



TAKING STOCK OF TCAs IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING BETWEEN 2019 AND 2023

Report of the research findings



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THE FIELD OF EDUCATION
AND TRAINING BETWEEN
2019 AND 2023**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

7	FOREWORD
9	I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
13	II. AIMS OF RESEARCH
14	III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
14	A. Desk research
14	B. Quantitative approach
16	C. Qualitative approach
17	IV. MAIN RESULTS
17	A Role of TCAs and their success in implementing the Erasmus+ programme
58	B. Organisational framework of TCA task within National Agencies
68	V. RECOMMENDATIONS
68	1. Strategic approach to quality and quantity indicators
72	2. Reducing administrative burdens while maintaining flexibility of regulatory framework
73	VI. POSITION PAPER OF THE EDUCATION & TRAINING TCA WORKING GROUP
73	Objectives
74	I. Long-term activities
75	II. Activity types
77	III. Regional SALTOS in the E&T field
78	IV. Eligibility, administration, and finances

FOREWORD

Erasmus+ National Agencies hold a vital role in bridging national and European educational policies, fostering collaboration, and implementing strategic initiatives. Training and Cooperation Activities (TCAs) have been instrumental in these efforts, enabling National Agencies to respond flexibly to emerging challenges while advancing the shared goals of the Erasmus+ programme.

Since their introduction in the field of education and training in 2014, TCAs have evolved into a *strategic mechanism* that improve the quality of the entire Erasmus+ programme, enhance the preparedness of project holders, and strengthen the supportive and service-oriented role of National Agencies. The first research, published in 2019, highlighted their transformative potential and documented the progress made during the initial five years of their implementation in the field of education and training. It is with great pride that we now present the next chapter in this journey – this publication covering TCAs realised between 2019 and 2023.

This comprehensive study reaffirms the critical role of TCAs as a tool to enhance the quality and impact of the Erasmus+ programme. The research demonstrates significant growth in the scope and reach of TCAs, underscoring their increasing importance to National Agencies. Over the past five years, approximately 17,000 participants have engaged in international TCA events, while the inclusion of national TCAs has broadened their accessibility and relevance. Long-term collaborations (LTAs), introduced in this programme cycle, have emerged as key instruments for strategic planning and resource utilisation, reinforcing the programmatic goals of National Agencies.

The establishment of the SALTO E&T TCA Resource Centre in 2018 has been a milestone in this development. Through its unwavering support and innovative tools, the Resource Centre has contributed to increasing the operational efficiency of TCAs. Feedback from National Agencies clearly reflects the appreciation for its role in fostering collaboration.

For grant-awarding organisations, first-hand experience with project implementation is essential to effectively and authentically support Erasmus+ beneficiaries. In this context, participating in TCA cooperation is valuable for National Agency staff as well. The research highlights that TCAs play a vital role in fostering *organisational learning*, requiring well-developed human capacity and strategic planning. Over the ten years since their introduction, TCAs have significantly enhanced the quality and impact of the Erasmus+ programme, though ample scope for development remains. Activities like long-term collaborations (LTAs) provide valuable insights into project management

81 Annex: Research results "Taking stock of TCAs realised in the field of education and training between 2019 and 2023" (Excerpts)

85 VII. APPENDICES

85 A. List of figures and tables

86 B. Databases

90 C. NA Participation

92 ANNEXES

92 Annex 1 – Desk research

93 Annex 2 – Questionnaire for TCA Officers

96 Annex 3 – Interview topics for intermediary leaders and NA Directors

challenges, strengthening staff competencies and reinforcing the Agencies' role in promoting European values.

Despite obvious successes, challenges remain. The research highlights ongoing administrative burdens, limitations in data management systems, and the need for further development of human resource capacity within National Agencies. The evolving demands of TCAs require stronger strategic planning, organisational competencies, and an emphasis on capacity-building to sustain the programme's impact.

This new edition also includes a dedicated chapter featuring the position of the TCA E&T Working group, the reference group of TCA Officers. Their insights and recommendations aim to support the European Commission's planning for the upcoming Erasmus+ programme period (2028–2034). With discussions already underway, this chapter seeks to make the impact of TCAs both visible and actionable, providing valuable input for shaping the future framework. By highlighting lessons learnt and strategic priorities, the research underscores the importance of leveraging TCAs as a tool for achieving programme goals.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all National Agencies for their active contributions to this research, particularly the TCA Officers and NA Director colleagues whose insights and efforts have been invaluable. I also wish to thank the colleagues at the European Commission who support TCA-related work for their guidance and collaboration.

It is my hope that this publication will serve as a resource and inspiration for all colleagues dedicated to advancing the Erasmus+ programme. By fostering innovation, collaboration, and shared learning, TCAs remain a vital tool in promoting our shared European values.

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



9

National Agencies, implementing the Erasmus+ programme, play a crucial role in promoting European educational policy objectives, not only through the precise execution of their grant awarding activities but also by acting as bridge between national and European educational policies. Transnational or, more recently, Training and Cooperation Activities (TCAs) have been part of the work programmes of National Agencies operating in the field of education and training since 2014, while in the youth sector, they have a history of 25 years.

This research has examined quantifiable results achieved by TCAs over the past five years and their impact on the programme through document analysis, a questionnaire sent to TCA Officers at National Agencies, and managerial interviews. The two most important findings uncovered during the research confirm that

the system of TCAs – serving as a toolset to support the quality of the programme and to advance policy objectives – successfully fulfils the function envisioned by the European Commission, namely, serving as a strategic mechanism in the construction of the European Education Area.

National Agencies agreed that the role of TCAs is key to quality implementation of the Erasmus+ programme, and – while original objectives related to TCAs remain unchanged – the framework that defines operations (NA Guide) is flexible and has evolved positively.

Over the past few years, the European Commission – having heard the requests of National Agencies – has made several changes to the conditions surrounding TCAs, which show a developmental trajectory and serve as incentives for National Agencies: the supportive role of the SALTO E&T TCA

Resource Centre, the lifting of restrictions of organising national events, and the establishment of a financing mechanism. The research confirms that

national activities hold significant importance in programme implementation, that Agencies are satisfied with the work of the SALTO E&T TCA Resource Centre, and that the number of staff involved in TCAs is increasing, which necessitates the creation of favourable financing conditions.

Nonetheless, many administrative difficulties remain within the system, which prominently emerged in various dimensions of the research: travel arrangements for participants attending international events, work associated to event management and financial accounting, and formal challenges of annual report submitted to the European Commission. This is compounded by the inadequacy of databases, which also constitutes a significant limitation of the current analysis.

Content analysis of the questionnaires and particularly the interviews revealed that TCAs can only fulfil their expected role as policy support tools if human capacity of National Agency staff working on implementation also develops. The Commission places strong expectations on National Agencies: they should be active and effective representatives of European educational, training, and youth policies, which requires much stronger organisational competencies and strategic planning than simply fulfilling the grant awarding function. TCAs are playing an increasingly important role regarding collaboration between National Agencies, and at the national level, they serve as a flexible tool for Agencies to respond to the specific needs of target groups. TCA Officers and leaders provided positive feedback on the opportunities offered by TCAs, particularly highlighting their developmental impact on National Agencies and their staff. Activities organised by the Agencies themselves, and especially long-term collaborations (LTAs), resemble the process that applicants go through when submitting and implementing a project, thereby allowing staff groups within National Agencies to gain first-hand experience regarding challenges of project management. Many described how they can utilise this experience in their work. One of the key messages of the present research is that

the implementation of TCAs holds significant individual and organisational learning potential for Agencies coordinating the Erasmus+ programme: strategic thinking, joint planning and decision-making at international level while bridging cultural differences, connecting different units of Agencies, etc.

All of these strengthen organisational competencies necessary for them to be able to convey European values to applicants in a prepared and authentic manner alongside their operational grant awarding role, ultimately contributing effectively to the promotion of European policies as well. It is evident – particularly when compared to responses from the previous research analysing the first five-year period – that Agencies are increasingly committed to TCAs, with the experience of collaboration with other Agencies as well as collaborative learning playing a key role. Although activity levels vary, all National Agencies participate in TCAs to the limit of their capabilities, and in many countries, TCA Officer positions have been reorganised with a reinforcement of the role.

The establishment of the SALTO E&T TCA Resource Centre in 2018 marked an important milestone in the development of the programme. Over its six years of operation, it has developed stable process-supporting work methods while regularly seeking feedback from National Agencies to improve the quality of its work. TCA Officers greatly appreciate the work of the Resource Centre and have provided numerous suggestions for expanding the SALTO Platform with additional features, which support the idea that this IT platform could play a larger role in programme coordination. The databases provided for the research (EplusLink and NAM) did not always contain comprehensive and accurate data, and the possibility of time-series comparability of the data is incomplete compared to the previous programme cycle, while there is a currently untapped, professional database available on the SALTO Platform that could be used for many purposes. Due to the limitations of the databases, the tables and graphs presented in this report are primarily informative, emphasising the representation of proportions.

Comparing the processed data with results of the previous research (2019) – with a decline in activities during the nearly two-year pandemic period

– significant growth, over 100% can be observed in the second five years of TCAs compared to the first five-year period:

approximately 17,000 people have participated in TCA events organised at international level, and it is estimated that twice as many participants have been sent by National Agencies, the proportion of events held in inter-sectoral cooperation has nearly doubled, and there has been a strong demand for national TCAs as well. The number of national events accounts for approximately 30% of all hosting-type events, while Agencies reach approximately half of the participants through national events, with the cost side accounting for only 15% of total expenses related to TCA organisation.

In the new programme cycle, the scope of previous TCA activities has been expanded with two new opportunities, both of which have been positively received by Agencies and applicants. Nationally organised TCAs have a distinguished role in establishing contacts with applicants in their own countries, while LTAs play a key role in utilising available resources, providing the opportunity to focus on long-term strategic goals.

Examining the organisational background of TCA activities reveals that there are still significant gaps in human resource capacity, although the situation has become significantly more favourable than it was five years ago. TCA Officers' role in most Agencies is still predominantly administrative, with travel arrangements and event management being dominant, and not all Agencies have a full-time TCA Officer. However, feedback indicates that the planning of TCAs increasingly plays a strategic role in achieving the professional goals of Agencies. This is well supported by the financing framework that will be available from 2024, allowing for up to 15% of the costs of implemented activities to be allocated for staff, which could provide opportunities, tasks, and responsibilities for agency leaders alike.

There is still ample scope for development around TCAs, but over the ten years since their introduction in the education and training field, Agencies have come a long way.

The quality and impact-enhancing role expected by the European Commission is not merely an idea but requires an increasingly strategic approach from the National Agencies and a deliberate development of human resources, while the Commission must continue to provide flexible frameworks and consider the varying situations of individual Agencies.

It is essential to recognise that human capital of European officials working at National Agencies is key to realising the European Education Area.

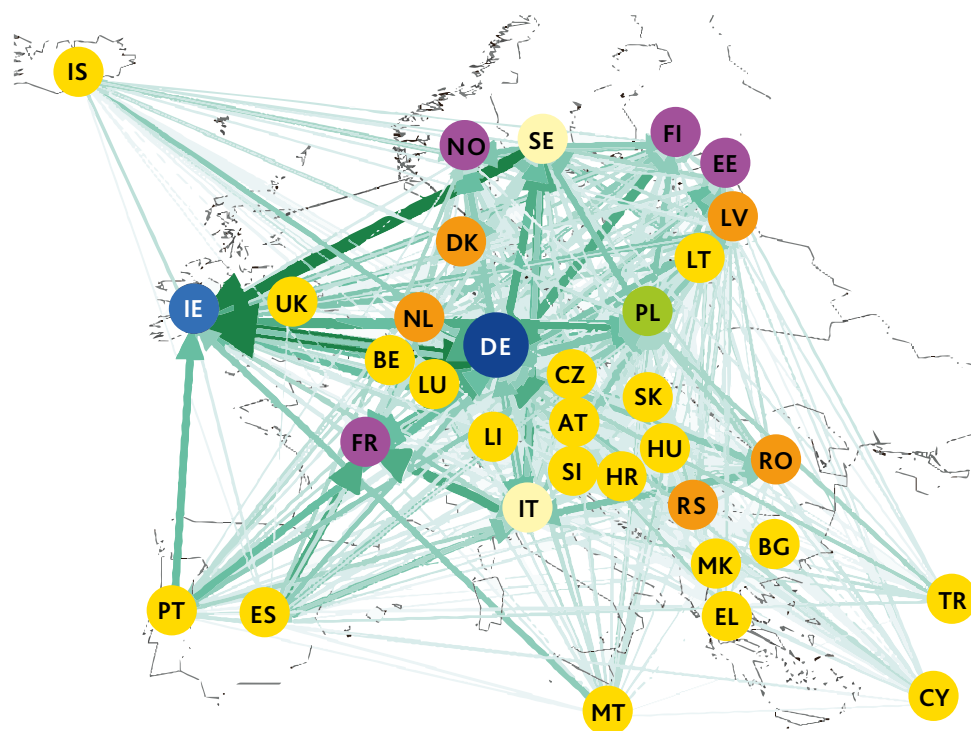


Figure 1 Mobility of E+ beneficiaries through Training and Cooperation Activities in the Erasmus+ programme

II. AIMS OF RESEARCH



The main purpose of our research has been to formulate a comprehensive picture of the world of Training and Cooperation Activities (TCAs) implemented after 2018 under the Erasmus+ programme in the field of education and training (E&T) and to make results and development opportunities visible.

The research covers the following areas of investigation:

- examination of quantifiable data of TCAs realised in the period, and comparison – where it is possible – with those of previous periods;
- examination of utilisation of TCAs, achievement of target groups and main objectives based on the opinion of NA staff, and the analysis of the SALTO Platform;
- examination of first experience related to LTAs appearing as a new type of TCA in the period;
- organisational issues within NAs regarding TCAs;
- implementation of work programme plans regarding TCAs and TCA strategy;
- utilisation of TCA resources and opportunities.

The report has twofold aims concerning TCAs:

1. summarising results of TCAs that took place between the project rounds of 2019–2023;
2. drawing conclusions for upcoming period in order to raise quality and impact of TCAs.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY



14

A. Desk research

1. Document analysis on TCAs:

- expectations towards TCAs as tools of the Erasmus+ programme to increase policy impact (history, expectations of the European Commission, changes)
 - E&T TCA Working group's (WG) formal and working papers;
 - TCA Officers' meetings' working materials (e.g. online discussion about processes, needs, and ideas of TCA Officers having arrived to the SALTO staff);
 - Erasmus+ Guides for National Agencies between 2019–2024;
 - presentations of the Commission's representative on Officers' Weeks organised by the SALTO E&T TCA Resource Centre;
- exploration of data from previous research;
- examination of the SALTO Platform and its tools supporting the implementation of TCAs.

B. Quantitative approach

2. Questionnaire for TCA Officers:

- survey for TCA Officers could be filled in during TCA Officers' Week in the spring of 2024 (paper form) or online after the event;
- exploration of quantifiable results mainly in the following fields:
 - TCA Officer position;
 - challenges regarding TCA work;
 - work of SALTO E&T TCA Resource Centre.

3. Data analysis: dataset provided by the European Commission; database of the SALTO Platform

- The analysis was performed on a unified, self-constructed database of TCAs¹. Original data was derived and extracted from the EplusLink between 2019–2020, the NA's yearly reports in 2021, 2022 and 2023, and from the E&T TCA Resource Centre's SALTO Platform.
- The following data was counted in the analysis:
 - 2019, 2020: EplusLink
 - 2021–23: NA yearly reports
 - January 2018 – June 2024: SALTO Platform
- Only realised activities were taken into account (not cancelled or postponed, not planned).
- 'Year' in the tables and graphs always means the year when the TCA is implemented and not the year of the programme planning (e.g. if a TCA was planned in 2020 under the KA215 project but was implemented in May 2021, the unified database shows this event under the year of 2021).
- Descriptive statistical analysis of implemented TCAs along main columns of available databases:
 - year
 - scope (national, transnational)
 - type (sending, hosting/organised)
 - training area (TSS, THO, EBAR)²
 - country
 - sector (SE – school education, VET vocational education and training, AE – adult education, HE – higher education)
 - horizontal priorities
 - number of participants
 - realised budget

15

¹ The use of a unified, self-constructed database can be justified by several factors:

1. The examined research period spans two distinct planning periods of the Erasmus+ programme (2014-20 and 2021-27). During the transition period between the programme cycles, the database used by the European Commission was not continuous, leading to the fact that the dataset provided by the Commission for the research was based on two different, not connectable databases.
2. The SALTO Platform, developed in the meantime, has its own database of international programmes, which was an important component of the research.
3. The quantified results of previous research on the topic could only be compared with the quantifiable results of the period explored in this study by creating a unified database from the various sources. A more detailed analysis of the databases can be found in the appendix of the research report.

² In the previous programme cycle (2014-20), three training areas of TCAs were separated within the education and training field:

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

Since 2021, the acronym TCA has meant Training and Cooperation Activities, but the databases include former training areas of Transnational Cooperation Activities for information.

C. Qualitative approach

4. Questionnaire and interviews

- NA Directors and TCA Officer superiors have been chosen for interviews:
 - 3 NA Directors;
 - 3 sector heads (one also head of a priority SALTO Resource Centre);
 - 1 TCA Officer superior.
- Content analysis of textual responses: the questionnaires sent to all TCA Officers in the field of E&T also included open-ended questions, which were elaborated on in the following topics:
 - strategic planning within NAs;
 - cooperation of TCA staff within NAs;
 - added value of TCAs to the Erasmus+ programme;
 - TCA evaluation/follow-up;
 - TCA assessment, impact;
 - budgetary and administrative issues.

IV. MAIN RESULTS



A. Role of TCAs³ and their success in implementing the Erasmus+ programme

The Erasmus+ programme as its predecessors has the main objective of operating a European-level tool and funding system to promote international cooperation in education, training, youth, and sport through supporting learning mobility, which, with its indirect impacts, contributes to the creation of the European Education Area. The seven-year programme cycles define priorities that align with current challenges facing the European community, along which mobility programmes can also be organised. In addition to individual mobility opportunities (KA1 – Key Action 1), the programme supports partnership projects that enable cooperation between institutions and organisations (KA2 – Key Action 2), while a third activity type encourages strategic cooperation at the European level through grants aimed at policy development and cooperation (KA3 – Key Action 3).

The roots of the Erasmus+ programme trace back nearly four decades. The stages of the programme's development reflect the strengthening of European educational policy and the directions of common educational objectives. As the programme became increasingly widespread and popular across Europe, the importance of the quality of programme implementation and the impact achieved by the programme also gained prominence. Concurrently, the potential role of National Agencies that

³ In the jargon of the Erasmus+ programme, the abbreviation TCA refers to **T**rainning and **C**ooperation **A**ctivities. Although the abbreviation has remained unchanged, the current report provides a broader interpretative framework compared to the previous term **T**ransnational **C**ooperation **A**ctivities. This research does not sharply distinguish between the two forms of activity but rather aims to capture their developmental path and expansion of roles within the field of European educational policy. The study consistently uses this abbreviation when presenting both previous and current individual training programmes.

implement the programme has been increasingly recognised in promoting European educational policy objectives. Consequently, the European Commission has set higher expectations towards National Agencies – as organisations who are familiar with both national and European educational policies – in terms of advancing and measuring the systemic impact of mobility programmes. To this end, various tools have been designated both within and outside the programme, which have naturally evolved and changed over the years.

One such tool, built on their precedents, is the encouragement of transnational cooperation activities amongst National Agencies, which was brought into focus approximately ten years ago as a means of enhancing quality and impact within the Erasmus+ programme. Since 2014, the organisation of TCAs has been a mandatory part of the work programmes of National Agencies operating in the field of education and training, while it already has a 25-year history in the youth sector.

The two most significant findings having been revealed by present research confirm that organising TCAs indeed serves, even if indirectly as a strategic mechanism in the establishment of the European Education Area.

1. All respondents have agreed that TCAs play a key role in the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme. Single TCAs, embedding into a broader professional framework, along with the newly emerging long-term activities (LTAs), increasingly contribute to supporting the quality of the Erasmus+ programme in the field of education and training.
2. While the original objectives related to TCAs have remained unchanged, the operational framework has evolved in a positive direction. This has been creating more and more opportunities for collaboration amongst National Agencies and their staff, resulting in the establishment of multi-layered, strengthened relationships within educational sectors across Europe.

1. Expectations of European Commission related to TCAs

The current study has also extended to the document analysis of the European Commission's Guides for National Agencies (NA Guide) for the period between 2019 and 2024, which outline the operational framework for their activities. Changes in the regulatory framework related to TCAs clearly indicate that

the European Commission regards TCAs as an important policy support instrument.

Accordingly, recent regulatory changes have primarily aimed to provide incentives for National Agencies. The changes introduced with the new seven-year programme cycle that began in 2021 extend not only to the content of TCAs but also to the feasibility, financing, and administration aspects. Since 2014, the Commission – following the model of the youth sector – has also mandated National Agencies in the field of E&T Transnational and Cooperation Activities, to enhance the quality and impact of the programme. Details regarding TCAs are elaborated in Chapter 10 of the NA Guide, which outlines objectives, possible activities, as well as financing conditions of TCAs. The regulatory framework is like NET (Networking Activities) implemented in the youth sector.

KEY CHANGES IN RECENT YEARS

1. Following the model of the youth sector, the SALTO Education and Training TCA Resource Centre (SALTO E&T TCA RC) was launched in 2018 within the education and training field to support TCA management of all National Agencies operating under the Erasmus+ programme. The acronym stands for **Support, Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities (SALTO)**.

The SALTO E&T TCA RC is coordinated by the Hungarian National Agency (host organisation: Tempus Public Foundation). Its activities include providing online and offline platforms, consultations, support tools, and trainings to facilitate the planning, effective implementation, and evaluation of TCAs. The SALTO E&T TCA RC operates its own professional portal through which most events are announced, where at least part of the application process takes place, and it also aims to showcase and make outcomes of TCAs accessible to the public. Evidence clearly shows that

the systematic coordination of the SALTO E&T TCA Resource Centre greatly supports the work of TCA staff at other Agencies, focusing not only on quality assurance but also extending to professional development.⁴

2. The acronym TCA has been retained, but the original designation **Transnational Cooperation Activities** has been replaced by **Training and Cooperation Activities**. This change has become necessary to ensure that national events targeting the audiences in the given country, as justifiably requested by National Agencies, also fall under this umbrella term.

The organisation of national TCAs has been made possible by the Commission since 2020, but the current regulations were only developed in 2021, at the beginning of the new programme cycle of the Erasmus+ programme. In this regulation, the previous restriction was lifted, which only allowed the organisation of national TCAs related to the Erasmus+ programme's key projects (e.g. European Youth Week, EYE – European Youth Event, Role Model Network). The new condition for the authorisation of national TCAs is the European added value and the contribution to programme quality development.

According to the interviews, national activities hold significant importance in the implementation of the programme.

3. Previously, funding for TCAs was possible within the framework of the KA2 (Cooperation among organisations and institutions) type of grant, while in the new programme cycle, this has been moved under the KA3 (Support to policy development and cooperation). This new separation enables National Agencies to concentrate more effectively on TCAs, shifting their focus away from administrative management concerns.

⁴ For further details, please refer to Chapter III.B.3.

This change is certainly in line with the Commission's intention for TCAs to truly fulfil their role as part of a toolkit supporting European policy. Additionally, administrative simplification that has occurred because of this change in funding and reporting obligations for Agencies is also crucial.

Administrative difficulties surrounding TCAs have been strongly highlighted at various points of the research. One of the main messages from the results of the questionnaire completed by TCA Officers highlighted the overwhelming administrative burden associated with the activities, which not only includes the meticulous tasks associated with travel arrangements and event management, but also specifically addresses difficulties related to the Yearly report* that needs to be submitted to the Commission. On the other hand, the administrative logic also posed serious limitations to the analysis of databases.⁵

* **EDITOR'S NOTE:** A new development regarding TCAs: the European Commission is making noticeable efforts to reduce administrative burdens. For the upcoming reporting period, they have adjusted the types of data required in the Yearly report. There is no need to duplicate data that TCA Officers have already entered into the National Agency Module (NAM).

4. Starting from 2021, in addition to single TCA events, National Agencies have had the opportunity to participate in or organise long-term activities (LTA), which are strategic, multi-year initiatives involving cooperation amongst multiple National Agencies. There is a clear expectation regarding long-term collaborations: they should align with the strategic objectives related to TCAs within the work programmes of National Agencies and explicitly identify the policy goals to which the LTA will contribute.

Additionally, the plan must be specific, demonstrating the organisational functioning, the specific activities planned within the framework of the LTA, their estimated number, information regarding the monitoring and dissemination of results, and the connection of the theme to the policy priorities of the Erasmus+ programme.

5. In 2024, a new chapter was introduced in the NA Guide, which provides significant support in the area of human resource management, as the work of staff involved in organising TCAs has become directly fundable up to 15% of the total cost of the implemented activities. Although this is undoubtedly a step forward for the Agencies, there are still uncertainties within the system.

Table 1 – Introduction of the 15% rule in the 2024 NA Guide

NA Guide 2024
<p>10.6 Common funding rules for 'National Agency support to quality and impact' actions (TCA/NET, TEC and DiscoverEU Learning Cycle)</p> <p>10.6.1 Eligibility of National Agency staff costs</p> <p>For each 'National Agency support to quality and impact' action, National Agency staff costs are eligible up to a maximum of 15% of the total realised budget (i.e. actual budget spent), limited to a total amount of EUR 150,000.</p> <p>In case of increase of the EU allocation to a 'National Agency support to quality and impact' action following a budget transfer, eligible staff costs are limited to 15% of the initial EU allocation in the Contribution Agreement and to a total amount of EUR 150,000.</p> <p>Staff costs refer to any payment made to National Agency staff strictly for performing tasks related to the 'National Agency support to quality and impact' actions. (...)</p>

In all these changes, a strategic development trajectory can be observed:



Figure 2 – Evolution of the TCA criterion system

The European Commission increasingly views TCAs as a strategic tool, as can be inferred from the phrasing in the Commission's Guides. Although the description of TCAs appears in both versions in the same chapter (National Agency support to quality and impact), there are significant differences in the wording of the introductory text.

⁵ More comprehensive information can be found in Chapter III.B.1, which discusses organisational issues of National Agencies, and in Chapter 1 of the Annex, which presents the databases.

Table 2 – Comparison of chapters defining goals of TCAs in 2019 and 2024 Guides for NAs

NA Guide 2019	NA Guide 2024
<p>5.1.1 Objectives and scope of Transnational Cooperation Activities</p> <p>1. The Transnational Cooperation Activities (TCA) between National Agencies represent an instrument available to the NA to support the Erasmus + programme in fulfilling its objectives and priorities. Its aim is to bring added value and increased quality in the overall programme implementation and so contribute to increasing the impact of the programme at systemic level.</p> <p>2. Transnational Cooperation Activities target:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support to high quality implementation of Erasmus+ and to mobilising a maximum number of organisations and individuals to whom the Programme is addressed; • Strategic support to the development of the fields of education, training and youth work in line with the specific objectives of Erasmus+; • Strategic support to the cooperation between organisations active in the fields of education, training and/or youth. <p>3. When planning and implementing the Transnational Cooperation Activities, the NA has to take into account aims and measures for their implementation formulated in strategic documents such as EU 2020 in the field of Education and Training and the EU Youth Strategy in the field of youth and the annual European Commission Erasmus+ Work Programme.</p>	<p>10.1.1. Objectives of TCA and NET</p> <p>1. The Training and Cooperation Activities (TCA) and Networking activities (NET) are support activities implemented by the National Agency aiming to improve the implementation of the programmes in qualitative terms and to make them more strategic by building closer links with relevant elements of policy development.</p> <p>2. Specific objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support to activities aiming at enhancing links to European policy cooperation in the fields of education, training and youth as well as to activities aiming at influencing national practice in the fields concerned, and vice versa; • Support to activities aiming at increasing the quality of programme implementation, notably the participation and accessibility of the programmes, as well as community-building and networking between organisations.

While the 2019 NA Guide primarily focused on collaboration amongst National Agencies, the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme's objectives and priorities, as well as quality improvement and impact enhancement, directly linking tasks to higher applicant success rates, the 2024 NA Guide focuses much more on the quality approach, community and network building. It clearly articulates expectations towards National Agencies to support the mutual impact of programme implementation on national and European policies. This shift clarifies

the expected role of National Agencies: active and effective representatives of European education and training and youth policies (policy agent role). While there is no essential change in the range of implementable activities, the role of policy mediation and the expectation that National Agencies channel national practices into the system, require significantly stronger organisational competencies and enhanced strategic planning compared to their traditional operational function as grant providers.

Therefore, a separate two-year plan for TCA activities must be prepared within the National Agency's annual work plan (NA Guide 10.1.2.8. Planning, change, and cancellation of activities). As mentioned

earlier, the planning of long-term activities (LTAs) is even more stringent, requiring preliminary consultations with the Commission as well.

2. Effectiveness of TCAs and LTAs from the perspective of National Agencies

At the beginning of its activities, the SALTO E&T TCA Resource Centre conducted a European overview of the TCAs that had been operational for five years. According to the report published in 2020⁶, most National Agencies agreed that TCAs have added value and improve the overall quality of programme implementation, as well as contribute, at least in part, to enhancing the programme's impact at systemic level. This research – building on results of the research conducted five years ago – has primarily sought to answer what changed in the past five years.

In general, it can be said that:

- There has been significant growth of over 100% in both sending and hosting/organised activities between 2019 and 2023 both in terms of number of events and of participants.⁷ Although the level of activity is not uniform, all National Agencies participate in TCAs to the extent of their capabilities, and TCA Officer positions have been reorganised and strengthened in many countries.
- Both TCA Officers and leaders speak very positively about the opportunities provided by TCAs.

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

The previous research already revealed that participation in transnational collaborative activities represented an important learning opportunity for National Agency staff, and in many cases, the new tasks associated with organising TCAs influenced the working methods of National Agencies. After five years, based on both the interviews and written responses to the questionnaire, it can be clearly stated that alongside individual learning potentials, TCAs have also initiated significant organisational learning processes.

TCA PARTICIPANT: First, you can find the networks, you can find good practices coming from different other organisations in Europe, you can find future partners for your projects. And most of all, on one hand, you can share your activities and results coming from your projects, but on the other hand, there is first-hand qualitative information coming from NA staff, coming from trainers, experts within different fields of expertise.

SALTO TCA Education & Training YouTube channel

⁶ Balla, Á.; Molnár, K.; Almássy, A.; Albrecht-Garai, K. (editor), 2020: Taking stock of TCAs between 2014-18. Report of the research findings. Tempus Public Foundation

⁷ The last year examined in the previous research was 2018, after which, in 2019, a significantly great increase in TCAs could be observed in all fields compared to earlier years. In 2020, due to the pandemic, the number of organised activities had decreased to about half, and the number of participants had fallen to about a fifth, but in 2021, this number already reached the 2018 level, and by 2023, it exceeded the results from 2019 as well. For a detailed presentation of the data, see Chapter III.A.3.

INTERVIEW: A good training tool for NA staff is one that helps them truly understand what it means to engage in challenging methods, guiding them through the entire process of planning and coordinating international projects with their colleagues as part of their professional development. We view this as a critical modelling and training resource for NA staff, and our approach has been to ensure that everyone is involved.

Although National Agencies utilise various tools to engage and educate potential applicants, the significance of the TCA toolset in quality improvement is multifaceted. It serves as a fundamental resource that offers a flexible approach to cooperation amongst National Agencies, allowing for responsiveness to national needs within the programme and addressing numerous other – often unanticipated – areas. Hosting/organised activities, and, even more so, long-term activities (LTAs), share several aspects with the processes that Agencies expect from programmes submitted by applicant organisations. This similarity enables the staff groups within National Agencies to encounter and experience the challenges of project management while carrying out their own work. Such experiential learning fosters a better understanding of the dynamics involved in project implementation and enhances the capacity of National Agencies to support applicants effectively.

INTERVIEW: We see professional development as highly valuable for our staff, not only for their own growth but also to enable them to authentically communicate to others what the programme can achieve.

Qualitative research at all levels supports the observation that TCA Officers and NA leaders are increasingly committed to investing in TCAs. This growing commitment is significantly influenced by the experience of collaboration with other Agencies and the benefits of collaborative learning.

Thanks in part to the support of the SALTO E&T TCA Resource Centre, formal and informal channels have been established through which Agencies share information about their plans, assist each other in finding partners, and prepare for joint TCAs. Regular consultations on this topic take place during the meetings of National Agency Directors, with a clear common goal of better harnessing the potential inherent in TCAs.

INTERVIEW: We maintain close contact with our applicants, listening to their needs and plans. Additionally, we communicate with other National Agencies and partners to understand their activities and initiatives. Based on this collective input, we work to establish a list of topics that are most important for us.

In addition to cooperation, the Agencies are interdependent, as any NA can only be successful in the field of sending if there are enough hosting places, meaning that other NAs must be active in organising and must provide adequate quality. Similarly, those who organise transnational events inherently rely on the work of other NAs to reach their target groups and ensure an adequate number of applicants. In this sense, the Commission could hardly have provided a more suitable tool for the National Agencies

to initiate genuine cooperation among them, and the recognition of common goals will surely lead to increasingly stronger working relationships over the years.

INTERVIEW: It is not only the question of rules, it's the question of the overall capacity of other NAs. If other NAs don't have capacity to organise TCAs, you cannot send your participants to TCAs.

The mutual influence among NAs can also be observed at another level. For example, international events that – due to oversubscription – cannot provide enough space in one country, can be organised as national events, thus, responding to the needs of applicants. Participation in each other's events is key to development: the staff of National Agencies can learn new methodologies and approaches from one another, which they can later apply in their own work.

TCA Officers and the interviewed leaders also identified many learning areas and positive outcomes associated with attending TCAs organised by other National Agencies:

- the development of participants' personal competencies, which they can channel back into their grant application work;
- networking and partnership-building potential;
- direct contact with representatives from the sector even on an international level;
- they can strengthen ongoing projects with their personal presence, helping with monitoring work;
- they can find and connect to new partners;
- they can build personal relationships with the staff of other National Agencies, allowing them to share common challenges in their work and learn from one another.

FROM THE RESPONSES TO THE TCA OFFICER QUESTIONNAIRE:

"participation of NA staff: new ideas, new contacts, opportunity for sharing, job shadowing, networking and understanding what E+ is and what it stands for"

"sense of community with other countries' citizens"

"it makes participants feel European, seeing that they meet the same challenges as their colleagues from abroad – it makes them feel closer"

"developing skills, learning about new topics, clarifying aspects of daily work, building cooperation, sharing knowledge, peer learning among colleagues, improving strategic planning of TCAs, growing professionally"

In addition, the most frequently mentioned importance of organising transnational TCAs is the support for partner search. Beneficiaries often complain to National Agency staff that they have great difficulties in finding potential partners for their project ideas, and TCAs provide excellent opportunities for National Agencies to coordinate networking activities. Several respondents also noted that for smaller countries, the opportunity to participate in TCAs opens doors for their applicants, as they can meet potential partners from all over Europe.

Cooperation within National Agencies is also a key factor, as successful events can only be achieved through joint planning. Based on the responses to the questionnaire regarding this issue, the general working method is that staff members working on TCAs and those working in sectoral funding areas jointly plan TCAs, typically involving managerial levels as well. Regular internal meetings are held, and in some cases, external experts are also involved, clearly building on good practices learned from TCAs organised by others. There is an increasing focus on what other National Agencies plan, also to avoid unnecessary duplications. Different approaches exist within various educational sectors, but the grassroots approach is more typical, meaning that the proposal for the theme of the TCA often comes from sectoral programme managers who know their beneficiaries the best. These staff members incorporate their grant application experiences into the TCA processes (e.g., if they notice that needs analysis presented in many applications is weak, they initiate a thematic event in this area to improve quality of applications). However, it also happens that Agencies assess the training needs of their applicants or specifically organise a TCA on a topic because they have few applicants in a particular horizontal priority and can better familiarise them with the subject through this.

FIGURE 3 – DO YOU CONSIDER COOPERATION WITH ERASMUS+ APPLICATION UNITS APPROPRIATE?

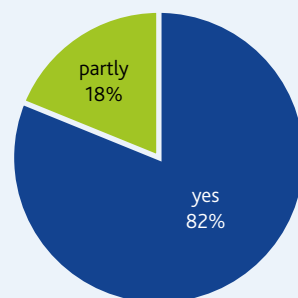


Figure 3 – Opinion of TCA Officers about cooperation with sectoral units

Based on the responses to the questionnaire, communication regarding the organisation of TCAs is functioning well in the majority of National Agencies, and continuous internal cooperation increasingly places TCAs within a strategic framework.

QUESTIONNAIRE: At our NA, sectoral officers regularly cooperate with the TCA Officer, so we can communicate specific sectoral needs, then, we can easily include them into our strategy.

INTERVIEW: The TCA Officers are in constant communication with the sectoral departments. They ask them what they want, what they need, what they would like to organise, what their priorities are for a certain year, what partners they have. So, it's a constant communication and I think more and more they will be able to reflect on them strategically, and then the final decision is always made on the level of the heads of units and the main E+ coordinators.

All of this represents a clear added value to the Erasmus+ programme, influencing the learning potential at all levels of National Agencies. It encourages continuous professional development, creates opportunities for networking amongst those working in the same field at the European level, and broadens the spectrum of opportunities for meetings with project implementers.

Overall, it provides developmental opportunities for the staff members of National Agencies to more effectively convey European values and their benefits to applicants, supported by personal experiences they gain in project-based organising job, the working methods of other National Agencies, and the cultural differences that become part of their daily work. Participation in TCAs, along with the knowledge gained from being involved in their organisation, clearly channels back into the grant application knowledge and thus becomes organisational knowledge. Finally, TCAs provide not only learning opportunities but also inspiration for participants. It would be a mistake to underestimate the learning aspect of TCAs, as the European Commission sets high expectations: beyond precise and efficient operational work, it expects National Agencies to deliver tasks with a creative and strategic approach. Through TCAs, they essentially receive tools for development, and Agencies are increasingly taking advantage of these opportunities.

NATIONAL ACTIVITIES

National TCAs play a crucial role in establishing connections with applicants from their own country.

INTERVIEW: National TCAs are very important components of building project capacities on the national level, but you have to know that although the Commission has approved it, they always want to see the balance, that there are fewer national activities than transnational TCAs.

The pool of potential applicants in each country – both in quantitative and qualitative terms – can be much more actively engaged in discussions related to specific European policy goals or horizontal priorities. Transformative seminars provide an opportunity for participants to initiate conversations in an open atmosphere, free from language barriers. Those attending these events do so out of a desire to learn and show interest, and they often arrive at their own project ideas through feedback from other participants. However, it can already be considered a significant achievement if their horizons are broadened towards the European dimensions of education and training, or if they gain inspiration for participating in further professional events. Therefore, these dialogue-generating opportunities are crucial for National Agencies.

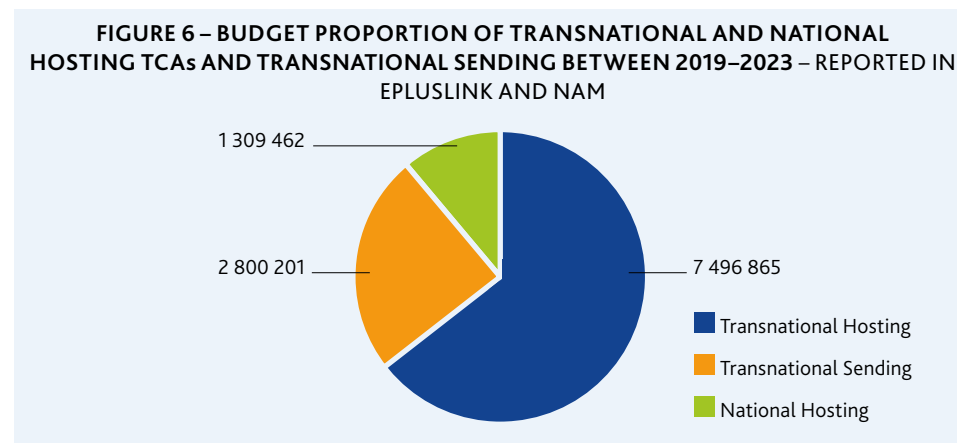
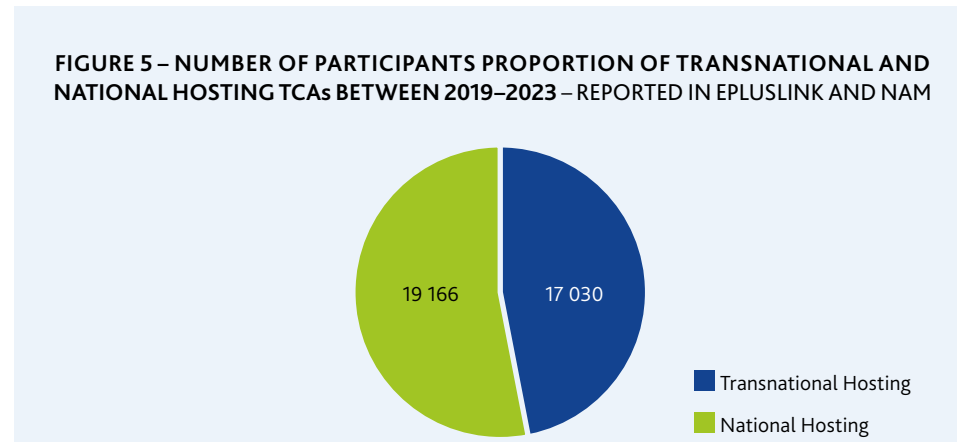
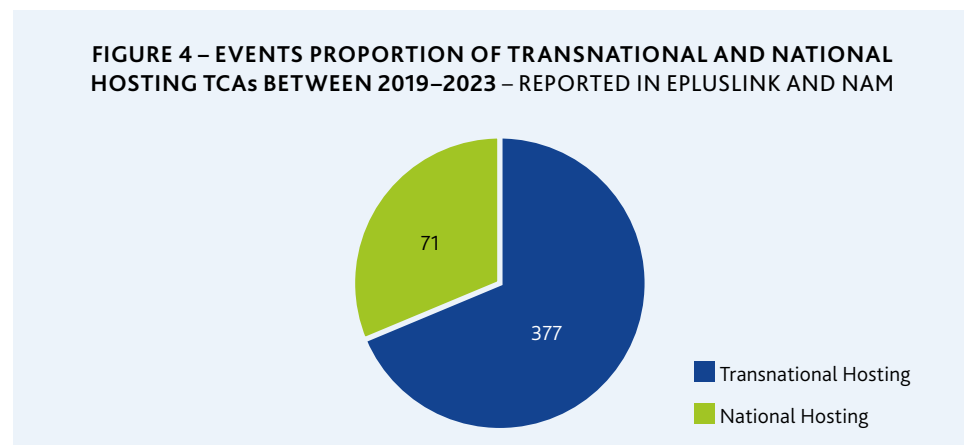
INTERVIEW: When we started organising one or two activities, the staff saw first-hand how transformative TCAs can be for teachers, adult educators, or tutors. They witnessed how partnerships are formed and how these partnerships evolve into projects that change lives and help create more inclusive societies. Through these small experiences, they gained a deeper understanding. Similarly, when we talk to schools, we often say that once people get involved in the programme, they rarely step away—and I think this is equally true for the Agencies when it comes to TCA. They see the programme come to life before their eyes, understand the impact it can have, and they never look back.

The interviewed leaders unanimously evaluated that TCAs are a flexible tool for engaging potential applicants, as both the topics and methodologies can be tailored to the needs of the target group. Agencies strive to identify these needs and create connections between European goals and national policy programmes. Analysing the titles and objectives of the events, four characteristic groups can be identified within the national TCAs:

- The most common events relate to major projects of the Erasmus+ programme (e.g., "The Future of Erasmus," "Role Models").
- This is followed by contact seminars that support networking and partner search.
- A distinct group comprises events focused on enhancing application quality in specific areas (such as, supporting strategic planning in KA2 projects or events organised around specific horizontal priorities like the green agenda and sustainability).
- Finally, there are very specialised events targeting specific groups, presumably in sectors where resources are not adequately tapped.

Sectoral unit staff members are well aware of the shortcomings in the implementation and execution of applications, and through national TCAs, they can take targeted measures to improve quality. National TCAs can be flexibly adjusted to thematic needs and priority areas, such as sustainability, inclusiveness, digitalisation, or the green agenda. It is crucial for these topics to be integrated into the national education discourse through National Agencies.

Figures 4-6 – Number of events, number of participants and budget of transnational and national hosting and transnational sending TCAs between 2019–2023 - reported in EplusLink and NAM



Comparing the quantifiable results of transnational and national TCAs, we observe that while the number of national events accounts for about 30% of all hosting-type events, nearly 50% of participants are reached through national events, whereas the cost associated with these events represents only 15% of organised TCA total expenditures.

In a position paper formulated by National Agencies in 2019, a call was made to the Commission for clearer guidance on the potential scope of national TCAs: "The activities at national level should be further clarified and clearly linked to programme priorities." The Commission clearly accepted this request, allowing for the organisation of national TCAs within the new programme cycle that began in 2021, which is currently still operating under the 2021 conditions. According to the NA Guide, events do not have to be strictly tied to horizontal priorities; rather, the general and more flexible principle applies, as it does in the overall framework of TCAs. It should be clear that the event adds value at the European level and contributes to quality improvement of the programme. While interpretations by

Agencies may differ, it appears they have been able to utilise the flexible frameworks effectively, as the number of nationally organised TCAs has significantly increased since 2023.

The first draft of the upcoming position paper does not request significant changes regarding national TCAs. However, there is a desire to ensure that the new NA Guide does not impose a maximum limit of 50% on the ratio of organised events but rather reflects on the proportional role of the National Agency within its own TCA strategy, both financially and in terms of scale.

NA Guide 2019	NA Guide 2021
<p>5.1.2. Activities 5.1.2.1 Eligible activities</p> <p>1. The NA may organise the following eligible activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transnational training, support and contact seminars of potential Programme participants; • Transnational thematic activities linked to the objectives, priority target groups and themes of the Programme. <p>National activities are eligible if they are directly linked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the European events relevant to Erasmus+ (European Youth Week, EYE-European Youth Event); - the establishment and implementation of the network of role models for social inclusion as specified in Annex III.20; - activities in the field of youth addressing policy themes highly relevant at European level which are connected to Erasmus+ (implementation of Paris Declaration, integration of refugees/asylum seekers). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transnational evidence based analysis of Programme results. <p>2. The following activities are ineligible and cannot be funded from the budget for Transnational Cooperation Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities implemented solely at national level with no direct link to a Transnational Cooperation Activity between NAs (to be covered through the Contribution to management costs of the NA); an exception being the events at national level as described under point 1 above; • Erasmus+ volunteering Training and Evaluation Cycle (to be supported with funds from the European Solidarity Corps); • NA activities planned in the frame of Part II of the annual NA Erasmus+ Work Programme – Programme implementation activities and Programme management which are supported through the contribution to the management cost of the NA. 	<p>5.1.2. Activities 5.1.2.1. Eligible Training and Cooperation Activities (TCA)</p> <p>The NA may organise the following eligible activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training, support and contact seminars of potential Programme participants; • Thematic activities linked to the objectives, priority target groups and themes of the Programme; • Evaluation and analysis of Programme results; • Activities linked to European-level events (e.g. legacy of the European Youth Week, EYE-European Youth Event, European Day of Languages, European Language Label, European Innovative Teaching Award, etc.). <p>TCA can have a transnational or national scope. TCAs with a national scope are eligible provided that they offer clear European added value and are instrumental to improving the quality of the programme and/or reaching its objectives.</p> <p>Activities concerning the 'Evaluation and analysis of Programme results' can only have a transnational scope.</p> <p>The following activities are ineligible cannot be funded from the budget for TCA:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DiscoverEU Learning Cycle; • National Agency activities planned in Part II of the NA Work Programme, which are supported through the contribution to the management cost of the NA. <p>5.1.3.2. Eligible costs</p> <p>4. National TCA/NET</p> <p>The part of the budget for national TCA/NET activities should be proportional and balanced in relation to the objectives of the NA strategy for TCA/NET and the part of the budget for transnational TCA/NET activities. For TCA, indicatively, at least half of the implemented activities should have a transnational scope.</p> <p>National activities under TCA/NET must not overlap with activities supported through the management fees and indicated in Part II of the Work Programme.</p>

Table 3 – Comparison of chapters defining activities in 2019 and 2021 Guides for NAs

EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPACT

A key element of the managerial interviews was the question about the impact of TCAs and the measurability of that impact. In line with the strong expectations of the Commission, several entities are attempting some form of measurement, but the lack of centralised coordination from the Commission in this area poses a challenge for NAs. One potential effectiveness indicator could be measuring whether TCA participants later become active programme users or whether they can improve the quality of their projects. Among the interviewees, several mentioned this possibility, but few were aware of whether their agency had collected such data. A sectoral unit head pointed out clear methodological difficulties, and it is probably not coincidental that this direct expectation has also been omitted from the NA Guide. In the survey, TCA Officers indicated that they faced the most difficulties in impact measurement (see the chart below), like the findings of the 2019 research. At the same time, they reported – particularly Agencies in smaller countries – that they maintain live and close relationships with beneficiaries, which allows them to observe the progress being made.

INTERVIEW: As a smaller National Agency, we maintain proximity to our beneficiaries. This allows my colleagues, during the selection process, to recognise instances where, for example, a participant engaged in a TCA 18 months ago and is now taking part for the first time in a larger initiative.

Another approach frequently appeared in the responses, which aligns better with the programme's perspective. Although there are no specific expected indicators from the Commission regarding outcomes, nor a formal reporting mechanism at the horizontal level, every activity must be in line with the broader objectives of the programme. Additionally, TCA activities must be based on sectoral strategies, which need to be presented annually in the work programme.

INTERVIEW: When submitting our contact activities in the final report, there must be a clear correlation between what was planned and how it aligns with the broader objectives of the programme.

A field of uncertainty is predominantly perceived in impact measurement. Various measurement methods are employed, with each TCA event accompanied by an evaluation questionnaire. Some Agencies and events conduct both pre- and post-evaluations; however, leaders also recognise the existing gaps in this regard. They state that real impact unfolds only over a longer time frame, and that methodologically sound measurements exceed the capacity of a grant-awarding organisation.

Nonetheless, there is also a noticeable curiosity, leading several respondents to suggest that longitudinal studies are needed for a better understanding of TCA impacts. It would likely be more advantageous to seek concrete outcome indicators along the lines of individual NA strategies rather than focusing solely on horizontal impact. This assumes that NAs make a genuine effort to develop the TCA strategy as part of their work programme, and to include it in their yearly reports, which are then professionally evaluated by the Commission. This could pave the way for a constructive dialogue.

FIGURE 7 – WHICH OF THE FOLLOWINGS ARE THE MOST CHALLENGING IN YOUR JOB AS A TCA OFFICER?

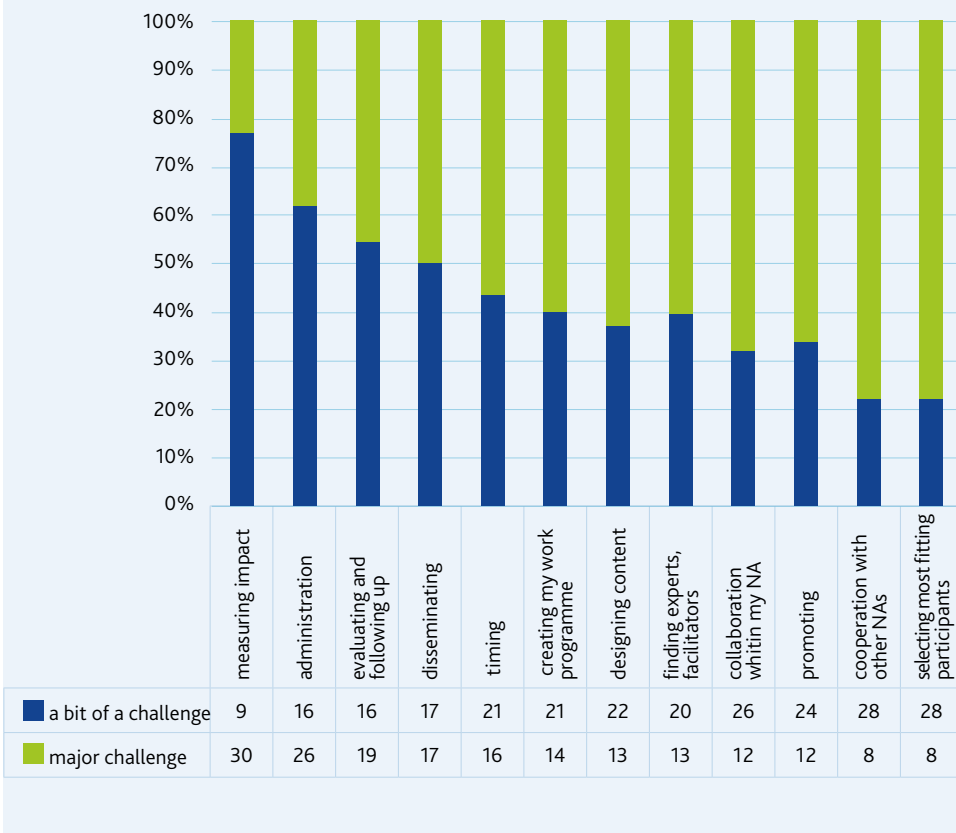


Figure 7 – Which tasks are the most challenging for TCA Officers? (Questionnaire for TCA Officers)

Currently, the submission of yearly reports is conducted through the National Agency Module (NAM), which is hardly useful for research purposes.

It would be significantly simpler and more effective for everyone to standardise data collection necessary for the analysis of quantifiable indicators.

One possible tool can be the SALTO platform, which already has the appropriate IT infrastructure for this purpose. The SALTO E&T TCA Resource Centre could support the collection of numeric results and outputs in collaboration with the National Agencies, as well as the dynamic processing and accessibility of outcome indicators on the platform. However, such central coordination requires standardised data uploads, which is currently not agreed upon amongst the Agencies.

Although all respondents unanimously supported the relevance and usefulness of TCAs in achieving the National Agencies' objectives, several questions have arisen regarding the achievement of long-term effects. It is evident that the National Agencies flexibly utilise the opportunities provided by TCAs in accordance with their goals, but since there are no output expectations and measurable indicators, the true impact remains hidden. Responses indicate that the Commission is exerting pressure on the Agencies to demonstrate the real impact of the use of TCA resources on the Erasmus+ programme, while – as previously demonstrated – the changes in the conditional framework do not point towards more specific frameworks and central expectations. The relationship between the Agencies and the Commission appears to be a kind of cat-and-mouse game: if the Agencies want additional funding for quality improvement and efficiency enhancement of their programmes, they can essentially utilise TCA resources freely, but specific results must be demonstrated, placing the responsibility on individual Agencies. Thus, the traditionally grassroots-organised nature of the field, which provides creative space for Agencies, can be maintained, but they must also seize the opportunity to increase programme impact. There is, of course, no specific or uniform answer to what best enhances programme impact. Therefore, experimentation and the organisational learning process described above, utilising the TCA framework, are important, as is close cooperation between the Agencies.

The situation can also be interpreted as the European Commission believing that National Agencies are capable of finding their own tools to achieve common goals, which clearly indicates trust in them. Among the responses regarding the achieved impact and its measurability, several indicated that they would welcome more concrete manifestations of this trust.

Overall, we can reach a similar conclusion to that found in the mid-term evaluation report of the Erasmus+ programme:

“The evaluation concludes that, in the absence of the Erasmus+ and its predecessors, there would be clear negative effects on learning mobility abroad, transnational cooperation among organisations, including with partner countries, integration between European countries as well as the attitude of participants towards the EU.”

EC (2018): Mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme (2014–2020)

In the absence of the toolset of Training and Cooperation Activities, National Agencies would certainly have fewer tools for improving project quality and creating connections between national and European policies, which would not only negatively impact the achievement of operational objectives but also hinder the organisational development process that could lead to the expected role perception presented in Chapter 1.

Outlook for the youth sector

INTERVIEW: I think a big progress can be seen but the first few years were very difficult for the education field.

Inevitably, a comparison arises between the education and training sectors and the youth sector. According to data shared by the European Commission at the TCA Officers' meeting in April 2021, education and training sectors were only able to utilise 33% of the available resources, with just six Agencies achieving over 50%. By 2024, a significant increase to a utilisation rate of 66% is predicted, while for the youth sector, this rate is expected to be around 93%.

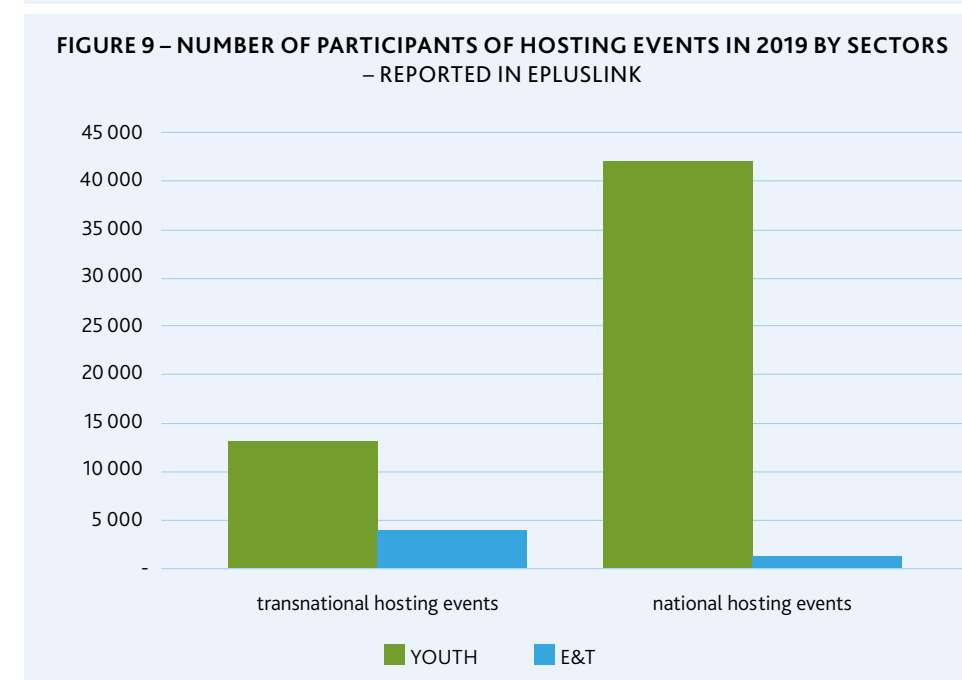
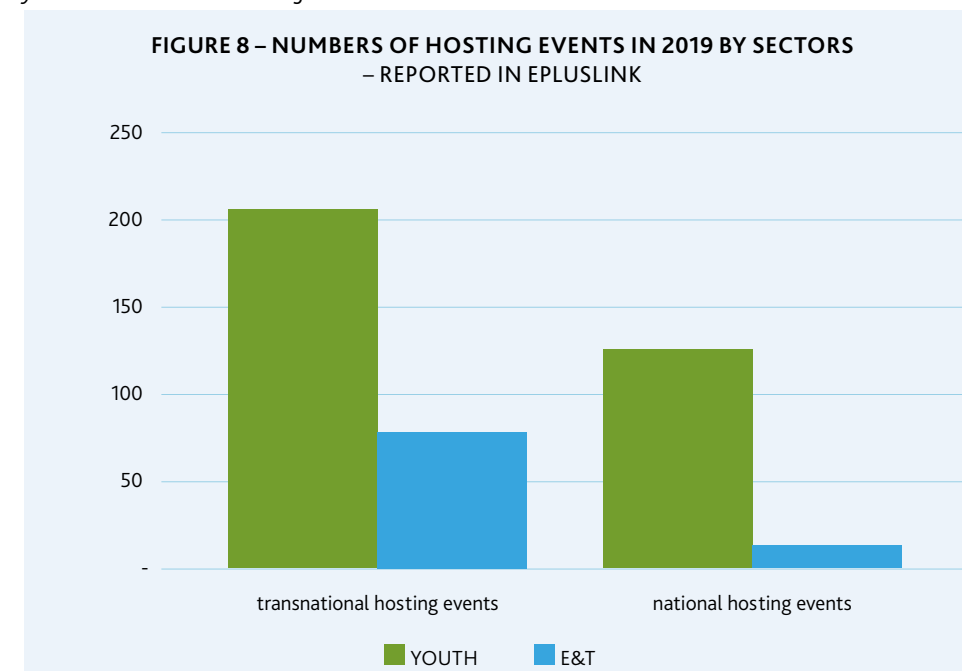
Interviews indicate that the Agencies strive for more balanced performance, but they still face numerous obstacles. In the youth sector, TCA activities started 15 years earlier, and in many ways, the needs, traditions, and cultural and institutional characteristics of the two fields differ significantly.⁸

The database provided by the European Commission for research purposes (EplusLink 2019-2020) allowed for a comparison of the data from the first two years of the examined period. The graphs on the left show the data for the year of 2019, which marked the fifth year of the introduction of Transnational / Training and Cooperation Activities (TCA) within the education and training sectors. From the graphs, it can be seen that in 2019, the number of transnational events, the number of participants, and the associated costs in the youth sector were 2 to 2.5 times higher than those in the education and training sectors. However, the most significant difference was in the volume of national events, which, at that time, could hardly be organised in the education sectors, with few thematic exceptions. Over the past five years, the rate of resource utilisation in the education sectors has grown to about three times of its previous levels, but unfortunately, we do not have comparable data for 2024. Interestingly, when comparing the ratio of participants sent to events organised by other National Agencies in the youth sector, it is about twice as high as compared to the education sectors. This means that the youth sector sends double the number of participants to each event, and these events themselves tend to have larger attendance. This is especially true for nationally organised TCAs, where there is a tradition of hosting large-scale events in the youth sector.

The comparison of the numerical data from the two sectors is particularly interesting in terms of the expected development potential from TCA activities, which were introduced much later in the education sectors. It's also worth looking into the role that TCAs play within these sectors.

⁸ Resources available to both fields are essentially the same, but within education and training, these resources are shared among four major sub-sectors: school, vocational training, higher education, and adult education. It's important to note that the data may not necessarily be reliable, as Agencies themselves are uncertain due to overlapping periods of reporting and planning, as well as changes in the databases (details can be found in the first chapter of the Appendix).

Figures 8-10 – Comparison of number of hosting TCAs, number of participants and cost of events in 2019 between youth and education and training sectors



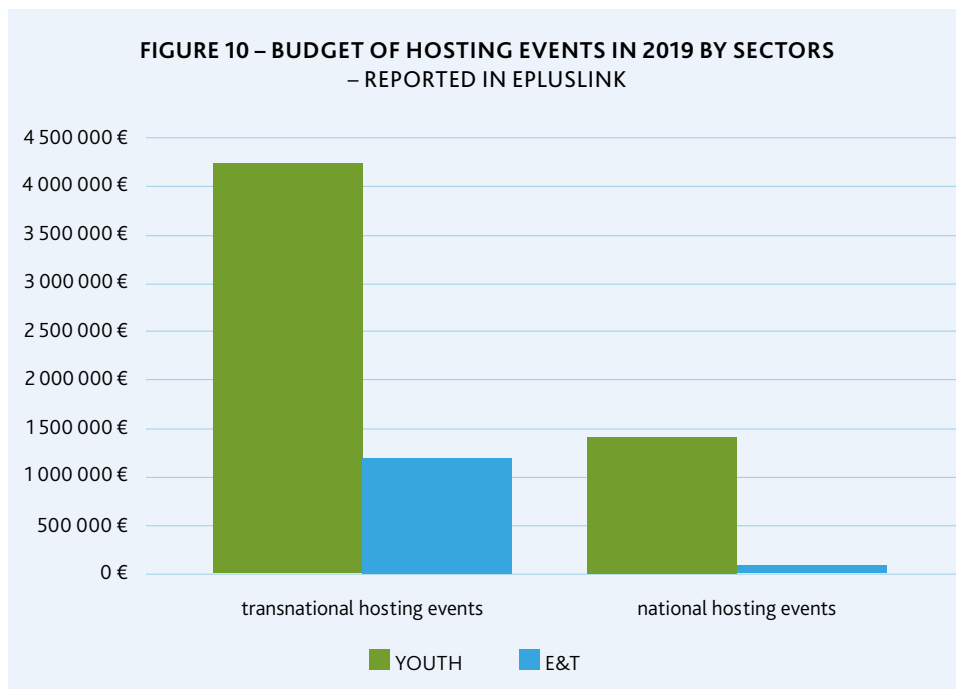


Figure 11 – Comparison of the number of sending TCAs, the number of participants and the cost of those events in 2019 between the youth and education and training sectors

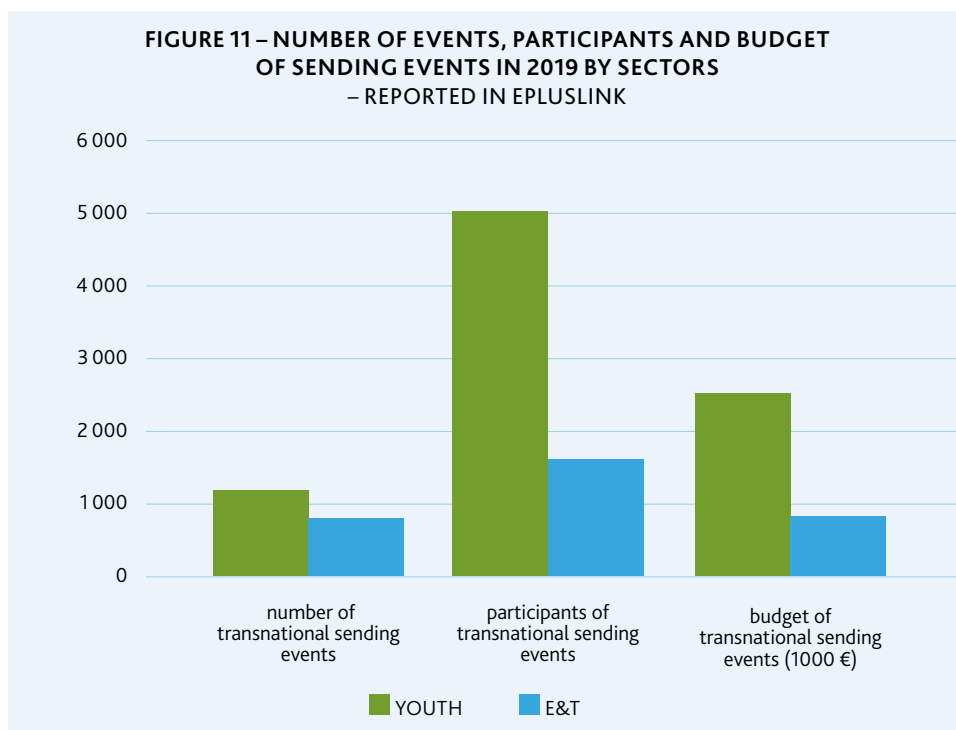


Table 4 – Objectives and importance of TCAs in the education and training and the youth sectors

The objectives and importance of TCAs in the given sector	
YOUTH	EDUCATION AND TRAINING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25 years of tradition • rather self-organising, large proportion of non-governmental organisations • lack of stable financial resources in the sector (in many countries) • the sector consciously uses Erasmus+ funds for capacity building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 years of experience • highly institutionalised, slowly reacting systems • generally predictable financial resources in the sector • Erasmus+ funds are mainly used for individual and organisational purposes

The sectoral features listed vary significantly from country to country, but overall, they can powerfully explain why the TCA has become such a popular and successful tool within the youth sector. The youth sector, which is primarily organised from the bottom-up and often underfunded in many countries, has increasingly begun to use the resources available through the TCA for capacity building and systems development. The training activities of youth workers have been complemented by various evaluation collaborations and impact assessments, as well as networking opportunities. It is no coincidence that the evaluation-type TCA (EBAR) is much more prevalent in the youth sector than in education. The Europe-wide RAYNet network started in 2008 with a joint international research project by the Austrian National Agency and the University of Innsbruck and currently includes 34 Member Countries. This research network operates international projects across all areas of European youth strategic priorities and, of course, heavily relies on the personal professional meeting opportunities provided by TCAs. In 2019, around 100 TCA titles featured various RAY projects (30% hosting, 70% sending) with more than 5,000 participants. Previous research noted, and interviews have confirmed, that

there is a much larger human capacity relative to the volume of applications within the youth units of the National Agencies, with significantly more staff involved in organising TCAs.

The youth SALTO Resource Centres have supported this work from the beginning (currently, four thematic and three regional centres are operational), and since 2003, they have regularly published longitudinal statistical data, research, and evaluation reports. It is likely just a matter of time before the education and training sector can further tap into the strategic development potential inherent in TCAs, which strengthens policy collaborations in line with the Commission's guidelines.

In this regard, it would be premature to be impatient after ten years. It is more important to recognise the significant strides the youth sector has made, even with stable development goals and funding backgrounds, while the education sectors are increasingly able to leverage resources.

National Agency leaders acknowledge that there is still much to learn and develop, for which the operation of the Agencies of both fields alongside each other is a natural opportunity within many NAs.

LONG-TERM ACTIVITIES (LTAS)

Since 2021, as a strategic advancement of TCAs, National Agencies have had the opportunity to plan and implement long-term activities (LTA). These collaborations can specifically be established for policy development goals and areas, and prior consultation with the Commission is required before they can be included in their multiannual work programme. This opportunity seems particularly attractive to the Agencies. By 2022, sixteen LTAs had already been launched, with about half of the Agencies participating. The two piloting LTAs (coordinated by the SALTO E&T TCA RC) had already been completed, with additional ones finished in 2024, and new ones are continuously starting. The SALTO E&T TCA Resource Centre created a Padlet space⁹ accessible for all Agencies to collect new LTA ideas, where anyone can announce their concept along with its related project plan, and those interested can indicate their willingness to join. The SALTO E&T TCA RC supports these ideas by sharing information, and most ideas are likely to lead to collaboration sooner or later.

The LTAs most commonly relate to horizontal priorities, but there are also plans for various research initiatives and university and researcher networking. Additionally, current topics linked to the digital world are quite popular, such as Digital education in the age of artificial intelligence or AI-driven search, certainly in connection with the Erasmus+ programme, aimed at facilitating the work of applicants. The Mentor network LTA concept seeks to reach a broader range of institutions and improve the quality of applications. Most plans have a developmental focus, often serving as a continuation of the results from previous LTAs.

During both the interviews and the questionnaire, we have asked for opinions on how well LTAs fulfil their expected roles. There was a unanimous response regarding the idea that alongside individual TCAs, a more strategic and long-term approach could enhance the impact and visibility of these initiatives. Moreover,

LTAs represent an important opportunity for strategic cooperation among National Agencies (interestingly enough, these types of TCAs are referred to as SNACs – Strategic National Agency Cooperations in the youth field).

However, similar to what we see with project applications, some growing pains are still noticeable. The ability to launch unique ideas strengthens the approach that allows for bottom-up initiatives, where innovations can thrive; yet creativity does not always come hand in hand with a strategic mindset. Several respondents suggested that the planning of LTAs should ideally be preceded by a multi-step, longer process to ensure partners' commitment and appropriate expertise. Since staff from National Agencies can only participate in TCA and LTA activities through active involvement (the phrase is an

'active role' in the NA Guide¹⁰), the workload of the staff often hinders the quality of their work, especially if engaging in these new activities was not originally part of their workload. Many TCA Officers report feeling overwhelmed, which – for LTA Coordinators – complicates the search for partners. On the other hand, many experience that there is 'too much noise', with an increasing number of events to promote, partners to recommend, and the amount of information can be confusing.

FROM THE ANSWERS TO THE TCA OFFICERS' QUESTIONNAIRE:

"It's challenging to integrate the LTA activities in the work routine of the Agency and to plan activities with other Agencies."

"I love working in partnership with other NAs but it's financially complicated."

"LTAs look like KA220 restructured partnerships, but they do not have lumpsum."

"NAs are eager to participate in our LTAs and sometimes they join the ongoing project(s) and shed new fresh light on the already discussed issues."

"Big advantage for small NAs as they can contribute depending on their possibility in terms of human resource."

Overall, it seems that most Agencies are eager to take advantage of the new opportunities, with many initiatives having been launched. These include some more structured, long-term projects, as well as others where the expected outcomes aren't completely clear – like what we see among project applications. As it was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, project planning and experience are extremely important learning processes for staff members working at National Agencies. It's natural that there's a lot of experimentation when starting a new task, with some efforts yielding immediate results while others may only prove useful later, as many LTA Coordinators working in the education and training sectors are still learning the process. In terms of quality management, European coordination from both the Commission and the SALTO Resource Centres is crucial. However, it is also essential to maintain TCAs' flexibility as a tool to facilitate development. This will ensure that, in the long run, the effectiveness of LTAs is not solely measured by quantifiable data from the series of events, their topics, and connections to specific priorities or resource utilisation. Instead, it should also highlight the new professional outcomes created within the framework of LTAs and the development of the LTA professional communities. The involvement of National Agencies and the support for their staff is key, as their professional development will benefit their application management work, positively impacting both the quantity and the quality of the programme.

¹⁰ In the 2019 NA Guide, it was clearly stated that an NA staff member's participation in a TCA organised by another Agency could only be funded if they were acting as a trainer or facilitator. However, since 2023, the wording has been alleviated to allow funding for participation as long as there is active involvement. This change has caused some confusion among Agencies that prefer clearer and more precise guidance, in contrast, the modified wording offers more flexibility to others, enabling them to interpret the concept of active involvement in a more adaptable way. (NA Guide 2019: NA coordinating or co-organising the activity can cover the travel and accommodation costs for one NA staff member provided that he/she participates in the activity as a trainer/facilitator. NA Guide 2024: Staff members of the National Agency organising, co-organising the activity or coordinating (in the case of long-term activities), provided that they have an active role in the TCA/NET.)

⁹ [LTA Ideas](#)

In addition, LTAs play a strategic role in utilising available resources. While implementing individual TCAs is a much simpler, quicker, and more flexible tool for responding to the needs of target groups, their impact is short-term. On the other hand, LTAs hold greater potential for achieving strategic goals and long-term impacts, while also deepening collaboration amongst National Agencies. Therefore, it is worthwhile to focus on balancing these two types of activities in the future.

INTERVIEW: This does not mean that standalone TCAs should be stopped. They are also very good and very relevant, but I think that more and more LTAs should be formed, and they should really provide good systemic impactful support to the programme beneficiaries.

A great example is the experience of one of the first Digital LTAs launched. Although there was no explicit goal to track or measure the project applications submitted in this area, participants reported that their decisions related to applying for Erasmus+ grants were significantly influenced by their participation in the international seminars organised under the LTA framework. They successfully found partners and, as a result, later applied for student support for digital-focused KA1 mobility or started a KA2 project on digital topics, incorporating the themes of digital well-being and media literacy learned during the LTA.

DIGITAL LTA'S PROJECT COORDINATOR REPORT: We have concluded that the biggest and most obvious benefit of an LTA is collaboration of NAs and so, the internationalisation of the TCAs on the project management level. It is much easier and fluent to organise a relevant event in a priority with the expertise and contribution of more than one NA! Partners have been able to share their knowledge, their practices and good examples with one another, they have been able to filter out the most needed topics to organise events for, and it has also been much easier to identify the most fitting participants together when sending NAs have not only seen short TCA Descriptions but have been there from square one to see who exactly should be sent to the event and how exactly they can prepare them for the event. (Digitalisation in SE 2021-2024 Long-term Activity Overview)

3. Quantifiable results of TCAs between 2019 and the first half of 2024

The databases used for the research do not necessarily contain comprehensive and accurate data, which is detailed in Chapter 1 of the Appendix, presenting the databases. Therefore, the tables and graphs presented in this study primarily serve as a guide. By comparing various databases, we have concluded that while the exact numbers may not fully capture reality, the ratios related to the programmes are closely aligned, making them suitable for extrapolating trends in the growth and changes of TCA activities.

Three databases have been processed for this research:

- EplusLink 2019-2020, youth and education and training sectors (European Commission)
- National Agency Module (NAM) 2021-2023, education and training sectors (European Commission)
- SALTO E&T TCA RC Platform database 2018-2024, education and training sectors (Tempus Public Foundation)

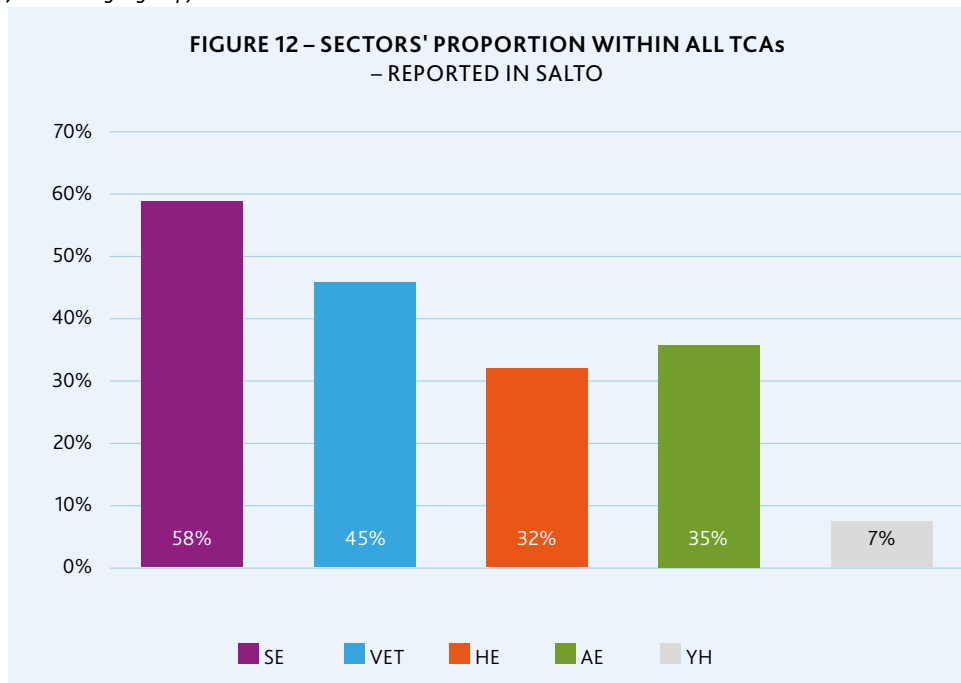
The first two years of the research period (2019 and 2020) belong to the previous, 2014-2020 programme cycle, and the data came from the same source as those of the preceding research. However, with the transition to the 2021-2027 programme cycle, the data collection methodology had changed, necessitating the merging of the Commission's databases to present time series data for the examined period. EplusLink contained individual events, while the NAM only provided aggregated National Agency reports (for an uncertain period, because of the overlapping reporting and planning dates), which could only be matched in the main categories. Therefore, in several areas of investigation, it was more appropriate to use the SALTO database, which was not mandatory for Agencies to fill in, and which still matched the EplusLink data that had been filled in on a mandatory basis by 90%. The second and third years of the research period coincided with the pandemic, which significantly reduced the number of organised TCAs, and most of the ones actually realised were held online. To allow for better comparability of the two five-year periods since the start, the analysis also included the first half of 2024. Consequently, the data revealed in the analysis could be compared with the findings from the previous five-year analysis (Taking stock of TCAs between 2014 and 2018).

Comparing the key findings of the two periods, we observe a significant increase in the numbers.

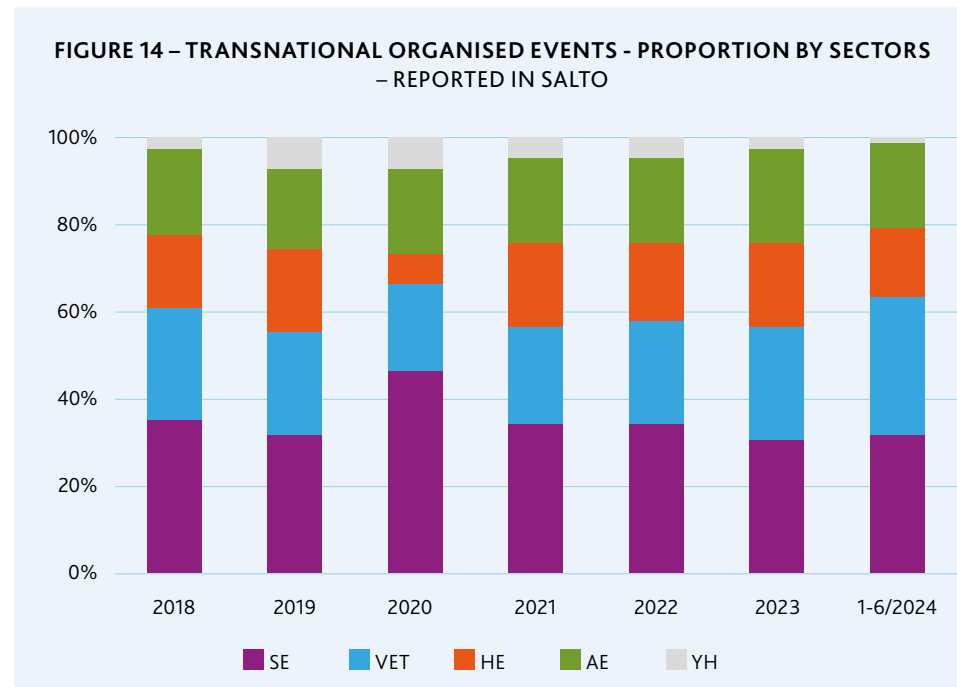
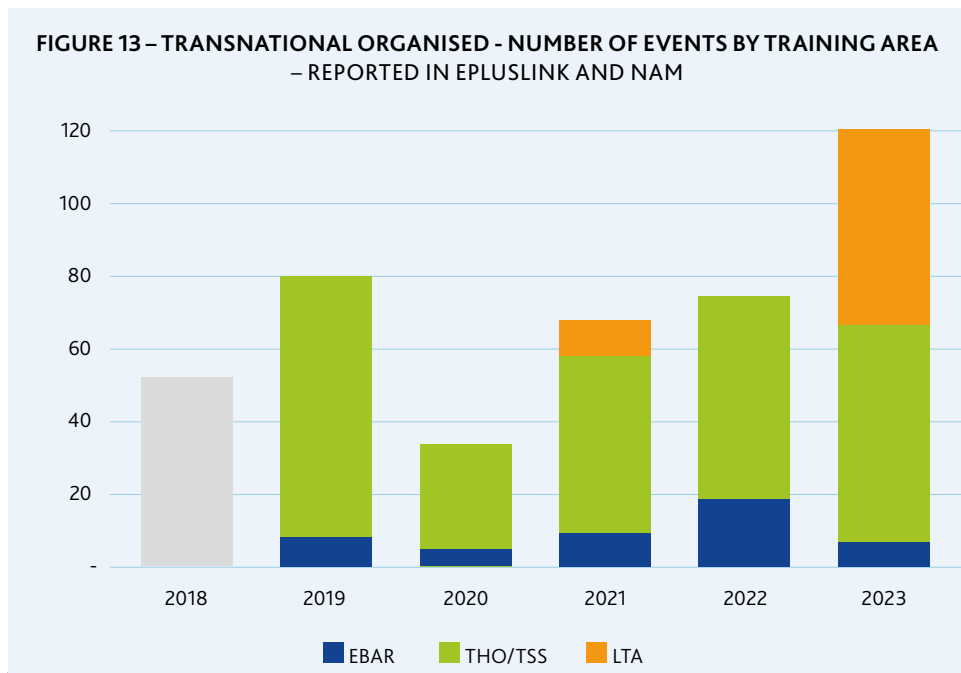
Table 5 – Comparison of the main quantifiable data of TCAs in the first and second five-year periods of their operation

The table contains only approximate values!	Between 2014 and 2018	Between 2019 and the first half of 2024	Change
Number of TCA events organised at transnational level	209 events	377 events	80%
Number of TCA participants	5,700 people	17,000 people	300%
Cost of TCAs organised at international level	no data	7,500.000 €	
Share of cross-sectoral events	22%	37%	70%
Most active sector	school education – 40%	school education – 58% (share of events exclusive for this sector – 26%)	
Most popular priority	inclusion – 30%	inclusion – 24%	

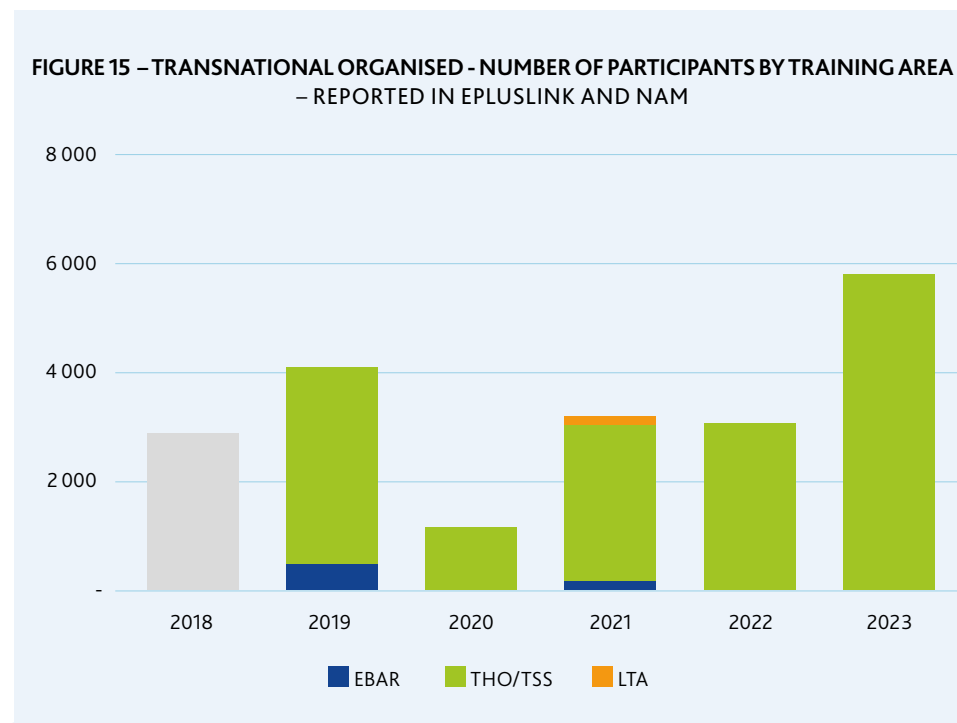
Figure 12 – Proportion of each education sector within all transnational TCAs (cross-sectoral events are counted for each target group)



Figures 13-14 – Distribution of TCAs organised at transnational level by training area and educational sectors between 2018 and the first half of 2024



Figures 15-16 – Number and cost of participants in TCAs organised at transnational level between 2019 and 2023



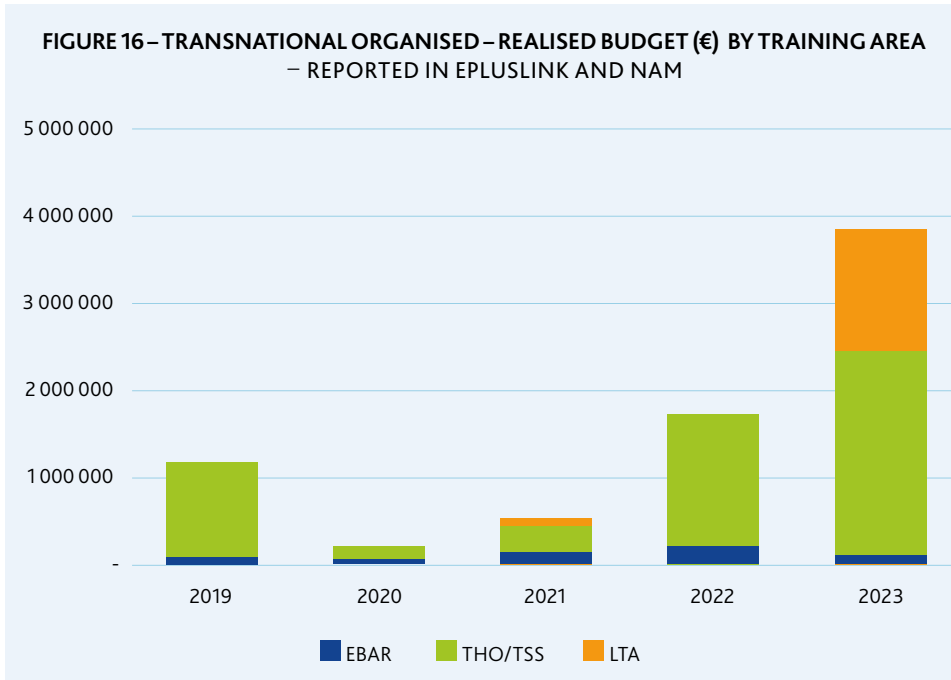
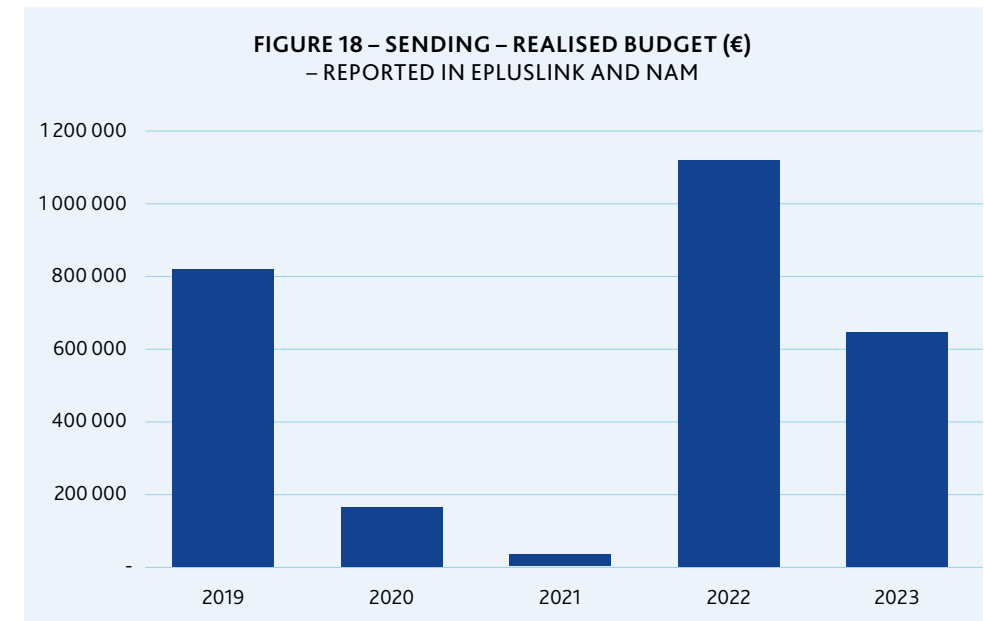
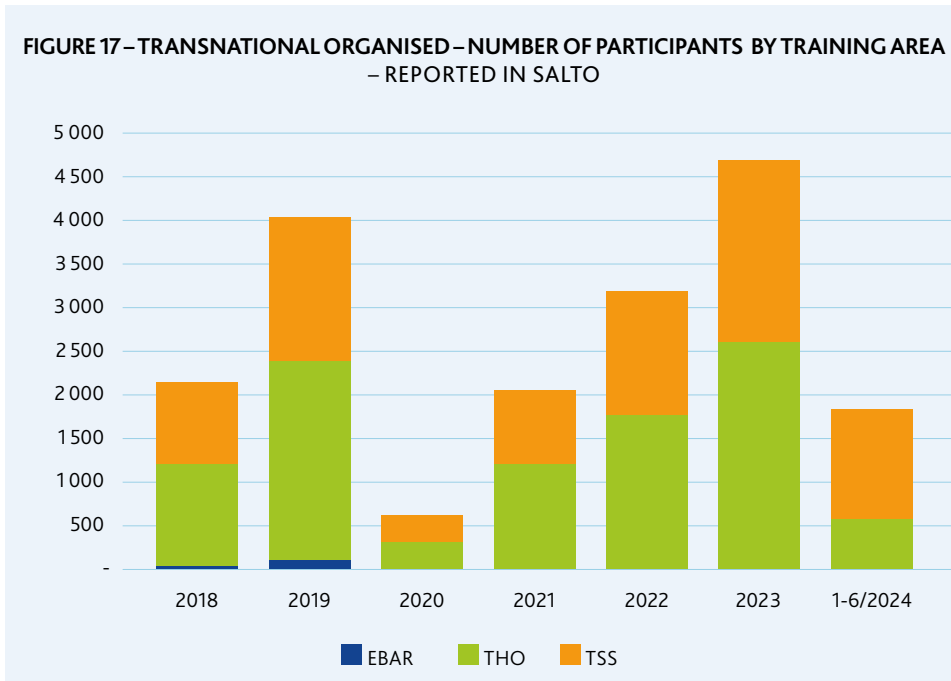
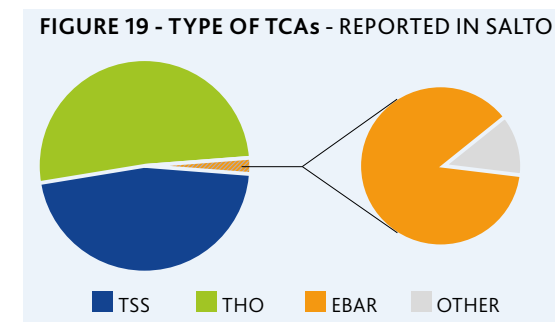


Figure 17-18 – Number and cost of participants sent to transnational TCAs between 2019 and 2023



In 2019, there was approximately a 50% increase in the number of TCAs organised transnationally and in the number of participants compared to the previous year, 2018. The following year saw a significant decline in events due to the Covid-19, but in 2021, the numbers had surpassed those of 2018, partially due to the utilisation of online organising opportunities. By 2023, the figures had even exceeded the peak levels of 2019. The distribution between sectors fluctuates slightly each year, at the front with the largest institutional base being in school education, followed by vocational education and training (VET). Events that engage multiple sectors at once are becoming increasingly common, not only in general partner search seminars or large annual events but also in thematic events specifically aimed at inter-sectoral collaboration (e.g., between school and university teachers, vocational training institutions, universities, and adult education and youth organisations). The proportion of events targeting newcomers is around 10%.

Figure 19 – Distribution of TCAs organised at transnational level by training area between 2018 and first half of 2024



The previous research focused significantly on comparisons of different types of training. It seems that the categories of former contact seminars (TSS) and thematic activities (THO) are blurring, at least because the Commission no longer requests these to be reported separately in the NAM monitoring tables. However, activities focused on evaluation and analysis are still registered separately, and their numbers were notably high in 2022 compared to previous years.

It is worth noting that, according to the graphs, the number of participants in hosting-type events is significantly higher than in sending activities. This discrepancy is most likely a database error that should be investigated, especially as the SALTO Platform data – which also breaks down participants by country – aligns much closer to the expected numbers. Although national educational professionals from the country may participate in international events and are not listed on the sending page, this should not account for such a large difference. This error could be mitigated in the SALTO database, as Agencies can indicate places reserved for national participants, but only a few utilise this option.

Figures 20-21 – Number and distribution of TCAs organised at national level by education sector

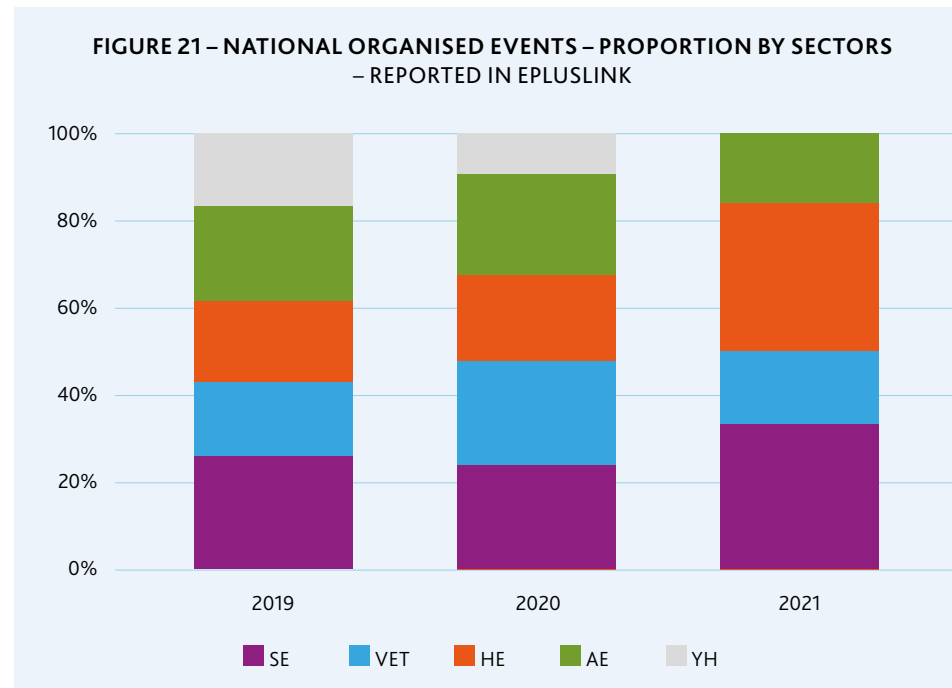
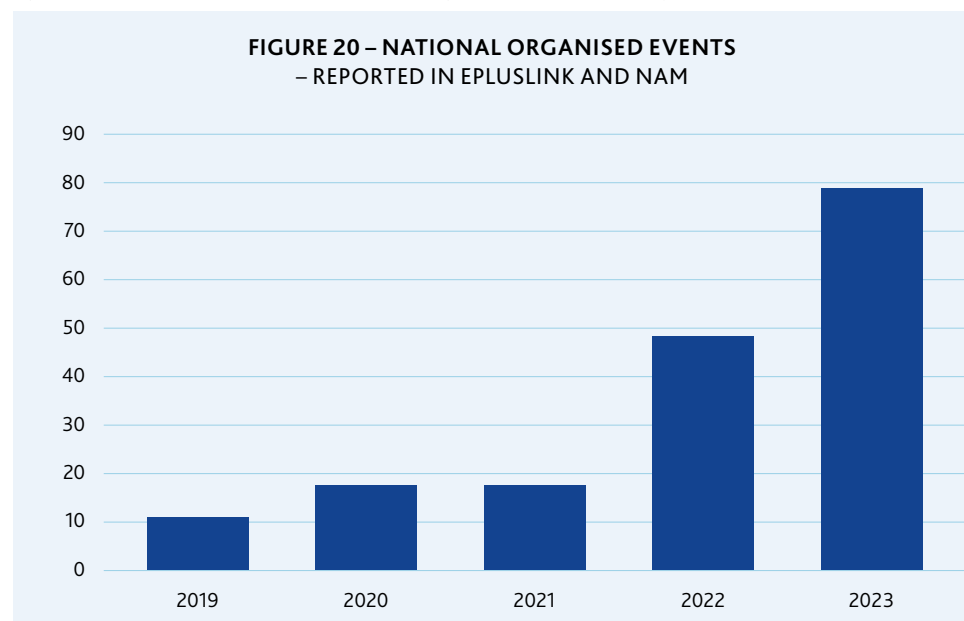
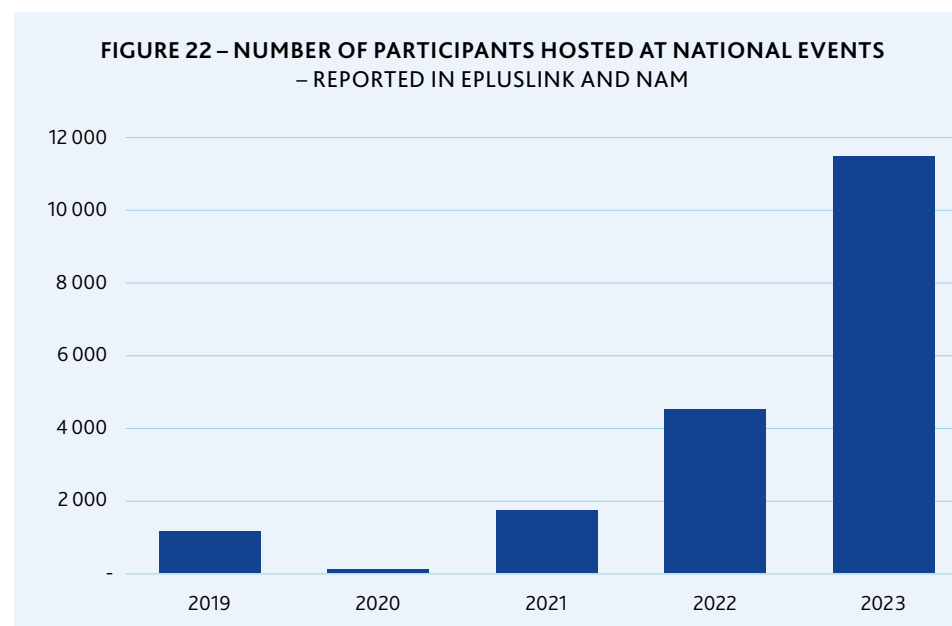
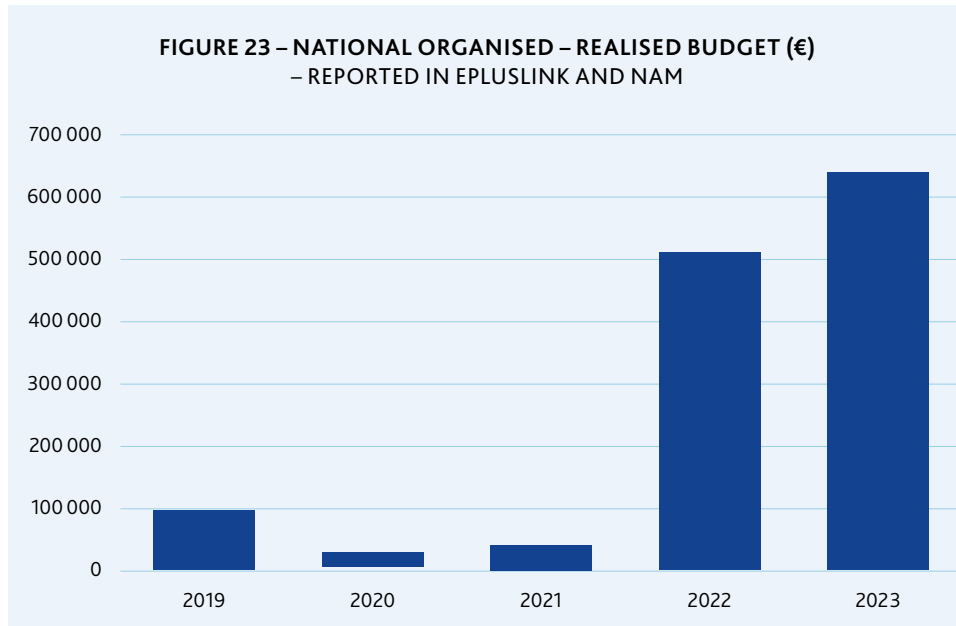


Figure 22-23 – Number and cost of participants in TCAs organised at national level

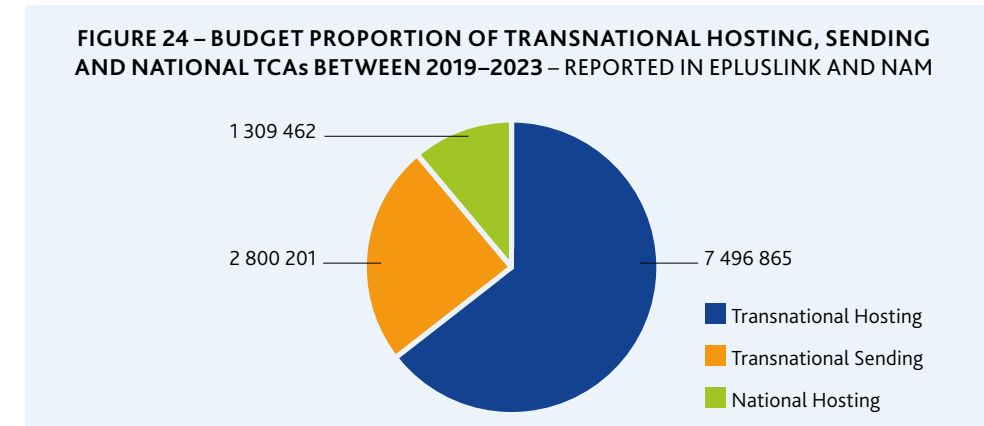




The number of events organised at the national level has increased significantly, even more so than international events, especially after 2021 when Agencies were given more freedom to do so. The distribution of national events by sector presents a slightly different and more balanced picture among sectors, but it varies more from year to year. This is likely a response to current demands mentioned earlier, which National Agencies can leverage (for example, if there aren't enough applicants for a specific grant type, they organise a separate TCA event for them).

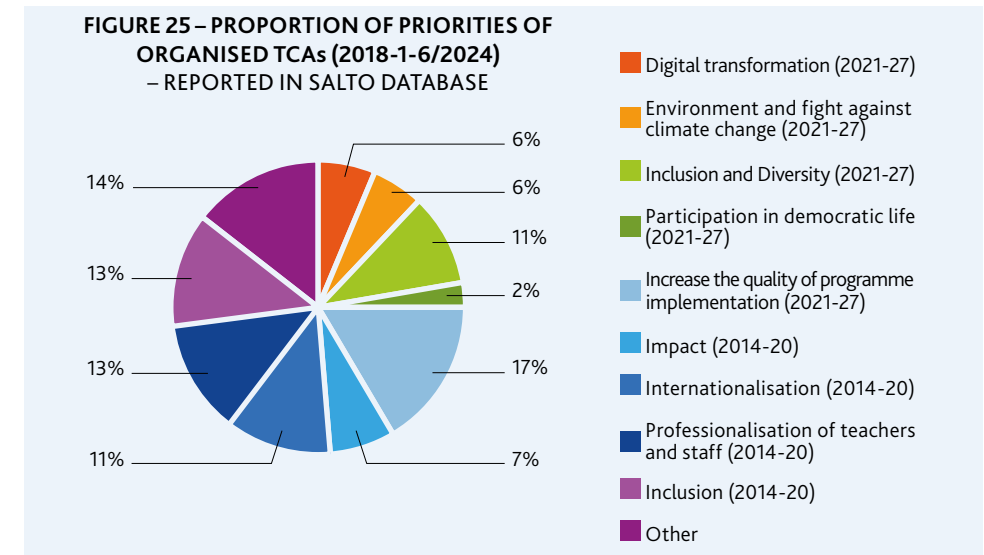
There are considerable differences in the number of participants, costs, and duration of individual events, and expenses are largely dependent on the venue as well. Based on the NAM reports, it is also evident that Agencies reallocate budgets between fiscal years, and some events are financed from sources other than TCA. This makes it quite challenging to estimate the average cost per event, and country-specific estimates could provide a more accurate picture. However, out of curiosity, for a thought experiment, we wanted to know what the average costs per event and participant have been over the most recent five years. Based on calculations with notably limited reliability, the estimated organising cost of a transnational event is around €10,000 to €20,000 (which has significantly increased over five years), while the cost for sending someone to a TCA averaged about €500 for an NA over the five years. The costs for events organised at the national level were much lower than that.

Figure 24 – Budget proportion of transnational hosting, sending and national TCAs between 2019–2023



During the examined period, the direction of European education policies changed, along with the horizontal priorities of the Erasmus+ programme. The graph above shows the distribution of the priorities for transnational TCAs organised during this period, indicating that old and new priorities emerged in roughly equal proportions¹¹. Based on the interviews, it can be concluded that the most popular priority in both programme cycles has been inclusion. However, the graph also shows that while inclusion was one of the most popular topics in both periods, events related to teachers' professional development were organised in equal measure – likely connected to the higher proportion of the public education sector – and the topic of internationalisation was also quite popular.

Figure 25 – Distribution of horizontal priorities across TCAs organised at transnational level



¹¹ Considering that the TCA funds planned each year in the work programme can be carried over to finance activities in the following year (N+1 rule), approximately half of the TCAs implemented during the examined period were related to both the old and new programme cycles (in 2021, there were TCAs targeting both old and new priorities simultaneously).

When comparing the two programming cycles, it's noticeable that the alignment of TCA priorities was more evenly distributed during the previous five-year period than in the last five years, although the impact priority lagged behind the others there as well.

The distribution of priorities after 2021 is less even and varies significantly from year to year. At the beginning of the programming cycle, the theme of digital transformation was very popular, but now the most sought-after events are those related to increase the quality of the programme implementation, which clearly align with the core objectives of the TCAs (quality and impact enhancement).

National Agencies are making efforts to familiarise applicants with the less popular priorities, as evidenced by the increasing proportion of TCAs in both the green priority and democratic participation, while the popularity of inclusion seems to be waning. National Agencies have the opportunity to apply their own national priorities during the application and TCA organisation processes; however, the leaders' interviews uniformly reported that they were not really taking advantage of this, primarily trying to connect with Erasmus+ priorities instead. Presumed that the expectations communicated from the Commission played a significant role in this.

Figures 26-27 – Distribution of horizontal priorities across TCAs organised at transnational level in the two programme cycles

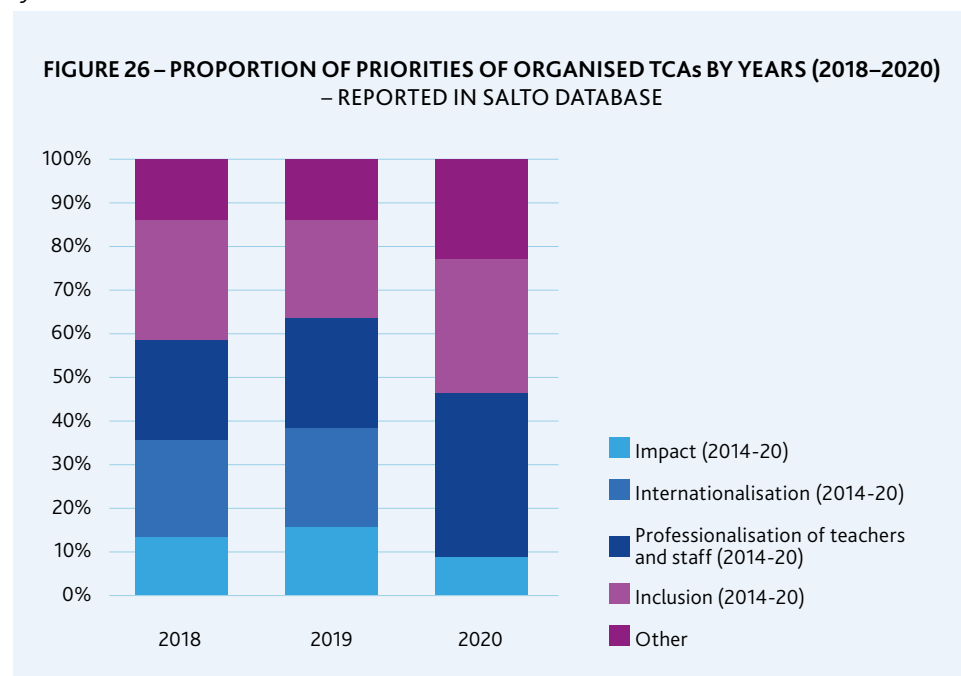
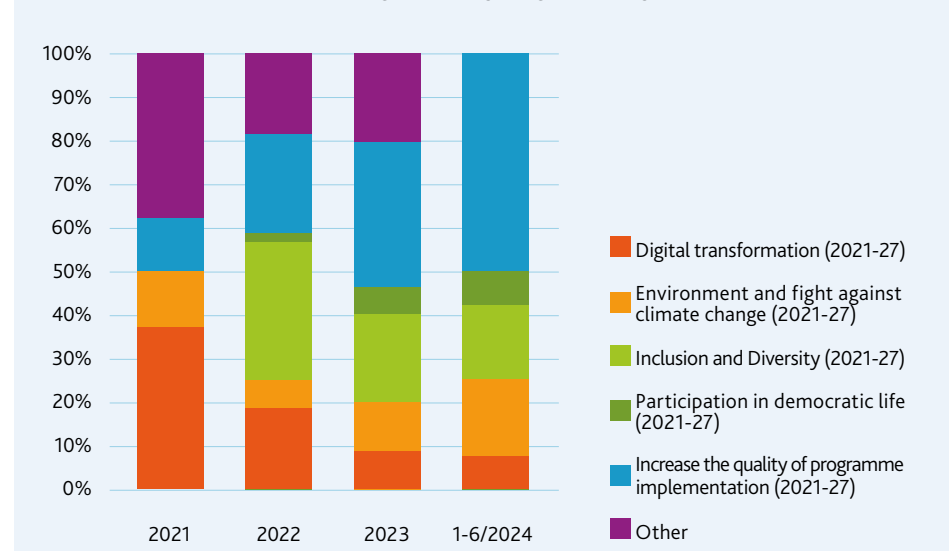


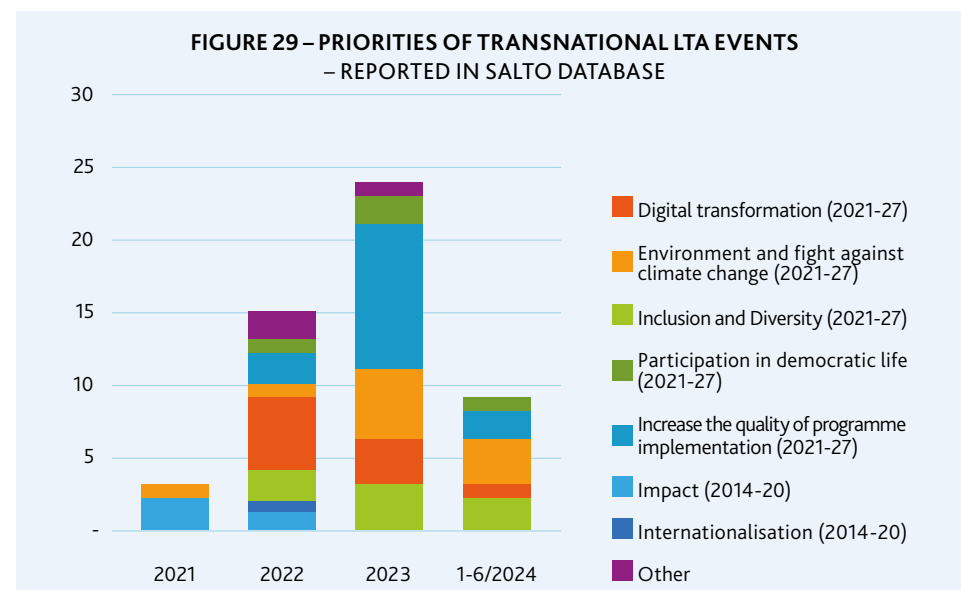
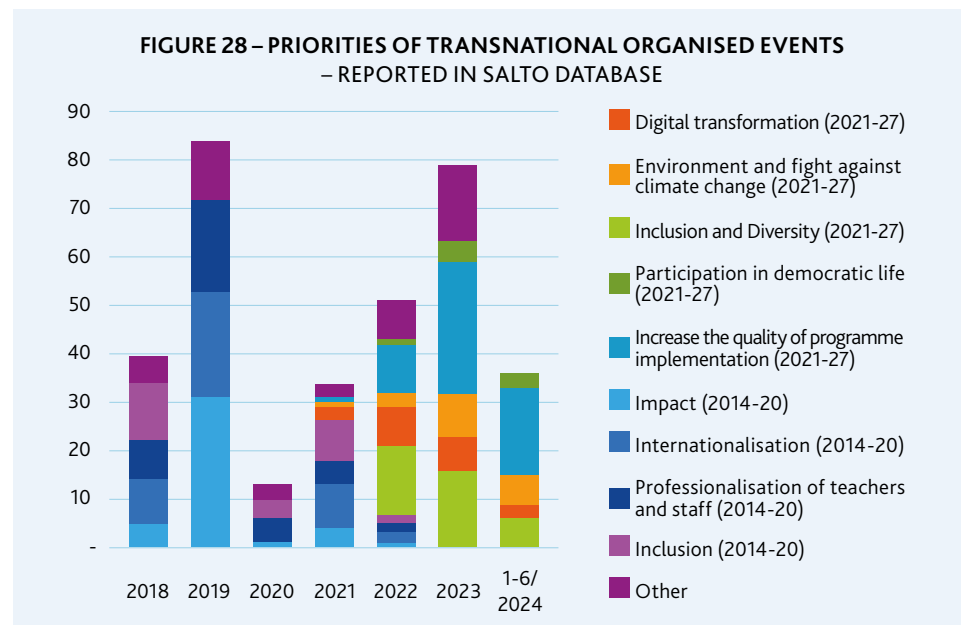
FIGURE 27 – PROPORTION OF PRIORITIES OF ORGANISED TCAs BY YEARS (2021-1-6/2024) – REPORTED IN SALTO DATABASE



While it's crucial for the opportunities offered within the programme to support the alignment with the European Education Area, National Agencies are much more attuned to the needs of applicants and understand better how to make European policy messages attractive to national educational stakeholders. Therefore, it's not necessarily about directly or textually matching the priorities, but rather about the value and message that a specific event conveys to the target group (for instance, embedding the green priority within a sustainability context, as one interviewee specifically mentioned). This can significantly depend on how developed and open educational policy is within a given country. Where European and national directions align, it's easier to incorporate events related to every priority into the work programme. However, where the two directions are not entirely parallel, it can be a considerable achievement to dedicate a section of an event to topics that are still distant from the needs of the target audience and educational policy. In higher education, the efforts are generally most similar in national and European objectives, but other educational sub-sectors are more differentiated. There are Agencies that focus mainly on two or three priorities in a certain year and switch the following year while monitoring the related activities of other National Agencies. This highlights again the importance of keeping TCAs flexible tools for the Agencies. If the target audience is willing to participate in events tailored to their needs, then it becomes increasingly feasible to introduce topics that are currently less on their focus. Similarly, once they have sufficiently explored a nationally important topic (e.g., inclusion), they can move on to another. In this planning process, it is much more beneficial to support the Agencies rather than impose fixed indicators for them to meet, as one staff member from a National Agency put it: 'we don't ask questions about priorities when planning TCAs but prioritise potential impact.' When comparing the distribution of European horizontal priorities within recently launched LTAs and

TCAs that have been running for ten years, it is evident that the proportions are essentially the same. In other words, the Agencies know exactly what they want to achieve, what topics they want to engage with, or at least what they can handle well – topics that are of interest to both them and their target audience. In this sense, it would be futile to regulate or pressure the policy learning process.

Figures 28–29 – Distribution of horizontal priorities within TCAs and LTAs



4. Role of SALTO E&T TCA Resource Centre

The establishment of the SALTO E&T TCA Resource Centre in 2018 marked a significant milestone in the development of the programme. Over its six years of operation, the Centre has developed stable process-supporting methodologies and consistently sought feedback from National Agencies to enhance the quality of its operations. Analysis of surveys and other working materials reveals that the SALTO E&T TCA Resource Centre is actively seeking and shaping its role, involving staff members from National Agencies, and integrating feedback into collaborative efforts. The Centre aims to build direct connections with TCA Officers, monitors their needs, and relies on the advice of the E&T TCA Working group. It provides an IT interface for organising TCAs, analyses and evaluates TCAs from the process aspect, however, its primary function is to promote cooperation and communication among National Agencies.

The SALTO Platform¹² offers a wealth of supporting materials and infographics to help the public audience and TCA Officers understand the topics and navigate the platform. Within the CANVAS LMS¹³, MOOC courses available to TCA Officers not only convey information but also provide methodological assistance in various areas, such as, strategic planning, TCA and LTA processes, effective writing, promotion of TCAs, and evaluation. The learning materials are enriched with video tutorials, and the explanatory charts built logically, concise, and effectively utilise the advantages offered by digital tools. The illustration on the next page presents a summary from which the most important supporting materials are readily accessible via hyperlinks (User manual for NA staff, online courses, video tutorials, LTA idea collection, contact information, etc.).

To support TCA Officers, regular personal and online meetings are organised, with the semi-annual TCA Officers' Weeks being the most important events, attended by representatives of the European Commission and priority SALTO Resource Centres as well. The Working group (WG) acts as an advisory board and hosts online TCA WG Café events, where challenges and development opportunities are discussed. The SALTO E&T TCA Resource Centre places significant emphasis on collaborative digital tools, such as collecting questions and LTA ideas on a shared Padlet space and planning TCA plans in a joint spreadsheet. The staff at the SALTO E&T TCA RC consider it a crucial task to encourage cooperation and experience sharing among National Agencies. In addition to technical tasks, there is a regular discussion of professional questions related to TCAs, such as, the recruitment of new applicants, which allows for the sharing of best practices. The Resource Centre plays a significant role in collecting and disseminating results, especially as the number of events increases, necessitating stronger coordination and support for TCA Officers.

Analysis of the questionnaires filled in by TCA Officers regarding the SALTO E&T TCA RC indicates that most are satisfied with the RC's work and appreciate its effectiveness. The graph below shows that TCA Officers feel they receive at least partial support from the SALTO in most TCA-related tasks. However, areas such as reporting to the Commission, financial and administrative tasks, and compliance with

¹² <https://salto-et.net/>

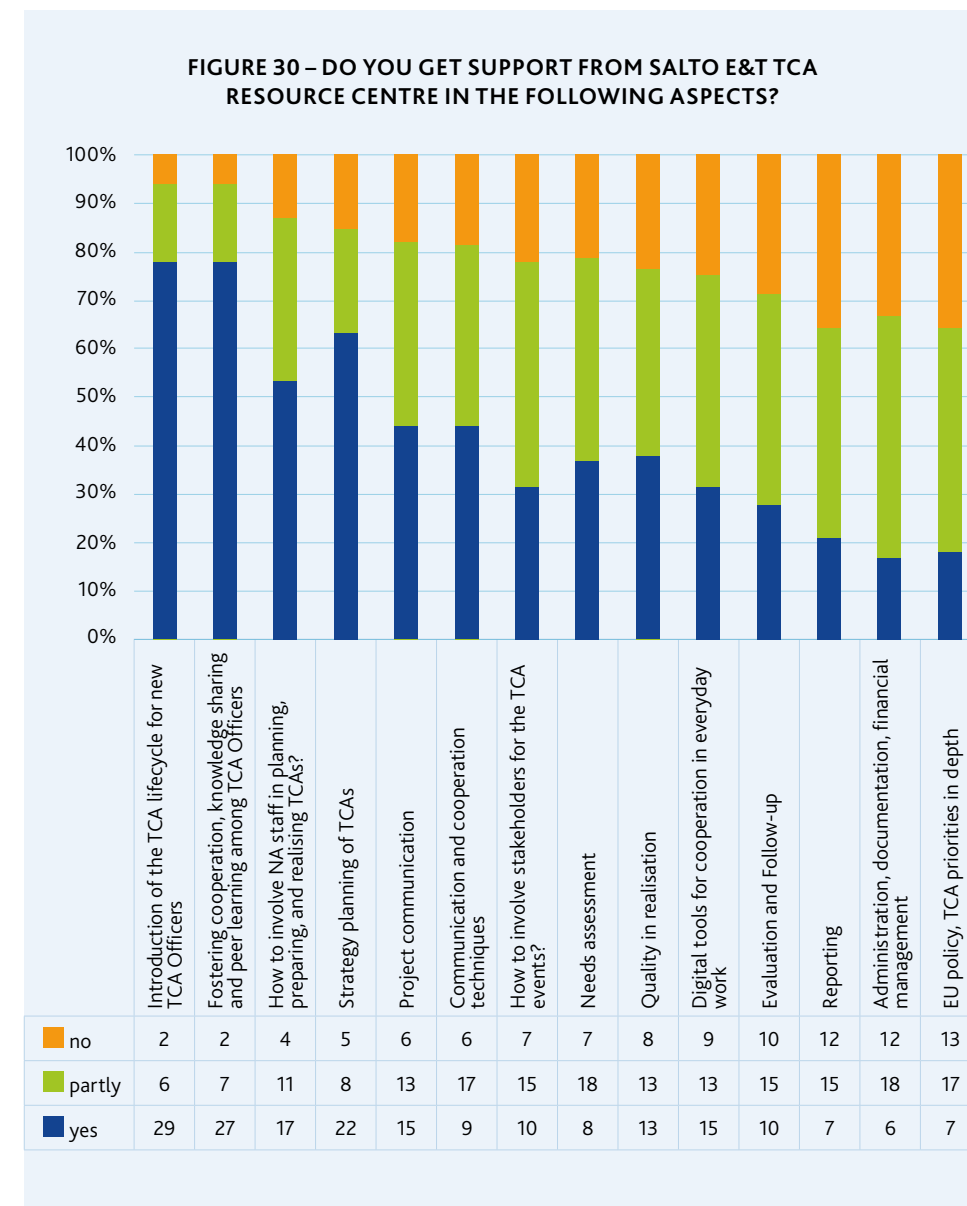
¹³ <https://canvas.tpf.hu/courses/265/modules>

European policy goals and priorities show lower levels of support, which largely depend on the internal processes of National Agencies and of certain countries.

Figure 30 – SALTO Resources¹⁴

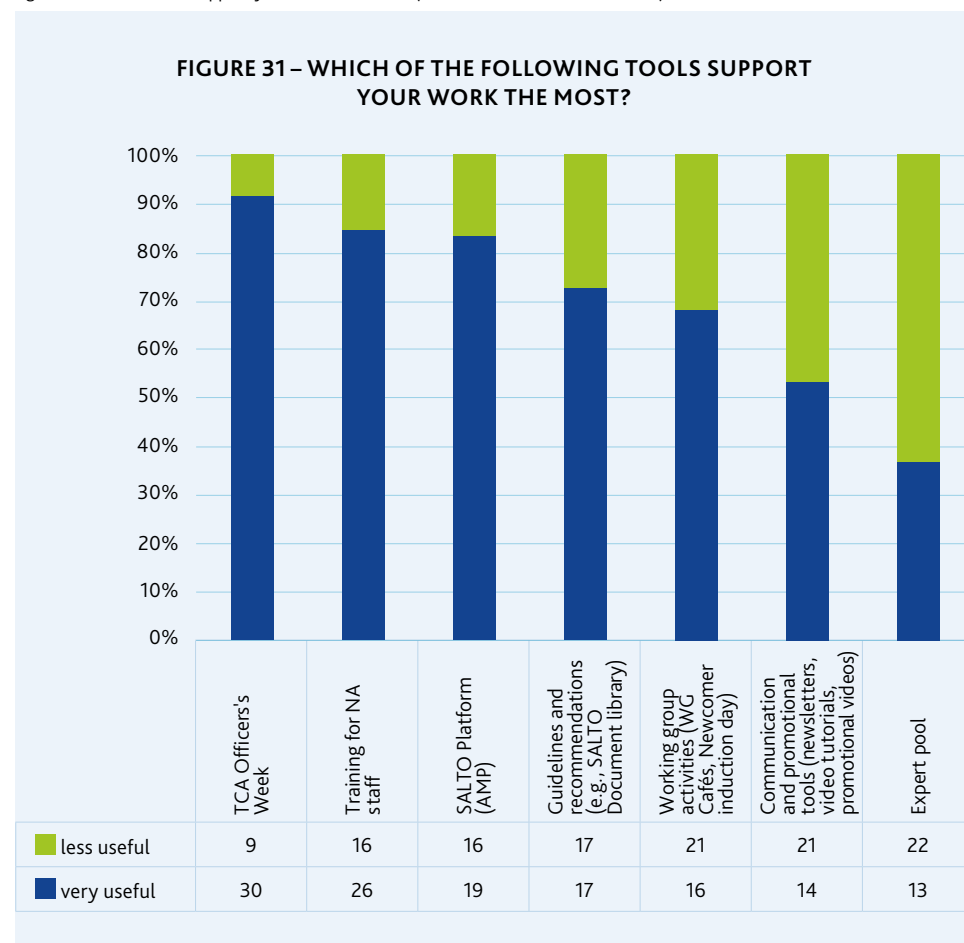
Resources of SALTO E&T	
<p>READ:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the Guide for NAs several times; our handbooks: Strategic Planning; Enhancing Impact; our User Manual in the FAQ; and check out our E&T TCA Q&As; information about LTA ideas; the Golden routes of LTA management. 	<p>CHECK OUT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> our step diagrams created for you to easily understand the flow of work as a TCA Officer, the GOLDEN ROUTES of TCA and LTA management: A year in events; Organising TCAs; Sending to TCAs; Strategic planning of TCAs in the Work Programme; Managing LTAs.
<p>JOIN:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the Canvas online courses we offer: TCA Lifecycle; TCAs Going Online; Attractive TCAs – Effective writing; Attractive TCAs – Effective facilitation. 	<p>COLLABORATE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> find your colleagues; and see who the members of the E&T TCA Working group are on the Activity Management Panel (AMP) of the SALTO Platform (available after login).
<p>STAY IN TOUCH AND BE UP TO DATE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> by joining the GRP-EACNAs – NAconnect team on the MS Teams environment of the European Commission, especially the TCA Education and Training channel, where you can instantly message your colleagues from around European NAs. 	<p>WATCH&LEARN:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> our tutorials on the SALTO E&T YouTube channel: What are TCAs? and Platform tutorials for TCA Officers; tutorial videos about platform-related issues regarding LTAs.
<p>PLAY&LEARN:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> in the Sandbox of the SALTO Platform to try out functions of the platform without consequences (make sure you can log in to the demo version of our website. If you have any problems, please e-mail us at tca-rc@tpf.hu). 	<p>BROWSE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> our NEWS section on the SALTO Platform; and read our TCA Insider on a regular basis to get and stay updated about the TCA universe.
<p>MARK YOUR CALENDAR AND SIGN UP</p> <p>for upcoming opportunities as soon as possible.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> next TCA Working group Café; next Newcomer Induction Day; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> next LTA Coordinators's Community meeting; next platform session and next TCA Officers' Week; next training session

Figure 30– To what extent do you receive support from the SALTO RC in the following areas? (Questionnaire for TCA Officers)



¹⁴ https://salto-et.net/files/site/salto_resources_to_platform.pdf

Figure 31 – Which tools support your work the most? (Questionnaire for TCA Officers)



The performance of the work formats, resources, and online tools provided by the SALTO TCA RC was also assessed in the questionnaires. Here, too, the Centre's performance has been rated high, with only one tool, the expert database, receiving a rating below 50%.*

**EDITOR'S NOTE:* The Expert pool is currently being developed to enhance its usability and effectiveness.

QUESTIONNAIRE: Expert pool: although a good idea, the expert pool doesn't seem to be utilised much. It's probably really difficult to establish an expert pool similar to the one in the youth sector because of the complexity and diversity of the four educational sectors. It would be great to have more of an exchange between NAs and recommendations for experts. I'm not sure if the expert pool in its current form is effective.

A wealth of ideas has been received regarding the further development of the platform, demonstrating a strong willingness to use it and an interest in tapping into its developmental potential. Some development ideas, not an exhaustive list, include automatic notifications*, an editable application interface, a more informative user profile, and a chat room. Alongside these technical suggestions, many express their gratitude for the support work, while also indicating a desire to deepen professional discourse.

* *EDITOR'S NOTE:* Automatic notifications are now available.

QUESTIONNAIRE: TCA Officers' Week: Personally, I think it would be beneficial to focus more on content and less on administrative details - or at least have dedicated sessions for those who are interested. It would be great to have more time dedicated to developing ideas for LTAs and TCAs. At the last meeting, the sessions with the thematic SALTOs, working groups, and LTA coordination were the most interesting for me personally. (...) Additionally, it would be helpful to work more within the sectors and address specific needs. It often feels like the programme priorities are always at the forefront, which is too simplistic and doesn't always allow for in-depth exploration of ideas and discussions. (For example, inclusion has a different meaning in the higher education sector compared to adult education.)

The SALTO Platform could play a significantly more important role in supporting TCAs operating in the field of education and training. The main obstacle to this is that its use is not mandatory in all fields, leading Agencies to operate other systems alongside it. While events organised independently are uploaded for promotional purposes, national events are often excluded, and the data on transnational TCAs is not comprehensive (e.g., actual participant numbers and event costs are missing). However, with few resources investment, it could serve as both a process organisation and project management platform, function as a communication and promotional portal, and even automate the completion of yearly reports on TCAs through database usage, thereby relieving the capacity burdens of many Agencies and improving the efficiency of resource utilisation.

Alongside the SALTO E&T TCA Resource Centre, thematic SALTO Resource Centres also play a crucial role. Their primary tasks include leveraging synergies, supporting navigation through excessive information, and establishing a conscious European-level development plan and coordination along horizontal priority themes. Thematic SALTO Resource Centres¹⁵ also utilise the potential of LTAs: they conduct needs assessments, collect and disseminate initiatives related to specific themes, and strive to align them with broader programme goals. Their objectives include promoting knowledge exchange among related LTAs and strengthening professional relationships, ultimately resulting in the formulation of European-level policy recommendations based on the experiences of beneficiaries – namely, those involved in the practical aspects of the education and training system.

15 SALTO Participation & Information: <https://participationpool.eu/>

SALTO Green: <https://www.youtube.com/@SALTOGreen>

SALTO Digital Resource Centre: <https://www.oph.fi/en/european-salto-digital-resource-centre>

SALTO Inclusion Education: <https://saltoinclusion.eu/>

B. Organisational framework of TCA task within National Agencies

1. The TCA Officer job

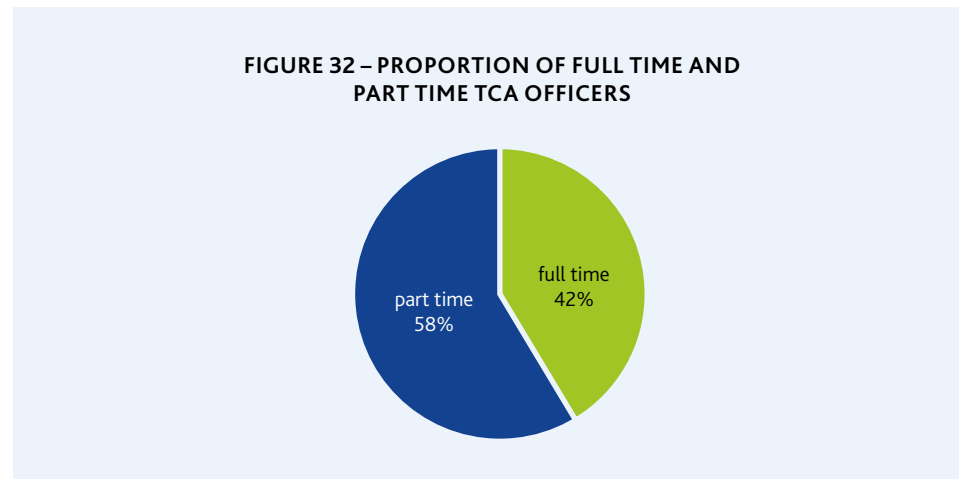
We gathered information about the organisational issues of TCAs and the structural frameworks within the National Agencies in two ways¹⁶:

1. Sent a 20-question questionnaire to every TCA Officer, which included multiple-choice and rating questions that allowed for statistical comparisons, as well as open-ended questions for detailed responses. These responses were then analysed qualitatively.
2. The topic was also a key element in interviews conducted with managers responsible for TCAs and the directors of National Agencies.

The responses reveal significant differences between National Agencies in terms of both human resource capacity and the hours worked. Less than half of the TCA Officers have been in their position for over two years, and a majority do not work full-time on these tasks. Part-time staff spend about 12 hours a week on planning and organising TCAs. There's a surprising statistic that 30% of them have never participated in a TCA event organised by another National Agency, while 70% have only attended once. However, those who are newer in this field tend to engage more actively in international events.

Full-time employees organise twice as many TCAs as those working part-time.

Figures 32-33 – Proportion of full-time and part-time TCA Officers and time spent on task



¹⁶ The outline of the questionnaire and interview questions can be found in the Annex. We received 43 responses to the questionnaire (27 on paper and 17 online), and three directors from National Agencies, three sectoral programme leaders, and one staff member from the SALTO E&T TCA Resource Centre participated in the seven completed interviews.

FIGURE 33 – WORKS AS PART TIME TCA OFFICER HOURS/WEEK

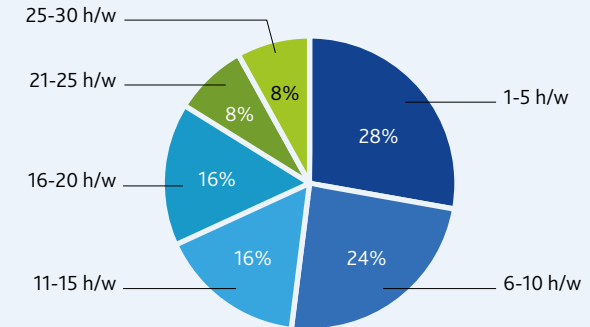
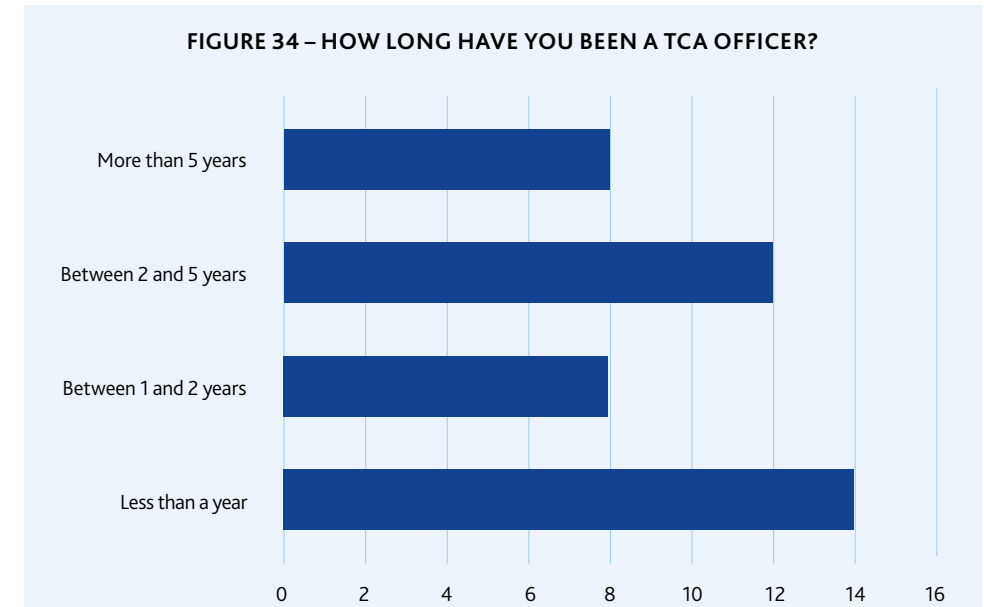


Figure 34 – How long have you been working as a TCA Officer?



Comparing these data with the numbers collected in the previous research, significant progress can be observed. Five years ago, there were hardly any Agencies employing full-time TCA Officers, and those working on the tasks dedicated a much smaller proportion of their working hours to these responsibilities. However, while in 2019 most TCA Officers had been in the field for a longer time, by 2024, a larger portion of them has been new, likely due to the entering of new staff into positions created

during reorganisation. The SALTO TCA Resource Centre has repeatedly mentioned the high turnover among TCA Officers, which complicates collaboration.

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%. (Taking stock of TCAs between 2014 and 2018, p33)

The interviews with managers have revealed that each of the interviewed Agencies had undergone restructuring recently, and more effective organisation of TCAs was a key catalyst for this change. Additionally, the responses to the questionnaire indicate that in most Agencies, the role is more administrative, focusing on travel and event organisation. Full-time TCA Officers support the professional work of those in sectoral groups, but the operational implementation of TCA-related tasks falls on them. Generally, the collaboration within the National Agency is considered adequate, as during planning, they collectively take into account what types of applications have received fewer submissions, which priorities applicants have struggled to maintain, and in what areas they need more support. Some Agencies require more assistance from the SALTO TCA Resource Centre regarding operational tasks, as smaller Agencies may not be able to afford a full-time TCA Officer. At the same time, there are National Agencies that prioritise TCA organisation and make specific strategic decisions. In these cases, it is common for the TCA Officer to be a more experienced colleague with a strategic outlook.

INTERVIEW: Our TCA strategy is based on the NA strategy; current state of programme management (e.g., the NA's ability to absorb the budget, the number of applications in various sectors, the quality of received applications; quality of running projects), this helps us to decide whether to use TCAs as a tool to attract newcomers or support current beneficiaries; inputs from the sectoral colleagues who are in daily touch with applicants and beneficiaries; lessons learnt from previously organised TCAs.

INTERVIEW: We are just at the point now, where we're establishing our five-year strategic plan which had a focus on several core areas, such as, operational capacity and our ability to deliver the programmes effectively and transparently and then also focusing on developing people and programmes.

Although leaders generally perceive the reorganisation of job roles related to TCAs as successful, TCA Officers themselves, based on the questionnaire, feel quite overwhelmed. Many expressed complaints about insufficient human resources and unreasonable administrative burdens*. If a TCA Officer diligently fulfills their duties and aims to meet the requests from other Agencies, they may end up publishing numerous calls annually on their NA's website and in newsletters to promote selected TCAs, sending targeted invitations to institutions and organisations, ensuring they find the most fitting participants. This is just the sending side; it doesn't include the preparation for TCA events organised by themselves, which is an extremely time-consuming task, including not only planning the programme's content but also selecting the appropriate venue, timing, and participants.

*EDITOR'S NOTE: National Agencies (NAs) address capacity issues related to TCA work in diverse ways, depending on several factors, including local regulatory environments, the experience level of TCA Officers (junior or senior), and the size of the NA, which influences the workload placed on individual officers. To alleviate these challenges, some NAs opt to outsource specific tasks. For instance, certain NAs engage external event management companies to handle the entire event management process, thereby reducing the burden on both the TCA Officer and the hosting organisation's event management capacities. Others outsource administrative tasks associated with TCAs, while some focus their outsourcing on the facilitation and moderation of events or the professional content. However, there are Agencies that manage all aspects of the process internally, where the personal skills and expertise of the TCA Officer significantly impact the quality and quantity of TCAs delivered by the NA.

QUESTIONNAIRE: Also, the opportunity to organise their own TCA is sometimes a motivating factor. But what I hear very often is: 'we like TCAs and we would like to organise more of them, but we don't have enough time'. So again, capacity issues.

Furthermore, all respondents hold a positive view of the opportunities provided by the TCA: they can better understand and comprehend the programme's priorities, connect with beneficiaries, and gain first-hand information about the obstacles faced by their applicants. This knowledge assists them in their efforts to create better informational content and to explain application rules in different ways. Several individuals see the greatest advantage of TCAs in the power of personal encounters, as one participant articulated: 'to see the faces behind the e-mails'.

Regarding leadership expectations, few expressed dissatisfaction; generally, expectations and instructions are clear, and typically, implementation follows the work programme. Among those who received less clear assignments, some indicated that the support from colleagues at other National Agencies, established through live connections during TCA Officers' meetings, is of significant help. Others noted that they increasingly find themselves approaching tasks in a more creative manner. Many highlighted that they receive ideas from one another, and the value of international collaboration lies in experiencing cultural differences and various working styles. Overcoming these differences, finding common ground, and engaging in collaboration-based decision-making are experiences that they can authentically represent to applicants. Participation in TCA activities serves as motivation for many, as events usually foster a collaborative atmosphere with a positive environment, bringing together individuals who share important common causes.

QUESTIONNAIRE: The primary goal is to utilise the available resources/budget as effectively as possible and to develop and implement high-quality formats. I mainly work with the heads of sectors, each of whom has a different approach. Initially, I sometimes wished for more clear instructions, especially in the planning stage of the work programme. Over time, however, I have come to appreciate the freedom to develop ideas (together with colleagues) and propose initiatives, which are generally well-received and considered. I also receive a lot of trust and support from my direct superior, which

gives me significant autonomy, which I enjoy, and a strong position when dealing with different sectors and departments.

It is clearly a strategic organisational decision regarding the scope of authority, empowerment, and knowledge of a TCA Officer, which can significantly influence the volume and impact of TCAs at certain Agencies. Based on the interviews and questionnaire responses, there is not necessarily a single best solution in this area. In some cases, well-prepared sectoral colleagues provide crucial support to less experienced colleagues who may be more adept in the digital realm or skilled in organisation. In contrast, there are situations where the longest-serving, most strategically-minded colleague leads TCAs. Undoubtedly, in the latter case, there is a greater likelihood that the National Agency can assume a think tank role at the European level, which is necessary. However, any other conscious human resource development strategy can produce good solutions as well.

Both National Agencies and their staff are diverse. In some cases, the overarching institutional goal is to maximise the use of funding frameworks and to adhere to precise and transparent workflows to maintain the trust of applicants and funders. In other instances, there is a greater demand for creativity and the search for professional challenges. The former type requires more precise bureaucratic skills, while the latter thrives on creative idea generation. The first group may be less inclined to step outside their comfort zone and find the world of TCAs less appealing. In contrast, the second group might struggle with administrative accuracy but excel at devising excellent programmes for target groups.

The European Commission expects National Agencies to excel in both areas, which is possible if a strategic approach to TCAs is coupled with conscious human resource development.

The analysed results indicate that Agencies are indeed investing considerable energy to achieve better outcomes in the realm of TCAs, and they have initiated changes in the execution of TCA tasks to this end.

2. Challenges in administration

The most notable commonality in the responses of TCA Officers was the reference to administrative overload. Due to the nature of the tasks, there is indeed a significant amount of mandatory administrative work involved, whether related to travel arrangements or events management, which is compounded by the aforementioned capacity difficulties. However, several factors are also cited that stem from the excessive service of applicant demands (a 'call centre' role) or could be mitigated through more effective coordination. A portion of the coordination could potentially be automated through the SALTO Platform, but this would require consensus among the Agencies involved*.

* *EDITOR'S NOTE:* An additional approach to capacity issues, commonly employed in the youth sector and potentially adopted in the education and training field, involves the use of 'ready-made' TCAs. In this model, an NA develops a comprehensive ready-pack, which includes all essential elements, such as, the TCA Description, its thematic focus, the programme outline, recommended experts and facilitators, and other relevant materials. This pack is then shared with other NAs, enabling them to replicate the event in different locations. This approach not only reduces the time and human resources required but also addresses the issue of oversubscription. A popular TCA, which may not accommodate all interested participants at a single event, can be reproduced in multiple locations, thereby allowing a larger number of beneficiaries to access the event and the knowledge it imparts.

FROM THE ANSWERS TO THE TCA OFFICER QUESTIONNAIRE:

„administrative tasks related to TCA management are sooooo heavy (especially sending)“

“Note to the Commission: planning, reporting, and monitoring data about TCA activities asked from NAs is super inconsistent and sometimes even lacks common sense”

“after the EPlusLink, a big blur of global data collected by the EC”

“EplusLink was extremely useful, the NAM has its flaws; unified tables for tracking TCAs would be of great help instead of multiple local spreadsheets on local servers.”

“TCA Officers often find themselves so overwhelmed that it sometimes seems easier not to send anyone anywhere. For just a few hundred euros, they are required to complete countless forms, gather documents, collect signatures, and so on. The amount of paperwork and time involved often exceeds reasonable limits. It would be helpful to hear examples of how others manage these challenges. Who is responsible for making the decisions on sending participants? How lengthy is the selection and confirmation process (e.g., how many people need to approve or sign off)? Any insights would be greatly appreciated.”

Three areas appear to be the most problematic:

1. **Travel arrangements** *: Some Agencies outsource these tasks, while others assign a dedicated staff member to handle travel arrangements, thereby alleviating the burden on the TCA Officer. However, in many cases, the TCA Officer is responsible for organising the travel of each participant. Agencies support approximately 50-100 participants annually for TCA events, which places a significant strain on resources if simplified accounting rules cannot be applied.

* *EDITOR'S NOTE:* Recently, a poll has been distributed to National Agencies to explore their current practices and future needs concerning the financial accounting of travel arrangements. The results indicate that flexibility from the Commission is essential to accommodate the unique differences in national contexts.

2. **Reporting to the Commission:** Many have noted the difficulties in preparing the annual reports that need to be submitted to the Commission, suggesting that a standardised template could be created that would apply to all TCA events (including agreement templates with speakers and contributors). A larger concern seems to be the introduction of the National Agency Module (NAM) and the discontinuation of the EplusLink which contained individual events, despite previous complaints

about it. We have information from the query page of the NAM: Agencies upload their results to the system with varying quality, and a significant portion of the texts explains overlapping planning and financial periods, although some National Agencies do provide detailed accounts of the professional outcomes of the TCA activities they have implemented. It seems that the professional and financial reporting have merged; at least

in the database we received, the quantitative results are combined in a single cell with textual explanations, making it impossible to filter or create a quantitative summary, thus, rendering it unsuitable for research purposes and failing to provide an accurate picture of TCA activities at the European level.

INTERVIEW: It was always very difficult to introduce the data of TCA in the IT tools, and you could never get the right information, you know, the real time, and then, the TCA lasts for two years, and it overlaps. The format is very flexible but then, very difficult to follow the concrete percentages and when you need the right data.

3. Financial Accounting: This area has received the most suggestions on how to alleviate the financial accounting burdens related to both travel arrangements and the events being organised. A summary of these suggestions is included in the following chapter.

The SALTO E&T TCA Resource Centre staff have reported that the frameworks established by the Commission, as documented in the NA Guide, are interpreted very differently by the Agencies. Such interpretative questions can also be found frequently on the TCA Q&A Padlet¹⁷. As has been illustrated in several chapters, the Guide indeed uses broad language in many instances, which is likely a deliberate decision. As one NA Director has noted in this context, the trap lies in the fact that the application of flexible and open systems may bring about a certain degree of uncertainty, which impacts accountability. Just as decisions must continually be made regarding how prescriptive the accounting rules should be in relation to applications, the Commission also weighs how to phrase certain questions, and National Agency leaders must take responsibility to ensure that the administration of a given interpretation is compliant during an audit. Thus, decision-making requires a complex perspective from management.

Nevertheless, the Commission responds to the requests of National Agencies, as many points from the position paper articulated in 2019 have been addressed. For example, it is now possible to organise national events, and the conditions for participation in TCAs have been modified (no longer limited to one individual, and the active role of how a staff member may be involved is not explicitly defined). However, the most significant change is the funding for TCA Officers, which now covers up to 15% of the activities implemented. During interviews, the heads of the Agencies acknowledged this, although they have further ideas for changes that could be integrated into the planning of the next programme cycle.

3. Financing issues

In 2024, a significant change occurred regarding the previously underfunded TCAs.

Table 6 – 2024 Guide for NAs

For each 'National Agency support to quality and impact' action, National Agency staff costs are eligible up to a maximum of 15% of the total realised budget (i.e. actual budget spent), limited to a total amount of EUR 150,000.

The quantifiable results from the first half of 2024, the plans outlined for 2025, as well as insights from interviews, indicate that

Agencies are professionally motivated by the establishment of the funding.

However, they still perceive numerous obstacles to the more active implementation of activities. The transition of TCA funding to the KA3 programme is a relief; nevertheless, within this framework, only grant-type payments are permitted, necessitating full accountabilities for the activities against all other activity funding. Some Agencies are therefore advocating for a flat-rate option (unit costs, lump-sum accounting, distance bands, or flat-rate amounts). There is also a perspective that the newly introduced 15% cover up, tied to implemented activities, is too low to significantly increase the number of TCAs. Since there are no more specific central expectations or indicators associated to TCA activities, this change may provide less incentive for some National Agencies, serving more as reassurance that their previously unfunded activities are now financed, yet it is unlikely to lead to increased activity in organising TCAs.

However, opinions among Agencies regarding the transition to flat-rate funding are not uniform. Some believe that it could at least be piloted by utilising experiences from within the KA2 programme, while others argue that the national regulatory environment does not allow for simplification, as internal rules (e.g., public procurement) are much stricter, and for them, the main difficulties stem from this rather than from the Commission's conditions. Other Agencies that outsource activities find financial administration less problematic, but there are also Agencies that refrain from outsourcing for fear of losing their direct connection with applicants*.

***EDITOR'S NOTE:** The E&T TCA Working group recommends introducing micro-grants as a tool to empower smaller and hard-to-reach organisations to organise national thematic events. These events can serve as a stepping stone for organisations, enabling them to gain valuable experience and prepare for deeper engagement in future programme activities, such as hosting study visits or organising more complex events. Micro-grants also provide an accessible entry point for participants to familiarise themselves with Erasmus+ processes, fostering their integration into the programme. This approach has demonstrated effectiveness in promoting inclusivity, building organisational

capacity, and engaging grassroots and hard-to-reach organisations, ultimately enabling their future participation in Erasmus+ programmes. (Quote from the Position paper written by the TCA WG)

INTERVIEW: So, for instance, we do host a lot of events and we send to a lot of events, so when it comes to hosting an event, our team is responsible for everything: from booking the hotel, contracting the trainers, having all of the materials there, making sure that all of the invoices are tracked, that appropriate staff is there, and reporting their time is accurate, and then, for each event, kind of making sure that there's a full reconciliation cost and it is quite a cumbersome piece of work.

INTERVIEW: We are grateful that the Commission has now allowed for the TCA budget also to be used for national activities sometimes and this is really a good thing, and also, we appreciate that we can now pay salaries from TCA budget to people working on TCA. All those things are a little bit tricky, because you can only use the percentage of the spent TCA to finance the salaries, and not the percentage of the planned TCA. So, in fact you have to wait for quite a long time, a year or two to see how your spending is going to be able to calculate the percentage then you can turn into salaries.

Arguments against flat-rate financing and the expansion of resources may include the concern that additional concessions could potentially lead to stricter accountability measures or that the Commission might impose higher expectations regarding the demonstrable impact of TCAs. However, this fear is not necessarily well-founded, as accountability is already organically integrated into the expectations surrounding TCAs. TCAs must align with the other tasks of National Agencies and their annual work programmes, which are reported in the yearly report. They must provide planned management frameworks and report on their realisation, ensure inter-sectoral coordination, and comply with the rules of the Erasmus+ programme. One director expressed that 'they have already learnt the lesson well', indicating that National Agencies carry out their responsibilities with a high level of quality, ensuring transparency in financial processes. Therefore, it is unlikely that irregularities threatening the programme will arise in TCAs, even if the area is not overly regulated.

The costs associated to TCAs are influenced by numerous factors and can vary significantly depending on their objectives, modes of implementation, and locations. Flat-rate planning could be more feasible if individual National Agencies could estimate what cost range – potentially not identical at the European level – could be realised for each type of activity within their own country. They could then construct their budget plans based on these unit costs. There is already a known procedure for planning and accounting travel costs related to sending participants to TCA events organised by other countries in KA2-type projects, which could be applicable on the sending side as well. It is certainly a legitimate expectation from the Commission to verify the utilisation of funding and its cost-effectiveness, but there are surely intermediate options between itemised accounting and exclusive flat-rate funding that could also motivate Agencies. Both the Commission and the National Agencies might benefit most if the agreement between them were based on a specific TCA strategic plan that aligns with local needs while maintaining European objectives, demonstrating that the NA has a well-thought-out and feasible

strategy for TCA activities, clearly understands financial expectations, and can assume responsibility for managing appropriate financial processes. A shift towards more structured rules might provide greater security in decision-making for some leaders, but it could hinder the flexibility identified as an advantage of the programme, which is essential for National Agencies to effectively address changing demands.

For these reasons, a complete consensus among all National Agencies regarding flat-rate financing is unlikely, as some Agencies function well within the existing framework, while others would prefer either more or rather less freedom of interpretation. Therefore, it would be more prudent to focus on the unique TCA strategies of the Agencies rather than devising new rules aimed at standardisation. The amounts that Agencies spend annually on TCAs are of a similar magnitude in smaller Agencies and at least comparable to the amount that supports some KA2 strategic partnerships. KA2 applicants must meet serious evaluation criteria through which the viability of their project plans is assessed by evaluators. If Agencies were required to present their strategic ambitions and the necessary funding in a simplified form based on applicant logic, possibly with a longer-term perspective, and if the Commission had the capacity, expertise, and time to seriously examine, discuss, and collaboratively develop these with each Agency, then it would be likely that the accounting and administrative difficulties would genuinely decrease while simultaneously an increasing professional planning and evaluation of tasks would take place. This approach could be forward-looking, as those Agencies that already prioritise TCAs would gain broader space for implementing their ideas, while those just starting to engage would not be discouraged by numerous technical obstacles.

As it is no longer questioned that a 'one size fits all' approach does not work in education, and that schools and teachers need to build on individual learning characteristics, it is also well-known in the organisational development literature that organisations have their own unique developmental paths. Thus, the development of each National Agency is not uniform and is shaped by numerous factors; therefore, a single approach will not suit everyone simultaneously. In a regulated area where the optimal and most resource-efficient use of public funds is of paramount priority, it is challenging to establish a regulatory framework that prescribes both the professional and verifiable use of resources while allowing the executing organisations to find creative ways to achieve their goals. However, if National Agencies and the Commission could move together towards collaboration and orient on strategic planning through individual agreements concerning TCAs – as a toolset for quality enhancement and impact increase within the Erasmus+ programme – it would certainly motivate NA staff and, consequently, increase the European-level outcomes achieved through TCAs.

In many National Agencies, some leaders are high-qualified individuals who have been working in the field for 20-30 years, possessing comprehensive knowledge of the programme, and playing a crucial role in transforming the Agency into a learning organisation. This transformation leads to rise a class of officials who speak a common language, think in a European manner, and prioritise common objectives in the best interest. It is crucial to recognise that the human capital of those working in National Agencies is key to implementing the European Education Area.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS



68

The entire regulatory framework of the programme reflects the mutual balancing act in which the Commission seeks to ensure the accountability of the programme's results, while the National Agencies defend the preservation of the programme's flexibility. These two efforts are not necessarily in opposition to each other. Currently, there are noticeable differences in attitudes among the directors of National Agencies regarding the interpretation of the Commission's NA Guide, such as how they interpret active involvement, expectations relating to impact assessment, or the degrees of freedom inherent in accountability and implementation options. The pressure arising from this reaches the staff level in some Agencies, which does not provide incentives for the effectiveness of professional work. Therefore, it is worthwhile to clarify these areas – taking into account the local specifics of each Agency – in order to ensure that uncertainty does not hinder the release of energies. By continuing a constructive dialogue, the areas of both accountability and flexibility could be more precisely delineated, but it is also important to consider the differing situations of the National Agencies in this context. By formulating the following recommendations, we aim to support the effectiveness and enhancement of the impact of Training and Cooperation Activities within the Erasmus+ programme based on the findings of our research.

1. Strategic approach to quality and quantity indicators

The research findings provide evidence regarding the relevance and usefulness of the TCAs, but they cannot provide information on achieving long-term impact.

The impact of TCAs on the Erasmus+ programme and their added value could be meaningfully examined by evaluators at the European level.

This point is currently painfully missing from the reviewed reports (mid-term evaluations, annual reports). It is also unclear what increases the programme's impact the most; therefore, local-level experimentation is important, leading to the organisational learning process described earlier. Developing the frameworks for impact assessment could be a good topic for an LTA organised around this, in close cooperation among Agencies, as it is also important for them that the real impact of TCAs does not remain hidden*.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:* Applicant organisations and National Agencies are challenged to increase the quality and visibility of programme results. Recognising what impact is in a specific context, and determining an impact approach that supports the further development of impact, is a challenging task for all stakeholders involved.

The Impact LTA – coordinated by the NL01 and a collaboration of more than 10 NAs – seeks to develop skills, tools and attitudes that enable NA staff, assessors, and beneficiary organisations to improve programme effectiveness.

In doing so, it recognises the mutual dependency that exists and the joint effort that is needed to develop and implement a coherent, impact-driven programme.

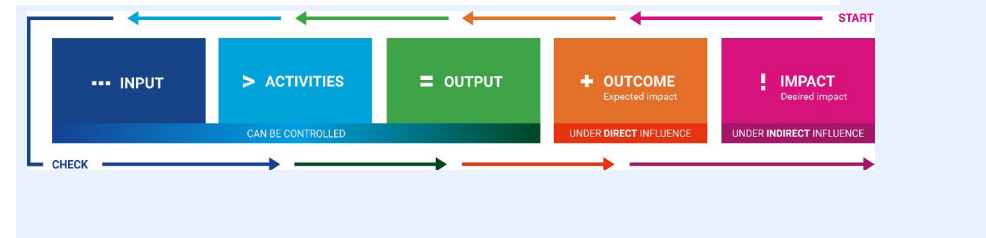
The outcome of this process will be a mutual understanding of what impact is, supporting tools that help ensure that impact is an integral part of project design and insights into research methods and research results that are useful in designing and measuring for impact.

69

Figure 35 – Erasmus+ Impact Handbook – an output of the LTA on Impact



Figures 36-38 – QR code to the website and Erasmus+ Impact Tool



- **IMPACT ASSESSMENT:** Each National Agency evaluates its activities using various measurement tools (needs assessments, participant satisfaction, etc.), and some even operate a form of impact measurement system. However, it cannot be expected that Agencies demonstrate the European-level impact of the programme. Methodologically, it is evident that a barrier exists, as **there are no specific output expectations or measurable indicators assigned to TCAs**. At the same time, stronger central expectations and central indicators would not provide incentives for National Agencies, as this would undermine the most important characteristic of the TCA – its flexibility.
- **UNIFIED EVALUATION FRAMEWORK:** A unified collection of quantified indicators in an evaluation framework would provide valuable feedback for both the Agencies and the Commission. This could be particularly useful for preparing reports and would significantly reduce the capacity burden on certain National Agencies. The data collection necessary for the analysis of quantitative indicators should be standardised through the SALTO Platform, which already has the appropriate IT infrastructure for this purpose. The platform allows for the collection of both preliminary and follow-up information from participants for each event, and follow-up questionnaires can be sent out, the processing of which can be automated, thus, yielding valuable information about the impact of the grants. It likely does not require monumental IT development to establish an interface between the SALTO Platform and some National Agencies' systems, ensuring that the Agencies are motivated to better utilise the opportunities of the SALTO Platform and develop automated systems. The SALTO E&T TCA Resource Centre could collaborate with National Agencies to support the collection of results and outputs, ensuring greater transparency and addressing research and development needs. Additionally, it could facilitate the dynamic processing and accessibility of jointly defined output indicators through its website. Currently, data required for the Commission's report could be accessible to all Agencies with a single click, but since data upload is not standardised and comprehensive, this function remains underutilised.

The planning of the evaluation framework can be assisted by the criteria collected in the following table. The listed data should be readily available in a simple manner for both the youth and education and training sectors.

Table 7 – Data collection proposal to assist in designing an evaluation framework of TCAs*.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:* This framework is being developed, aiming to establish recommendations for a comprehensive evaluation system for TCAs, based on data from the European Commission and the SALTO E&T TCA Resource Centre's databases. The initiative is going to build on findings from the present research that has identified gaps in data collection practices, and highlighted the need for both professional and IT improvements.

Data collection proposal to assist in designing an evaluation framework	
Strategic planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strategic goals • needs and demands of the sector • country specific issues
Financial resources of the programme per year by sectors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • budget • proportion
Applications and networks (number, size)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • number of projects • size of projects • research activities • network activities
TCAs in numbers by sectors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • potential financial resources • single TCAs (national and transnational) • LTAs • participants • released budget
NA staff capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • number of staff • number of TCA Officers

- **STRATEGIC PLANNING:** Standardising processes and setting indicators may facilitate statistical analyses, but even if growth could be demonstrated numerically, it would not necessarily improve activities. A differentiated strategic approach is more effective for quality development, allowing National Agencies to set their own medium- and long-term goals by formulating related output indicators. The entire activity system can benefit from a strategic planning process that is not merely a written chapter in a multi-annual work programme, devoid of substantive discussions but rather the result of real consultation processes both within individual National Agencies and at the European level among Agencies, as well as with the Commission regarding expectations. The SALTO TCA Resource Centre could support this planning process through coordination, thereby reducing the real risk that TCA events organised around overlapping themes compete instead of complementing one another.
- **EUROPEAN EDUCATIONAL AREA – BUILDING CONNECTIONS AND CAPACITY EXPANSION:** The development of staff working on TCA activities, as well as presumably the development of other National Agency staff, is crucial. National Agencies should incorporate plans for the training and capacity-building necessary for the quality execution of complex tasks into their strategic plans, along with an accompanying budget, which could at least partially utilise the TCA frameworks. TCAs can only achieve a greater impact at the European level alongside the development of human resource capacity within National Agencies; therefore, it is essential that opportunities for networking and collaboration be free from administrative burdens.

2. Reducing administrative burdens while maintaining flexibility of regulatory framework

- FLAT-RATE FUNDING:** The opinions of the Agencies regarding flat-rate funding are not uniform; however, many are open to piloting this approach, while others do not see a significantly simpler accounting format due to stricter national regulatory environments. This could be a potential area for a differentiated approach based on the needs of the Agencies. Since the current accounting is essentially project-based, it might be worthwhile to negotiate an accounting mechanism with each Agency based on their strategic plans described above. A flexible system that allows for the mobilisation of funds and reallocation for emerging professional programmes implementing the TCA strategy could support the work of many Agencies, potentially even including the youth sector.
- TRAVEL COST REIMBURSEMENT:** Each year, Agencies send between 2,000 and 3,000 participants to TCAs, accompanied by detailed reimbursement procedures. The process of organising travel is highly time-consuming, yet the primary focus for ensuring programme quality lies in the careful selection of high-caliber participants. To ease this burden, the introduction of distance bands and flat-rate sums, similar to those used in KA2, should be considered, taking into account national contexts and varying needs.
- FINANCIAL PLANNING FOR SELF-ORGANISED TCAS:** For the planning of event costs, the application of a flat-rate budget could be considered when submitting the annual work programme, but only based on each Agency's own planning figures. Years of experience could allow for the expected material and personnel expenses of specific activity types to be planned according to cost bands, which would understandably vary by country. It would be justified to detail the discrepancies in the report, and during an audit, invoices must be presented; however, due to the meticulous financial operational mechanisms of National Agencies, it is not expected that a simpler accounting methodology would jeopardise the achievement of professional outcomes or the rational use of resources. Another accounting difficulty on the organisational side is the significant resource requirement for precise workload tracking (timesheets). Alleviating the accounting burden in this area would likely have a more encouraging effect on the Agencies.
- COMMISSION REPORT:** It is essential to rethink the data collection possibilities and methods for TCAs. Having an informative, easily accessible, and analysable time-series database is indispensable in the information age for both the Agencies and the Commission. There seems to be consensus that the current form of the NAM is not suitable for this purpose, but the question how it will develop, what will replace it. As has been mentioned multiple times, the SALTO TCA Resource Centre could coordinate the data collection and evaluation automation task; however, regardless of where this task ends up, automated processes are expected in this area. The strategic approach could be strengthened if, during the reporting period, there is no need to deal with the data at all, while the professional report plays a more prominent role.

VI. POSITION PAPER OF THE EDUCATION & TRAINING TCA WORKING GROUP

Recommendations about TCAs & LTAs between 2028–2034

Written by the Education and Training TCA Working group in 2024

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Objectives

The research carried out by the SALTO Education and Training TCA Resource Centre in 2024 titled Taking stock of TCAs in the field of Education & Training between 2019 and 2023 shows that organising TCAs indeed serves as a strategic mechanism in the establishment of the European Education Area. TCAs play a key role in the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme. Single TCAs, embedded within a broader professional framework, along with the newly emerging long-term activities (LTAs), increasingly contribute to supporting the quality of the Erasmus+ programme in the field of education and training. While original objectives related to TCA activities remain unchanged, the operational framework has evolved positively in the recent period. This increasingly creates opportunities for collaboration among National Agencies and their staff, resulting in the establishment of multi-layered and strengthened relationships within the field of education across Europe.

TCAs have an added value and improve the overall quality of programme implementation, as well as contribute, at least in part, to enhancing the programme's impact at the systemic level.

There has been significant growth in both sending and hosting/organised activities since 2018. All National Agencies participate in TCAs to the extent of their capabilities, and the TCA Officer position has been reorganised and strengthened in many countries. Both TCA Officers and NA staff speak very positively about opportunities provided by TCAs.

The goal of this paper is to make suggestions by the E&T TCA Working group including the most experienced TCA Officers to enhance the quality of Training and Cooperation Activities in the next Erasmus+ programme period (2028–2034).

I. Long-term activities

The effectiveness of single TCAs and long-term activities (LTAs) as instruments for supporting programme quality has been validated. However, there is a clear need for LTAs to become more thematically focused and structured to better prepare coordinator or partner NAs for future challenges.

LTAs within the Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps (known as **Strategic National Agency Cooperations**, or **SNACs**) present a model for long-term collaborations focused on quality and thematic priorities.

Enhanced collaboration between LTAs and SNACs is recommended to eliminate redundancies and maximise resource utilisation.

Furthermore, fostering synergies across sectors could enable the dissemination of results across education, training, and youth sectors.

Thematic SALTO Resource Centres are well-situated to lead efforts in:

- sharing knowledge,
- disseminating results, and
- engaging stakeholders for LTAs.

However, challenges persist for SALTOs operating exclusively within a single sector – whether in the youth sector or within the field of education and training. These challenges highlight the necessity of tailored procedures to enable effective cross-sectoral collaboration.

The SALTO E&T TCA Resource Centre serves as a fully operational and essential support hub for NAs in implementing TCAs and leading the community of TCA Officers. Recent establishment of thematic SALTOs for all Erasmus+ priorities has presented challenges in coordinating with existing LTAs. To address these challenges, the Working group recommends structured assistance for LTAs focusing on strategic priorities, creating a framework that future LTAs can adopt.

The following three-step approach is proposed to ensure effective collaboration and coordination:

1. Enhancing communication regarding thematic LTAs

Close and consistent communication between thematic SALTOs and the European Commission: discussing new LTA proposals, approving new LTAs based on clear and transparent criteria, evaluating progress on a regular basis, identifying successes and shortcomings, and addressing gaps.

2. Dissemination/Communication of information to the TCA/LTA Community

Transfer of key insights and updates from thematic SALTOs and the Commission to the community of TCA Officers and LTA Coordinators: through already existing and potential formal, semi-formal, and non-formal channels (events, meetings, online platforms, etc).

3. Feedback integration into the communication cycle

Feedback from the LTA Coordinators' Community and partners of LTAs: integrating knowledge and experience into step 1 to ensure a continuous feedback loop where community perspectives shape discussions and decisions, fostering iterative improvement.

This cycle – communication, dissemination, and feedback – should function as an ongoing and iterative process, fostering alignment between the SALTOs, the LTAs, and the broader Erasmus+ priorities.

To fully realise the potential of LTAs, NA Directors must acknowledge the critical role of human resources in sustaining long-term collaboration between NAs.

For an NA to participate in LTAs, whether as a coordinator or a partner, sufficient staff must be allocated to meet the partnership's expectations. NA Directors should account for this in their multi-annual planning.

II. Activity types

Since 2021, TCA activities have developed in various ways to cope with the objective of supporting quality and impact of the Erasmus+ programme. The activities implemented by NAs predominantly consist of a combination of networking events, training sessions, contact seminars, and thematic gatherings.

The Working group recommends simplifying and broadening the scope of eligible activities outlined in the Guide for NAs. This can empower NAs to organise activities that effectively contribute to the programme's strategic goals.

Proposed eligible activities could include:

- Training and support activities to help beneficiaries enhance their participation in the programme and improve project quality.

- Implementation of thematic objectives and priorities, including focus on priority target groups and programme themes.
- Developing policies and fostering cooperation in education, training, sport, and youth through stakeholder engagement, including Erasmus+ beneficiaries and experts.
- Facilitating the exchange of experiences and innovative approaches to improve programme management via Communities of Practice (e.g., LTAs for NA staff and experts, as explained below).

Unchanged:

- Evaluation and analysis of programme results.
- Supporting European-level events (e.g., legacy of the European Year of Youth, European Youth Week, EYE – European Youth Event, European Day of Languages, European Language Label, European Innovative Teaching Award, etc.).¹⁸

Concerning LTAs, given the significant leverage effect of long-term cooperation between NAs, the Working group proposes a new form of LTAs dedicated to Communities of Practice or Thematic networks.

While single national thematic monitoring is mandatory for NAs, there is a need to expand this at the transnational level and plan them over the long term. For this purpose, LTAs provide an appropriate solution.

The Erasmus+ programme funds numerous projects addressing similar themes. However, project beneficiaries often face challenges in connecting with one another to exchange practices, results, and learn from one another. LTAs dedicated to Communities of Practice or Thematic networks would aim to bring together project beneficiaries and experts on specific themes, facilitating exchanges and enhancing potential impact at both the national and European levels.

Furthermore, we recommend creating opportunities for LTAs or specific TCAs focused on programme management for experts and NA staff. Unlike traditional job shadowing, which involves one-to-one exchanges between NAs, the proposed format – i.e., LTAs or cluster cooperations between NAs – would promote *long-term, structured collaboration among multiple NAs*. This approach would involve work packages and expert participation, addressing broader project management challenges and facilitating the establishment of common practices across NAs.

¹⁸ 2024 Guide for NAs

10.1.2.1. Eligible TCA activities

1. The National Agency may organise the following eligible activities:

- Training, support and contact seminars of potential Programme participants;
- Thematic activities linked to the objectives, priority target groups and themes of the Programme;
- Evaluation and analysis of Programme results;
- Activities linked to European-level events (e.g. legacy of the European Year of Youth, European Youth Week, EYE-European Youth Event, European Day of Languages, European Language Label, European Innovative Teaching Award, etc.).

Currently, the exchange of practices between National Agencies and experts in programme and project management primarily takes place informally, relying on job shadowing and online training provided by the European Commission for tool usage. The proposed initiative aims to formalise and enhance these exchanges by establishing a more structured framework for skill development and knowledge sharing.

The experience of some LTAs also underlines that there is a crucial need to build common approaches and to exchange practices and results among NAs within a formal strand. A ratio between *traditional LTAs and Community of Practice LTAs* could be defined by the Commission.

III. Regional SALTOS in the E&T field

The international dimension of the Erasmus+ covers Youth (Y), Higher Education (HE) and vocational education and training (VET). TCAs have been enabled to support the international dimension for HE and VET since 2023. National Erasmus+ Offices (NEOs) are essential to establish and to strengthen links between EU and non-EU stakeholders, and to help NAs. Regional SALTOS in the youth sector have played a pivotal role in fostering relationships with potential applicants and beneficiaries, as well as supporting NAs in selecting participants and acting as intermediaries.

As budgets for international actions continue to grow in the field of education and training,

the Working group recommends extending the role of regional SALTOS in the youth field to encompass the E&T sectors.

This extension should be supported by the NEOs, enabling regional SALTOS to serve as shared resources that address both local and regional needs for NAs. The Working group recognises the evolving role of the SALTOS and NEOs in advancing programme objectives, particularly through their contributions to TCAs. Regional SALTOS have proven effective in promoting inclusivity and supporting NAs in youth-related initiatives. However, a notable challenge in the field of education and training is ensuring inclusivity and avoiding unintentional exclusion – a concern that requires careful goal-setting, engagement strategies, and measurable outcomes by TCA Officers.

While the youth and the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) have successfully leveraged SALTOS, the education and training sectors have been slower to adopt these mechanisms. This gap has become significant as expectations and budget allocation for international collaboration in education and training have risen.

Proposed role expansion for regional SALTOs

Regional SALTOs could serve as critical assets for the field of E&T by:

- supporting NAs to select participants from specific regions;
- acting as intermediaries to strengthen connections between participants and NAs;
- enhancing international collaboration within TCAs, aligning activities with EU external relations priorities in education and training.

Furthermore, the inclusion of regional SALTOs in E&T initiatives could improve alignment across sectors and amplify the overall impact of TCAs.

Challenges and recommendations

Engaging NEOs meaningfully in TCA activities remains a challenge, partly due to limited guidance and focus on their roles within the framework of the Erasmus+ programme. To address these challenges and ensure effective engagement, the Working group highlights the need for:

- clear strategic planning that defines the objectives and scope of NEO involvement;
- collaboration frameworks that promote inclusivity while maintaining focus and quality in TCA activities;
- enhanced coordination between regional SALTOs and NEOs to maximise their contributions to programme goals.

By leveraging the proven success of regional SALTOs in the youth sector and extending their role to education and training, the programme can better meet its objectives, foster inclusivity, and strengthen international collaboration across sectors.

IV. Eligibility, administration, and finances

Budget uptake

The Working group is aware of the need to increase the budget intake in the E&T sectors. To make this happen, we perceive several key aspects. First,

it is necessary to make sure that NAs dedicate enough human resources for TCA activities; this should be followed by a flexible approach to TCAs which enables NAs to realise various types of activities.

As a final step, the Working group would like to encourage the Commission to consider launching new types of activities (e.g. specific TCAs/LTAs targeting NA staff).

Common procedures for all sectors

As there is an increase in cross-sectoral activities and, in some cases, the same events attempt to

attract applicants both from the E&T and youth sectors, the Working group suggests synchronising application procedures for all sectors (TCA E&T, TCA Youth, TCA Sport) and the NET activities. Also, to ensure a pleasant user experience for all applicants from various sectors,

it is recommended to have one portal (a common landing page) for all the SALTOs that will redirect its visitors to the sites of the SALTO Resource Centres.

Staff cost

The Working group is aware that, at the time of writing this paper, there is still some uncertainty among many National Agencies regarding the practical use of the advantages enabled by the 15% rule. Concerns have been raised, particularly around the fact that eligible staff costs are derived from the realised budget, whereas staff costs typically arise before the actual implementation of activities, leading to insecurity among NAs.

The Working group recommends that the eligibility of these costs be based on timesheets, which would justify the legitimacy of costs to the appropriate controls and audits. We consider this approach optimal, as some activities (such as online TCAs, in-house TCAs, and impact analysis of TCA activities) may involve little to no financial costs but can still be time-consuming to prepare.

Reporting

At the moment, NAs are requested to report TCA activities in the Yearly report, where a specific calendar year is being reported. Also, reporting happens in the NAM (National Agency Module) where all activities for the entire eligibility period are reported. This means that National Agencies report budget uptake and activities twice. Further simplification is advised.

National TCAs

The Working group observes that the current guidance regarding the balance between national and transnational TCAs, particularly the 50% rule, remains unclear. National TCAs have emerged as a valuable tool for NAs to support various activities involving beneficiaries, experts, and applicants. However, as transnational and national activities develop further under the framework of LTAs, alongside single TCAs, adhering to the 50% rule based on the number of activities – as outlined in the Guide for NAs – has become increasingly challenging.

The Working group recommends revising the guidance in the Guide for NAs to emphasise either a proportionate budget balance or a reasonable number of activities, rather than strictly adhering to the 50% activity-based rule.

Proposed eligible funding mechanism for national thematic events

In order to most effectively outreach and support for potential programme participants, the E&T TCA Working group recommends introducing micro-grants.

This tool would empower smaller and hard-to-reach organisations to organise national thematic events. These events could serve as a stepping stone for organisations, enabling them to gain valuable experience and prepare for deeper engagement in future programme activities, such as hosting study visits or organising more complex events. Micro-grants also provide an accessible entry point for participants to familiarise themselves with the Erasmus+ processes, fostering their integration into the programme. This approach has demonstrated effectiveness in promoting inclusivity, building organisational capacity, and engaging grassroots and hard-to-reach organisations, ultimately enabling their future participation in Erasmus+ programme.

Funding based on real costs

The Working group advocates for a flexible approach to supporting participants attending TCA activities.

Currently, most National Agencies reimburse real costs. However, this approach is not considered optimal by many Agencies due to the significant administrative burden it entails (e.g., verifying the eligibility of submitted travel documents). This burden can, in some cases, hinder National Agencies from sending participants to TCAs they find relevant. Which is something that can also have a negative impact on Hosting/Organiser Agencies and, more broadly, can reduce NAs' ability to fully use their TCA budget.

A potential solution could be to allow National Agencies to adopt alternative reimbursement models, such as unit cost systems similar to those used in KA1 mobility projects. The suitability of these systems depends on factors like geographical context and national legislation. However, a recent SALTO poll of National Agencies revealed that most Agencies prefer unit cost systems and unanimously support greater flexibility on this matter.

Meeting the challenge of increasing the number of TCA events and encouraging participation in TCAs

As statistics show, TCAs attract an increasing number of applicants. Yet, due to the above-mentioned reimbursement rules and the administrative workload associated with sending individual participants, NAs are limited in their capacity to send more participants to TCAs. Moreover, NAs are willing to organise more TCA events in line with priorities and issues to improve programme quality and implementation. Participants' reports clearly show that the opportunity to meet and exchange ideas at TCAs is highly valued by beneficiaries, especially by newcomers and grassroots organisations, as TCAs offer a unique way to meet counterparts and peers.

To address this need and challenge, we propose establishing a Working group with representatives of the EC, the SALTO Resource Centres in education and training, and youth, and NAs to brainstorm solutions to overcome barriers and propose innovative strategies for the next Erasmus+ programme.

Annex: Research results "Taking stock of TCAs realised in the field of education and training between 2019 and 2023" (Excerpts)

The TCA Working group highlights the following findings of the research:

(...)

The two most significant findings having been revealed by present research confirm that organising TCAs indeed serves serves, even if indirectly as a strategic mechanism in the establishment of the European Education Area.

1 All respondents have agreed that TCAs play a key role in the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme. Single TCAs, embedding into a broader professional framework, along with the newly emerging long-term activities (LTAs), increasingly contribute to supporting the quality of the Erasmus+ programme in the field of education and training.

2 While the original objectives related to TCAs have remained unchanged, the operational framework has evolved in a positive direction. This has been creating more and more opportunities for collaboration amongst National Agencies and their staff, resulting in the establishment of multi-layered, strengthened relationships within educational sectors across Europe. (p 18)

(...)

According to the report published in 2020, most National Agencies agreed that TCAs have added value and improve the overall quality of programme implementation, as well as contribute, at least in part, to enhancing the programme's impact at systemic level. This research – building on results of the research conducted five years ago – has primarily sought to answer what changed in the past five years.

In general, it can be said that:

- There has been significant growth of over 100% in both sending and hosting/organised activities between 2019 and 2023 both in terms of number of events and of participants. Although the level of activity is not uniform, all National Agencies participate in TCAs to the extent of their capabilities, and TCA Officer positions have been reorganised and strengthened in many countries.
- Both TCA Officers and leaders speak very positively about the opportunities provided by TCAs. (p 23)

(...)

The last year examined in the previous research was 2018, after which, in 2019, a significantly great increase in TCAs could be observed in all fields compared to earlier years. In 2020, due to the pandemic, the number of organised activities had decreased to about half, and the number of participants had fallen to about a fifth, but in 2021, this number already reached the 2018 level, and by 2023, it exceeded the results from 2019 as well. (p 23 footnote 7)

(...)

The previous research already revealed that participation in transnational collaborative activities represented an important learning opportunity for National Agency staff, and in many cases, the new tasks associated with organising TCAs influenced the working methods of National Agencies. After five years, based on both the interviews and written responses to the questionnaire, it can be clearly stated that alongside individual learning potentials, TCAs have also initiated significant organisational learning processes. (p 23)

(...)

National TCAs play a crucial role in establishing connections with applicants from their own country.

INTERVIEW: National TCAs are very important components of building project capacities on the national level, but you have to know that although the Commission has approved it, they always want to see the balance, that there are fewer national activities than transnational TCAs.

82

The pool of potential applicants in each country – both in quantitative and qualitative terms – can be much more actively engaged in discussions related to specific European policy goals or horizontal priorities. Transformative seminars provide an opportunity for participants to initiate conversations in an open atmosphere, free from language barriers. Those attending these events do so out of a desire to learn and show interest, and they often arrive at their own project ideas through feedback from other participants. However, it can already be considered a significant achievement if their horizons are broadened towards the European dimensions of education and training, or if they gain inspiration for participating in further professional events. Therefore, these dialogue-generating opportunities are crucial for National Agencies. (p 27)

(...)

A key element of the managerial interviews was the question about the impact of TCAs and the measurability of that impact. In line with the strong expectations of the Commission, several entities are attempting some form of measurement, but the lack of centralised coordination from the Commission in this area poses a challenge for NAs. (p 31)

(...)

Overall, we can reach a similar conclusion to that found in the mid-term evaluation report of the Erasmus+ programme:

“The evaluation concludes that, in the absence of the Erasmus+ and its predecessors, there would be clear negative effects on learning mobility abroad, transnational cooperation among organisations, including with partner countries, integration between European countries as well as the attitude of participants towards the EU.”

EC (2018): Mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme (2014–2020) (p 33)

(...)

In the absence of the toolset of Training and Cooperation Activities, National Agencies would certainly have fewer tools for improving project quality and creating connections between national and European policies, which would not only negatively impact the achievement of operational objectives but also hinder the organisational development process that could lead to the expected role perception presented in Chapter 1. (P 33)

(...)

Inevitably, a comparison arises between the education and training sectors and the youth sector. According to data shared by the European Commission at the TCA Officers' meeting in April 2021, education and training sectors were only able to utilise 33% of the available resources, with just six Agencies achieving over 50%. By 2024, a significant increase to a utilisation rate of 66% is predicted, while for the youth sector, this rate is expected to be around 93%. Interviews indicate that the Agencies strive for more balanced performance, but they still face numerous obstacles. In the youth sector, TCA activities started 15 years earlier, and in many ways, the needs, traditions, and cultural and institutional characteristics of the two fields differ significantly. (p 34)

83

(...)

Previous research noted, and interviews have confirmed, that

there is a much larger human capacity relative to the volume of applications within the youth units of the National Agencies, with significantly more staff involved in organising TCAs.

The youth SALTO Resource Centres have supported this work from the beginning (currently, four thematic and three regional centres are operational), and since 2003, they have regularly published longitudinal statistical data, research, and evaluation reports. It is likely just a matter of time before the education and training sector can further tap into the strategic development potential inherent in TCAs, which strengthens policy collaborations in line with the Commission's guidelines.

In this regard, it would be premature to be impatient after ten years. It is more important to recognise the significant strides the youth sector has made, even with stable development goals and funding backgrounds, while the education sectors are increasingly able to leverage resources.

National Agency leaders acknowledge that there is still much to learn and develop, for which the operation of the Agencies of both fields alongside each other is a natural opportunity within many NAs. (p 37)

(...)

There was a unanimous response regarding the idea that alongside individual TCAs, a more strategic and long-term approach could enhance the impact and visibility of these initiatives. Moreover,

LTAs represent an important opportunity for strategic cooperation among National Agencies (interestingly enough, these types of TCAs are referred to as SNACs – Strategic National Agency Cooperations in the youth field).

However, similar to what we see with project applications, some growing pains are still noticeable. The ability to launch unique ideas strengthens the approach that allows for bottom-up initiatives, where innovations can thrive; yet creativity does not always come hand in hand with a strategic mindset. (p 38)



VII. APPENDICES

A. List of figures and tables

- Figure 1** Mobility of E+ beneficiaries through Training and Cooperation Activities in the Erasmus+ programme
- Figure 2** Evolution of the TCA criterion system
- Figure 3** Opinion of TCA Officers about cooperation with sectoral units
- Figures 4-6** Number of events, number of participants and budget of transnational and national hosting and transnational sending TCAs between 2019–2023 – reported in EplusLink and NAM
- Figure 7** Which tasks are the most challenging for TCA Officers? (questionnaire for TCA Officers)
- Figures 8-10** Comparison of number of hosting TCAs, number of participants and cost of events in 2019 between youth and education and training sectors
- Figure 11** Comparison of the number of sending TCAs, the number of participants and the cost of those events in 2019 between the youth and education and training sectors
- Figure 12** Proportion of each education sector within all transnational TCAs (cross-sectoral events are counted for each target group)
- Figures 13-14** Distribution of TCAs organised at transnational level by training area and educational sectors between 2018 and the first half of 2024
- Figures 15-16** Number and cost of participants in TCAs organised at transnational level between 2019 and 2023
- Figures 17-18** Number and cost of participants sent to transnational TCAs between 2019 and 2023
- Figure 19** Distribution of TCAs organised at transnational level by training area between 2018 and first half of 2024
- Figures 20-21** Number and distribution of TCAs organised at national level by education sector
- Figures 22-23** Number and cost of participants in TCAs organised at national level
- Figure 24** Budget proportion of transnational hosting, sending and national TCAs between 2019–2023
- Figure 25** Distribution of horizontal priorities across TCAs organised at transnational level
- Figures 26-27** Distribution of horizontal priorities across TCAs organised at transnational level in the two programme cycles
- Figures 28-29** Distribution of horizontal priorities within TCAs and LTAs
- Figure 30** SALTO Resources
- Figure 31** To what extent do you receive support from the SALTO RC in the following areas? (questionnaire for TCA Officers)
- Figure 32** Which tools support your work the most? (questionnaire for TCA Officers)
- Figures 33-34** Proportion of full-time and part-time TCA Officers and time spent on task
- Figure 35** How long have you been working as a TCA Officer?
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- Figure 37** Erasmus+ Impact Handbook – an output of the LTA on Impact
- Figures 38-39** QR code to the website and Erasmus+ Impact Tool
- Figure 40** Sectors' proportion within all TCAs by NAs
- Figure 41** Events proportion of transnational and national hosting TCAs by NAs between 2019–2023
- Figure 42** Number of participants proportion of transnational and national hosting TCAs by NAs between 2019–2024
- Figure 43** Budget proportion of transnational hosting and transnational sending, and national hosting TCAs by NAs

- Table 1** Introduction of the 15% rule in the 2024 NA Guide
- Table 2** Comparison of chapters defining goals of TCAs in 2019 and 2024 Guides for NAs
- Table 3** Comparison of chapters defining activities in 2019 and 2021 Guides for NAs
- Table 4** Objectives and importance of TCAs in the education and training and the youth sectors
- Table 5** Comparison of the main quantifiable data of TCAs in the first and second five-year periods of their operation
- Table 6** 2024 Guide for NAs
- Table 7** Data collection proposal to assist in designing an evaluation framework of TCAs
- Table 8** Comparison of main features of examined databases

B. Databases

The lack of a unified data repository was a serious challenge during the research. The previous data extraction facility, the EplusLink has been discontinued and the new system, the NAM contains hardly any data compared to the previous ones. When performing some spot checks, it happens that

the SALTO database, the EplusLink (2019) and the NAM contain different data about the same event,

meaning that there are many errors in the data provision. There is extreme data (e.g., events with 1 or 1000 people), but these could not be filtered due to the lack of sufficient information, so we only improved the data in very clear cases.

The graphs are suitable for comparing the two five-year periods, but the data cannot be considered reliable at the National Agency level. However, they are still suitable for individual Agencies to check themselves and to further think about the methodology of data collection and processing.

Below, we compare the main features of the examined databases and then summarise the data structure in a common table.

Eplus link (2019-2020 Youth and E&T together)

- planned and released single activities
- many types of data
- inconsistencies in the interpretation of terminology, as well as issues with timeliness and precision, result in uncertainty regarding the reliability of the extracted data
- cross-sectoral events listed within each KA2 programme had to be deleted, merging budget and participant data
- target group text field: cannot be filtered

NA reports – NAM (from 2021, only E&T)

- both hosting/organising and sending activities (separate databases)
- only summary data (period not clear, not necessarily an annual statement according to interviews)
- few types of data
- filling in data fields is textual, not summable, NAs clearly struggle to fill in report meaningfully (no room for explanations)
- sometimes plans appear in text

SALTO database (from 2018, only E&T)

- only transnational events are promoted on portal (organised activities)
- planned single activities (but no reference to Eplus link, double filling)
- no data about budget and realisation
- many types of data
- sometimes date errors

Dataset	Eplus link	NA reports	SALTO database
availability			SALTO E&T link
codes: application or training area, NA, year	Project Code (e.g. 2019-1-AT01-KA220)		Reference Number (e.g. AT01_0157_THO_2019)
NA (reference to country)	Agency	NA code	Organiser NA
	NAReference	Version (of the report)	
E+ project reference	TypeTCA (ESC61/KA218/KA215/KA216/KA217/KA220)		Key Action (KA1/KA2/KA3, not applicable)
	dataset shows single activities	Realised number of single activities	
national/transnational	Scope	Type	Scope (mainly transnational events)
F2F, online, blended, hybrid			Type of presence
project title	Title		Title
sector	Target Group (not drop-down menu but text field)		Sector
priority			Priority
aims and activities, expected results	Activity Aim	Short description of activities and achieved results	Themes and goals/ Expected results/ Additional information
target group (newcomers/experienced)			Target group (key words) Erasmus+ Programme experience level Profile of participants
type of event	Training_Area (TSS/THO)		Role (TSS/THO/EBAR/AELE)
sending/organising	Role (sending/hosting)		mainly organising events are in database
dates	StartDate/EndDate		StartDate/EndDate
venue			Venue country/Venue city

Dataset	Eplus link	NA reports	SALTO database
language			Working language
number of participants	Participants Number	Total number of participants (hosted and sent in separate reports)	Number of participants
distribution of participants			Participants per country
budget	Budget Awarded/Budget Realised	Released budget	
	Final Payment Date		
realisation	Status (planned, released, cancelled)		Postponed
booking acceptance status			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sending partner(s) – Booked places/Pending Sending partner application(s) – Booked places/ Accepted Sending partner(s) – Accepted places (by countries) • Pending booked places/Accepted places (number)
realisation			Start date of TCA Participant Application /Application deadline/ Confirmation deadline for Sending Nas/Confirmation deadline for Organiser NAs

Dataset	Eplus link	NA reports	SALTO database
LTA related question			Is this TCA part of a Long-Term Activity? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-Term Activity Title • Long-Term Activity Coordinator • Long-Term Activity Priority • Long-Term Activity Subtopic • Long-Term Activity Sector • Long-Term Activity Country • Long-Term Activity Working language • Long-Term Activity Start date • Long-Term Activity End date • Long-Term Activity Rationale and background • Long-Term Activity Challenges • Long-Term Activity Planned Activities • Long-Term Activity Expected results • Single activities connected to this Long-Term Activity
further data			TCA documents E+ Academy Subtopic (key words)
confused data, cannot be analysed	Approval Status ID/Linked Project Code/Comments		

Table 8 – Comparison of main features of examined databases

C. NA Participation

Figure 39 – Sectors' proportion within all TCAs by NAs

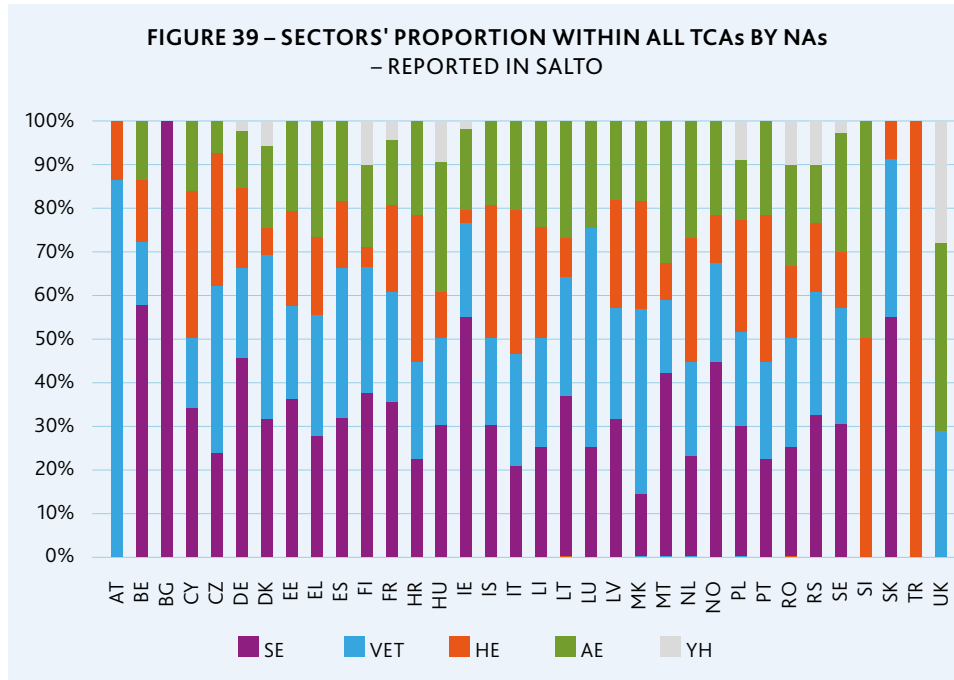


Figure 40 – Events proportion of transnational and national hosting TCAs by NAs between 2019–2023

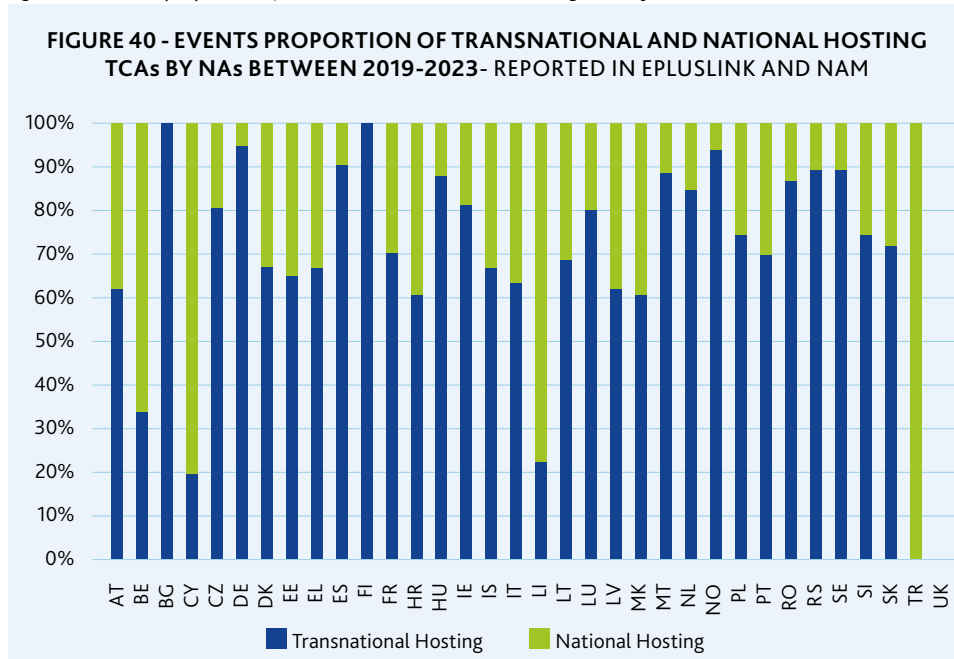


Figure 41 – Number of participants proportion of transnational and national hosting TCAs by NAs between 2019–

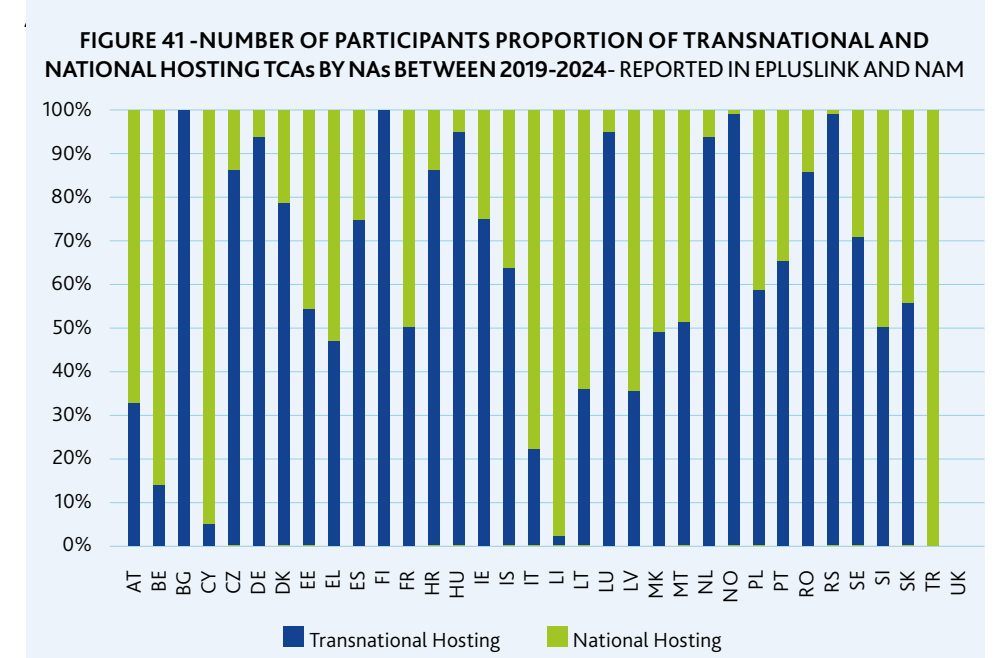
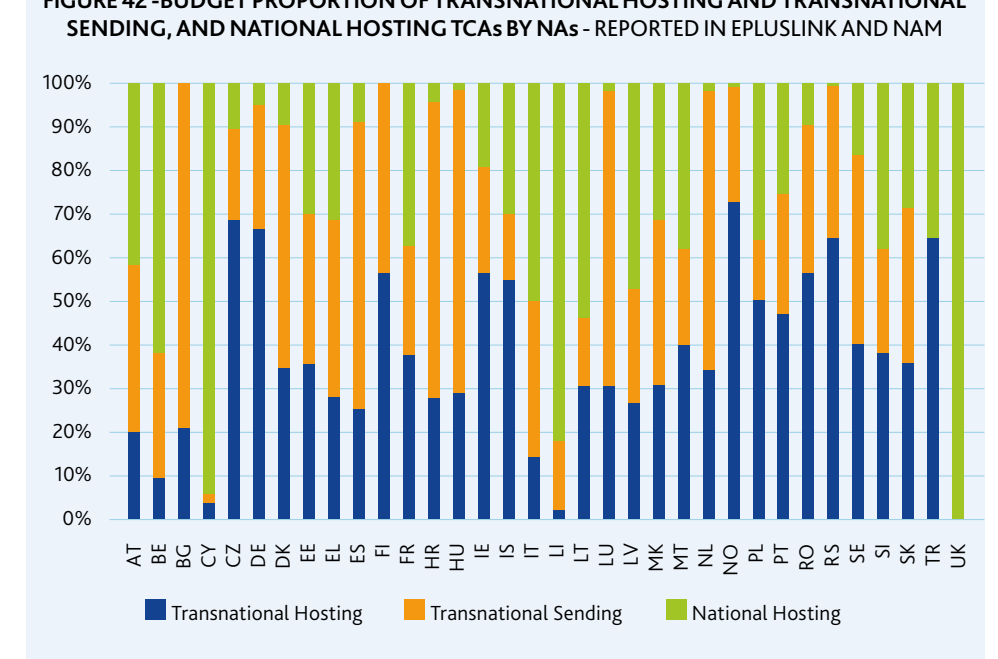


Figure 42 – Budget proportion of transnational hosting and transnational sending, and national hosting TCAs by NAs - reported in EPLUSLINK AND NAM



ANNEXES

Annex 1 – Desk research

Documents examined through desk research

Erasmus+ Guides for National Agencies between 2019 and 2024

Balla, Á.; Molnár, K; Almássy, A; Albrecht-Garai, K. (editor), 2020: Taking stock of TCAs realised in the field of Education and Training between 2014 and 2018. Report of research findings. Tempus Public Foundation

European Commission (2018): Mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme (2014–2020)

European Commission (2023): Erasmus+ annual report 2022

Webpages examined through desk research

SALTO TCA E&T RC: <https://salto-et.net/> and https://salto-et.net/tools_and_docs/analytics

SALTO TCA YOUTH RC: <https://www.salto-youth.net/>

THEMATIC SALTO RCs:

- Digital: <https://www.oph.fi/en/european-salto-digital-resource-centre>
- Green: <https://www.youtube.com/@SALTOGreen>
- Inclusion and Diversity: <https://saltoinclusion.eu/>
- Participation and Information: <https://participationpool.eu/news/>

Working materials examined through desk research

SALTO E&T TCA RC working materials

- Officers' Weeks: working materials and communication tool (Padlets)
- TCA Officers' planning tool (Spreadsheet)
- TCA Working group's (WG) formal and informal working papers

SALTO E&T TCA RC training materials in the Canvas LMS

Questionnaire for TCA Officers

1. How long have you been a TCA Officer? – months or years

2. Is it a full time or a part time work for you? – full time part time

If part time, please estimate your weekly hours spent with this task: ... hours per week

3. How often do you take part in TCAs organised by other NAs as NA staff? – times per year

4. Have you ever organised a TCA event? – yes no

If yes, please provide us with the number of TCAs you have organised and, in a few words, explain what exact tasks you are responsible for as organiser:

5. Which of the followings are the most challenging parts of your job as a TCA Officer?

administration	major challenge	bit of a challenge
• cooperation with other NAs	major challenge	bit of a challenge
• strategic planning - collaborating within my NA - creating the work programme	major challenge major challenge major challenge	bit of a challenge bit of a challenge bit of a challenge
• preparing and realising TCA event - designing content - finding expert(s), facilitator(s) - promoting - timing - selecting most fitting participants - evaluating and following-up	major challenge major challenge major challenge major challenge major challenge major challenge	bit of a challenge bit of a challenge bit of a challenge bit of a challenge bit of a challenge bit of a challenge
• measuring impact	major challenge	bit of a challenge
• disseminating	major challenge	bit of a challenge
• other:	major challenge	bit of a challenge

6. How are needs and demands of beneficiaries mapped for planning TCA strategy at your NA?

7. Do you think that TCA events can reach not only beneficiaries, but also policy makers and experts on related thematic fields? *yes partly no*

8. Are there other staff members (non-TCA Officers) involved in TCA events at your

organisation? (Please choose ALL options true at your NA.)

- everyone can take part if they want, this is common practice at our NA true
- a few colleagues at our NA are interested and can be involved true
- they can participate at locally organised TCAs only true
- it is not common at all for NA staff to apply true
- it is not supported by our NA Director true
- there is not enough time and capacity for this (NA staff are usually overburdened) true
- other: true

9. Do you consider cooperation with Erasmus+ sectoral units appropriate? yes partly no

10. Which of the following formats of TCAs is the most popular among your participants?

- face-to-face TCA events
- online TCA events
- blended TCA events
- no idea

Has there been any changes due to the pandemic regarding this preference?

11. Would you recommend reinforcing the green priority more with organising online TCAs (because it is greener, time- and cost-effective) or do you rather believe in face-to-face training events?

12. In your opinion

- why are TCA activities important for your organisation?
- why are TCA activities important in your country?
- why are TCA activities important on the European level?
- why are TCA activities important for you professionally?

13. Do you have experience with LTAs (long-term activities)? yes no

Could you explain in a few words its advantages and/or disadvantages as far as NAs are concerned? And the Erasmus+ programme?

14. Are there any direct or indirect expectations coming from your NA Director/superior regarding your work? If yes, do you get clear instructions to meet those expectations?

15. Do you think that participation in TCA activities could be used as motivation for NA staff, a reward, a learning opportunity?

16. Do you get support from the SALTO E&T TCA Resource Centre in the following aspects?

- Introduction of the TCA lifecycle for new TCA Officers yes partly no

- How to involve stakeholders for the TCA events? yes partly no
- How to involve NA staff in planning, preparing, and realising TCAs? yes partly no
- Needs assessment yes partly no
- Strategic planning of TCAs yes partly no
- Quality of realisation yes partly no
- Project communication yes partly no
- Reporting yes partly no
- Evaluating and following-up yes partly no
- Administration, documentation, financial management yes partly no
- EU policy, TCA priorities in depth yes partly no
- Communication and cooperation techniques yes partly no
- Digital tools for cooperation in everyday work yes partly no
- Fostering cooperation, knowledge sharing and peer learning among TCA Officers yes partly no

17. Which of the following tools support your work the most?

- TCA Officers' Weeks very useful less useful
- Training events for NA staff very useful less useful
- Working group activities (WG Café, Newcomer induction day) very useful less useful
- guidelines and recommendations (e.g. SALTO document library) very useful less useful
- Expert pool very useful less useful
- SALTO Platform (AMP) very useful less useful
- communication and promotional tools (newsletters, YouTube tutorials, promotional videos) very useful less useful

Do you have any suggestions for improving any of the above tools?

18. Do you need support in any other fields from the SALTO E&T TCA Resource Centre for making your TCA-related work more effective? Right now, what would support the most successful continuation of your work as a TCA Officer?

19. Do you need more support from other organisations or actors? If yes, please specify!

20. Are there any other ideas you suggest to the SALTO E&T TCA Resource Centre regarding knowledge sharing, training activities, result collection, and dissemination by which it could better foster your TCA-related work and could make the use of TCA funds more efficient?

Annex 3 – Interview topics for intermediary leaders and NA Directors

1. Is it possible to measure the impact of TCAs on the Erasmus+ programme? Is impact directly measured at your NA?
2. Is there any information about the extent to which TCAs fulfil their role in increasing the utilisation of the programme and in improving the quality of the projects?
3. Who is the main target group of TCAs? What might the learning outcomes be for NA staff participating in a TCA event? What might they be for experienced beneficiaries and for newcomers?
4. What do you consider more important regarding TCA events:
 - opportunity for potential project owners to find partners and build projects;
 - opportunity for project owners to improve the quality of their running (and/or future) projects through professional activities;
 - attracting newcomers to the programme through professional activities;
 - connecting sectors to share knowledge, exchange good examples, and learn from one another;
 - providing development opportunities for NA staff;
 - anything else?
5. What do you think about E+ priorities and how they have changed in recent years? Are there underrepresented priorities, and if so, why? Is there a known shift in previous priorities at the European level in Education & Training? Is there any research on this?
6. How do you support the work of TCA Officers within your organisation? Do you see the work of TCA Officers more as organisational, administrative, or strategic?
7. What do you think about LTAs? Could they be real opportunities in terms of long-term professional cooperation among Agencies, as expectations placed on them by the Commission suggest?
8. To what extent can TCAs be exploited as learning and relationship building opportunities for NA staff? What is the utilisation rate of this opportunity within your own NA? Do you personally consider important that as many people as possible within your Agency can take advantage of this opportunity? If you think it is less important, what are the reasons for this?
9. Are there national priorities and how are they identified? How can you better focus on your national priorities through organising TCAs and sending beneficiaries to TCAs addressing those issues?
10. How could the Commission better support the utilisation of TCAs and LTAs? Are there any aspects of the programme that require development?

