration rate of 60% in employment, education or training².

“The participants in the IdA programme have no deficits, but capabilities which are not used to their full potential.” - Municipal job centre in Hamm, Germany.

These successful results led to high interest from several EU Member States, and the Transnational ESF Learning Network TLN Mobility was created in 2013 to implement transnational mobility programmes focusing on this target group in the framework of a Coordinated Call during the ESF programming period 2014-2020. This Coordinated Call contained agreed minimum quality standards⁵ for transnational mobility programmes addressing disadvantaged youth and young adults. It is the reference framework for calls to be implemented by the Member States participating in this transnational partnership at the national and regional level, respectively.

So far, a further nine EU Member States and regions⁶ have successfully implemented mobility programmes for NEETs under this framework. They have also achieved good results and integration rates of up to 60%.

This programme demonstrates that mobility schemes such as those promoted by Erasmus+ can be successfully adapted using, for instance, the more flexible range of opportunities under the ESF, to the specific needs of the most disadvantaged young people and integrated into a comprehensive approach. In turn, this proves to be a viable solution leading to the successful integration of the most disadvantaged youth: it brings them back into education or into the labour market.

Such practices are worth being sustained at European level. There is the potential to design actions to help NEETs through ESF support to get back on a

⁵ Participant Recruitment and Selection, Participant Preparation, Stay abroad, Follow-up
² reference: participants of a questionnaire addressing projects operators, job centres and employment agencies.

⁶ Poland, Czech Republic, Spain (Catalonia and Galicia), Italy, Trento, Estonia, Sweden, Slovenia.

learning or employment track to then receive further help through an additional Erasmus+ mobility action.

Programmes like IdA also contribute to a more “Social Europe” by making its advantages tangible for disadvantaged people, allowing them to experience the benefits of Europe first-hand.

4: THE CHALLENGES

4.1: The starting point

Our work to date suggests that amongst ESF Managing Authorities and Erasmus+ National Agencies, the perceived opportunities and expectations regarding greater programme synergy are not always obvious. There are important questions which mostly relate to *how* this might work in practice.

This section sets out stakeholder views relating to the barriers that will have to be overcome in future, and in particular with an outlook to the 2021-2027 programming period. It draws upon material gathered through our network discussions, the survey of ESF Managing Authorities and the Barcelona and Brussels workshops. In our view this could become a viable basis for further discussion and solution-finding in various EU level forums.

4.2 The survey of ESF Managing Authorities

In early 2019 the TNP surveyed the views of ESF Managing Authority on the proposal for closer collaboration between the ESF and Erasmus+ programmes. The survey was confined to Managing Authorities participating in the Youth Employment and Learning and Skills networks. A total of 17 Partnership members responded. Although this represents more than half of EU Member States, because it does not represent the views of all ESF MAs it is necessary to apply some ‘health warnings’ to the findings.

However, in relation to the challenges, the information gathered was widely corroborated in the Barcelona workshop which followed in March 2019, as well as in the Brussels workshop in May 2019.

4.3. The survey headlines

In most Member States, the working relationship between ESF MAs and Erasmus+ NAs is not close.

Some 64.7% of responding ESF Managing Authorities had no direct contact with Erasmus+ National Agencies. This underlines the fact that in many Member States, the two instruments are managed and supervised by different public authorities. Exploring the relationship more closely, the survey presents the following picture of the working relationship:

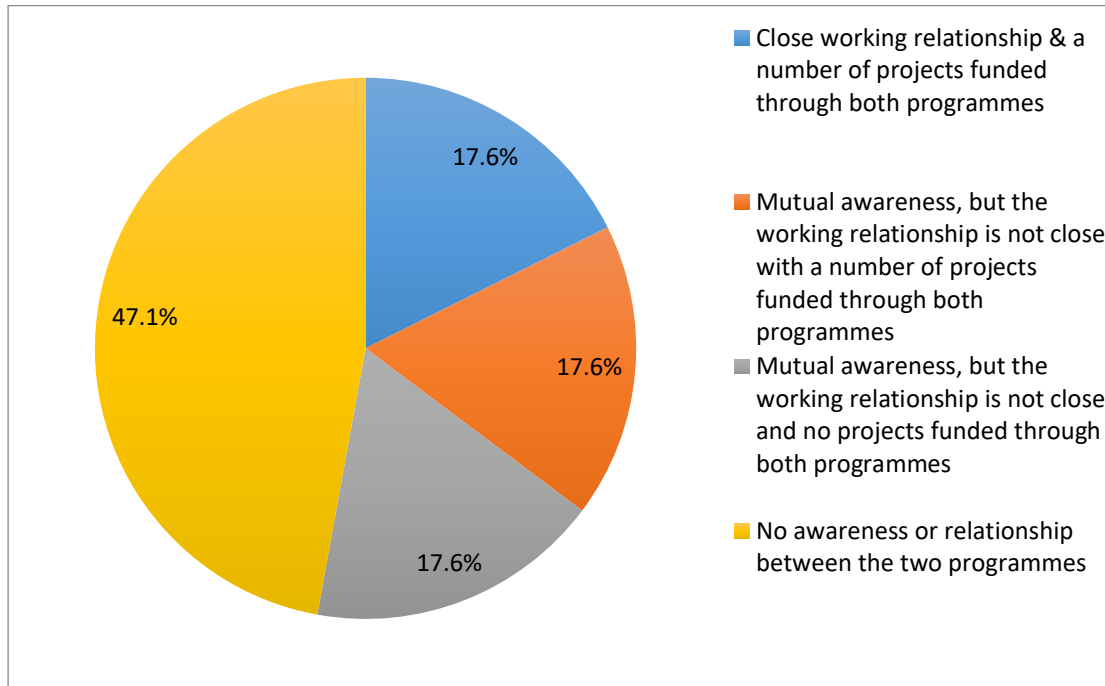


Figure 2: Source, ESF TNP survey

While 64.7% of respondents had no experience of combining the ESF and Erasmus+ programmes, 17.6% reported a positive experience of combining them.

In response to a question about the future, the largest proportion of respondents stated that “I can see scope for high levels of synergy between the ESF and Erasmus in my Managing Authority area however the organisational structures do not assist this.” Exploring the question of barriers further, the most prominent were identified as being:

- different procedures;
- different managing organisations; and
- lack of experience in combining the programmes.

“Erasmus procedures are much simpler than ESF”

“The ESF division and Erasmus+ know each other but in the Flemish structure it is difficult to work together.”

“ESF Luxembourg has no experience in combining EU-funded projects.”

“Both the ESF and Erasmus+ are managed quite effectively in Finland, but there is a lack of mutual cooperation. The public administration organisations are separate.”

Source: ESF TP Survey

Exchanges with representatives of Erasmus+ National Agencies during the two joint events with ESF Managing Authorities broadly corresponded with these responses, and the challenges relating to wider collaboration across the funds.

Much of the anxiety about achieving operational synergy focuses on structural and procedural barriers. In most cases, the two programmes are managed separately with little convergence, as our survey shows. The “language” and culture of both programmes seem separate and distinct.

A further specific concern was identified at the final Brussels workshop (May 2019), notably that among some authorities involved in ESF implementation, transnational mobility as such raises concerns about encouraging flight of talent and a certain fear that mobility actions might exacerbate an existing ‘brain drain’ problem. Such perceptions will have to be managed at operational level when implementing synergies, and complementarities and actions will have to fit within the relevant national strategic policy frameworks. Unless these issues are addressed, operational synergy between the programmes will be hard to achieve.

Given the positive results of well-designed mobility programmes, such as IdA in Germany, it is clear that careful targeting and design of actions making smart use of the available EU funding instruments could bring about significant added value in terms of outcomes for participants.

4.4: What can we take from this?

Our survey and the discussions at the two dedicated events in Barcelona and Brussels demonstrated that the potential for complementarities and synergies between the ESF and Erasmus+ is currently exploited only in a limited number of EU Member States.

The main barriers and limitations identified concern the following:

- limited coordination and interaction between responsible authorities; and
- insufficient operational measures to enable such cooperation, notably at national level, such as established regular communication and information-sharing processes.

Complex financial rules and delivery mechanisms e.g. distinct instruments with independent procedures, different intervention logics, divergent programming timing, and different evaluation criteria, management modes and architecture are also barriers to the use of various funding sources.

The challenge of institutional cooperation between the ESF and Erasmus+ structures is even greater in regionalised Member States where the ESF is managed by regional authorities while one or more Erasmus+ National Agencies are spread throughout the country, sometimes also dependent on education policy competences. In such a context, there is no established mechanism for these actors to cooperate and exchange.

The following section will focus on how these issues might be tackled.

5: MAKING IT HAPPEN – POTENTIAL ACTIONS

5.1 What steps can we take to build synergies on the ground?

What are the prospects for widespread synergy between the ESF and Erasmus in the new programming period? Beyond the clearly stated high-level policy aspiration, the research carried out by our networks has identified real barriers to this translating into operational reality. Yet, despite these barriers, as Section 4 of this paper illustrates, there are already examples showing what is possible.

Looking ahead, there is a clear need to create a more conducive environment to cooperation that is relevant to national and regional contexts and which brings added value from the perspective of ESF and Erasmus+ implementation. Initial messages from our current collaborative work involving ESF Managing Authorities and Erasmus + National Agencies suggests that this will not happen automatically. Contributors to the Barcelona and Brussels workshops identified potential supporting actions required.

The Brussels workshop provided an opportunity to also identify priorities amongst these actions. In Section 5.2 we present all of the proposed actions and in Section 5.3 we focus on the priorities and the concluding messages from the Brussels workshop.

5.2 Political support and commitment

Clear political support in the Member States and at EU level is identified as a prerequisite for systemic change. This is required at all levels. Some suggestions have been proposed as part of our process. These include:

- At EU level:
 - Enabling a high-level forum for discussion as a permanent space for planning, collaboration and exchange on synergies and complementarities between the ESF and Erasmus programmes. This could potentially be extended to other EU funds and programmes aimed at investing in people. Ideally, this could be envisaged as part of existing structures such as the ESF Committee and relevant Erasmus+ forums.
 - Fostering further awareness raising, knowledge-sharing and collaboration between the programmes. These should be in place from the start of the programming period. In this respect, stakeholders appreciate the role of the European Commission in further disseminating examples and good practices on how to operationalise the legal frameworks of the two instruments, and to facilitate the interaction of Member State implementation structures. A number of participants at the Brussels event pointed out that the EU legal framework (ESF and Erasmus+ regulations)

provides sufficient basis for interaction and it is to the responsibility of the Managing Authorities and National Agencies to proactively engage with each other at national level.

- At national and sub-national/ regional level
 - Most stakeholders identified success as dependent upon a continuous political commitment at government level to enable and foster cooperation across management structures of the different funding instruments at national and regional level. The examples discussed in this paper highlight this as an overarching preliminary condition for smart use of the available funding sources at the disposal of a Member State.
 - Proactive measures at national level can enable and promote operational synergy. The examples from Poland and Lithuania show that this is possible in varied ways, one of them being to carefully reflect on how to optimise know-how and competence when designing management structures for the different programmes.

Several possible avenues were mentioned at the Barcelona workshop and could be further explored:

- At programming level, ESF+ programmes in the next round could identify concrete aspects and measures of complementarity with Erasmus with regard to addressing education, training and youth policy-related challenges where this is a relevant aspect for the Member State.
- At the level of design of operations/actions, ESF and Erasmus authorities could jointly develop project ideas.
- ESF/Erasmus implementing authorities could participate in meetings of the respective monitoring structures (e.g. ESF Monitoring Committees) that concern ways to enhance communication and information-sharing among stakeholders related to opportunities in terms of open calls for proposals and best results of both programmes.
- Creating a system of *liaison officers* in ESF and Erasmus+ implementing authorities. Although differences in territorial competence remain part of the challenge, a clear message is the need for a dialogue that can engage key players on different levels. This is the case in particular in Member States where the Erasmus+ NA is responsible at national level while the ESF is implemented regionally. It should also be noted that city authorities – like Gijón – can make creative use of both funds to add value to their activities – to better support marginalised young people and people with fewer opportunities.

5.3 Technical support

Suggested steps to build synergies on the ground include the following:

- The establishment at EU level of common guidelines to support collaboration.
- Gathering and sharing of good practice examples that use funding from both the ESF and Erasmus+, accompanied by appropriate communication and dissemination of the practical lessons for others.
- Dedicated staff in the implementing bodies of both programmes – change agents with the role of creating dialogue and stimulating collaboration.
- The identification of practical steps to reduce the potential administrative burden – such as the use of the [Seal of Excellence](#) approach initially developed through Horizon 2020. This could support the funding of proposals that meet the objectives of ESF programmes, and that have already been positively evaluated under Erasmus+ but which could not be funded due to a lack of budget.

5.4 Build a collaborative culture

Synergy on the ground between these two programmes would benefit hugely from the creation of a new collaborative culture between those authorities managing the funds. The work led by the ESF Transnational Platform has indicated that there is an appetite for this amongst ESF Managing Authorities and Erasmus+ National Agencies.

One of the most important preliminary steps required is the need for a shared narrative which would set out the added value that the complementary use of these funds can achieve. Part of this would be a focus on the range of potential target groups (some already identified in the case studies in this paper) and on organising the support available through different EU funding instruments around the needs of these participants and groups. It is important to pay particular attention to target participants having multiple and complex support needs.

Practical steps that can help build this collaborative culture, include:

- The organisation of shared events for ESF and Erasmus implementing structures at EU and national level to raise awareness, encourage dialogue, build capacity, promote collaboration and increase understanding of the mechanics and implementation processes of each instrument.

- The identification of areas for cooperation that could help to achieve the objectives of each instrument (this could possibly be extended to other EU instruments beyond the ESF and Erasmus+).
- Making better use of the relevant participatory structures (e.g. monitoring/steering committees) to enhance communication and information sharing related to opportunities in terms of open calls for proposals and best results of both programmes.

5.5: The emerging priority actions

The Brussels workshop participants – once again bringing together ESF Managing Authorities, Erasmus+ National Agencies and other interested stakeholders – reviewed the framework of actions presented in the previous section. It also generated a number of important key messages about what lies ahead.

- One of these was to **avoid ‘reinventing the wheel’** and to make optimum use of existing structures. Already, the landscape is busy with lots of structures. In line with the principle of simplification, we should look to adapt what is already in place. This was the experience in particular of Member States such as Poland, that receive large amounts of EU funding and where programmes cater for a wide range of target groups having different needs and objectives, allowing the authorities to draw on a range of available EU resources depending on the focus of support. Conversely, Member States with small allocations of EU funds could have an incentive to make smarter, back-to-back use of ESF and Erasmus+ co-financed actions, to achieve their policy objectives.
- Another key aspect was the acknowledgment that the **ESF and Erasmus+ have, in the past, largely operated as parallel tracks**. Consequently, stakeholders on either side have few crossover points, which are important to build familiarity and understanding. This will have to be addressed to help forge a stronger shared culture going forward.
- A third key point was **the importance of placing target participants at the heart of our thinking** – and actions. By definition, the ESF aims to support society’s most vulnerable groups. For those involved in programme delivery, this should be the priority, and finding ways to align available funds will ultimately support more beneficiaries, in particular people with fewer opportunities, and increase levels of impact.

In terms of actions, to help focus on priorities, participants in the Brussels workshop had the chance to vote on the long list of proposed actions. The selected priority actions were:

5.5.1: Political support

- the identification of a high-level forum at EU level to function as a permanent space for planning, collaboration and exchange between the

programmes. This would help to better align the calendar for respectively, ESF and Erasmus+ programmes and calls at national and/or regional level and ensure they are designed in a way that allows for synergies and complementarities between them; and

- fostering further awareness raising, knowledge-sharing and collaboration between the programmes.

There was also acknowledgment of the need to operate at different territorial levels – particularly at national level - inspired by the examples from Poland, Lithuania and Latvia.

5.5.2: Technical support

- further work at EU level to produce shared guidelines based on good practice examples; and
- recruitment of dedicated staff from both programmes charged with the role of change agents – to create dialogue and stimulate collaboration.

5.5.3: Build a collaborative culture

Here, the group advocated combining actions to support this key objective. These would include:

- shared capacity-building events; and
- capacity-building activities such as staff exchanges and job-shadowing across the two programmes to enhance the effectiveness of actions and enable the identification of 'win-win' situations.

6: NEXT STEPS

6.1: An opportunity

The initial exploratory work of the ESF Transnational Platform has been well received by most stakeholders. It has identified important challenges and some potential solutions for translating the desired aspiration of programme synergy into action. What's more, it represents a huge opportunity.

To make this happen in the months ahead will require:

- continued momentum in the dialogue between programme stakeholders;
- design of events and activities to raise awareness, build trust and nurture shared goals;
- continued sharing of practical lessons and case studies combining the funds; and
- a focus on target participants/end beneficiaries – and the prize of reaching greater numbers and securing better results and impact, notably for people with fewer opportunities.

Our ESF Transnational Partnerships are concluding. The energy and dialogue now taking place between ESF and Erasmus stakeholders is part of the legacy from this partnership activity. But it will be up to others to now take this forward. The European Commission is a key player in this, but so too are Member States and other stakeholders. Without an active partnership approach, the aspiration for synergy will not translate on the ground.

However, this work indicates that the appetite for collaboration is there. The actions set out in this paper can help provide the framework for that to happen.

Technical dossiers online at <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/library>:

0. TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION in the ESF 2014-2020 – An introductory guide – November 2015

This guide describes the Common Framework for transnationality in the ESF in the 2014-2020 period, including the common themes, calls for proposals, thematic networks, and how the ESF can contribute to Macro-Regional Strategies. It concludes with a list of National Contact Points.

1. THEMATIC NETWORKING – A guide for participants – April 2016

This user guide to the nine thematic networks that support transnational co-operation in the ESF sets out the stakeholders involved, and suggests principles and tools for animating their interaction.

2. ESF TRANSNATIONAL CALLS – Writing and managing calls for proposals – February 2017

A step-by-step guide to designing transnational calls for proposals in the ESF, from added value, institutional capacity and priorities, through design, partner search and the TCA, to assessment.

3. INTEGRATED SERVICES – Early lessons from transnational work in the European Social Fund – October 2017

Drawing on evidence from the employment, inclusion, youth employment, governance and partnership thematic networks, this dossier presents the theoretical and practical arguments for service integration.

4. CO-PRODUCTION – Enhancing the role of citizens in governance and service delivery – May 2018

This dossier articulates the various ‘co-trends’ and shows how they are being applied in inclusion, migrant integration, social enterprise, community development and social innovation.

5. SYSTEMS THINKING for European Structural and Investment Funds management – May 2018

This handbook explains how to apply the Vanguard Method to improve service quality in managing European funds.

6. Tackling Long-Term Unemployment through RISK PROFILING AND OUTREACH – May 2018

This discussion paper from the Employment Thematic Network reviews approaches to risk profiling and outreach, summaries their benefits and challenges, and gives case examples.

7. REVIEW OF THE EUROPEAN CODE OF CONDUCT ON PARTNERSHIP (ECCP) – Thematic Network on Partnership – May 2018

The main aims of the review were to assess the usefulness of the ECCP, learn more about the challenges encountered in its implementation, and develop recommendations to embed the partnership principle into the next European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) programming period.

8. FEMALE (UN)EMPLOYMENT AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE – November 2018

This paper examines gender equality issues in employment (including segregation, the pay gap, entrepreneurship and care responsibilities), describes ESF projects which address it, and concludes with the ESF Employment Thematic Network’s recommendations.

9. Addressing youth unemployment through outreach, activation and service integration – November 2018

This dossier consolidates the three sharing papers published by the Youth Employment Thematic Network on outreach, activation and service integration. It features studies of Ohjaamo in Helsinki, Rubikon Centrum in Prague, So Stay in Gdańsk and MRC Pathways in Glasgow.

10. Inspirational practices for tomorrow’s inclusive digital world – May 2019

Digitalisation is not only transforming the economy; it is transforming our society as a whole. This dossier presents the contribution of the ESF Transnational Platform Thematic Network on Learning and Skills to the ambitious policies developed both at EU and national levels: building an inclusive, knowledge-based digital economy and society in Europe.

To find more about the ESF please visit

<http://ec.europa.eu/esf>

You can download our publications or subscribe for free at

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/publications>

If you would like to receive regular updates about the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion sign up to receive the free Social Europe e-newsletter at

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/e-newsletter>

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/>

<http://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality>

ESF TRANSNATIONAL PLATFORM