



TAKING STOCK OF TCAs REALISED IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING BETWEEN 2014-2018

Report of the research findings



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IMPRINT

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FOREWORD

Erasmus+ National Agencies are diverse all over Europe, however we all face at least two similar challenges in our everyday work: attracting new actors in the Programme and raising the quality of running projects.

Transnational Cooperation Activities (TCAs), an instrument granted within the Erasmus+ for the national agencies to increase their potential in the above mentioned areas, has been introduced in the field of education and training in 2014. In the first years, NAs were reluctant to jump into TCAs, while over the years the value of these activities has been more and more conceived and for now the majority of national agencies pursue such cooperation by both sending participants and hosting events.

The study carried out in 2019 by the SALTO Education and Training TCA Resource Centre revealed that although TCAs demand considerable effort from the NAs, those national agencies which have been involved in TCAs find this opportunity unique and valuable in increasing the potential of the Erasmus+ Programme and meeting the challenges they face.

It is my honour to offer you this publication presenting the results of the study and incorporating conclusions of the consultations with the E&T TCA advisory group and the working group. The book summarizes the state of transnational cooperation activities in the field of education and training, gives an insight into how NAs look at these activities, how they decide on topics, manage events, and what advantages and obstacles they perceive in this regard.


This piece of work on one hand is a report enumerating what has been done between 2014-2018, on the other hand, it is a collection of practices and potential solutions aiming to give inspiration to NAs to get involved in TCAs. The report also contains recommendations on how to improve the transnational cooperation activities in the future Erasmus Programme.

Myself as the head of the Erasmus+ Department at the Hungarian National Agency - host of the SALTO E&T TCA Resource Centre – would like to thank, also in the name of my colleagues, all national agencies for filling in the online questionnaire sent out in the summer 2019 in the framework of the research. Let me express special acknowledgement to the representatives of those agencies who submitted good practices and who were available for the interviews.

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Finally, yet importantly, we are grateful to the European Commission for providing the consolidated data tables for the quantitative research.

I hope that this piece of work will serve as an important resource to all the colleagues who would like to use the TCA tool more extensively in supporting the joint efforts of the Erasmus+ national agencies.



ISTVÁN VERES

*Head of Department, Erasmus +
Tempus Public Foundation*

INTRODUCTION

1 TCAs IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING AND THE SALTO E&T TCA RESOURCE CENTRE

Transnational Cooperation Activities (TCAs) are instruments of the Erasmus + national agencies that aim to support the Erasmus+ Programme in fulfilling its objectives and priorities.

TCAs in the field of education and training exist from 2014 and in the higher education sector these activities started only in 2017.

The SALTO¹ E&T TCA Resource Centre was established by the European Commission in 2018 with the aim to support the effective and efficient management and organisation of TCAs and to increase the quality in TCA work. Before its commencement there were no tools to assess the TCA results, and monitoring of the outcome of the transnational cooperation activities was not structured and had not been carried out on European level. The European Commission requested the SALTO E&T to implement a study to see the first TCA results in the education and training sector and to form recommendations for the further development of the Programme.

The youth sector has a long TCA history, the SALTO Youth Network consisting of seven resource centres (four thematic and three regional) celebrates its 20th anniversary this year, while TCA activities of the education and training sectors could start in 2014 under the Erasmus+ Programme's framework. Therefore the analysis at several points looked at the practice of the youth sector and it incorporated the relevant aspects in the conclusions of the chapters of this report.

According to the current Guide for National Agencies (NA Guide) implementing the Erasmus+ Programme the main goals of TCAs are to:

- bring added value and increased quality in the overall Programme implementation
- contribute to increasing the impact of the Programme at systemic level².

TCAs are organised by Erasmus+ national agencies and funded from KA2 funds.

¹ Support Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities

² 2019 Guide for National Agencies Implementing the Erasmus+ Programme and the European Solidarity Corps (chapter 5.1.1): NAconnECT Wiki » Programme Documentation » NA Guidance » Guide for National Agencies

TCAs can be workshops, seminars and other types of events or activities. According to the Guide for Erasmus+ National Agencies, NAs may organise the following types of activities in transnational cooperation in the field of education and training:

- Transnational training, support and contact seminars of potential Erasmus+ Programme participants (TSS).
- Transnational thematic activities linked to the objectives, priority target groups and themes of the Erasmus+ Programme (THO).
- Transnational evidence-based analysis of Programme results (EBAR).

2 AIM OF THIS REPORT

In 2019 the SALTO Education and Training TCA Resource Centre contracted a study on the transnational cooperation activities (TCAs) realised between 2014-2018 in the field of education and training. The aims were to present an overview of the named activities (meeting the relevant expectations of the European Commission and provide feedback to the national agencies) and to draw conclusions for the upcoming period in order to raise the quality and the impact of the TCAs in the next phase of the Erasmus Programme.

Expectations

In order to see the result of TCAs carried out between 2014-2018, the SALTO E&T ordered a study with the following specific aims:

- Summarizing TCAs numerically and typologically
- Showing the results and impact of TCAs and highlighting some good practice TCAs
- Making recommendations for TCA officers on how to organise a good quality TCA
- Drafting conclusions for the National Agencies and the Commission on how to make better use of TCA in the next phase of the Erasmus Programme

The present report, as a milestone before the next Erasmus Programme period, aims to serve

- **National agencies** for looking back on their TCA practices and for looking ahead for further improvement.
- **The European Commission** for evaluating the TCA achievements and for the further improvement of the TCA programme in order to get better results, stronger strategic approach in the future Erasmus programme.
- **SALTO E&T** to reveal and reflect on the shortcomings, providing support in the improvement of TCA lifecycle to NAs, and to link NAs' needs and expectations with that of the European Commission.

This publication will provide an overview of the present status of TCAs as concluded from the research. In addition to the study this report is also based on consultations with the TCA E&T advisory group (AG: consisting of members from senior management of some national agencies), and the TCA E&T working group (WG: consisting of TCA officers with extensive experience in the management of Erasmus+ Programme).

3 METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

In terms of methodology the research combined quantitative and qualitative methods to analyse the TCA work. Quantitative data were abstracted from the **EPlusLink**, from *SALTO-E&T RC website*³ and from a dedicated **questionnaire**⁴ sent to the NAs. Qualitative information were gathered through **interviews**⁵ conducted with representative of NAs and via the mentioned questionnaire. **Good practice TCAs were also identified** in the qualitative part. In order to draw conclusions and form recommendations some **additional related documents and websites** (eg.: SALTO Youth, Guide for NAs, previous studies of SALTO E&T TCA RC) **were reviewed**.

3.1 QUANTITATIVE METHODS

To have a full analysis data were extracted from EPlusLink with the help of the European Commission. The study compiled all data between 2014 – 2018. All realised activities registered in the EPlusLink until 11 July 2019 were taken into account considering that at the time of conducting the analysis there were still open Erasmus+ project rounds, which made the data provisional. Data on budget were not provided and the data on participants are also provisional due to the lack of common understanding of the term 'participant' (see later). Data were analysed both from hosting and sending perspective.

Since the EPlusLink does not store information about the TCA priority⁶, SALTO E&T added this information to the tables manually in order to get an insight into the statistics of TCAs from the aspect of the distribution by priorities.

Considering the above described factors **the study cannot contain data on TCAs in full precision. The status presented in this publication can only be taken as an indication and can provide basis for approximating the following years to see trends and identify problems.**

The study rather aims to highlight some challenges based on the quoted data than to present final and total numbers and results.

3.2 QUALITATIVE METHODS

The study used the following qualitative methods to gather information: a questionnaire was sent to all relevant NAs' TCA officers and interviews with NA directors and experienced TCA officers were conducted.

3 <https://salto-et.net/>

4 The Questionnaire sent to the national agencies can be found (after logging in) in the SALTO E&T website in the Documentary section.

5 The interview questions can be found (after logging in) in the SALTO E&T website in the Documentary section.

6 The Directors of National Agencies - at their Informal Meeting in Malta in 2017 – discussed the transnational cooperation activities and took stock of the strategic priorities of all NAs. The most prioritised topics were clustered to four main broad themes which were named as the four priority themes for transnational cooperation activities. These priority themes - impact, internationalisation of HE and VET institutions, professionalisation of teachers and staff and inclusion – provide a strategical focus for the TCAs in 2018-2020. The priorities are not exclusive other topics can also be proposed.

The qualitative methods served the aim of collecting information on the results and the effectiveness of TCAs in the present form. At the same time the aim was to have foresight into the upcoming years and form recommendations for the next programme period. With the help of the open questions in the questionnaire and the interviews conducted with some directors the study aimed also to identify and/or examine good examples of TCA topics, to have deeper understanding of TCA challenges and to identify challenges on systemic level.

The questionnaire was open for three weeks from 13 September 2019 to 4 October 2019. Altogether 29 NAs out of the 41 responded to it by the due deadline. (30 questionnaires were filled in since one NA provided two separate answers for different sectors.) **More than two-thirds of the NAs filled in the questionnaire (70.7%) which aimed to explore the behaviour of the NAs regarding hosting, sending, organisation and management aspects as well as advantages and difficulties in TCA work.** The distribution of responses by sectors was mostly bvalanced, since most of the NAs covered 3-4 sectors. Adult education was represented in the highest number (N: 27), there were 26 answers from the higher and school education sectors, while the VET sector was present with 24 answers, and even youth was represented with 13 NAs combined with the previously mentioned sectors. The biggest proportion of colleagues started to work with the TCAs since 2014 (N: 11), only two of them are newcomers and started in 2019. The remaining 3-5 respondents started between 2015 and 2018.

Based on the information derived from EPlusLink and identified in the questionnaires, certain NAs were chosen for interviews. **The interviews served to validate the results of the questionnaire and to explore TCAs from a strategic context focusing on NAs' TCA management activity.** The main selection criteria were the number of organised TCAs, the number of hosted TCA participants, the varied sectors in TCA events, TCA collaboration among NAs, topics, questions raised in the questionnaire, recurrent and regularly organised TCAs, examples or at least one example for all three TCA types and the size of the country. There were four NAs which answered the request (RO01, IS01, FI01 and DE02) and the representatives (director or senior TCA officer) of them were interviewed.

In order to gather all relevant data, the following documents and information were also reviewed:

- SALTO-E&T RC website (salto-et.net/)
- SALTO- Youth RC website (salto-youth.net/)
- Guide for the National Agencies (relevant chapters)
- 'All you need to know about TCAs': online training provided by SALTO E&T via Canvas
- TCA ALMANAC⁷, - Things to know about Transnational Cooperation Activities in Erasmus+: Youth in Action (March 2018)
- Looking forward, looking back – 15 years of SALTO Youth
- Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management, OECD, 2010
- Previous questionnaires and studies of SALTO-E&T
- Good practice template provided by SALTO-E&T.

4 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

IN TERMS OF NUMBERS the study concluded that over 220 events were carried out, approximately 12,000 participants were hosted, and out of them almost 6,000 participants were sent for TCA in the school, vocational, adult and higher education sectors between 2014 and 2018. It means that the distribution of national and international participants at TCAs is closely even.

The school education **sector** (KA215) hosted the highest number of events and participants too. The second place is taken by the VET sector, followed by the adult and the higher education sectors. This latter, while getting the opportunity only in 2017 to organise TCAs, is catching up with the adult education TCAs in terms of hosted events and sending numbers.

The **number of events** and also of participants shows an increase over the years between 2014-2017; in 2018 we notice a slight fall compared to 2017.

In terms of TCA **types** contact seminars (TSS) were the most popular activity followed by the thematic events (THO). The research TCAs (EBAR) are less in number, however – due to their different nature - these cannot directly be compared with the statistics of the previous two.

Almost all the NAs **were active in the hosting role** implying that TCA is an attractive and useful tool from the NAs' perspective. It was highlighted in the interviews that **NAs consider TCA a flexible tool that can be valuable to fulfil both strategic and operational aims.**

Regarding how the TCA serves the original aim defined by the Guide for NAs (bringing added value and increased quality in the overall Programme implementation; contributing to increasing impact of the Programme at systemic level) national agencies replied 4 on average on a 5-point scale. NAs declared that TCAs **fully or partially reached their aims.**

National agencies spend a small portion of the available **TCA budget**, but the intensity of TCA work varies largely between the NAs both in terms of time and personnel, sometimes it seems fragmented even within an individual NA.

Regarding topics, amongst the four main (Inclusion, Internationalisation of HE and VET institutions, Impact, Professionalisation of teachers and staff) plus the 'other' priority areas agreed by NA directors in Malta, the highest rate of hosted TCAs focused on **Inclusion**. The second most popular priority area is Impact. This is followed by Internationalisation of HE and VET institutions and Professionalisation of teachers and staff showing a similar trend. "Other" category reached the lowest but still noticeable number reflecting the aspect of TCAs being a flexible tool serving the needs of the NAs.

Recognizing the value of TCAs **all agencies are involved** to some extent in such activities.

REGARDING THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TCA WORK of the NAs most agencies agree that TCA:

- is an important tool to flexibly support the needs of the NAs regarding increasing the impact of the Programme,
- brings added value and increases quality in the overall Programme implementation,
- at least partially contributes to increasing the impact of the Programme at systemic level. The good practice collection demonstrates that the success of the TCAs is manifested in various ways.

However the engagement in TCA work varies largely among the NAs and offering hosting activities is not balanced in the Erasmus+ programme countries.

NAs mentioned that working on TCAs is **fragmented and according to the TCA E&T Working Group there is high fluctuation among the TCA officers**. More NAs mentioned that they find it hard to devote time for such activities and it happens that TCA work is carried out in extra work time.

NAs mention that they face various **challenges** in the TCA work, namely:

- In general, NAs say that realisation of TCA events are quite **time consuming** and the administration is complicated.
- Clear **definitions** regarding TCA partnership and terminology are missing, which makes cooperation difficult and results in incoherent data keeping.
- **Lack of funding models** increases the time of preparatory work.
- Complicated **administration** puts too much burden on the officers.
- **Double administration resulting from shortcomings** (lack of synchronization) of the IT system(s) is difficult to handle.
- **Evaluation of outcomes** and carrying out follow up is challenging for the NAs.
- It is hard to **excerpt statistics from the EPlusLink** in a user friendly form.
- **Reliability of data excerpted from the EPlusLink** shall be considered with caution due to the incoherencies of the interpretation of the terminology and the timeliness and precision of the data keeping which needs improvement.
- **The registered data – once correctly and coherently kept – can provide quantitative overview, but does not provide information on TCAs' outcomes and impact.**
- **There are no solid methods** to measure the success of TCAs either on the level of individual events or at systemic level.
- Apart from the uncertainties and **difficulties in administration**, some NAs also noted that they would welcome **more guidance**, common paths in terms of TCA strategy.

All in all TCA projects demand high level of administration while they are short-term projects (2.2 days-long on average) and their impact is rather indirect, and in many cases it cannot be traced on the level of the individual TCA event.

Despite all challenges the value of the TCAs perceived by the NAs is evident and the results are clearly noticeable. Certainly, there is a lot to do in the future to make TCAs more strategic, more efficient and increased in volume but bearing in mind that TCAs are available in the education and training sectors only from 2014, and the only SALTO supporting the NAs in this respect has been existing for two years, we have good reasons to permit positive expectations for the future in terms of the impact of the TCAs.

In the following chapters the findings of the research will be presented describing in detail the challenges and the conclusions.

REALISED TCAS FROM NUMERICAL POINT OF VIEW

1 MAIN PRINCIPLES OF DATA ANALYSIS OF THE TCA RESULTS

As mentioned before, the data of realised TCAs were extracted from EPlusLink, as the NAs registered the TCAs in the database⁸.

The following list of data were provided by the European Commission:

Transnational Cooperation ID, Action Type Code (KA215, KA216, KA217, KA220), Agency Code, Training Area Code (TSS, THO, EBAR), Training Status Code (realized, cancelled, cancelled with eligible costs, planned), Call Year, Title, Hosting Countries, Coordinating Agencies, Partner Agencies, Start Date, Final Payment Date, Participants Number.

Since neither the EPlusLink nor the Guide for NAs explained the definition for the above-mentioned terms regarding TCAs, the study revealed that the lack of clear definitions created some anomalies in data keeping in case of host/coordinating/sending and partner agency.

Since the **time period** embraced by the study was 1 January 2014 – 11 July 2019 and based on the definition of the organising period, planned TCAs have to be realised in the period of 1 January N till 30 June N+1, thus TCAs included in the analysis took place in the 2014 – 2018 budget years. The study contains the following project rounds: 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, and TCAs with 'realised status' in EPlusLink of 2018 budget year until 11 July 2019.

Planned, cancelled and cancelled with eligible costs statuses were not taken into account.

The study mentions planned activities beside the realised numbers in certain cases especially in case of project round 2018, which was still open at the time of carrying out the analysis.

International events were counted only, however certain **events** were also organised on **local level** under the umbrella of TCAs. *Eg: European events relevant to Erasmus+ (European Youth Week, 30th anniversary of Erasmus), the establishment and implementation of the network of role models for social inclusion, activities in the field of youth addressing policy themes highly relevant at*

⁸ According to the status of 11 July 2019

European level which are connected to Erasmus+ (implementation of Paris Declaration, integration of refugees/asylum seekers, European Solidarity Corps).

These national TCA events added up 2,603 participants in case of Erasmus 30th anniversary and 1,904 participants in case of Role model theme according to the EPlusLink data. Since there was no place to indicate whether it had been a national or an international event, we handled them as national ones⁹ and these were not added to the total numbers.

Since the SALTO E&T is responsible for the school, vocational, adult and higher educational sectors, and the youth area has its own SALTOs, the study summarized the results of all TCAs (including also the cross field¹⁰ events) except for the ones which targeted only the youth sector.

The following data were summarized in the analysis:

FROM HOSTING PERSPECTIVE

- Number of hosted TCAs
- Number of hosted TCAs by priority
- Number of hosted TCA participants
- Number of TCA participants/sector
- Number of participants according to training area codes
- Number of participants and TCAs/organising NAs
- Average length of hosted TCAs

FROM SENDING PERSPECTIVE

- Number of sent TCA participants/year
- Number of sent TCA participants/sector
- Number of sent TCA participants/training area codes

2 REALISED TCAS FROM HOSTING PERSPECTIVE

2.1 NUMBER OF HOSTED TCAS

The first indicator which was considered when summarizing the outcomes of TCAs is the number of hosted TCAs.

While calculating the number of hosted TCAs certain problems occurred, which caused duplicates and even triplicates in the data. To make the calculation reliable all recurrences had to be deleted.

⁹ The assumption was based on consultation with representatives of the specific NAs who affirmed that these types of events are in most cases national events.

¹⁰ Events which targeted one or more sectors from the E&T field and the youth sector

Challenge concerning the indication of TCA sectors:

Unfortunately, while aggregating the total number of hosted TCAs, we also faced indication problems, which resulted in the repetition of TCAs.

When NAs register their TCAs, only one sector can be ticked, while the TCA can address more sectors. In case NAs want to register more sectors, they have to copy the TCA event in EPlusLink as many times as many sectors their TCA addresses.

It resulted in higher number of TCAs than the real number, so to get the final number, duplications had to be deleted.

Although when summarizing the data we have to keep in mind that intention of organising a cross-sectoral TCA is not always clear either. The title of the TCA may suggest that it is a cross-sectoral event, but then some NAs registered only one sector instead of the suggested ones. After deleting the duplicates and clarifying some mis-registrations (directly with certain NAs) we can see the following numbers:

TABLE 1 - NUMBER OF REALISED HOSTED TCAS – CLEARED VERSION (ORIGINAL NUMBER)

	KA215	KA216	KA217	KA220	CROSS SECTORAL	TOTAL NUMBER
2014	5 (8)	8 (11)	2 (4)	0(0)	3	18 (23)
2015	12 (26)	10 (29)	2 (13)	0(0)	12	36 (68)
2016	17 (28)	9 (26)	6 (18)	0(0)	8	40 (72)
2017	19 (36)	18 (36)	4 (19)	5(19)	18	64 (110)
2018	20 (28)	10 (16)	8 (12)	7(12)	6	51 (68)
TOTAL NUMBER	73 (126)	55 (118)	22 (66)	12 (31)	47	209 (341)

A column was added with cross-sectoral title, which helps to summarize the number of TCA events with more sectors involved. Approximately 209 events were organised between 2014 and 2018. School sector was the most active, VET is in the second place but there is a significant number of cross-sectoral events also: 20% of all TCAs involved more than one sector.

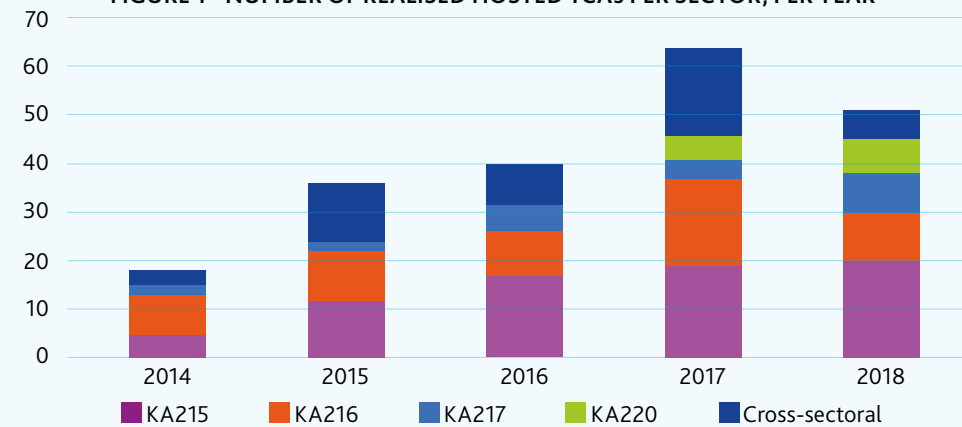
Worth to note:

Cross-sectoral event covers those ones where two or more sectors are addressed, but having a clear definition and the possibility of indicating "cross-sectoral" event in EPlusLink could minimize the duplications and could help the the right interpretation of NAs concerning the sectors.

Number of hosted TCAs per sector

The next figure shows that concerning the number of the organised 209 events 2017 was the peak year.

FIGURE 1 - NUMBER OF REALISED HOSTED TCAs PER SECTOR, PER YEAR

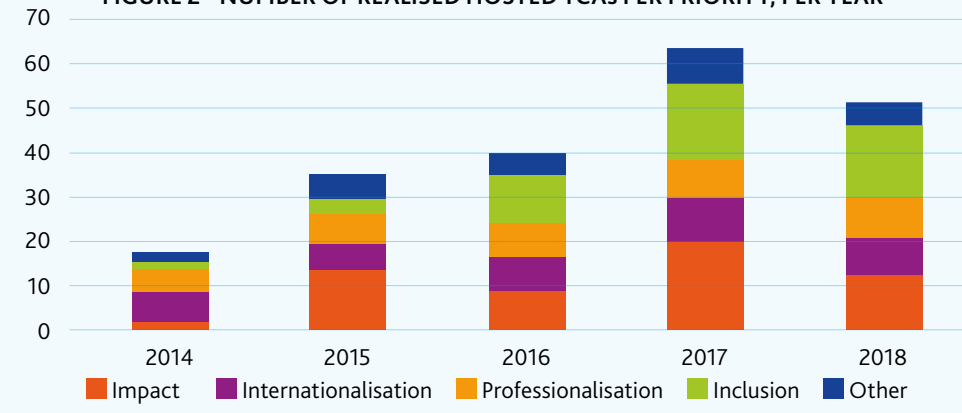


Number of hosted TCAs per priority area

In order to have a picture of hosted TCAs from the aspect of topics, all events were classified under a priority area. Since the EPlusLink does not store information about the TCA priority¹¹, SALTO E&T added this information to the tables manually in order to get an insight into the statistics of TCAs from the aspect of the distribution by priorities.

The figure below represents the distribution by priority. From 2016, topics tackling **Inclusion** became the most popular in the case of hosted TCAs. NAs organised TCAs in **Impact** area on the second place. This is followed by **Internationalisation and Professionalisation of teachers and staff** showing similar ratio in all five years. TCAs that could not have been categorized under the four main priority areas got the label "**Other**". Although the "Other" category comprised the lowest number of events, there were some TCAs which belonged in this set, eg. "International Conference on European Year of Cultural Heritage" and "Govorim- I speak".

FIGURE 2 - NUMBER OF REALISED HOSTED TCAs PER PRIORITY, PER YEAR



¹¹ The Directors of National Agencies - at their Informal Meeting in Malta in 2017 - discussed the transnational cooperation activities and took stock of the strategic priorities of all NAs. The most prioritised topics were clustered to four main broad themes which were named as the **four priority themes for transnational cooperation activities**. These priority themes - impact, internationalisation of HE and VET institutions, professionalisation of teachers and staff and inclusion - provide a strategical focus for the TCAs in 2018-2020. The priorities are not exclusive, other topics can also be proposed.

Hosting activity of the NAs and recurrent topics

At the time of data collection 41 NAs were entitled to organise TCA events in the field of education and training. During the examined period 35 NAs have organised TCA events, which means that **five¹² NAs have not hosted** TCAs yet. When we check the list of the countries which did not host a TCA, we can see that these are mostly small or new countries from the Programme perspective.

Certain NAs are quite **active in hosting TCAs**. Examining the list of the events it can be seen that there are several recurrent topics and certain countries organise TCAs with the same title or topic. Recurrent topics can be taken over from one NA to another and there are countries which organise TCAs with the same topic recurrently on an annual basis.

Some examples are:

- CZ01 has organised the same TCA in 2016, 2017 and 2018: "Using eTwinning in School To School Partnerships"
- DE03 organises "Towards High Quality in KA1 Mobility Projects for School Education Staff" TCA with similar titles, where the target group changes year by year:
 - o A Dialogue between National Agencies and Course Providers" (2015)
 - o A Dialogue between National Agencies, Course Providers and Schools" (2016)
 - o A Dialogue between Schools, Course Providers and National Agencies (2018).
- Based on their country feature, Estonian NA organises annual **cross-sectoral contact seminar** "Enhancing Digital Competencies in Education & Training" (2016, 2017, 2018).
- Training programme on "Internationalisation strategies in VET" is a recurrent topic, however the hosting NAs change year by year. It has been organised by FI01, NL01, HU01 and hosted by other countries too (ES01, DE02).
- RO01 has organised TCA with the title "Connector" four times in a row, and they have other recurrent topics too.

Worth to note:

When examining the roles of the NAs we looked for "contributing NA", "coordinating NA", "host NA", "sending NA" in EPlusLink, since the Guide for NAs refers to the named roles. The "contributing NA" status does not exist in EPlusLink data. Incoherency can be identified, since the difference between the hosting NA role and the coordinating NA role is not explained.

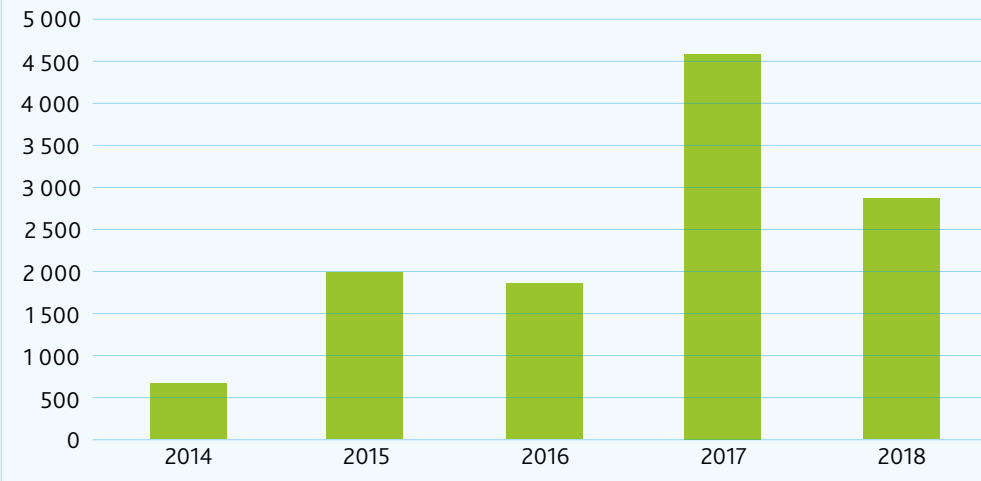
2.2 NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS OF HOSTED TCAs

Since the number of TCA events are not precise due to the redundant registrations and the lack of selecting the cross-sectoral option, another indicator, **the number of TCA participants** was also examined to have a picture of TCAs from this respect.

Adding up the yearly figures we see that 11,904 participants were hosted between 2014 – 2018 via the 209 TCAs.

¹² In case of UK, only the UK01 is registered as sending / hosting institution. It is due to the unique partnership between the British Council and Ecorys. In case of TCAs organised by the British NA, both agencies, UK01 and UK02 have to be taken into account.

FIGURE 3 - TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS IN REALISED TCAs PER YEAR



It was predictable that the first year was not easy for the NAs due to the change and shift to the new Erasmus+ Programme, thus the new TCA option did not attract many NAs and participants. The number of participants started to grow in the following years, although the increase is not continuous.

Since the study could not take data of the 2018 project round fully into account, to further examine the trend, the number of participants of TCAs registered with planned status in the EPlusLink were also counted. Looking at the final number of participants adding the planned TCAs' data we came to the conclusion that the numbers of the 2018 project round are still lower than that of the 2017 round, so the planned numbers did not affect the total number of participants significantly.

When providing the data, the European Commission highlighted that NAs might have calculated participants differently.

Challenge concerning the lack of TCA participants' definition:

Since there is no proper definition of TCA participants, it is not clear who were counted in case of an event. There can be several options:

- foreign applicants' representatives;
- national applicants' representatives;
- experts, trainers;
- hosting NA colleagues;
- other NAs' representatives.

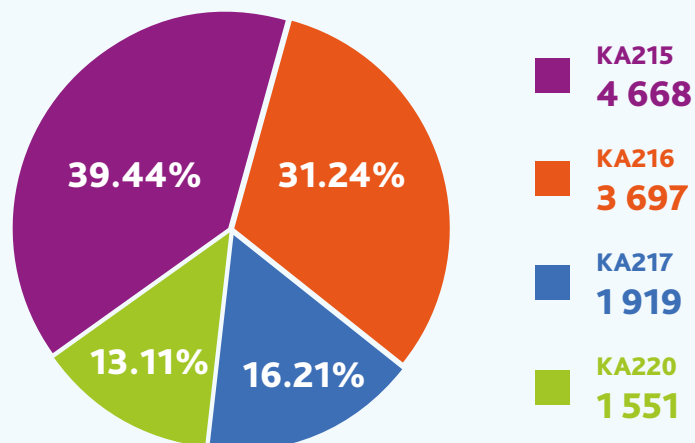
Worth to note:

The definition of TCA participant roles is suggested to be clarified (sent / hosted, national / international, expert / participant, NA representative) to increase the coherency of data keeping.

Number of TCA participants per sector

The number and distribution of participants can be examined **from sectors' perspective too**. As we can see from Figure 4 the school education sector (KA215) has the highest number of participants, VET is on the second place (KA216) followed by the adult (KA217) and the higher education sector (KA220).

FIGURE 4 - TOTAL NUMBER OF TCA PARTICIPANTS PER SECTOR



It has to be taken into account that the higher education sector started to organise TCAs only from 2017, which explains their lower numbers. Even though HE started to organise TCAs, later their TCA mobilities are not far left behind the adult education sector. Should the dynamism of the HE sector remain unchanged it can be anticipated that within a few years the higher education sector will exceed the TCA participants of the adult education sector.

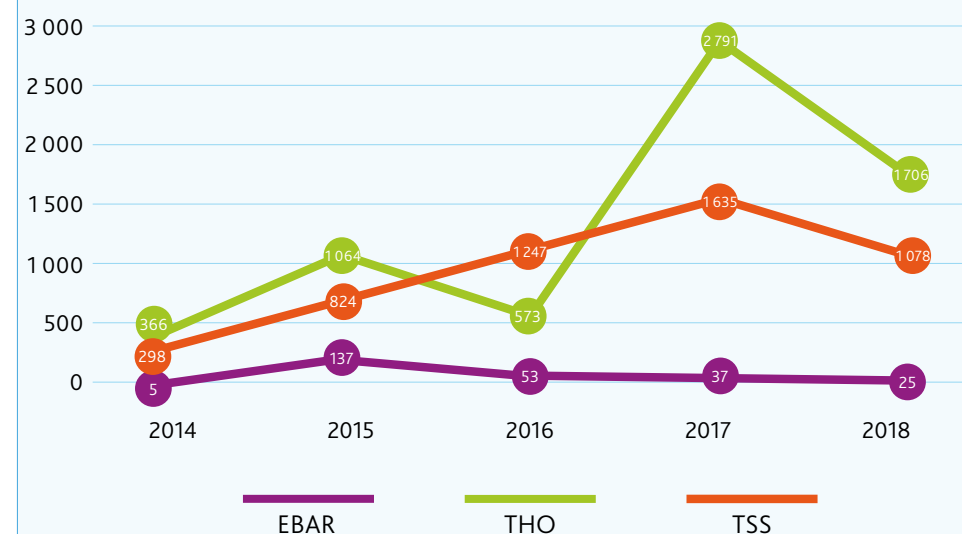
Number of participants according to training area

In the field of education and training, three types of TCA events are available:

- Transnational training, support and contact seminars of potential Erasmus+ Programme participants (TSS).
- Transnational thematic activities linked to the objectives, priority target groups and themes of the Erasmus+ Programme (THO).
- Transnational evidence-based analysis of Programme results (EBAR).

In the case of the EBAR type of TCA the number of participants is not an appropriate indicator since their main focus is rather the analysis than mobility. Therefore, it is clear that the EBAR type of TCA includes less participants than the other two types. Thematic activities seem to attract more people than contact seminars. Nevertheless, the numbers need to be handled with caution since TSS and THO types are not easy to differentiate.

FIGURE 5 - NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS ACCORDING TO TRAINING AREA CODES



Challenge concerning further clarification and need for different indicators for TCA types:

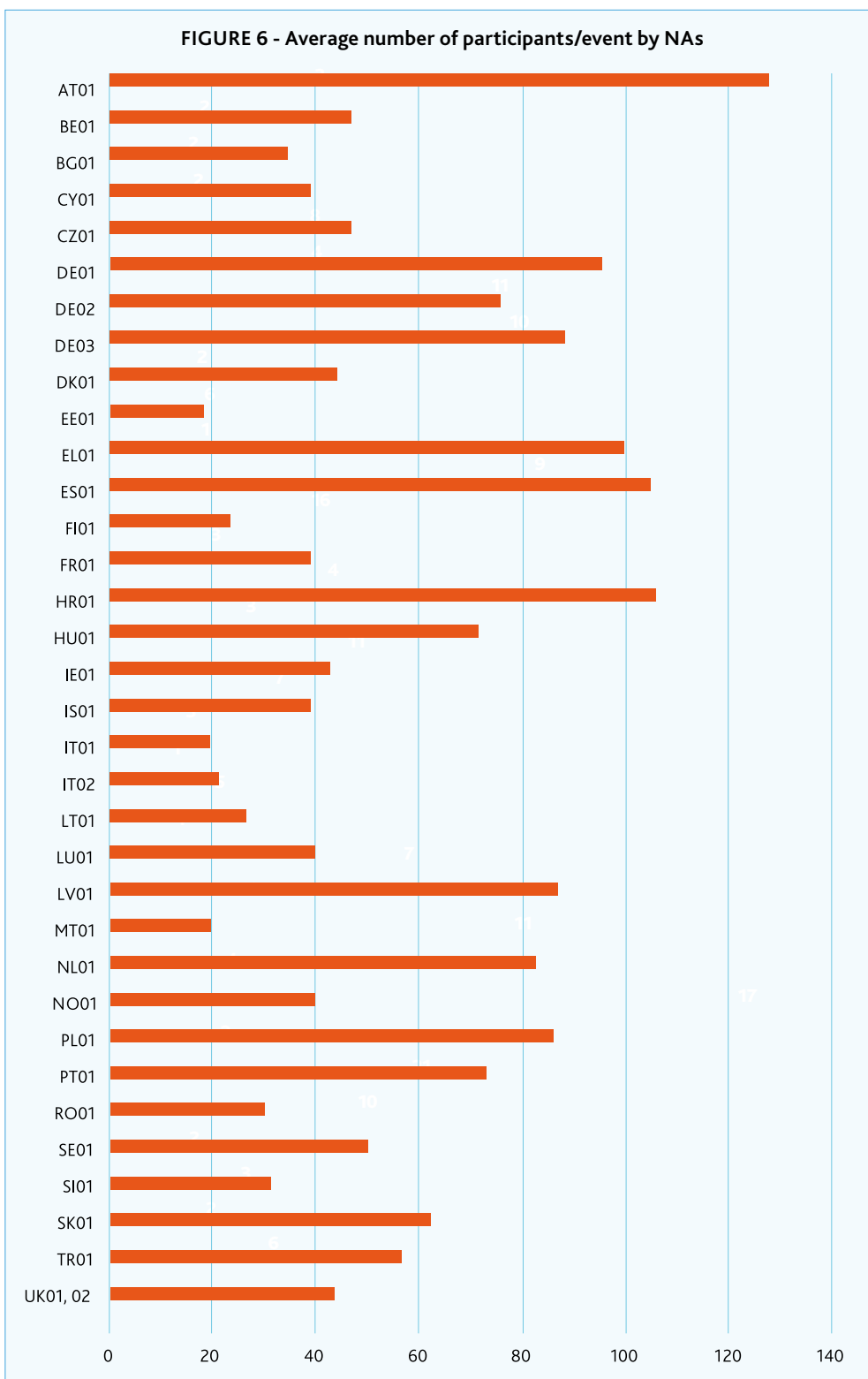
TCAs need further clarification also in the terms of the type of the activity. The problem with calculation is not only that the number of participants is not an appropriate indicator in the case of the EBAR type of TCA but TSS and THO types are not easy to differentiate and the categorisation is not coherent among the NAs.

Worth to note:

Clear definition of the training codes (TSS, THO, EBAR) would minimise the anomalies in the system. While TSS and THO types of TCAs focus on the event itself, where the number of mobilities are proper quantitative indicators, in case of EBAR type it is rather the process, which is important, hence different qualitative "indicator" would also be necessary to define.

It can also be examined how the **number of TCAs relates to the number of participants and organising NAs**. The next diagram shows the countries and the number of TCA participants per event by countries (above 800 participants):

The participants/ event ratio ranges from 18 to almost 130 participants illustrating that NAs may use TCA differently according to their needs and goals.



2.3 AVERAGE LENGTH OF TCAS

The length of TCAs is the criterion where we can find the most anomalies and uncertainty of understanding. Usually the NAs indicate the exact days of the events, while some NAs registered TCAs with some month-length due to EBAR characteristics. If we eliminate the extreme data, we can conclude that the average length of TCAs (events) are:

TABLE 2 - AVERAGE LENGTH (DAYS) OF TCAS / YEAR

YEAR	AVERAGE LENGTH (DAY)
2014	2.1
2015	2.1
2016	2.3
2017	2.3
2018	2.6

TABLE 3 - AVERAGE LENGTH (DAYS) OF TCAS / SECTOR

SECTOR	AVERAGE LENGTH (DAY)
KA215	2.2
KA216	2.2
KA217	2.2
KA220	2.2

TABLE 4 - AVERAGE LENGTH (DAYS) OF TCAS / TRAINING TYPE

TRAINING CODE	AVERAGE LENGTH (DAY)
EBAR	1
THO	2.1
TSS	2.3

Challenge concerning further clarification and need for different indicators for TCA types:
 These numbers serve just as indicative days since there is **no common interpretation** for the length of TCAs. Countries mostly indicated the TCA event days, only few of them registered TCA events measured in months, particularly in case of EBAR type. It is also a question whether the preparation phase for TCAs shall be considered somehow when analysing the length of the TCAs.

Worth to note:
 Counting the length of TCAs in days better fit to **TSS and THO trainings while EBAR type usually lasts longer and the process and the period are in the focus, rather than one event itself**. EBAR TCAs tend to contain only short meetings with experts and the activity takes place between these meetings and lasts for weeks or even months. In the case of TSS and THO also the preparation phase could be taken into consideration when indicating the length of a programme.

3 REALISED TCAs FROM SENDING PERSPECTIVE

Looking at the volume of TCAs from the sending perspective we can:

- get information on the number of **sent TCA participants** (per country, per year, per sector, according to the training codes);
- calculate the number of **national participants** (which can be concluded by subtracting the sent numbers from the hosted numbers);
- identifying further anomalies in the system by checking against the **hosted TCAs**.

Unfortunately the sending side of TCA data keeping seems vaguer than the host side. In certain cases the database contains extremely high (more than 30 or even 100) number of participants implying that national participants were indicated as well as 'sent participants'. In reality, one NA sends and finances 2-5 participants per events. The average number of sent participants is 2.1 persons¹³.

Challenge concerning mis-registration of TCA participants:

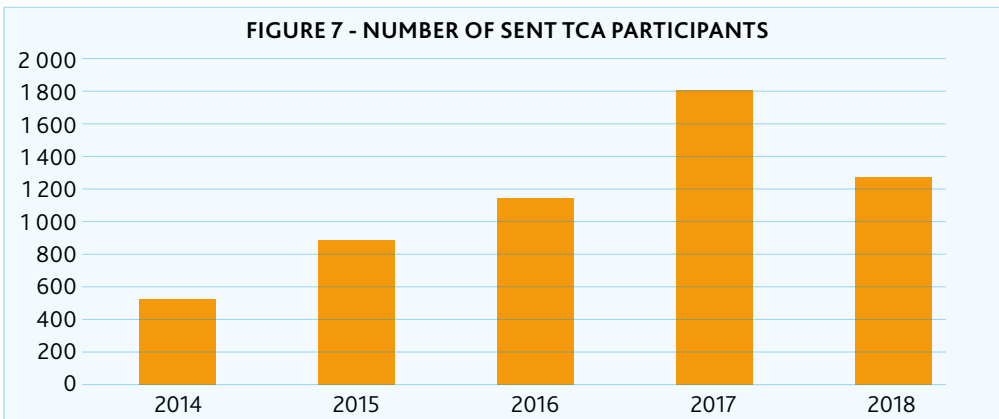
Where more than 30 sent participants were indicated we presumed that mis-registration might have happened. These mis-registrations caused more than 1,100 "extra" participants in the system therefore the data had to be considered as extreme anomalies and thus were deleted.

Worth to note:

Having seen the anomalies on the sending side (e.g. "sending" 30-70 or even 100 participants), it is worth considering to have drop-down menus with limited number of participants in the case of TCA sending side. It is also advisable to clarify the definition of "sent participant".

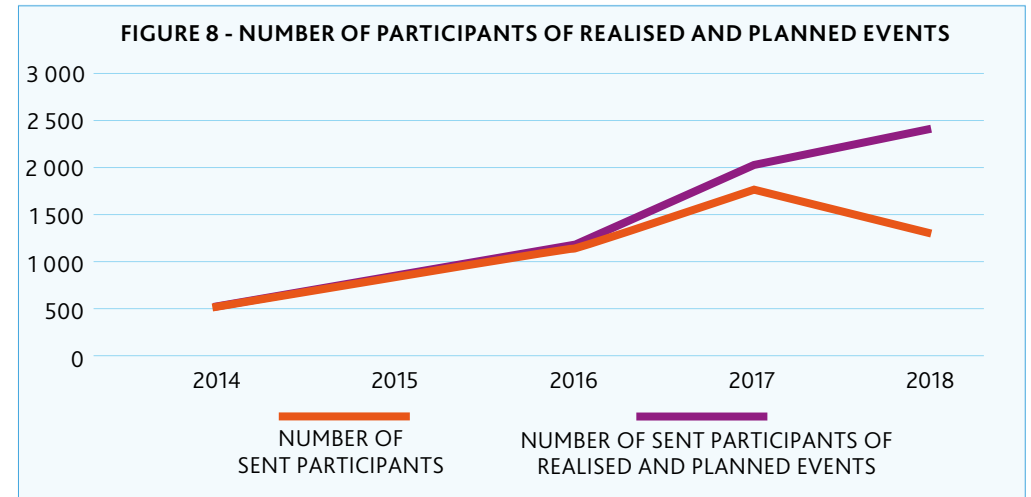
3.1 NUMBER OF SENT TCA PARTICIPANTS

When summarizing the available sending data with realised status, we can see that the number of sent participants are growing year by year, except for 2018.



¹³ Taking the 0-participant sending into account, but not counting the 30 or more sendings which are very likely the total number of participants or participants including the national ones as well.

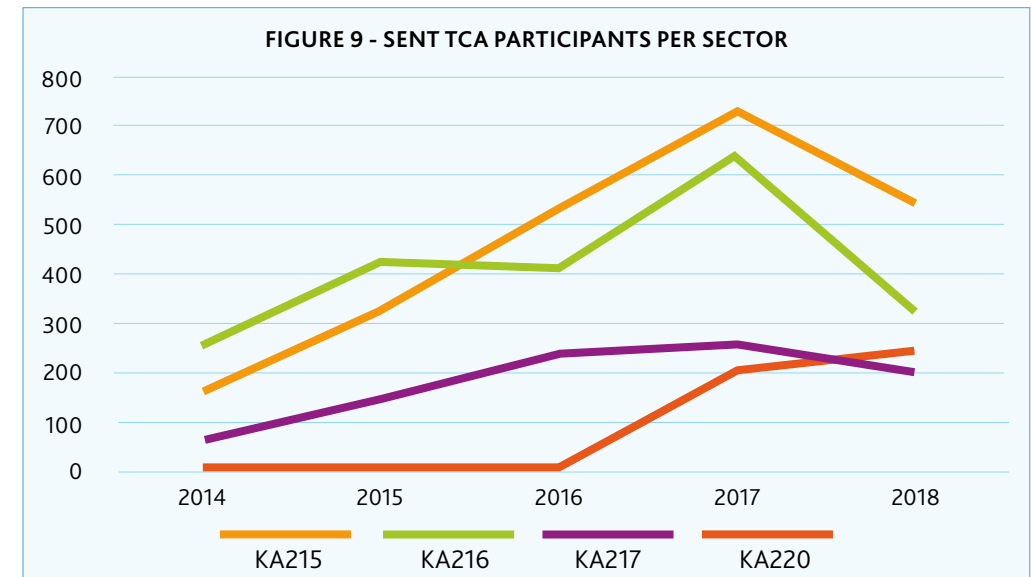
Since the year of 2018 had not been closed yet at the time of carrying out the research, we examined the planned data as well, keeping in mind that these are provisional data. Adding the number of sent participants of the realised and the planned events, we can assume that after finalising the relevant data in EPlusLink the 'sent participants' indicator will increase in 2018.



Number of sent participants per sector per year

The following figure shows the number of sent participants per sector separately, in each of the project rounds. If the planned sending numbers are taken into consideration, all sectors forecast growing numbers for the 2018 project round.

In case of the school and the higher education sectors we can examine a steadily growing trend, while the VET sector experienced small decline in 2016. The increase in the case of the adult education sector is not significant either.



Challenge concerning NA staff's participation:

Beside the average TCA participants, NAs can also be represented at an event. Unfortunately the EPlusLink does not provide registration option for the **NA colleagues**, although NA colleagues' participation could be financed from TCA budget if they take part as trainers or facilitators. In all other cases their costs shall be covered from NA organisation budget. Therefore, EPlusLink cannot provide number of participating NA colleagues from other countries, however at least 1-2 NA colleagues are represented at most events.

Challenge concerning national participants' registration:

The situation with **national participants** (participants from the hosting NA's country) is the same as in the case of NA colleagues: there is no registration option in EPlusLink, however costs occur regarding their participation as well. It is assumed that the hosting NA registers them in the system. The difference between the number of participants from the sending and the hosting side in the table below gives the number of the national invitees of a TCA.

Worth to note:

As already stated in the section presenting the hosting point of view, **pre-defining TCA participants in the Guide for NAs would be important**. It would give extra information if the background of the participants were registered and would help to get more precise data on the number of foreign participants, participants from the hosting country, NA representatives, etc.

According to the database provided by the European Commission the number of hosted TCA participants were 11,930, while there were 5,688 participants on the sending side. **We can assume that the number of national participants was 6,242.**

TABLE 5 - DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE HOSTED AND SENT TCA PARTICIPANTS

Total nr of hosted participants	11 930
Total nr of sent participants	5 688
Difference	6 242

Data show that the proportion of **national participants** is around 52%, while the international invitees are 48%. If we take the uncertainty of whom to count as participants into account, we can state that the ratio of national and international participants at TCA events is almost even.

SECTOR	KA215		KA216		KA217		KA220	
	Hosted	Sent	Hosted	Sent	Hosted	Sent	Hosted	Sent
2014	230	173	353	267	86	79	-	0
2015	875	319	802	423	344	146	-	0
2016	843	514	609	407	421	249	-	0
2017	1 759	733	1 365	613	588	256	846	200
2018	1 073	545	617	317	430	200	689	247
Total number	4 780	2 284	3 746	2 027	1 869	930	1 535	447

If we also consider the planned numbers, the proportion is more or less the same, still slightly higher on the hosting side.

TABLE 6 - NUMBER OF PLANNED AND REALISED PARTICIPANTS (HOSTED AND SENT)

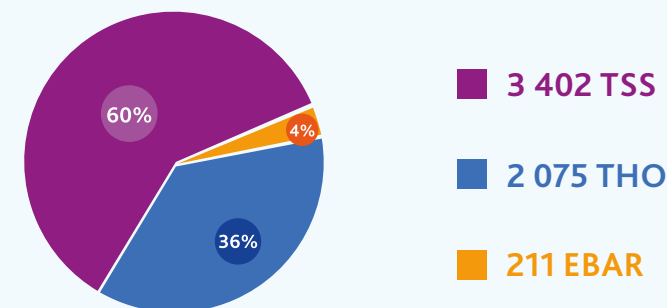
YEAR / STATUS	HOSTING (PLN, RLS)*	SENDING (PLN, RLS)	DIFFERENCE
2014	669	519	150
2015	2 021	894	1 127
2016	1 873	1 180	693
2017	4 725	2 021	2 704
2018	3 842	2 446	1 396
Total number	13 130	7 060	6 070

*PLN: planned, RLS: realised

Number of sent participants by TCA type

The sent participants can also be examined from the **training code perspective**. The pie chart shows that TSS type was the most popular one among the sent participants, THO is in the second place and the smallest number of participants were sent to EBAR-type of TCAs¹⁴.

FIGURE 10 - NUMBER OF SENT PARTICIPANTS ACCORDING TO THE TRAINING TYPES



4 CONCLUSIONS OF THE DATA ANALYSIS

TCA activities attracted approximately 12,000 people during the examined 5-year-long period (between 2014 – 2018). It is quite a high number, taking into account that TCA was a new tool for both the NAs and the beneficiaries.

¹⁴ As it was mentioned earlier the number of participants in the case of EBAR type of TCAs is not the most appropriate indicator, however in lack of a better statistics we included it in the distribution chart.

Over 6,000 participants were sent for TCA in the school, vocational, adult and higher education sectors, which means that the distribution of national and international participants at TCAs is closely even.

The school education **sector** (KA215) hosted the highest number of events and participants too. The second place is taken by the VET sector, followed by the adult and the higher education sectors. This latter, while getting the opportunity only in 2017 to organise TCAs, is catching up with the adult education TCAs in terms of hosted events and sending numbers.

The **number of events** and also of participants shows an increase over the years between 2014-2017, while in 2018 we notice a slight fall compared to 2017.

In terms of TCA **types** contact seminars (TSS) were the most popular activity followed by the thematic events (THO). The research TCAs (EBAR) are less in number, however – due to their different nature - these cannot directly be compared with the statistics of the previous two.

Almost all the NAs were active in the hosting role, which leads to the conclusion that TCA is an attractive and useful tool from the NAs' perspective.

Regarding topics, amongst the four main (Inclusion, Internationalisation of HE and VET institutions, Impact, Professionalisation of teachers and staff) plus the 'other' **priority areas** agreed by NA directors in Malta, the highest rate of hosted TCAs focused on Inclusion. The second most popular priority area is Impact. This is followed by Internationalisation of HE and VET institutions and Professionalisation of teachers and staff showing a similar trend. "Other" category reached the lowest but still noticeable number, reflecting the aspect of TCAs being a flexible tool serving the needs of the NAs.

The study highlighted several anomalies in the registering of the data in EPlusLink and the system also misses common understanding of certain points, roles and definitions which are recommended to be specified in the next Programme phase.

TCAS FROM ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT ASPECTS

As mentioned before the study also used qualitative methods to gather information about NA's processes regarding TCAs. Questionnaires were sent to TCA officers, and directors or senior TCA coordinators of certain NAs were chosen for personal interviews to give feedback on the key challenges identified in the questionnaires.

1 TCA PROCESSES – DECISION-MAKING

Questions about decision-making process contained four aspects: hosting a TCA, TCA topics and aims, type of the TCA (TSS, THO, EBAR) and cross-sectoral cooperation within the TCA.

According to the answers the decision-making process varies to some extent, but mostly colleagues from the relevant sectors prepare and make recommendations, and the **NA director makes the final decision**. Decision-making (TCA planning) is mainly based on needs' analysis, former TCA-feedbacks relevant national/regional policy documents.

Among the questionnaire respondents four NAs gave more thorough explanation on their decision-making process:

- FR01 indicated that they have general priorities, which affect the type of TCAs they organise.
- BE02 has four long-term priorities (STEM, inclusion, educators, languages) which affect their decision on TCAs.
- DE03 reported that TCAs could be related to current educational affairs.
- IE01 reported that cross-sectoral cooperation was an issue they try to keep in focus.

2 TCA TOPIC SELECTION

We could see from the statistical data that some **topics were recurrent**, however it was not always obvious from the titles of the event. Hence, the questionnaire asked whether the NAs have organised TCAs with recurrent topics and the answers were more or less balanced: (16 No, 4 Yes). Some examples can be read in data analysis part, point 2.1.

For the motivation of organising TCA with recurrent topics, NAs answered that their decision was mostly based on needs' analysis (13) and feedback from previously organised TCAs (13).

The reason behind not organising TCAs with recurrent topic was that some of the NAs did not see the added value of repeating the same topic (5) and others did not have resources to organise TCAs in successive years (6). Also offering broad variety of TCA topics and covering different sectors' needs in every year was in the background.

Worth to note:

The interviews also confirmed that however TCAs intend to improve the quality and the impact of the Erasmus+ programme on systemic level, **the events and their topics are decided** on country level. Priorities give an orientation but there is no other guidance, rule or decision which could streamline the events at European level.

The study aimed to examine to what extent TCAs include the topic of digitalization and how much new digital tools are applied as part of their methodology. We found that among the topics there are references of digitalization (to a small extent) but there are hardly any traces of using new, digital method in organising TCAs (namely partly or fully virtual events). Only a few virtual events have been organised so far.

YOUTH PERSPECTIVE: The topics in youth sector are elaborated by a group of NAs with a steering committee in charge. This is called TCA/NET Working Group, whose main responsibility is to support the network of NAs in the development of their TCA/NET strategies. Training programmes are developed with relevant NA staff and with the involvement of experts. A part of these TCAs run annually with recurring topics and programmes, which makes the whole process and working methods easier and ensure higher quality. This working method also takes some burden off the NAs' shoulders.

In the youth sector the topics (priorities) are decided along the Youth Strategy.

3 CO-ORGANISING TCA

For the question concerning co-organising most of the NAs gave positive answer. Many of them have already organised **TCAs together with another NA** (N¹⁵: 28, Yes: 23, No: 5). The main purposes behind the cooperation were the common interest on the same topic (22), the learning opportunity from other NA(s) (15), the previous good experiences of cooperation (14) and sharing the workload and costs (11). The drive behind the decision on the co-work was the common interest (10) and mainly the geographical location – neighbouring countries tend to cooperate more (9).

Those few who did not implement common TCA with other NAs mostly gave practical answers: it seemed easier to organise alone, they lacked experience at the beginning or they have not organised TCA at all.

4 HUMAN RESOURCES

The human resources devoted to TCA management and organisation at the NAs is an interesting and important question. The questionnaire revealed the following result about **how many**

personnel works on TCAs at an NA: there is an appointed TCA officer working for an NA, but he/she usually does not work full time on TCA. Beside the TCA officer there are always other colleagues supporting TCA, mostly from the relevant sectors (22), financial colleagues (21), external experts and trainers (21), personnel responsible for the communication and PR (20) and event organisers (14). The NAs also provided feedback on the personnel in full-time equivalent (FTE) that showed that TCAs have only part-time workers, and only a few NAs can provide full-time colleagues working on TCAs. NA colleagues tend to work part time on TCA: from 10% of their working time to 30%, sometimes it reaches 50%.

Of course, the human resources related to TCAs can vary according to the available budget – smaller NAs have difficulties to organise TCAs, while bigger countries' NAs can find more HR and financial resources to organise TCAs, so there is no "one fit for all" model.

It can be seen from the answers provided by the NAs that working on TCA is fragmented both in terms of time and personnel.

Just to give some examples from the answers of the questionnaire:

- *“Actual: 0.5 TCA officer, 0.25 colleagues from relevant sectors, 0.25 administrator. Ideal: 1 TCA officer, 1 event organiser, 1 administrator, 0.5 coordinator of relevant sector”.* It adds 1 FTE colleague, whose work is divided among 3 persons. The ideal number would be 3.5, so three and a half times more people could work on it.
- *“No one works full times only with TCAs, we have split work with TCA (0.5 TCA officer, 0.3 colleague evaluating applications, 0.3 financial colleague, PR colleague). Ideal would be 1 TCA officer with help of PR colleague to promote events and external event organiser for hosting TCAs.”*
- *“There are no full-time TCA officers at the moment. TCA officers have to juggle their TCA work with other works on other Key Actions.”* (TCA officer)

YOUTH PERSPECTIVE: Although examining the personnel of youth TCA was out of scope of this study, yet some NAs provided information on it as well. We have to highlight that the HR capacity of youth personnel in terms of TCAs is higher than in case of E&T.

Youth is only one sector and its SALTOs (in 2019 already four thematic and three regional) have been providing support to the NAs for almost 20 years. The youth sector works with more balanced human resources, sometimes with more than one TCA officers allocated to the tasks. At the same time, **E&T covers four sectors and compared to that their TCAs clearly did not get as many personnel.** It was also underlined by the NA directors that organising an international TCA event needs many efforts, however their resources and infrastructure are limited. The TCA officer usually coordinates the tasks and cooperates closely with sector representative colleagues and event organisers.

Based on the elaborated trainings at some NAs in the youth sector often outsources some activities: certain companies or NGO-s are involved in the organising phase.

5 BUDGET

Beside the HR capacity of NAs **the budget spent** on TCAs is also worth to be examined in order to get a picture how the NAs capitalize on the transnational cooperation opportunity. In **case of most of the sectors the rate of spending the available funds remains low, i.e. most responding NAs use less than 20% of the eligible funds and only few consume between 20 and 40%.**

The low spending means that the available budget was not spent on TCA, but it does not remain unspent since it can be used for KA2 or transferred to other actions.

However the spending of the available budget is low, most of the NAs say that **without the E+ financial support they could not finance valuable activities similar to the TCAs.**

Since **TCAs have to be implemented with a co-financing of minimum 5% from other than EU resources** most NAs indicated that they cover national contribution from the TCA staff costs and partial reimbursement of the travel costs by the participants, and in some cases NAs use national or other funds.

Concluding on the budget line: 14 NAs said that allocating TCA from KA2 budget was reasonable, while 16 NAs indicated that TCA budget should be allocated from a separate budget category.

6 PERIOD OF TCA IMPLEMENTATION

Concerning the time period given to TCA implementation 28 NAs gave positive feedback: 1.5-year (budget year) time is enough to organise the planned TCA activities, while there was one remark highlighting that the indicated period for EBAR may not be enough. It is in line with the results of the statistical analysis, that TSS and THO tend to "produce" within a shorter period of time, while the research time of activities demands longer time.

7 TCA TYPES

The questionnaire asked respondents about the clarity of the **definition of the three types of TCAs.**

Challenge regarding the definition of the TCA types:

Two thirds of the NAs (20) answered that all the three types were clear for them. Five NAs reported that it was hard to see the difference between TSS and THO, while 3 NAs said that EBAR type was not clear. Two NAs replied that all the three types were unclear for them.

Worth to note:

A more elaborated definition could help to differentiate among the three TCA types.

According to the interviews TSS and THO types are the most popular TCAs, while few EBAR TCAs have also been carried out. Even though EBAR is a good tool for the follow-up and evaluation of the Erasmus+ Programme's results and impact, only a few NAs coordinate this type of TCA. EBAR TCAs can produce tangible outputs: researches, analysis which can directly influence the programme and improve its processes.

Concerning **new types of TCA** the following ideas were mentioned:

- TCA as a training tool for NA staff / Exchange of good practice only between NA officers / Thematic NA networks
- Preparatory visit
- Study visits for beneficiaries
- National activities in the TCA
- Conference-style TCAs
- Special Erasmus+ training with given topics (e.g.: internationalisation at home, project writing, alumni networks).

8 TARGET GROUPS

The NAs identified new target groups to address in the new programme era.

Considering the previously non-target groups and topics half of the NAs gave suggestions:

- NA staff, TCA officers
- Participants with special needs, people with fewer opportunities
- E-sports - and sports in general.

Considering already covered target groups according to the respondents more attention should be paid to:

- VET teachers
- people on the labour market, professional workers
- participants from higher education
- newcomers
- decision-makers

9 OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES OF TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION ACTIVITIES

The outputs and outcomes of TCAs were in the focus of the questionnaire. NAs were asked to choose from a given list, which outputs and outcomes TCAs provide. They also had the opportunity to mark in the case of a given output or outcome that they "do not define the named output" or "they do not expect the named outcome" in the case of their TCAs.

The chosen outputs are listed below. (In descending order starting with the item chosen by the most NAs.).

Outputs	The output id defined in case of our TCAs	We do not define it as an output
Presentations, photos, workshop materials	28	2
Number of new contacts, networks of the participating institutions	20	10
Collection of data	20	10
Study, researches carried out	19	11
Number of Erasmus+ applications submitted resulting from the TCA	18	12
Number of new contacts of the organising NA(s)	18	12
Number of successful Erasmus+ applications attributed to the TCA	17	13
Higher number of participants with special needs or fewer opportunities	7	23

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Worth to note:

One third of responding NAs does not define **submitted Erasmus+ applications and the successful applications** as outputs. Establishing new contacts both from the participants' and the NAs' perspectives are not among common outputs either.

Concerning the **outcomes** the following order was set according to the given possibilities.

Outcomes	The outcome is expected in case of our TCAs	We do not expect this outcome
Improved, more in-depth networks of participating institutions	28	0
Visibility of the Erasmus+ Programme	24	0
Improved skills of participants regarding the TCA topic	23	0
Improved application writing process at participants' level	23	2
Developing evidence-based perspective	20	6
Improved project management at beneficiaries' level	18	4
Improved / modified working methods at NA level	11	11

The mentioned outcomes apply mostly to TSS and THO types of TCAs. In the case of the EBAR type of TCAs which, are different in their nature, outcomes need to be looked at from other aspects.

10 TCA EFFECT ON NAs' WORKING METHODS

The transnational cooperation of the agencies may function as a learning opportunity for the NA staff (although the most NAs do not really recognize TCA as an opportunity to improve their working methods according to the responses above). It is worth examining **how TCAs have an effect on NAs working methods** answering the question "Have you modified your working methods or applied new methods within the NA based on TCA experiences?"

17 NAs reported that they modified their processes and/or applied new methods at least once (56.6%); Five of them said that they did not use TCA for that purpose; the same number of NAs are not aware of that kind of modifications (16.6 %); while three of them have not experienced methods which could be utilized at NA level (10%).

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11 CHALLENGES IN TCA RELATED TASKS

Regarding **difficulties** the questionnaire asked which **elements of the TCA management and organisation** are the most challenging. The NAs gave the highest scores to the following five items (more than one answer could be given, N: 95):

- Evaluation of achieved outcomes (14)
- Carrying out follow-up (14)
- Realisation of TCA event (10)
- Administration in EPlusLink (10)
- Defining budget (9).

12 GOOD PRACTICE TCAs

Concerning the following question: "**Do you have any effective practices in one of the three TCA lifecycle parts?**" 10 NAs indicated that they had good practices in planning and/or promotion (33.3%), 9 NAs in selection and/or realisation (30%), only two assessed that they had remarkable follow up and/or evaluation tool (6.6%). The fact that only few NAs have good practice on evaluation and follow-up explains the difficulty mentioned above, in point 11.

The following table lists the responding NAs reporting that they had good practices in TCA management.

Responding NAs having good practices in managing TCAs by TCA lifecycle

planning and/or promotion	selection and/or realisation	follow up and/or evaluation
10	9	2
DE02	ES01	BE02
DE03	ES01-VET	EE01
DK01	FI01	
IS01	FR01	
IT02	HR01	
LT01	IE01	
LU01	NO01	
MT01	SE01	
PL01	UK02	
RO01		

The description of the TCAs which were mentioned among the good practices can be found on SALTO E&T website. As an illustration of successful TCAs one activity from each type was chosen to be presented in this publication:

'Enhancing Digital Competences in Education + Training' a successfully and repeatedly organised contact seminar since 2016 by EE01

The 'Enhancing Digital Competences in Education + Training' TCA event was a cross-sectoral contact seminar organised by the Estonian NA in 2018. It had been the 3rd time when the event was organised. By this time the Estonian NA had experiences on how to execute the TCA successfully. The aim of the event was to indicate new cross-sectoral KA2 Strategic Partnership projects which focus on ICT and digital skills.

This TCA is recurrently embedded into the Estonian NA workplan since 2016, they organise it yearly, the event has its own website where the upcoming one which will take place in 2020 is already advertised.

'Internationalisation strategies of VET institutions' a recurrently organised thematic training event since 2014. Core team NL, FI, HU; recently new coordinators joined.

The Finnish, Hungarian and Dutch VET NAs have a longstanding cooperation in the field of Internationalisation strategies in VET. They organised a seminar focusing on that topic and it was among the first TCAs in 2014. It has been organised in every year, at the beginning among the three founding countries in rotation, but after the 4th year new countries showed interest to host the event. Hence the Spanish NA in 2018 and the German DE02 NA in 2019 also hosted the event. This TCA is directly interlinked with the VET Mobility Charter and aims to give helping hand to VET schools to prepare their internationalisation strategies which is a pre-condition of this Erasmus+ application.

Study on the "Erasmus+ Programme's Impact on Individuals in VET and HE" – LT01 2018

On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of restored Lithuania and the 20th anniversary of international education exchanges, the Lithuanian NA carried out a study on the "Erasmus+ Programme's Impact on Individuals in VET and HE" and organised a conference to share the results under a TCA umbrella. The study was related to other relevant European researches, such as the Finnish "Hidden Competences", the Irish "Impact of Erasmus+ mobility placements on social and political attitudes of VET learners in Ireland" and the British "Widening Participation in Outward Student Mobility" researches. So the Lithuanian NA gave a wider perspective of the Erasmus+ VET and HE mobility results and impacts. The study is available in Lithuanian.

More good practices can be read on SALTO E&T platform¹⁶

The investigation of good practice TCAs revealed that those NAs who incorporate the youth sector as well have a wider perspective and more good practices in TCA. It can be explained because of their long history and that they can envisage the further development perspectives. NAs being familiar with the youth perspective highlighted that NAs in their TCA work in the education and training field **could adopt good examples from the youth** in terms of:

- More elaborated working methods at system level
- Structures of certain tasks
- Timing
- Certain recurring topics with experts and colleagues in the background.

13 SUPPORTING THE NAs IN TCA WORK

According to its mission the SALTO E&T TCA Resource Centre serves as a supporting body to the NAs by:

- Providing online and offline platforms and tools for promoting consultations, planning, effective realisation and evaluation of transnational cooperation activities;
- Designing trainings for increasing the capacities of NA staff regarding TCAs;
- Making the results of TCAs accessible for the public.

Therefore SALTO E&T intended to explore what support NAs need in order to organise TCAs with greater efficiency and in high quality.

SALTO E&T provides the IT Platform, which supports planning the activities at one place. According to the NAs, the Platform is an important and useful tool in TCA organisation and management. The development which started in 2018 has been valuable and demanded by the NAs to be continued. It is appreciated that SALTO E&T plans the phases of development based on the needs of the NAs. This development work should be continued.

16 salto-et.net/publisher/page/platform_documentary » TCA Officers Meeting » 22 May 2019 (1st day), session 2
Fast Track for Immigrants: SE01
Thematic conference "Erasmus+ programme impact on individuals in VET and HE: LI01
Cross-sectoral contact seminar "Enhancing Digital Competences in Education and Training": EE01

Worth to note:

Regarding the support to planning of TCAs in the field of education and training, it is worth to note that **covering four different sectors makes the streamlining of procedures more challenging** but at the same time **more needed**. It also has been highlighted by the NAs that similarly to the operation of the youth field there is room for more SALTOs in the field of E&T as well (eg. a thematic SALTO in the Professionalisation of teachers).

At the moment the "market" of E&T TCAs is only slightly regulated. It is only the four priorities defined by the NA directors in Malta in 2017, which give some guidance in the selection of the topics, but there is no expectation regarding countries harmonising the topics with each other at European level. It can result in several similar TCAs and overlapping topics within one year, which may decrease the successful realisation of some events. It is suggested that SALTO E&T takes some steps towards a stronger coordination in this regard.

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YOUTH PERSPECTIVE:

In the youth sector there are outstanding resources concerning SALTOs, since there are seven resource centres (RCs) supporting a topic or focusing on a region. Their SALTOs have been existing for almost 20 years and gradually developed and expanded with new focuses and certain modifications.

The youth SALTOs have a different working and organisational ground compared to what the SALTO E&T follows. Their longer history and more focused activity especially in case of youth policies resulted in several good practices and long list of documents.

In order to ensure quality, the **Guide for NAs** define Training and Evaluation Cycle for Erasmus+ volunteers (in youth sector). It does not only **describe certain compulsory activities** that the NAs have to manage, **but it also defines funding** to carry out these tasks. There is no similar content or description concerning E&T activities.

14 CONCLUSIONS FROM THE ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT ASPECT

The research revealed that the administration of TCAs is often time consuming and the lack of human resources in many cases decreases the opportunity to fully exploit TCAs.

While quality of TCAs should be kept in focus, **the administration process and the perceived impact of TCA should be brought closer. A shift from administration to the professional and content-oriented tasks** would enhance the impact of TCAs and could make the management and organisation more efficient.

A more even distribution of TCA among the NAs and the increased number of EBAR TCAs could be enhanced.

The justification of the recommended **target groups, especially** NA staff, participants with special needs and people with fewer opportunities) **should be examined** during the preparation of the new programme phase.

Beyond that, the **needs towards new activities** should be scanned as well. The launch of study visits, national activities or TCA trainings for NA staff are recommended types of activities by the respondents.

Cross-sectoral TCA is a good opportunity to gather different sectors under the same umbrella to understand each other. Organising these TCAs is more challenging, but valuable, therefore activities with **cross-sectoral approach could be promoted more**.

While more streamlined processes can lead to greater success in terms of effectiveness of TCAs at systemic level, **flexibility is recommended to be kept to a certain extent**, especially in the case of reallocation of funding.

From support aspect it should be **examined how the TCA lifecycle could be more streamlined at systemic level** (IT platform, common deadlines, scheduling activities). The events and their topics are decided at country level at the moment, while **scheduling certain activities and lifecycle of TCA could help improving the work flow** at European level.

It can be examined whether **"sub"-SALTOs and/or special working groups are necessary** in line with the SALTO E&T priorities. Harmonising procedures more between Youth and E&T would help. Youth's good practices should be used.

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STRATEGIC FOCUS AND SHOWING THE OUTCOMES OF TCAS

In the qualitative research the National Agencies indicated that there is a need to make TCAs more strategically-based and also there is a need for making their outcomes more visible. The NAs need to translate their long-term strategy into operational objectives when planning TCAs.¹⁷

1 PRE-DEFINING LEARNING OUTCOMES

One way to assess the outcomes of the TCAs is the learning outcomes approach. Learning outcomes are statements of what a learner (in this case: TCA participant) knows, understands and is able to do in completion of a learning process. They are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competencies.

Regarding the **content of TCAs** the questionnaire asked whether the **NAs define expected learning outcomes in case of TCAs beforehand**. Most of the NAs gave positive answer to that question (20), only a few of them said (7) that they occasionally define learning outcomes and only 1-2 indicated that they do not have time or expertise for that.

Although analysis of outcomes and outputs is at NA level, SALTO E&T is there for aggregating the TCA outcomes and outputs. The NAs could contribute to this analysis with their **Yearly Reports**. Deeper analysis of the outputs and outcomes of the TCAs in the Yearly Report would enable SALTO E&T to analyse easier data and outcomes. Aspects and points could be added to the **Yearly Report template** to help NAs in writing their **TCA reports** and analyse their **results**, that is:

- achieved learning outcomes of TCA participants,
- outputs of the TCA,
- outcomes of the TCA – which is the short or medium term effect of the TCA.

Concerning the **workplan**, the NAs have to outline their TCA plans in the Erasmus+ annual workplan. It serves as a good base, since most of the NAs do not write other workplans than that (15), only few of them write separate plan (6) and the rest leaves this question to the TCA officer, team and / or sector concerned.

On **SALTO platform** (MyRC menu) where NAs prepare and finalise TCA events: learning outcomes referring to knowledge, skills and competences of the participants should be placed among template questions and not only “expected results” (TCA outcomes).

¹⁷ Source: Taking stock of TCAs between 2014-18 – Specification for the contract

Worth to note:

There is a difference between **learning outcomes acquired by the learner** (in this case TCA participant) and **outcomes of the TCA itself** (which is the short or medium term effect of the TCA).

Concerning the lifecycle of the TCAs, one of the first steps is **defining learning outcomes**. Definition of **expected learning outcomes** of TCA participants makes assessment of TCAs possible by checking to what extent these expected learning outcomes were achieved by the TCA participants. This is the base for measuring whether these **achieved learning outcomes can contribute to the outcomes (short or medium term effect) of the TCAs** at higher level. Whenever learning outcomes are defined they may be done in a holistic way (not necessary defining knowledge, skills and competences separately).

2 ASSESSMENT OF TCAS

We could see in the section about TCA data that the information registered about TCAs are mostly numerical, quantitative data which hardly can help assessment. At the same time TCAs like any activity need feedback, self-check, assessment of the set aims.

Assessment has two levels according to the previous chapter:

- **assessment of learning outcomes of participants**
- **assessment of the outcomes of the TCA (short or medium term effect).**

Below you can find a sample for assessment indicators of the outcomes of TCAs.

It is the NAs' responsibility to decide what indicators they identify for assessment. Some recommended SMART¹⁸ indicators are listed here:

- to exploit the 5% budget frame as much as possible,
- to reach a certain number of TCA events,
- to involve a certain number of TCA participants,
- to reach an increase in Erasmus+ applications based on TCA-cooperations,
- to reach quality increase of the applications and/or projects based on TCA-cooperations,
- to contribute to the forming of international networks within and/or beyond educational sectors,
- to contribute to the NAs' cooperation,
- to have more TCAs built on each other and/or build on each other's outcomes,
- to finalise more evidence-based analyses,
- to fine-tune the Erasmus+ programme, based on those evidence-based analyses which were carried out within TCAs.

¹⁸ SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timely

Worth to note:

For a more precise impact analysis there could be a question on the Erasmus+ application form, whether the proposal is a result of participation in a TCA.

More data in the EPlusLink would help to make the outcomes of the TCAs more visible.

Here are some examples for registering: disadvantaged participants, gender, working language of the event, outcomes of the event, typical outputs, Erasmus+ applications, granted Erasmus+ projects, established partnerships, participant's satisfaction, participants' learning outcomes... etc.

One of the direct impact if a TCA can be measured by the submitted Erasmus+ application and beyond that, the granted projects. It is interesting to see the distribution of the NAs' answers to the question: "Approximately what proportion of the TCA participants (either sent or hosted) can submit successful applications?" 13 NAs (43%) answered that more than half of the TCA participants can submit successful application, 6 NAs (20%) estimated that less than half of them can do that, and what is interesting, **11 NAs (36,6%) are not aware of the proportion which means that they do not have follow-up measures at all.**

3 COMPLIANCE WITH THE OBJECTIVES OF THE ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME

Since according to the Guide for NAs TCA aims to bring added value and increased quality in the overall Programme Implementation and to contribute to increasing the impact of the Programme at systemic level, **the questionnaire examined the fulfilment of these aims from TCA hosting perspective.** In both cases, the NAs voted either for fully or partially reaching the two aims. Reaching systemic level got less "fully" answers and more "partially" votes, beside the other options:

- Aim No.1: to bring added value and increased quality in the overall Programme implementation (fully: 18, partially: 12)
- Aim No.2: to contribute to increasing the impact of the Programme at systemic level (fully: 12, partially: 15, not at all: 1, not aware of that: 2).

From **sending NAs perspective** (NAs which send participants to TCAs) answers were similar to the hosting NAs' responses with little less appreciation given to the systemic level impact (16 NAs said that this aim was only partially reached). This is understandable since due to volume reasons a sending NA perceives less effect on the TCA outcomes.

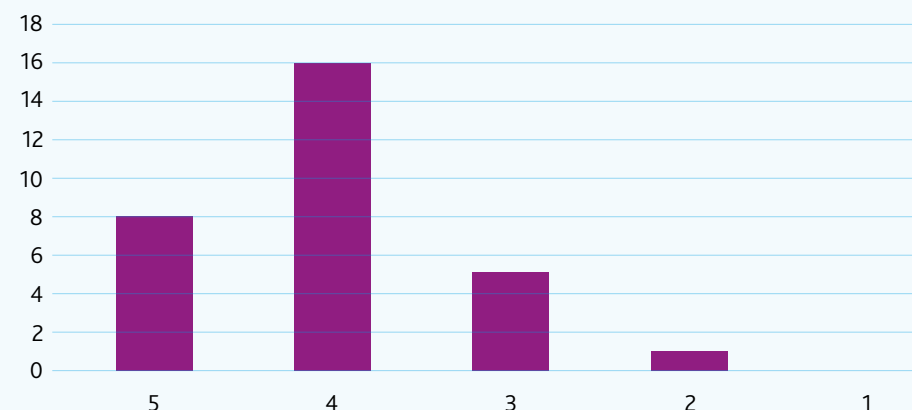
In the 6th year of TCAs **it is important to revise the original aims of that tool.** As it is stated above, the NAs can identify their work with the originally set two aims. When the questionnaire asked whether new aims should be set, only 9 NAs indicated answers. Some of their proposals were close to the original aims:

- networking, awareness campaign of the Erasmus+ programme, learning about education system in different countries

Other suggestions were:

- officers' professional development, training tool for NA staff
- thematic clustering for dissemination and exploitation.

FIGURE 11 - TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU THINK AS A TCA OFFICER THAT TCA IS THE BEST TOOL TO SERVE THE ABOVE MENTIONED AIMS?



The officers also evaluated on a 5-level scale how the TCAs serve the above-mentioned aims. The diagram shows that they gave mostly 4 out of 5, the average of their score is 4.

The comments that NAs gave as an explanation to their scoring varied from praising TCAs as a strategic tool to saying that it is too small-scale to reach a measurable effect.

Though there are several positive feedbacks, the critical comments give good explanations on **weaker parts of TCAs:**

- too much administration;
- small scale, cannot reach a critical mass;
- more systemic approach, more focused mechanism is necessary.

The interviews showed that the **advantage** of TCAs varies from NA to NA. One NA puts the cross-sectoral approach in focus, the other considers the partner searching elements to be the most important, hence they organise contact seminars. Others handle TCA as a tool, which can help the fulfilment of the national and/or NA strategy in parallel, and can react quickly to certain educational policy issues.

Worth to note:

Every NA uses different approach but it also suggests **that TCA is a flexible tool with several aspects that NAs can utilise according to their aims.**

4 REACHING STRATEGIC LEVEL OF TCAS

The strategic approach of planning a TCA certainly can contribute to quality and impact of the programme or can support promotion, it can enhance the cross-sectoral approach, but it is certainly limited concerning resources. We have seen earlier that the available budget hardly could be spent. Neither the questionnaire nor the interviews focused on strategic level of TCAs in detail, however the following challenges can be identified for reaching strategic level of TCAs:

- **HR dedicated to TCAs is limited and fragmented.**
- It is not clear whether it is a strategic tool or an operational element of the Erasmus+. According to the NA Guide's intention it is a strategic tool, but at the same time the granted resources (HR at the NAs, number of SALTOs) are insufficient.
- There is no opportunity to train the NA staff within TCAs.
- Compared to the size and impact of TCAs in E&T the administration of them is still high. These are individual grants¹⁹ which require a lot of administration on the sending side too, since the agencies have to follow a lifecycle of an application procedure (call, deadline, assessment, information, grant agreement, financial instalment... etc.). Since hosting an international event needs organisational and other tasks, human resources need to be allocated to that. All in all, there is a lot of work with TCAs regardless its direction (sending, hosting).
- Bigger countries and sectors with higher budget could organise TCAs in proportion. Only those countries can benefit from the outcomes of a TCA which participated and co-worked on the certain TCA. It was highlighted by one of the interviewees that ensuring the even distribution of TCAs per countries and by sectors should be promoted.

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5 CONCLUSIONS OF TCAS FROM STRATEGIC POINT OF VIEW

Based on the records kept by the NAs, SALTO E&T TCA and the European Commission at the moment, it can be concluded that the impact of TCAs on the Erasmus+ Programme cannot be assessed. It remains obscure whether TCA as part of the Programme **achieved and to what extent contributed to the set aims**.

The relevance of TCA was not questioned, but its effectiveness remained hidden.

The interviews showed that the **advantage** of TCAs varies from NA to NA. One NA puts the cross-sectoral approach in focus, the other considers the partner searching elements to be the most important, hence they organise contact seminars. Others handle TCA as a tool, which can help the fulfilment of the national and/or NA strategy in parallel, and can react quickly to certain educational policy issues.

Every NA uses different approach but it also suggests **that TCA is a valuable tool with several aspects that NAs can utilise flexibly according to their aims**.

Challenge:

The Guide for Erasmus+ National Agencies set two aims to reach, one is to bring added value and increased quality in the overall Programme implementation, the other is to contribute to increasing the impact of the Programme at systemic level, however it does not define specific ways of measuring the achievement of these overall aims.

Worth to note:

When looking at the impact of TCAs one method can be to define learning outcomes (LO) and assess the achievement of the LOs by asking the participants of the TCAs. The absence of well-defined and measurable LOs results in challenging follow-up. The lack of expected LOs makes it unclear what the NAs should assess. It has to be highlighted that learning outcomes are most relevant in case of thematic events.

National agencies may consider to define **SMART indicators** in order to be able to evaluate the outcomes of their implemented TCAs in the next programme period.

In the future it is also worth to consider looking at the impact of TCAs from a consolidated aspect by identifying the success factors (achieved LOs) in case of individual activities and exploring how these sum up to a common impact on the Erasmus Programme.

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¹⁹ Individual grants were typical in the LLP (Grundtvig, Comenius) but were ceased out in Erasmus+ E&T except for TCAs.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 2021 – 2027 PERIOD

TCAs realised between 2014-2018 involved nearly 12,000 people, out of them almost 6,000 came from abroad. On average NAs spent on TCAs approximately 20% of their budget available for such purposes.

According to the NAs' assessment the **aims of the TCAs** as set by the Guide for Erasmus+ National Agencies (*bring added value and increased quality in the overall Programme implementation; contribute to increasing the impact of the Programme at systemic level*) **have been fully or partially reached**.

The relevance of the programme was not questioned either by the answers of the questionnaire or the interviews, but its efficiency remained hidden. According to the study **TCA is a flexible tool with several aspects that NAs can utilise according to their aims, but there is room for further improvement**.

While appreciating the value of TCAs, **the Agencies face challenges in exploiting this tool on a larger scale**. The **administration and reporting of the activities are demanding** and the allocated **human resources** in the present circumstances are **fragmented and often insufficient**.

To lessen the administrative burden of TCA work the **simplification of administrative and financial rules** are needed as well as the **amelioration of the IT support**.

In order to precisely track the TCA work and make it possible **to generate valid and user-friendly statistics clarification of the terminology** regarding the different roles and actions and **coherence in data keeping** are necessary.

The **further development of the structure of the databases** (coherence with terminology, user-friendly statistics generation) would be important and **integrated IT systems covering the entire TCA lifecycle** (planning-promotion; management-realisation; evaluation-follow up) are demanded.

Synchronisation of the **SALTO E&T IT Platform and the Commission Platforms** is suggested in order to avoid double work of the TCA officers and to make follow-up of the entire lifecycle of TCAs possible.

Regarding TCAs the Erasmus+ Programme has overall aims to reach but there are **no set TCA indicators** at European level against which results shall be tracked.

It is suggested to consider **measuring the impact of TCAs on a consolidated (European) level and seek for success factors in the case of individual TCAs**.

In case of individual TCAs the **definition of expected outcomes of the activities** by the hosting agencies would support a more conscious planning and reflection on the results and success of the event/activity.

National agencies may consider to define **SMART indicators** in order to be able to evaluate the outcomes of their implemented TCAs in the next programme period.

Reporting on the content and results of the TCAs (not only administrative data) in the Yearly Report of the agencies submitted to the European Commission is recommended. This could be helped by the **automated evaluation and feedback gathering tool** integrated in the SALTO E&T IT Platform.

Involvement of more participants could be realised by the **organisation of larger and/or recurrent events** in cooperation of more NAs. **Long-term strategic cooperation of the NAs** could result in larger impact and greater efficiency. (Models applied in the field of youth.)

In terms of activities **clear description of the types and categories** would be necessary (for coherent data keeping) and 'study visits' are suggested to be listed among the types of the events.

NAs suggest emphasizing the importance of the **involvement** of Erasmus **special target groups** among TCA participants.

NAs see the potential in a greater exploitation of the TCA opportunity by broadening type and target groups. The Agencies mentioned the importance of study visits, national events with European topics, events organised for special target groups and also a better exploitation of the research projects.

Better IT support and simpler administrative rules are expected to have positive effect on the efficiency of TCA work, however **ensuring the dedicated time of staff members** (TCA officer and NA staff dealing with TCAs) would also be important to contribute to the realisation of activities on a larger scale.

Professional development of NA staff, either by participation at TCAs or by trainings of the SALTOs is also an important factor. **Funding rules shall be reconsidered** to make it possible for the NAs to devote resources for such purposes from the TCA budget.

A more concise report of the study including specific suggestions to take into consideration in the development of the future programme was also prepared and was forwarded to the European Commission in December 2019 by SALTO E&T TCA Resource Centre.