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Interim Evaluation of the European Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-2009: The National Report of Estonia

Laura Kirss

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This report summarizes the results of the interim evaluation of the European Lifelong Learning programme 2007-2009 in Estonia. The main objectives of the interim evaluation were: a) to analyse results of the LLP achieved hitherto and to identify lessons learned and good practices; b) to give recommendations for improving the execution of the current programme in the remaining stage of its implementation and; c) to give input for the preparation of the future programme in the field of lifelong learning. The analysis concentrated on the aspects of relevance, effectiveness and efficiency.

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PRAXIS Centre for Policy Studies
Estonia pst. 3/5, 10143 Tallinn, Estonia
tel (+372) 640 9000
fax (+372) 640 9001
e-mail praxis@praxis.ee

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Commissioned by: the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research
Author: Laura Kirss, MA

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PRAXIS Center for Policy Studies

PRAXIS Center for Policy Studies
Estonia pst. 5a, 10143 Tallinn, Estonia
Tel. (372) 640 9000, fax (372) 640 9001
e-mail: praxis@praxis.ee
<http://www.praxis.ee>

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Executive Summary

This report summarizes the results of the interim evaluation of the European Lifelong Learning programme 2007-2009 in Estonia. The evaluation was carried out following the guidelines provided by the European Commission. The analysis adopted a qualitative approach primarily due to the descriptive nature of the evaluation question. Additional data were used to supplement and illustrate the qualitative approach, if available.

The evaluation used all the relevant documentation available as well as semi-structured interviews as sources of information. Altogether 11 semi-structured interviews were carried out with LLP national implementers and relevant policy makers in the respective policy fields.

The interim evaluation results in Estonia point to the overall successful implementation experience. As the result of many years of solid experience in Estonia, the LLP sub-programmes have well established themselves in the Estonian education system. Despite its limited scope, LLP with its sub-programmes is instrumental in contributing to the internationalization and increased openness of the Estonian education. It is also valuable for facilitating cooperation, networks and also promoting the quality of education. As the overview of the relevance of the programme suggested there are no serious alternatives to the current programme activities in Estonia. Importantly, established cooperation networks of LLP have even paved the way for introducing complementary internationalization schemes to Estonian education.

The implementation of LLP has been so far successful. The views of implementers were in general positive. The analysis of selected beneficiaries' feedback as well as monitoring and other documents suggests that there have been no serious difficulties on the side of the beneficiaries. There have been occasional challenges but no major drawbacks.

Still, the evaluation outlined some areas of discontent regarding the implementation of the programme. The most acute problems that need addressing from the European Commission are related to the dysfunctional management tools, disturbing and frequent changes in the programme procedures, delays in the provision of documentation and insufficient budgets (primarily Grundtvig).

1. Introduction and methodology

This report summarizes the findings of the interim evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in Estonia during the period of 2007-2009. The report follows the structure outlined in the guidelines provided by the European Commission. Firstly, the relevance of the programme and its role in the Estonian context is discussed. This is followed by the section on effectiveness of programme implementation dealing with the issues of experienced difficulties and challenges. The effectiveness section also addressed topics like reaching programme target groups, integration of previous programmes, and dissemination of programme results. The third part of the report provides an overview of effectiveness related issues like system of cooperation between different implementation parties, management supporting tools and resource adequacy.

The analysis adopted primarily a qualitative approach as the evaluation questions posed by the European Commission were generally of descriptive nature (raising question like ‘how?’ or ‘what?’). The evaluation questions also assumed collecting information from the immediate programme implementers in which case a quantitative approach would not have been appropriate as the implementers are few in numbers in Estonia. Consequently, the primary source of data was semi-structured interviews with the representatives of the different sub-programmes of LLP at the National Agency (NA) as well as the experts of different policy areas at the Ministry of Education and Research (MER). Table 1 below provides an overview of the conducted interviews.

Table 1. Overview of the conducted interviews.

	Interviewee	Role regarding LLP	Date of interview
1.	Head of the School Education Unit at the Centre for Educational Programmes, Archimedes Foundation	Implementer of Comenius sub-programme at National Agency	April 7, 2010
2.	Head of the Vocational Education Unit at the Centre for Educational Programmes, Archimedes Foundation	Implementer of Leonardo sub-programme at National Agency	April 7, 2010
3.	Head of the Adult Education Unit at the Centre for Educational Programmes, Archimedes Foundation	Implementer of Grundtvig sub-programme at National Agency	April 7, 2010
4.	Head of the Higher Education Unit at the Centre for Educational Programmes, Archimedes Foundation	Implementer of Erasmus sub-programme at National Agency	April 9, 2010
5.	Advisor of the Centre for Educational Programmes, Archimedes Foundation	Implementer of horizontal sub-programme (study visits) at National Agency	April 9, 2010
6.	Director of the Centre for Educational Programmes, Archimedes Foundation	Director of the at National Agency	April 9, 2010
7.	Head of Vocational and Adult Education Department, MER	Policy maker in the area of vocational education	April 14, 2010
8.	Head of Public and Foreign Relations Department and Head of European Union Office, MER	Representative of the National Authority	April 16, 2010
9.	Adviser and Chief Expert of Higher Education Department, MER	Policy makers in the area of higher education	April 16, 2010
10.	Head of Adult Education Division, MER	Policy maker in the area of adult education	April 19, 2010
11.	Head of the Curriculum Division and Chief Experts of the Development Division of General Education Department, MER	Policy maker in the area of school education	April 26, 2010

The interviews provide valuable input and insight into the analysis of various aspects of relevance, effectiveness as well as efficiency of the LLP. The interviews were based on the developed interview schedules. The schedules were in general based on the evaluation questions provided by the Commission adjusting them to specific interview contexts. The interviews with programme

implementers focused more on specific implementation issues while the interviews with policy makers addressed more specifically the role of the programme and as well as meeting national needs. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed with the data analysis software NVivo.

In addition to the interviews, the available statistical data provided by the NA on the programmes were also used. The analysis of the data provided an overview of different aspects of the programme, e.g an array of countries included in the cooperation under LLP, inclusion of various target groups, etc. Where possible, databases of beneficiaries were used to inquire about their feedback on the programme.

Furthermore, the analysis made use of other available data sources in order to acquire additional input for the evaluation. For instance, various strategy documents were used to assess the appropriateness of the LLP goals in the Estonian setting; reports of the National Agency were analyzed in order to acquire further insight into the programme implementation process. The experience of the impact assessment of the previous European education programmes in Estonia is also used as Praxis carried out that assessment in 2007.

Taking into account the wide range of activities under the LLP, the evaluation did prioritize larger scale activities (activities with larger budgets) as these relate to larger potential impacts.

1. Relevance

The relevance of LLP and its sub-programmes in Estonia could be analyzed from various perspectives. On the one hand, as some interviewees also pointed out, the relevance could be seen in terms of the relative scope of the programme in the national context. In this view, the relevance can be measured either by participation or budgets. Placing LLP into the context of Estonian education system (See Table 2) on an annual basis (2009)¹, it could be seen that the scope of the programme is rather moderate in Estonia. Even in the largest programme Erasmus, with its annual outward student mobility of 880, the programme can only reach to 1,3% of all higher education students. The scope of Leonardo is rather similar with its annual share of 1,8% of all vocational education students. The share of teachers or staff participating annually in Comenius or Grundtvig in-service trainings is even smaller. On a positive side, 50 partnerships in Comenius and 13 partnerships in Leonardo is a relatively good indicator in the context of the number of institutions in the respective fields of education.

Table 2. LLP in the context of Estonian education system, 2009.

Area of education	No of participants in 2009	No of Institutions/providers in 2009	No of beneficiaries/ approved projects in 2009	LLP sub-programme
General education	Pupils: 141 800 Teachers: 14 701	558	In-service training: 77 Partnerships: 50	Comenius
Vocational education	Students: 28 363 Teachers: 2 096	51	Placements and exchanges: 516 Partnerships: 13 Projects: 3	Leonardo
Higher education	Students: 68 985 Teachers/staff: 5 942	34	Student mobility: 880 Staff mobility: 469 IP programmes: 6	Erasmus
Adult education*	Learners: 48 000	414	In-service training: 20 Partnerships: 17	Grundtvig
			31	Study Visits

* Population aged 25-64, participation in taught learning in last 4 weeks.

Source: Estonian Ministry of Education and Research²; Statistics Estonia³; Statistical reports on LLP provided by the NA.

When discussing the scope of LLP in a national context it is important to note that this scope is often directly related to the available resources for the particular activities. The adequacy of resources is discussed later under the efficiency section. The following will now look at the financial scope of the programmes in relation to other major sources of education funding in Estonia. It has to be noted here that this overview just illustrates the overall scope of LLP in Estonia, acknowledging the fact that LLP is only targeting particular aspects of the education system (primarily internationalization and quality) while the state budget and ESF/ERF resources are targeting the education system on a significantly wider scale. Hence, the large differences in funding levels as Table 10 in Annex 2, comparing LLP budgets with state budget and structural funds (ESF and ERF) expenditures during

¹ It has to be noticed here that the potential beneficiaries of the sub-programmes can extend beyond the formal participants outlined in the table (e.g Leonardo includes people in the labour market or Comenius includes also pre-primary or nursery schools.).

² The Ministry of Education and Research, www.hm.ee (May 17, 2010).

³ Statistics Estonian, pub.stat.ee, (May 17, 2010).

2007-2009, depicts. The differences in funding levels help to explain the limited possible reach of the programme and its actions, as outlined above. Consequently, LLP funding is often too low to be able to bring about any clearly visible changes into the specific educational fields. But this, by no means, indicates that LLP does not address any important needs in Estonian education. On the contrary, it was one of the most important measures to support international cooperation of various educational institutions of Estonia during the period under discussion. This brings us to the discussion of relevance content wise.

Even though LLP and its sub-programmes cannot have a remarkably wide scope in Estonian education, either in terms of participants or budgets, they do help to contribute to several important national policy priorities. In many aspects, LLP sub-programmes have been valuable for filling some important gaps in Estonian education.

The development plan of the Ministry of Education and Research “Tark ja tegus rahvas⁴” (“Smart and active people”), functioning also as an overall national lifelong learning strategy, emphasizes the importance of international cooperation in the context of vocational and higher education, mentioning also the importance of participation in LLP. The more specific priorities and goals of different areas of education are outlined in specific development plans and strategies.

Internationalization of education has been and currently is one of the key issues in Estonian higher education. It is one of the key action areas of the Estonian higher education strategy 2006-2015⁵. As part of the strategy a separate Internationalization strategy⁶ for higher education has also been adopted in Estonia. The internationalization strategy states clearly the critical importance of international education: *“Participation in international academic life is vital for Estonian students, teaching staff and researchers because it assures quality; guarantees sustainability of our research and higher education; stimulates cultural, political and economic contacts with societies and cultures important to us; and helps to prevent tendencies threatening small societies.”*. The internationalization strategy places strong emphasis on quality of education, international cooperation among higher education institutions, student mobility, increased openness and ability to work in an intercultural environment. In this context Erasmus with its activities is clearly relevant helping to contribute to all of these aspects. What is more, Erasmus has for long been the main scheme in Estonian higher education providing for such a large scale student mobility, especially on undergraduate level, and staff mobility.

In 2008, an ESF programme for developing doctoral graduate education and internationalization of education “DoRa” 2008-2011⁷ was introduced in Estonia, which supports among other activities the mobility of graduate students. Even though DoRa supports similarly to Erasmus mobility of students, the programmes are complementing each other. As was also stressed during the interviews, it is critical to note that DoRa has been set up using the established networks and frameworks of those of Erasmus. The well-functioning networks and cooperation frameworks of Erasmus have been valuable to further develop internationalization of education. For instance, Erasmus networks are used for student mobilities but scholarships are funded from ESF resources (e.g DoRa). This is a good example of complementarity of programmes in Estonian higher education. Erasmus is also deemed to be the most effective sub-programme in Estonia. Not only for its valuable cooperation structures described but also for its key role in the internationalization of Estonian higher education. The

⁴ The Ministry of Education and Research, <http://www.hm.ee/index.php?148568> (June 18, 2010)

⁵ The State Gazette, <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/ert/act.jsp?id=12752949> (May 7, 2010).

⁶ The Ministry of Education and Research, <http://www.hm.ee/index.php?popup=download&id=5617> (May 7, 2010).

⁷ Archimedes Foundation, <http://www.archimedes.ee/amk/index.php?leht=146> (May 7, 2010).

importance of Erasmus is also reflected through the fact that it is the only sub-programme which is co-financed from the state budget in Estonia.

In the area of school education, the General education strategy 2007-2013⁸ does not explicitly declare the goal of internationalization of education; neither does it particularly stress the issues of international cooperation or mobility. Regardless of that, Comenius activities still contribute to the goals of educational quality and internationally competitive education mentioned in the strategy. International in-service training of teachers and educational staff is an invaluable opportunity in a situation where in-service training resources at schools are still scarce and other alternative mechanisms for funding these activities are often absent. Comenius is a critical source providing access to the most current international knowhow and professional best practice. Similarly to in-service training, school partnerships are much appreciated means of real international cooperation. Even though Estonian schools might have so-called friendships schools abroad, these often lack substantial cooperation due to the lack of resources. Therefore, Comenius is filling an important gap here being essentially the only channel for systematic international cooperation for Estonian schools. Its role in providing access to the wider Europe for schools in rural and less well-off regions cannot be underestimated either. The new action under Comenius – individual pupil mobility – is introducing a relevant and so far missing measure in school education in Estonia.

The issues of international cooperation and mobility of students and teachers feature in the Development plan for Estonian vocational education system 2007-2013⁹. Therefore, Leonardo activities also seem to be explicitly linked to national priorities and goals. The mobility opportunities of Leonardo are highly valued by the target groups as it is the main measure providing larger scale placement opportunities in the field of vocational education in Estonia. The vocational education institutions sometimes organise mobilities or student exchanges in the framework of bilateral agreements or professional networks but these tend to be on a much smaller scale. The development plan also prioritizes quality of education to which Leonardo mobilities, especially for staff, but also partnerships and projects clearly contribute to through the exchange of international knowledge and best practice.

The Development plan of adult education 2009-2013¹⁰ does not place a specific focus on the internationalization of education in Estonia. But it does clearly stress the importance of quality of education and high level competencies of providers. Therefore, the activities supported by Grundtvig are all relevant as these facilitate acquisition of knowledge and skills, sharing best practice and updating competencies.

Nordic-Baltic cooperation programme NordPlus is supporting several activities similar to LLP through its funding schemes (Junior, Higher education, Adult, Horizontal). LLP sub-programmes complement NordPlus in several important aspects: LLP facilitates the cooperation of a much wider range of countries while NordPlus is only centred on the Nordic and Baltic countries; LLP is also less restrictive on participation as Nordplus often requires higher levels of co-funding (e.g other than mobility costs need 25% or 50% self-financing).

Even though being relatively limited in its scope, LLP is an important opportunity for increasing the openness of the Estonian education system and bringing its members together with their peers all

⁸ The Ministry of Education and Research <http://www.hm.ee/index.php?popup=download&id=5676> (May 12, 2007).

⁹ The Ministry of Education and Research <http://www.hm.ee/index.php?popup=download&id=9381> (May 12, 2007).

¹⁰ The Ministry of Education and Research <http://www.hm.ee/index.php?popup=download&id=9426> (May 12, 2007).

across Europe. The range of countries Estonia is cooperating with has been rather extensive. For instance, in the largest measure – Erasmus student mobility – the number of different countries represented has been slightly below 30 (See Figure 13 in Annex 3). The countries most often chosen for mobility have been Germany, Spain, Finland, France, Italy and UK. In Leonardo (See Figure 14 in Annex 3) the range of countries has been similar to Erasmus. The countries most frequently cooperated with have been Germany, Finland and Spain. Figure 15 and Figure 16 in Annex 3 provide an overview of countries that Comenius and Grundtvig in-service training participants have preferred. The United Kingdom clearly stands out as a favourite destination country.

2. Effectiveness

2.1. Level and quality of implementation

This section proceeds with an overview of the LLP implementation process and discusses the difficulties and challenges encountered during 2007-2009 in Estonia. The implementation process is monitored at the NA level according to the procedures set by the European Commission. Depending on the sub-programme, regular meetings are held, questionnaires distributed (e-monitoring), monitoring visits and audits are carried out, and random checks conducted. In addition, reports and feedback of beneficiaries are regularly processed. At the National Authority (NAU) level, monitoring is done through NA annual reports, participation in Supervisory Board of Archimedes Foundation, participation of the experts of MER in sub-programmes' evaluation committees and direct contacts between the experts of MER and their colleagues at the NA. In addition, monitoring takes place through the work of Audit committee of the Archimedes Foundation (the committee is chaired by the Head of Internal Audit Department of MER). All the LLP sub-programme evaluation committees include policy makers from the respective areas of education.

The following sections will address the implementation issues of each sub-programme separately. The overall impression based on the interviews and document analysis suggests that there have been no major difficulties and serious challenges with the implementation of the LLP programme in Estonia. The fact that the Estonian NA has been implementing the programmes from their beginning (1997), often with the same expert staff, has contributed to substantial management capacities in dealing with an array of upcoming problems. Even though the interviewees suggest that no significant problems have been encountered, some implementation issues that deserve attention were pointed out. The following sums up the collected information.

There were a few cross-cutting issues that emerged from several interviews. One of them is financing and the inadequacy of resources which is in greater detail discussed under the efficiency section. Another issue closely related to the programme implementation and everyday management was the low functionality of the LLP Link database. The dysfunctional database has extensively disturbed the management of the programmes. The greatest problems have been related to the delayed availability of the e-application and e-report forms but also access to and use of data and statistics. The management supporting tools are discussed in more detail under the efficiency section. The third issue complicating work on the NA level has been the frequent changes in the European Commission implementation guidelines. The frequent changes have been interrupting the work at the NA, especially when the annual guidelines are published at the end of the year. Late guidelines create a situation where different rules and procedures regulating the same period of time need to be followed simultaneously.

Comenius

The implementation period of Comenius in 2007-2009 could be evaluated very positively. There have been no major problems with implementing partnerships. The e-monitorings (mini-questionnaires) carried out by the NA among 2008 participants reveal that partnerships function well and no serious problems have been encountered. Only one out of 42 schools claimed that the partnership is not advancing as expected and that there are substantial problems with the partnership. The conclusions of NA monitorings also refer to a smooth implementation process. The occasional challenges mentioned during monitorings have been: need to rearrange partnerships due to the fact that some initial partners did not receive funding; problems related to changes among project team members; finding suitable project meeting times (non-coinciding school holidays in different countries); language problems between partners stemming from insufficient foreign language skills; finding replacements for teachers in home schools for the periods when teachers

are participating in project meetings abroad; unwillingness of some partners to include pupils in mobilities; insufficient funding.

The implementation of Comenius in-service trainings has also been successful. The in-service training action is very popular among the stakeholders and the number of applicants has increased considerably, even without large scale promotion campaigns (excl electronic promotion letters). The beneficiaries seem to have returned from their courses satisfied and positive, reveal the interviews. For many, the training has provided an opportunity for finding project partners for future cooperation. The occasional problems encountered by the participants have been mostly related to the organisation of the courses. For example, each year a number of courses have been cancelled and this has meant inconvenient rearrangements for the beneficiaries as well as for the NA. It has also come up that the language skills of the course participants vary too much affecting negatively the effectiveness of the course. Sometimes there have been too many participants from one country in the training group resulting in the use of one national language (other than the course language) inside the group. Occasionally, it has also occurred that the expectations of the participants and the course content have to some extent differed.

The implementation of Comenius assistantships has been somewhat less successful in Estonia. On the one hand, the number of applications to the action has been rising and the participants' feedback reveals that they appreciate this international experience highly. On the other hand, the implementation of the programme has been encumbered by the particular national context. The motivation to participate is decreased by the fact that graduated students lose their social security benefits in a few months if they do not continue their studies or get employed. In addition, the assistantships are not very attractive among future teachers because there is a one-year induction programme for future teachers in Estonia which seems to affect the decisions for choosing the assistantships. Furthermore, the long consultation procedure has been a problem as many assistantship applicants manage to find an alternative activity to assistantship during this period of time. For the activity to gain more popularity in Estonia, some changes would be necessary. The procedures of the programme (speeding up the consultation rounds) need to be looked over. In addition, the local setting might be reviewed from the aspect of extending social security benefits of students and possibilities of linking the induction programme and assistantships.

Erasmus

The interviews and document analysis (including NA annual reports, monitoring reports, Erasmus study and placement participants' reports in 2007-2008) suggest that the implementation of Erasmus has been successful and no serious problem have emerged. Estonia is one of the good examples where the inward and outward mobility of Erasmus students is well-balanced. The reports from performed audits by the NA suggest that overall the programme functions well. There have been a few problems with a small number of HEIs whose administrative capacity and commitment to programme implementation has not met the NA expectations. The deficiencies noted in audit reports have been communicated back to HEIs and the problems are being addressed.

The reports of the NA have also pointed to some difficulties related to the inflexible approach of HEIs to student mobilities: recognition of Erasmus studies and creation of mobility windows to the curricula still need extra attention in a few HEIs. It has also been noted by the NA in the reports that sometimes the cooperation between HEIs and placement enterprises is rather weak. This reflects mostly in a lack of possible placement opportunities but also in low quality supervision and support services at the placement institution. The NA reports as well as interviews suggested that Erasmus students sometimes abandon their mobility plans due to insufficient funding.

It was pointed out in interviews that sometimes implementation of Erasmus is complicated by overregulation issues. For instance, the scholarships of Erasmus staff have been regulated in more detail than they used to be under Socrates extending the workload of the NA and HEIs. Or another example – LLP introduced a rule that Erasmus students are only allowed to study at more than one institution during one Erasmus period only if the HEIs are affiliated with each other. This principle works directly against the overall European principle of cooperation and integration in higher education. The implementation of Erasmus staff mobilities has to some extent been complicated by difficulties caused by insufficient funding but also rigid visit durations.

At the beneficiary level the period of Erasmus mobility has been evaluated to be successful. The electronic database containing Erasmus study and placement participants' reports in 2007-2008, including 717 individual reports reveals that a large majority of participants evaluate their Erasmus study very positively with 76% providing the highest evaluation score (See Figure 1). Only a very low share of participants claimed their experience to be bad or average (score 2 provided by 1%; score 3 provided by 3%). Also, analysis of the responses to other questions related to programme implementation (e.g receiving grant on time, assistance with accommodation, personal and academic experience; See more for Annex 4) point to the fact that the sub-programme has been successful and the students are returning satisfied. The student reports reflect very high levels of appreciation of the sub-programme: 76% of students replied that their Erasmus study period was useful or very useful in terms of academic studies; and 95% agree that it was useful or very useful in terms of personal experience.

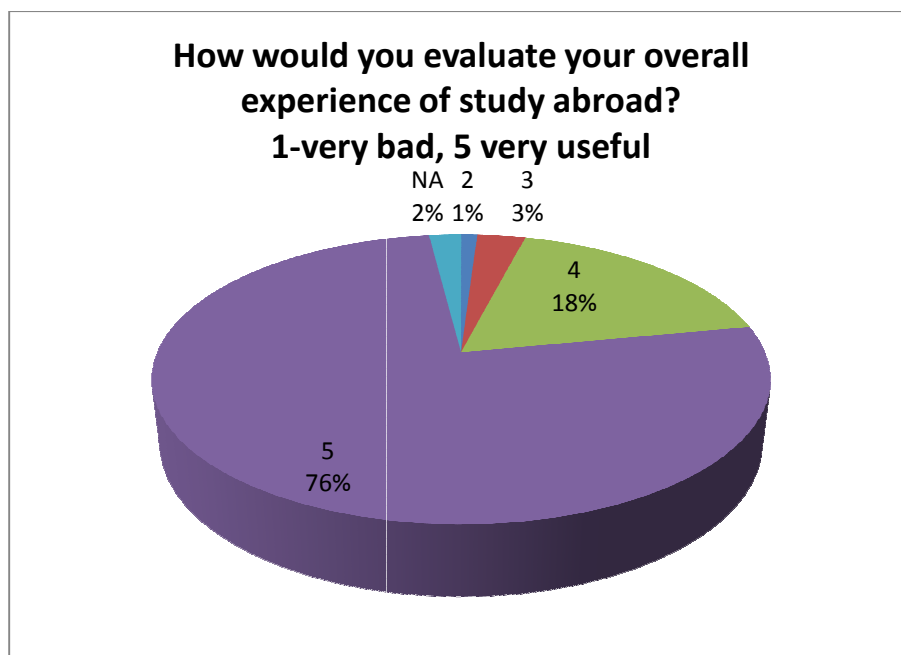


Figure 1. Erasmus participants' evaluation of mobility, 2007-2008.

In describing their Erasmus mobility, many beneficiaries emphasized the valuable experience of learning to live independently in a foreign country and in a different cultural environment, improving foreign language skills, expanding social networks, widening the overall world view and acquiring new knowledge.

When Erasmus mobility participants were asked to identify any problems experienced during their stay abroad, the array of problems was not very large. The most often mentioned problems were related to the curricula and provided courses at the host school as well as problems with accommodation and bureaucracy/documents.

Leonardo

The implementation of Leonardo has, in general, been successful, as the interviews and reviews of reports suggest. There are still a few issues that the interviews brought out. Firstly, the procedure for approving and financing partnerships is a source of some dissatisfaction in Estonia. As Estonia does not have a say in proposed partnerships where the Estonian organisation is a partner (not a coordinator), sometimes partnerships not deemed to be relevant in Estonia have been approved. Again, this is problematic in a situation where finances are scarce and the competition is intense. Estonia would rather provide money for partnerships that would contribute to the development of some critical aspects of the vocational education and training sector instead of allocating resources for less relevant topics. Another issue related to the partnerships is their focus on processes rather than achieving very specific results. The interview at the NA suggested that the expectation of the target group is to have an opportunity to develop more product/output-centred partnerships. Or the contribution of the partnerships to the VET should be more visible.

One of the challenges mentioned by the Leonardo unit is the limited flexibility of the financial rules, especially that of placements. Under the current programme rules, when finances are left over from the travel costs, they are not allowed to be used for supporting the subsistence costs of the beneficiary. The subsistence costs are already rather low, so it would help to use the money left over from travel there.

The Estonian Leonardo unit of the NA also outlined that they could again benefit from the informal meetings of national agencies that used to take place under the previous programme period. These meetings are valuable in exchanging good practice and disseminating information on programme achievements.

From the beneficiaries' perspective, the sub-programme does not reveal any considerable flaws or disadvantages. According to the evaluation reports¹¹ of 758 Leonardo placement participants and 564 exchange participants in 2007-2009, the sub-programme has been very successful and has fully met the expectations of the participants. Figure 2 provides an overview of the placement participants' opinion on selected aspects of their mobilities. These views reveal that the participants have highly appreciated their experience provided by the programme. More than 80% of the participants have been satisfied with their placement organisation and above 85% have evaluated positively the content of the placement. More than 90% have said that they were satisfied with the results of the placement and the same share has agreed that the placement is helpful when finding a job. The organisation of mobility, both on the sides of the host and home institutions, has also been evaluated very highly.

¹¹ Reports retrieved from Rap4Leo database.

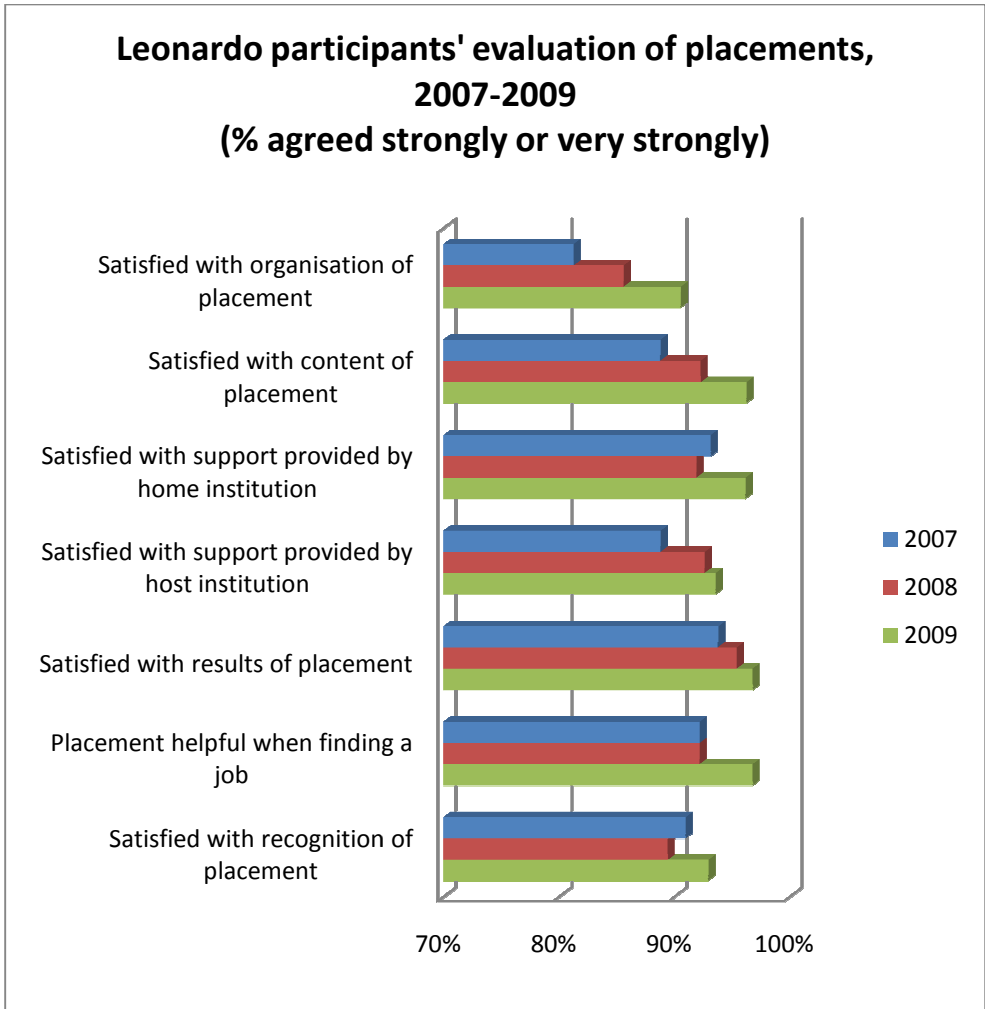


Figure 2. Leonardo participants' evaluation of placements, 2007-2009.

Figure 3 outlines a selection of Leonardo exchange participants' evaluation of their mobilities during 2007-2009. Again, the experiences reflect very positive reactions. More than 90% of exchange participants evaluate the preparation to be sufficient. The content of the exchange is also highly appreciated by more than 90% of participants. The share of those who thought that the exchange was helpful in getting to know other education systems was again 90%. The occasional difficulties encountered in mobilities and partnerships have been moderate motivation of placement participants to take part in language courses and changes among project partners.

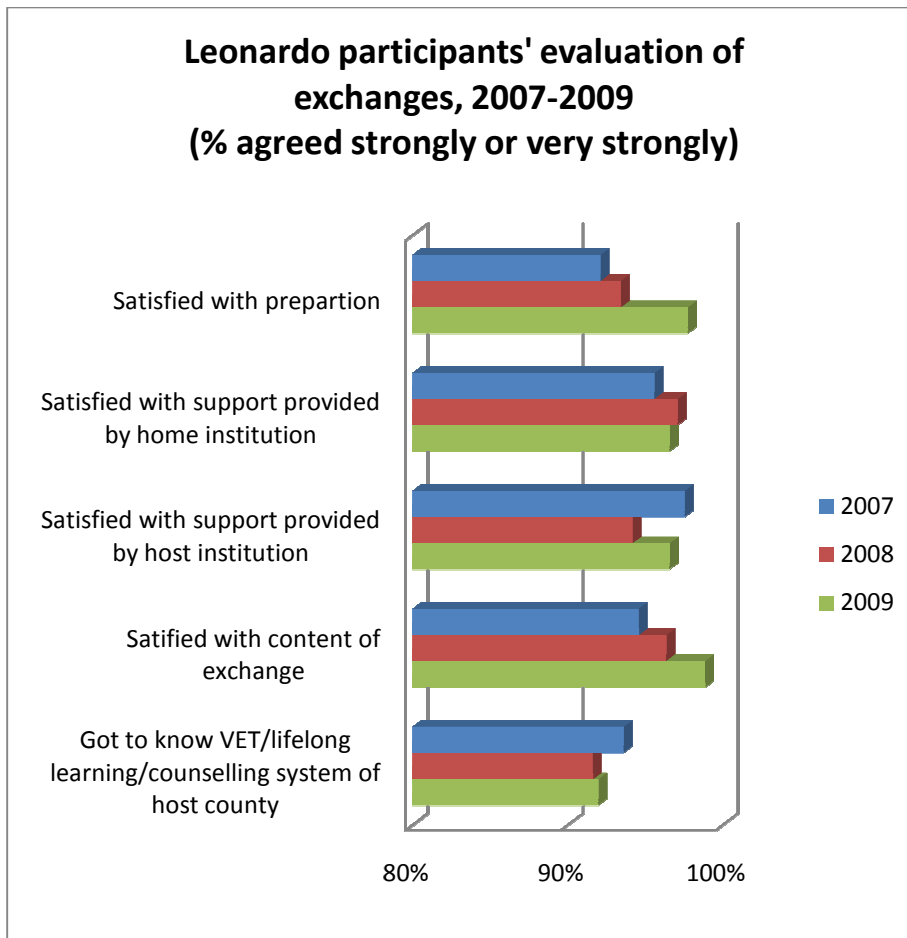


Figure 3. Leonardo participants' evaluation of exchanges, 2007-2009.

Grundtvig

The implementation of Grundtvig has also proceeded without serious complications. The launching of new activities is always challenging to some extent and identifying new potential applicants is sometimes rather difficult but in general there have been no significant problems to mention. The monitorings have referred to some occasional challenges among project participants like insufficient language skills of project participants; management problems; changes in partnership partners; time deficiencies or cultural differences.

One of the issues that came up during the interviews concerns the rigidity of financial rules in Grundtvig. In a situation where financing is extremely scarce, as it is in Grundtvig, the rule to allocate certain amount of funds to partnerships is not reasonable. This is especially worrying in a situation where new activities are launched and promoted but no funds are in reality available to support these activities.

The scarcity of resources in Grundtvig sub-programme is especially strongly felt in small countries like Estonia because the responsibilities of management are the same for all countries regardless of the size of the country. For instance, the responsibility to promote activities of the sub-programme is alike in all countries but the resources of a small country to do that are much more limited.

Study visits

At the beginning of LLP one of the main challenges for the study visits sub-programme was the missing name of the sub-programme. Under Socrates the study visits sub-programme was well known under the name of Arion which under LLP was not used any more. Contrary to other sub-programmes that have an established name, promoting a sub-programme without it is more complicated. The situation was further complicated by the fact that the two previous sub-programmes were merged into one. This required quite an effort from the programme implementers at the beginning to re-inform the target group.

On whole, the study visits sub-programme is highly valued among its beneficiaries as being an appreciated opportunity for exchanging experience on education policy and education management. The sub-programme has been successful in its implementation process and there have been no remarkable disturbances. The occasional difficulties of study visit participants have been insufficient foreign language skills of other participants and overwhelmingly tight agendas set up by visit organisers.

There are two calls each year for study visits since 2010. Taking into account the limited number of places available for the visits and the overall small scope of the sub-programme, it is rather questionable why more than one call is justified. Multiple calls for a small sub-programme are clearly inefficient in terms of management burden.

*

In conclusion, the implementation of the programmes in 2007-2009 could be regarded successful as there have been no major drawbacks in implementation, only occasional difficulties as mentioned above. Furthermore, the feedback from the implementers and participants reveals that the levels of satisfaction and appreciation of the programme are high. This is also evidenced by the large application numbers and intense competitions in various LLP actions. In terms of best practice, Erasmus is an excellent example of functioning cooperation networks that pave the way for other complementary internationalization measures in higher education.

2.2. Integration of previous Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci programmes

In Estonia, the integration of the two LLP predecessor programmes into one single LLP programme provided a rationale for joining together the previously separately existing Socrates and Leonardo National Agencies. The integration of the Leonardo NA with the Centre for Educational Programmes of Archimedes Foundation did not only result in an additional subunit at the Centre but also led to the creation of a common information unit. The aim of the information unit is to introduce LLP to its potential beneficiaries and disseminate project results respectively.

According to the interviewees and the NA annual reports, the integration of the previous programmes and the integration of separate NAs has brought along several advantages. The advantages were identified at different levels. In regard of the overall conceptual idea of the programme, it is very positive that LLP addresses the education system as a whole. Therefore it is clearly natural and logical that all areas of education, including vocational education, are addressed under one single programme. At the organisation level, besides decreasing duplication in management, the integration of separate agencies has been beneficial in terms of sharing best practice and previous experience but also organising joint events and coordinating information (e.g overlapping applications). Common activities across sub-programmes have also brought along cost-efficiency. In addition, the integration has resulted in more common and similar procedures (e.g financing rules) across sub-programmes. As mentioned by the interviewees, the integration of

programmes has also been beneficial to the programme target groups and potential beneficiaries who now can obtain information and advice on different activities from one single agency. Advantages were also identified at the sub-programme level – for instance, it is more logical now that placements and study mobility of higher education students are managed by HEIs under Erasmus; not under different procedures as it used to be.

No major disadvantages regarding the integration of programmes were outlined by the interviewed experts. Though, a slight downside of the integration of the two previous programmes could be the decreased visibility of the sectoral programmes. Still, the overall impression on the integration is very positive.

2.3. Reaching programme target groups

The following sections provide an overview of actors, either individuals or organisations, which LLP has been able to reach in Estonia during 2007-2009. Different sub-programmes and actions collect different data on its target groups, therefore the overviews vary across sub-programmes and actions. Where possible, background data on the general population or group is also provided to illustrate the wider context of the targeted groups.

Comenius

Table 3 provides an overview of the regional distribution of approved Comenius partnerships in 2007-2009. It could be seen that all counties are represented and there is no county which has 0 approved applications during the three years under scrutiny. The distribution of approved applications across the regions is in general rather well-balanced. It could be expected that the regions with the highest number of general education schools – Harju, Tartu and Pärnu – have the highest shares of approved applications. They are also slightly overrepresented compared to other regions. The representation of smaller regions is fluctuating more across various years. For instance, Rapla county had 5 applications approved one year, then again no applications at all in another year. The same characterisation could be applied for Jõgeva, Lääne or Põlva. The interviews also revealed that the application processes often tend to run as “waves”. Schools are usually not able to keep projects constantly running – they carry out a project, then take a break and then initiate a new one. It has to be kept in mind that projects are still mainly initiated and led by active teachers who have to find time for project activities aside their main teaching activities.

The overview of different institution types represented in Comenius partnerships (See Figure 4) reveals that the action has been able to include various organisations. The most frequent beneficiaries have been general secondary schools and primary schools. Pre-primary schools, vocational secondary schools and establishments for learners with special needs have been less often represented among participants. Still, the shares of different institutions have varied quite a lot across years.

Table 3. Comenius partnerships by regions 2007-2009.

	Approved applications					Schools in Estonia	
	2007	2008	2009	Total	Total %	2009	2009 %
Harju	25	12	16	53	28%	141	25%
Hiiu	1	1	1	2	2%	7	1%
Ida-Viru	4	3	3	6	6%	44	8%
Jõgeva	8	0	1	1	1%	26	5%
Järva	5	1	1	2	2%	22	4%
Lääne	6	1	0	1	1%	26	5%
Lääne-Viru	6	3	1	4	4%	40	7%
Põlva	1	0	3	3	3%	23	4%
Pärnu	5	4	9	13	14%	50	9%
Rapla	1	5	0	5	5%	24	4%
Saare	7	1	0	1	1%	21	4%
Tartu	12	8	4	12	13%	55	10%
Valga	6	2	1	3	3%	21	4%
Viljandi	6	1	4	5	5%	35	6%
Võru	6	1	4	5	5%	23	4%
Total	99	43	50	192	100%	558	100%

Source: Estonian Ministry of Education and Research¹²; Statistical reports on LLP provided by the NA.

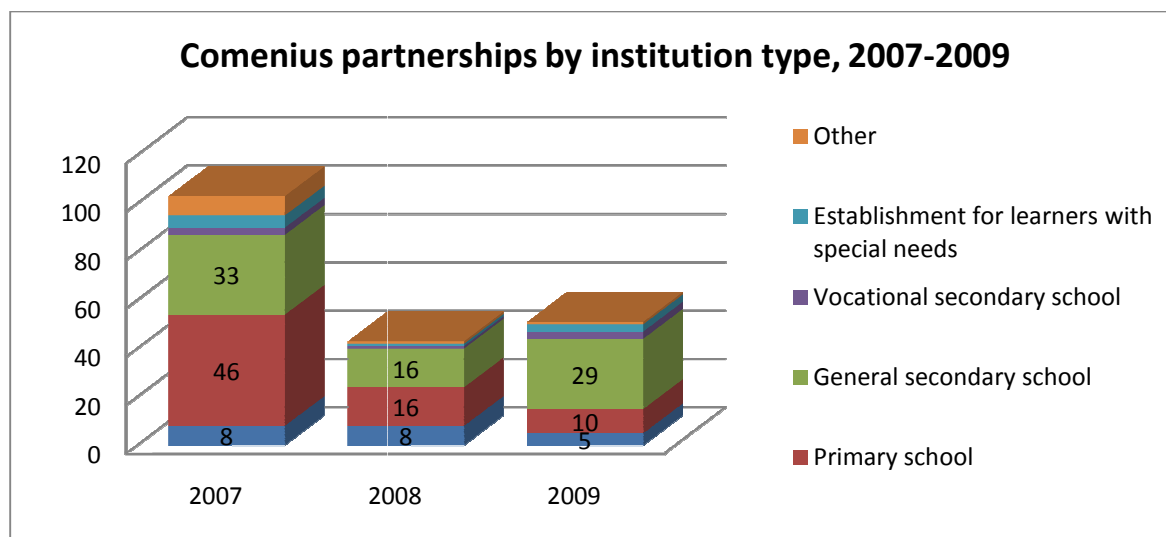


Figure 4. Comenius partnerships by institution type, 2007-2009.

Table 4 outlines an overview of the regional coverage of approved Comenius in-service training (IST) applications. Similarly to Comenius partnerships, all the regions are represented for the years under discussion. But in this case, the larger regions seem to be somewhat more overrepresented and the smaller regions underrepresented.

¹² The Ministry of Education and Research, www.hm.ee (May 17, 2010).

Table 4. Comenius in-service trainings by region, 2007-2009.

	Applications approved					Teachers in Estonia	
	2007	2008	2009	Total	Total %	2009	2009 %
Harju	20	24	31	75	37%	5 145	35%
Hiiu	0	0	2	2	1%	143	1%
Ida-Viru	4	3	2	9	4%	1 502	10%
Jõgeva	1	0	1	2	1%	471	3%
Järva	0	1	1	2	1%	463	3%
Lääne	2	1	0	3	1%	431	3%
Lääne-Viru	3	1	2	6	3%	845	6%
Põlva	1	2	2	5	2%	426	3%
Pärnu	9	7	8	24	12%	1 028	7%
Rapla	1	1	0	2	1%	481	3%
Saare	1	5	2	8	4%	437	3%
Tartu	12	11	18	41	20%	1 769	12%
Valga		2	1	3	1%	429	3%
Viljandi	6	2	4	12	6%	691	5%
Võru	2	3	1	6	3%	520	4%
Total	62	63	77	202	100%	14 781	100%

Source: Estonian Ministry of Education and Research¹³; Statistical reports on LLP provided by the NA.

The large majority of participants in Comenius in-service training are, as could be expected, teachers (See Figure 5) who are the primary target group of this particular action. Teachers are followed by headteachers and directors. Still, there have also been some education managers, inspectors and staff working with children.

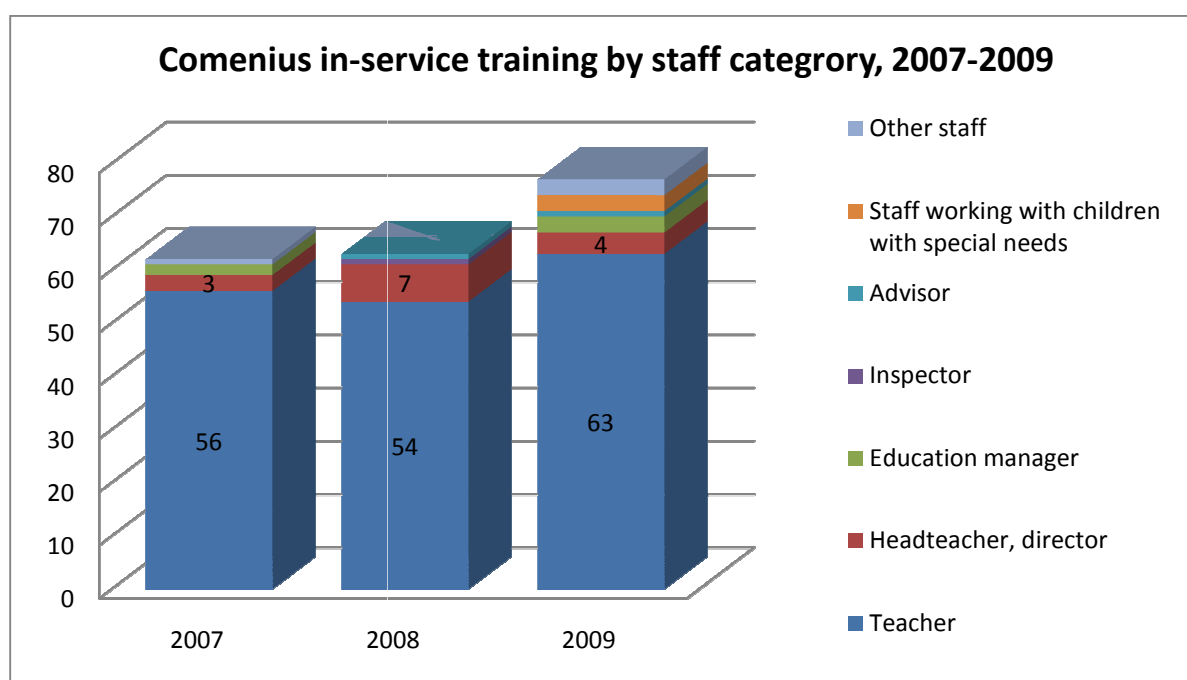


Figure 5. Comenius in-service training by staff category, 2008-2009.

¹³ The Ministry of Education and Research, www.hm.ee (May 17, 2010).

Erasmus

Table 5 reflects Erasmus student mobility in 2007-2009 and how these mobilities have distributed across the participating Estonian HEIs. Out of 34 (35 in 2007-2008) institutions providing higher education in Estonia, 25 have Erasmus University Charter in Estonia and have sent out Erasmus students during this period. The largest HEIs have sent out proportionately the same share of students as they form from the total Estonian HEI student population. The HEIs providing Music and Arts education in Estonia stand out with their exceptionally high Erasmus mobility. The Estonian Academy of Arts is a remarkable case here with its high proportion among Erasmus students (8%) while their students constitute only around 2% of all HEI student population. Likewise is characteristic to the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre – their share in Estonian HEI student population is only 1% while their Erasmus student population has reached the share of 5% of all outgoing students in 2007-2009. Tartu Art College is also a relatively more successful participant in Erasmus student mobility.

Table 5. Erasmus students by institution, 2007-2009.

	Erasmus students					Students in Estonia	
	2007	2008	2009	Total	Total %	2009	2009 %
University of Tartu	208	191	232	631	26%	17 643	27%
Tallinn University of Technology	120	132	156	408	17%	13 430	20%
Tallinn University	80	107	156	343	14%	8 962	14%
Estonian Academy of Arts	57	60	83	200	8%	1 199	2%
Estonian University of Life Sciences	36	46	55	137	6%	4 898	7%
Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre	38	36	39	113	5%	698	1%
International University Audentes	32	32		64	3%		
Tallinna Tehnikakõrgkool/ Tallinn College of Engineering	30	32	36	98	4%	2 860	4%
Võru County Vocational Training Centre	17	22	16	55	2%	424	1%
Tartu Art College	18	20	26	64	3%	303	0,5%
Estonian Business School	28	19	36	83	3%	1 553	2%
Tartu Health Care College	16	18	23	57	2%	1 149	2%
Tallinn Health Care College	5	8	13	26	1%	1 414	2%
Mainor Business School	2	7	8	17	1%	3 342	5%
Euroacademy	7	5	4	16	1%	1 119	2%
Estonian Academy of Security Sciences	6	4	4	14	1%	753	1%
Tallinn Commercial College		4	7	11	0,5%	114	0,2%
Estonian Maritime Academy	4	3	0	7	0,3%	876	1%
Tallinn Pedagogical College	3	3	3	9	0,4%	1 003	2%
Estonian Aviation Academy	2	3	9	14	1%	331	1%
Lääne-Viru College		2	7	9	0,4%	833	1%
Estonian Information Technology College	2	2	5	9	0,4%	734	1%
University Nord	2	1	3	6	0,3%	725	1%
EELK Institute of Theology	1	1	1	3	0,1%	120	0,2%
Tallinn School of Economics	3		0	3	0,1%	1 084	2%
Total	717	758	922	2 397	100%	65 567	100%

Source: Estonian Ministry of Education and Research¹⁴; Statistical reports on LLP provided by the NA.

¹⁴ The Ministry of Education and Research, www.hm.ee (May 17, 2010).

The overview of Erasmus students by areas of study (See Table 11 in Annex 5) also reflects that the most active Erasmus students come from Humanities and Arts field. Although the students of that field of study only form a little above one tenth of the whole student body, their share in Erasmus was almost one third in 2008. At the same time the students of Social Sciences, Business and Law, Education and Science are less represented among Erasmus students. In the remaining areas of study the representation reflects the overall HEI student proportions.

Table 6 outlines the overview of mobility of Erasmus teaching staff by Estonian HEIs in 2007-2009. The range of institutions represented is a bit smaller than in case of students but still more than half of the Estonian HEIs are among participating institutions. All the largest HEIs are actively involved in teaching staff mobility. The largest share of mobilities also comes from the largest HEIs. The Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre as well as the Estonian Academy of Arts are again remarkably active compared to their size (student numbers). At the same time, the Estonian University of Life Sciences demonstrates comparatively lower rates of mobility compared to its size (student numbers).

Table 6. Erasmus teaching staff by institution, 2007-2009.

	2007	2008	2009	Total	Total %
University of Tartu	66	52	55	173	20%
Tallinn University	44	53	57	154	18%
Tallinn University of Technology	30	50	55	135	16%
Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre	31	31	25	87	10%
Estonian Academy of Arts	29	29	31	89	10%
Tallinn Health Care College	17	16	5	38	4%
Tallinna Tehnikakõrgkool/ Tallinn College of Engineering	11	12	11	34	4%
Tartu Health Care College	12	10	9	31	4%
Estonian University of Life Sciences	7	6	10	23	3%
Estonian Business School	3	6	4	13	2%
Tartu Art College	8	6	8	22	3%
International University Audentes	7	4		11	1%
Euroacademy	6	4	2	12	1%
Estonian Information Technology College	4	4	2	10	1%
Mainor Business School	1	2	3	6	1%
University Nord	2	2	1	5	1%
Estonian Maritime Academy	2	2	0	4	0,5%
Estonian Aviation Academy	1	2	2	5	1%
Tallinn Pedagogical College	2	1	2	5	1%
Tallinn Commercial College		1	2	3	0,3%
Estonian Academy of Security Sciences	1		2	3	0,3%
Total	284	293	286	863	100%

Source: Statistical reports on LLP provided by the NA.

Leonardo

The majority of participants in Leonardo mobilities during 2007-2009 (See Figure 6) have been people in initial vocational training (IVT) and professionals in vocational education and training (VETPRO). In total, IVT participants have constituted approximately half of all mobilities. The share of VET professional has been around 40% leaving only 10% of participation to people in the labour market (PLM).

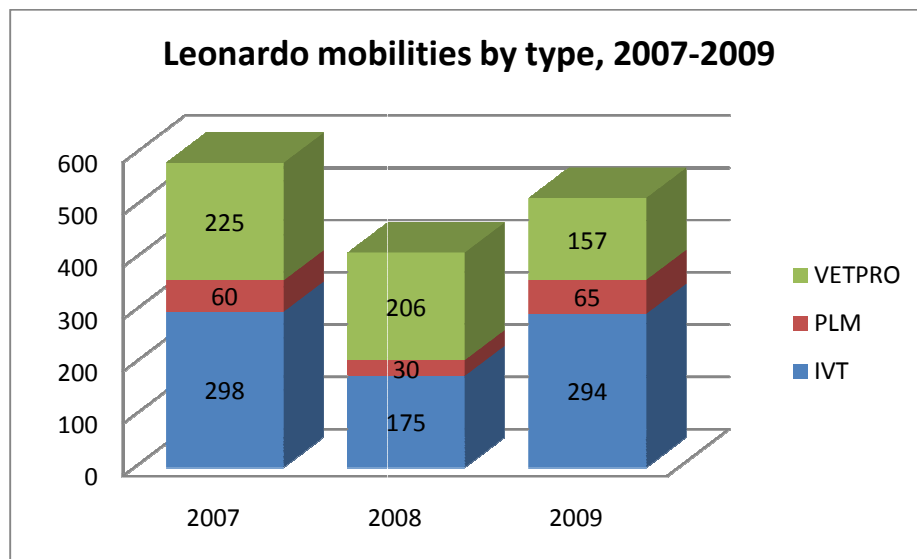


Figure 6. Leonardo mobilities by type, 2007-2009.

The large majority of the participants in Leonardo mobilities are from the vocational education and training organisations (See Figure 7). Approximately 80% (more than 400 participants in 2007 and around 300 in 2008-2009) of the Leonardo mobilities originate from these organisations. The variety of other types of organisations has also been rather large –from SMEs to local authorities. But still, their share in overall mobility has been rather marginal compared to VET organisations. The participation of other organisations has also varied to a great extent through the years. 2009 stands out positively with a larger share of various organisations other than VET institutions.

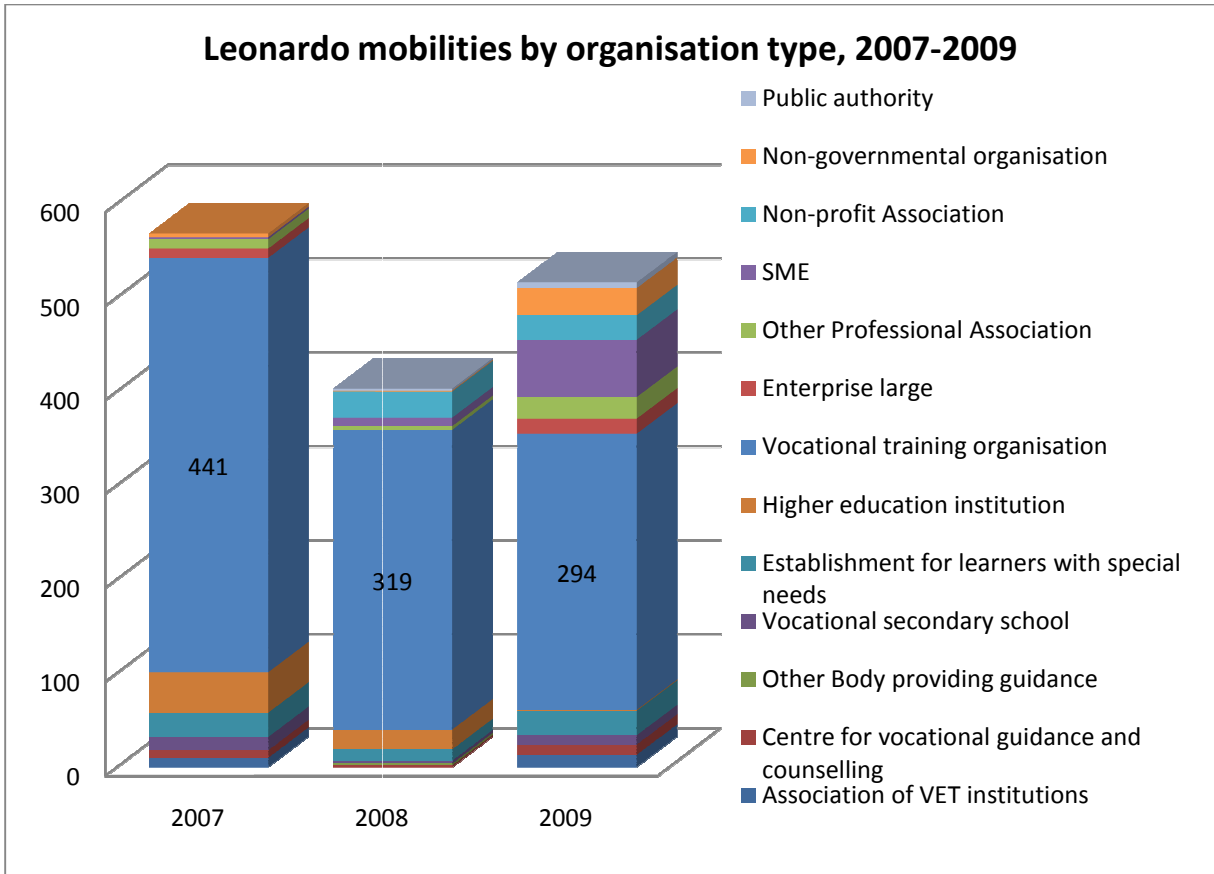


Figure 7. Leonardo mobilities by organisation type, 2007-2009.

The overview of Leonardo partnerships (See Figure 8) reflects that during the two years of implementation the successful organisations represent a rather wide array of institutions. It is natural that VET organisations have been among the more successful beneficiaries compared to other organisations. But other successful organisations have included also many NGOs in 2009. Furthermore, enterprises (SMEs), public authorities, HEIs as well as vocational secondary schools have been among the organisations included in Leonardo partnerships.

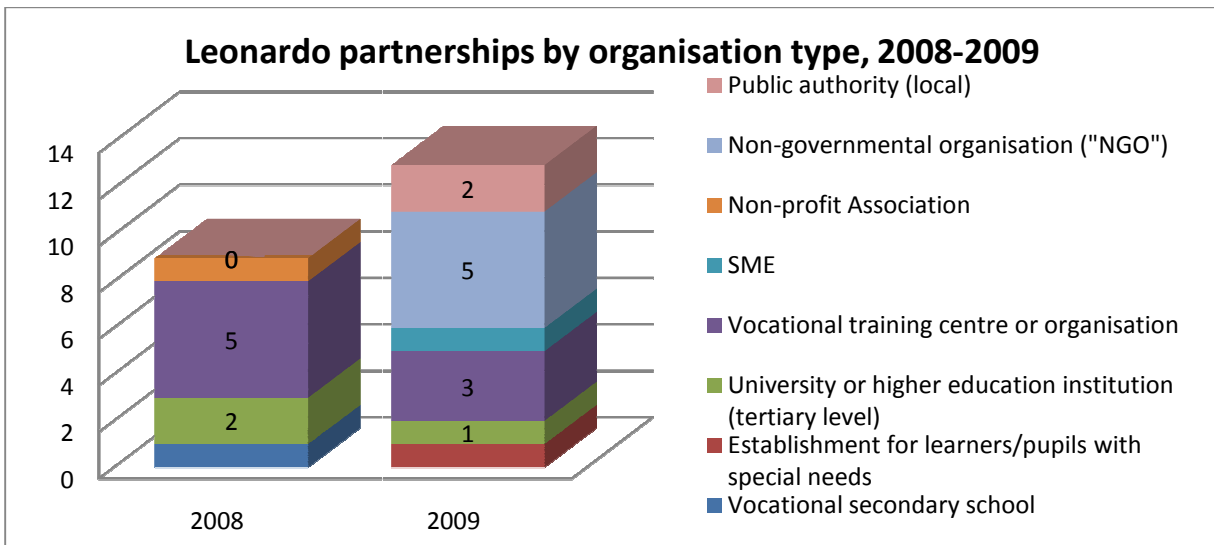


Figure 8. Leonardo partnerships by organisation type, 2008-2009. Note: Leonardo partnerships started in 2008.

Grundtvig

The regional coverage of Grundtvig partnerships (See Table 7) reveals that during 2007-2009 in total only 3 counties have not had successful Grundtvig partnerships. All the other counties are represented with at least one partnership during this period. The top successful counties include the most populated regions – Harju and Tartu. Almost half of the partnerships have originated from Tallinn (24 out of total 52). Tartu has 9 approved partnerships altogether.

Table 7. Grundtvig partnerships by county, 2007-2009.

	2007	2008	2009	Total
Harju	7	8	9	24
Hiiu	0	0	0	0
Ida-Viru	2	0	0	2
Jõgeva	0	0	1	1
Järva	1	0	0	1
Lääne	1	2	0	3
Lääne-Viru	0	0	0	0
Põlva	0	0	1	1
Pärnu	0	0	2	2
Rapla	0	0	0	0
Saare	1	0	0	1
Tartu	2	3	4	9
Valga	1	1	0	2
Viljandi	1	1	0	2
Võru	4	0	0	4
Total	20	15	17	52

The approved Grundtvig partnerships in 2007-2009 originate from 9 different types of organisation (See Figure 9). Adult education providers as one of the main target group of Grundtvig are most frequently represented. The variety of other institutions participating in Grundtvig partnerships has been rather wide and differs across the years. Non-governmental organisations and higher education institutions have had several partnerships. Adult education providers associations, vocational education providers, non-profit associations, establishments for learners/pupils with special needs, cultural organisations and local public authorities have also had successful Grundtvig projects.

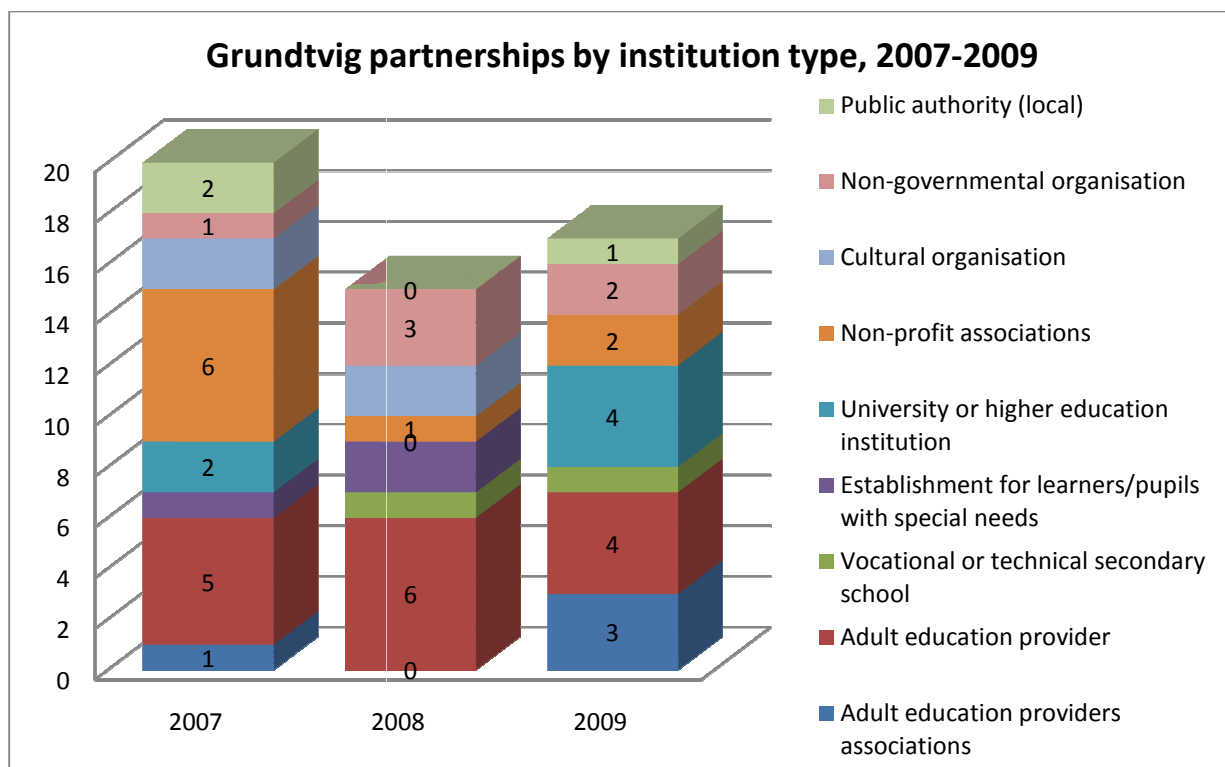


Figure 9. Grundtvig partnerships by organisation type, 2007-2009.

The regional representation in Grundtvig in-service training (See Table 8) resembles that of the partnerships. The majority of approved applications have been from the two largest counties (approximately 70% of all beneficiaries) and the few remaining ones have been submitted from other counties. Differently from Grundtvig partnerships less counties are represented among IST beneficiaries. Eight counties out of 15 are altogether represented.

Table 8. Grundtvig in-service training by county, 2008-2009.

	2007	2008	2009	Total
Harju	6	7	13	26
Hiiu	0	0	0	0
Ida-Viru	3	0	1	4
Jõgeva	0	0	0	0
Järva	0	2	2	4
Lääne	0	1	2	3
Lääne-Viru	1	1	0	2
Põlva	0	0	0	0
Pärnu	1	0	0	1
Rapla	0	0	0	0
Saare	0	0	0	0
Tartu	2	4	2	8
Valga	0	0	0	0
Viljandi	0	1	0	1
Võru	0	0	0	0
Total	13	16	20	49

The most common participants in Grundtvig in-service trainings (See Figure 10) have been adult education teachers and heads of organisations. But also the in-service trainings of administrative and non-teaching staff, educators, educational managers and trainers have been supported. 2009 stands out as a year when the mix of various organisations was the most balanced in Grundtvig IST.

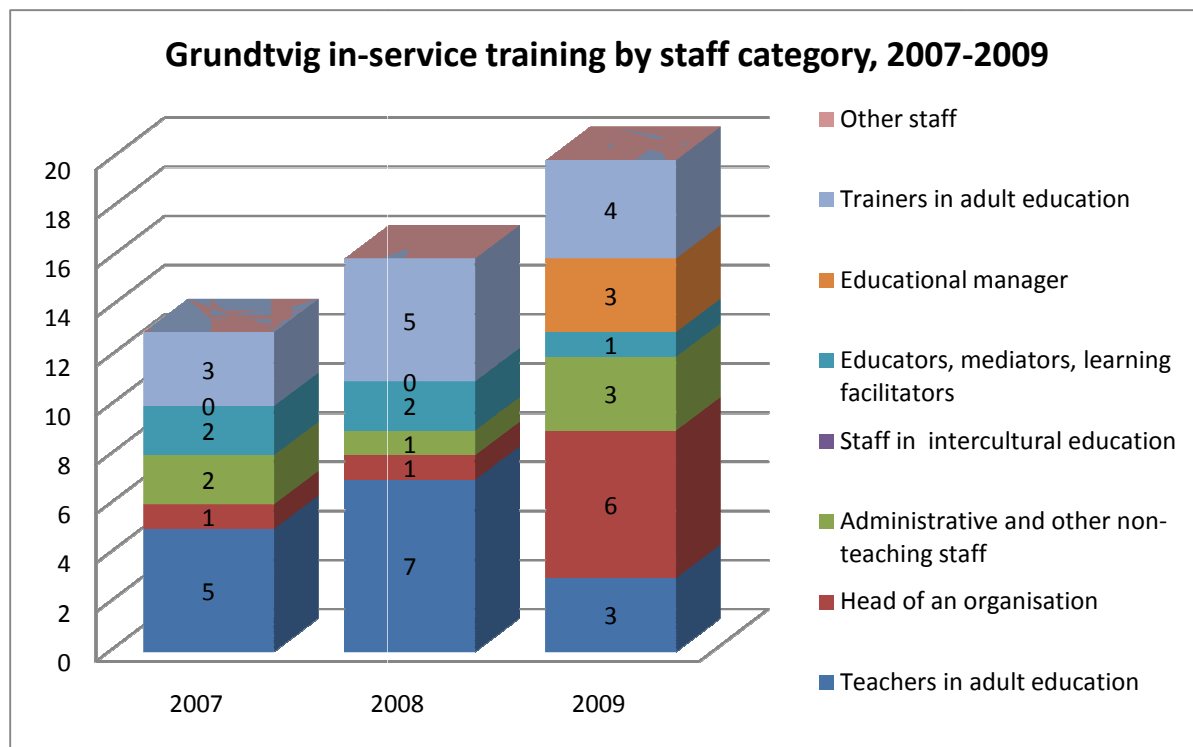


Figure 10. Grundtvig in-service training by staff category, 2007-2009.

2.4. Disseminating and exploiting results

The Estonian NA has established a wide range of communication channels for disseminating information on the programme and its achievements. In addition to the NA's own website for the programme, information is spread also through other relevant websites and education portals. The NA also has a client database of 4700 with former and potential beneficiaries among whom monthly and specific newsletters are disseminated. Other electronic channels include project databases (e.g EST, ADAM, virtual EXPRO) but also social networks (e.g Comenius in Facebook). Print media (e.g Teachers' Weekly, journal for adult education stakeholders Õpitrepp) is also used for communication and dissemination purposes. Furthermore, general information and promotion meetings are held to inform new potential beneficiaries. Specific promotion events include the "Annual valorisation conference EXPRO", where success stories are presented but also the Comenius Week, Grundtvig Day and LLP common national thematic monitoring meetings. There have also been contests on programme participants' essays and stories (e.g Leonardo placement stories). Finally, programme beneficiaries are constantly encouraged to disseminate their own experience and project results as the word of mouth is one the most effective communication channels.

As could be seen from this overview of various dissemination activities, a lot is being done in this aspect. Taking also into account the fact that the results of the programme are often quite intangible in nature and primarily have value within the immediate organisation or community, the dissemination and exploitation activities could not have a much wider scope. Still, some of the interviewees agreed that the dissemination and exploitation efforts could be improved, though this

is often dependent on the available time and resources of the participants. For instance, teachers having participated in an innovative in-service training share their knowledge with their colleagues at their home school but they might also do so with other teachers in the region if they have the time and opportunities to do so.

The promotion and dissemination efforts are another example of good practice in Estonia. The variety of events (e.g. EXPRO, thematic monitoring meetings, the Day of Grundtvig, etc) and ways of communication (e.g. e-mail lists, Facebook, stories, etc) reflect the synergy between the LLP sub-programmes in bringing the information about the programme and its achievements closer to its target groups and potential beneficiaries.

2.5. Visibility of LLP

The extent to which LLP and its sub-programmes are known to the education and training community in Estonia is, on the one hand, reflected through the number of applications received each year by the NA. The number of applications allows suggesting that LLP and its sub-programmes are very well-known in the target community. The interviews also point out that the specific sub-programmes are recognized in the particular educational fields, their organisations and individuals. Most interviewees agree that the sub-programmes are better known than the overall Lifelong Learning Programme. This is obviously due to the fact that the sub-programmes have been running for a longer period than LLP itself. Some interviewees thought that Erasmus is the most visible of all sub-programmes, having received most public attention. The role of Erasmus Student Network in Estonia has been quite remarkable here, in addition to the efforts of the NA and the HEIs. The policy makers at MER pointed out and highly appreciated the efforts of the Estonian NA, i.e. Archimedes Foundation, in popularizing the programme and its components.

2.6. Contributions to the Education & Training Programme 2010

All of the individuals interviewed during the evaluation were convinced that the LLP implementation in Estonia is definitely contributing to the EU priorities as set out in the Education & Training Programme 2010 (E&T 2010, See Annex 6 for the specific objectives outline in E&T 2010). Nobody revealed any doubts about it. The answer by one interviewee well illustrates the provided opinions: *“The programme was by default set up so that it would contribute to those priorities. In Estonia, we cannot do anything differently from what the rest of Europe is doing. The European Commission has taken care of that the programme would contribute to those priorities.”*. The experts also emphasized in several cases that the contributions to the priorities, especially regarding the measurable indicators, are not often explicit but rather indirect by nature. For instance, when teachers participate in partnerships or in-service trainings abroad and they learn about new approaches or methods, their own skills and knowledge would improve as a result; and in the end this would have positive impact, for instance, on dealing with problematic students or tackling early school-leaving. But it is clear that the LLP activities do not have direct links to decreasing drop-out, increasing the number of graduates in science and technology or attracting more people to lifelong learning.

Still, there are aspects where the contribution to priorities is more direct than others. One of the sub-objectives of E&T 2010 is increasing mobility and exchanges. The activities of LLP support this goal very explicitly by facilitating the mobility of students, teachers, staff, heads of institutions and policy makers across education sectors. Figure 11 provides an overview of the Estonian contribution to mobility activities during 2007-2009. The number of mobilities in various LLP activities during this period has altogether exceeded 12 000 (including incoming mobility under Erasmus and mobilities

within projects). The highest contributor has clearly been Erasmus with 6 800 mobilities. Erasmus is followed by Comenius with 2 800 and Leonardo with 1700 mobilities.

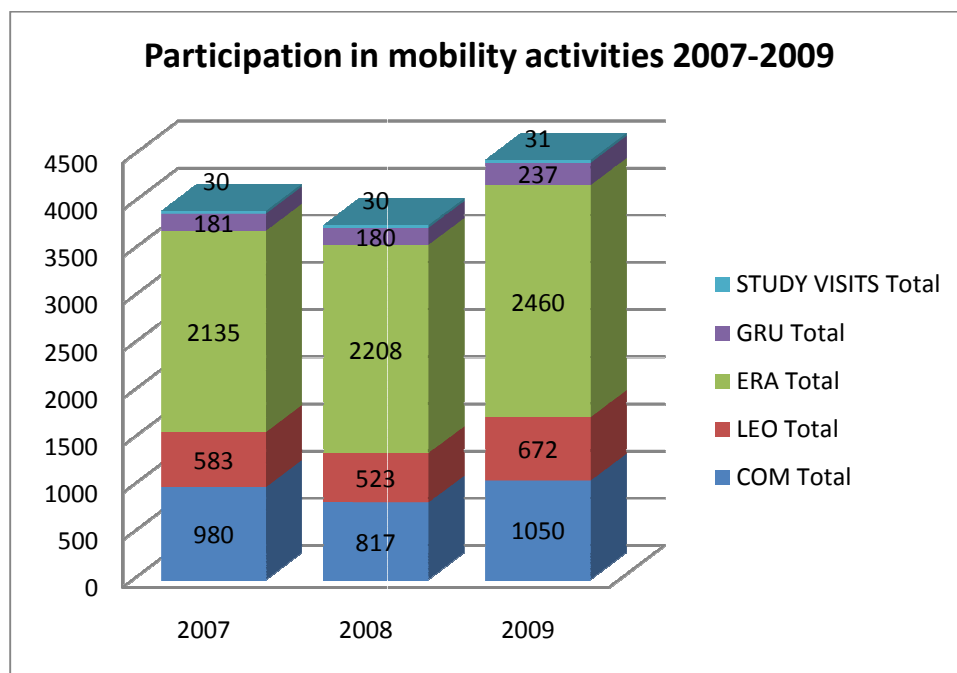


Figure 11. Overview of Estonian participation in mobility activities 2007-2009.

Several LLP activities also address directly the E&T 2010 sub-objective of improving education and training for teachers and trainers. The staff mobilities in Comenius, Erasmus, Grundtvig and Leonardo all aim to increase the knowledge and skills of those active in the field of teaching and training. The extent of the Estonian contribution during 2007-2009 through mobility activities of teachers and trainers has been around 3 500 participants (more than 1 000 annually). In addition to the mobility activities, partnerships and cooperation projects have also contributed to improving the knowledge and skills of teachers and trainers as any exchange of experience or good practice also helps to renew current knowledge and ways of thinking.

Partnerships and cooperation projects have also been a distinct way of promoting and strengthening European cooperation as well as opening up learning environments. Almost all of the LLP activities also contribute to increased foreign language skills and in some cases help making learning more attractive. Student mobilities are a valuable way of fostering future active citizens besides improving life skills of the young generation.

2.7. Approaches to meet the Community horizontal policies

The Estonian NA and the programme implementers act on the principle of non-discrimination and equal treatment of all applicants. The NA always monitors the coverage of target groups and the inclusion of various subgroups. For example, in Estonia special attention is paid to regional and linguistic coverage of the programme. Efforts have also been made to include more people with special needs (e.g in 2007, Estonia had proportionally the highest share of people with special needs included in Leonardo activities in Europe). No specific measures other than that have been introduced in Estonia.

3. Efficiency

3.1. Adequacy and optimization of resources

Several interviewees argued that the programme absorption capacity in Estonia is considerably limited by the provided financial resources. Both the programme administrators as well as policy makers pointed out that needs surpass actual possibilities provided by the programme. Some interviewees suggested that the capacity to absorb funds is twice that of the current levels (e.g Comenius partnerships, Leonardo mobility and partnerships). One of the ways of ascertaining the extent of the funding inadequacy is the share of eligible applications rejected due to lack of funds. Table 9 provides an overview of partnerships and mobilities where such statistics were available. It can be seen from the table that very often competition for funds is intense and the share of applications rejected due to insufficient funding is rather high. The most outstanding figures come from Leonardo partnerships as well as Grundtvig partnerships but also Grundtvig training (2009). But the demand has also been high in Comenius where, for instance, in in-service training action the threshold for applications in 2009 was 75 points out of 100.

Table 9. Applications received vs applications rejected due to lack of funds, 2007-2009.

Activity	Year	Total received	Rejected due to lack of funds	%
Grundtvig Training	2009	61	33	54%
	2008	57	20	35%
	2007	36	2	6%
Grundtvig Partnerships	2009	40	16	40%
	2008	34	14	41%
	2007	48	10	21%
Comenius Training	2009	167	38	23%
	2008	106	38	36%
	2007	65	0	0%
Comenius Partnerships	2009	103	40	39%
	2008	81	21	26%
	2007	157	37	24%
Leonardo Mobility	2009	62	14	23%
	2008	57	24	42%
	2007	55	14	25%
Leonardo Partnerships	2009	38	25	66%
	2008	28	19	68%
	2007			
Study Visits (mobility)	2009	31	12	39%
	2008	30	2	7%
	2007	30	9	30%

Sometimes the funding levels are somewhat artificially complicated by programme rules. For instance, the funding levels in Grundtvig are related to the funding regulations. As was pointed out during the interviews, the rules determine the share of Grundtvig funding to be allocated for

partnerships (e.g at least 65% in 2009) leaving the rest of the 35% of funds to be distributed among 6 other activities. At the current low sub-programme budget level very marginal resources are available for implementing the rest of the 6 programme activities. For example, in Estonia only two Grundtvig senior volunteering projects and three Grundtvig workshops could be supported in one year. This again points to the issue of decreasing programme efficiency as well as limited opportunities for programme communication. The latter issue is especially critical in the context of introducing new activities of the sub-programme. On the one hand communication efforts need to be made to inform potential target groups about the new activities but on the other hand resources are too marginal to support almost any applications. The problem of limited information activities and inadequacy of funds was highlighted not only in the case of Grundtvig but also in other sub-programmes.

Erasmus scholarships would also benefit from more extensive funding. Despite national co-funding, the scholarships are often too small to compensate the additional costs of mobility on a sufficient level. As seen in Figure 12, less than half of the Erasmus students (39% answered 4 or 5) evaluate the scholarship to be more or less adequate. About half of the students declared that the scholarship enabled to cover around half of the incurred costs during the mobility period. Around 10% of the student said that the scholarship was totally insignificant compared to the costs. Taking into account the very limited financial student support measures as well as the fact that the standard of living is below European average in Estonia, the issue of insufficiency of support becomes more exacerbated. Under the current economic recession the opportunities of families to support their children’s studies abroad have also become more and more limited. As was also pointed out during the interviews, there are also signs that the rate of declining the scholarship due to financial reasons is on the rise. Furthermore, Erasmus, as a very well established action, should also be considered as one of the potential receivers of additional financial support due to the fact that it is one of the key actions contributing to the European goal of increasing significantly higher education student mobility by 2020 (20% higher education students should have an experience of international mobility).

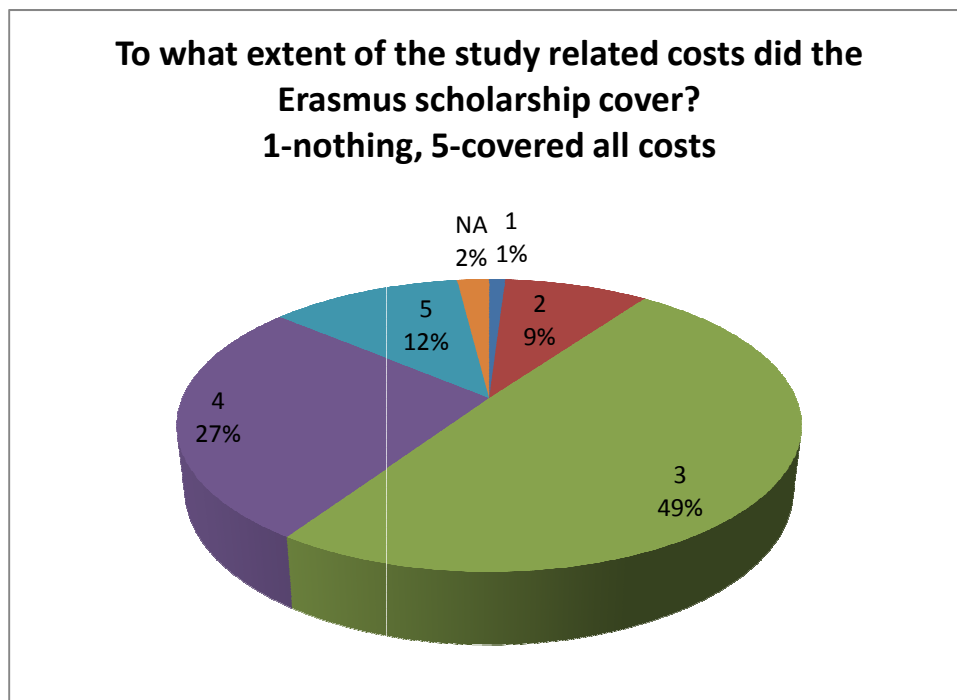


Figure 12. Erasmus students’ assessment of adequacy of scholarship, 2007-2008.

The resources for implementing LLP in Estonia are inadequate despite the efforts to optimize the use of resources. The optimizations efforts have included the limitation of maximum subsistence grants provided (at 50-75% level of the maximum levels allowed by the Commission), provision of lower budgets for partnerships but also the shifting of funds from less popular activities to others more in demand (e.g the first year of Comenius Regio did not have very many applications so some of the funds could be used to satisfy the big demand in Comenius in-service training). In Erasmus, the usage of funds is constantly monitored to detect incomplete absorption at HEIs. In cases when this is detected, funds are redistributed among other HEIs, as the programme regulation stipulates. The same applies for Grundtvig, where funds are monitored and implemented according to the respective demand and possibilities (partnerships are an exception here while the share of funds to be used for partnerships is fixed).

3.2. Adequacy of management supporting tools

The interviews at the Estonian NA regarding the management supporting tools suggest that this is one source of quite remarkable inefficiency and distress. It could be seen from the interviews how the changes and problems regarding the management supporting tools complicate the efficient functioning of the NA. When previously well-functioning tools are substituted with one or several non-functioning and non-user-friendly tools, it is quite clear how this creates implementation inefficiencies. As the interviewees pointed out, the previously well-functioning Nety was a valuable tool for exchange of information with other national agencies as well as for retrieving documentation. Currently, Nety has been replaced with a separate LLP Forum and a documentation storing environment Circa, which both have lost the advantages of the previous tool, Nety, and due to that lost their value to the users. Similarly, in Leonardo the previously useful and reliable Rap4Leo is being closed and substituted with the dysfunctional LLP Link. Many interviewees pointed out that even though the current main management tool LLP Link could have a lot potential and several major advantages, the problems with its implementation have decreased the users' optimism about it considerably. Furthermore, the lack of user support and training on the tool's possibilities has contributed to the cautious attitudes. Finally, the virtual forum set up for communication purposes between NAs and the Commission – ECAS – has also proven to have a very low level of user-friendliness.

The effectiveness of LLP Link is even more questionable in Erasmus as Erasmus managers have to simultaneously manage a separate tool – NA reporting software – in addition to the LLP Link. Duplicating information in two separate and different systems is a clear waste of resources complicating programme implementation.

Another example of inefficiency in management tools is the creation of separate systems for disseminating project results. As suggested in interviews, a database – ADAM – exists for disseminating Leonardo Transfer of Innovation project results which now is being supplemented with a different project dissemination database – EST – for Comenius, Grundtvig and Leonardo partnerships and an extra database EVE for Culture, LLP and Youth centralised projects. Again, it is questionable why an existing and functioning database could not be used for similar and wider purposes.

3.3. Divided management for centralized and decentralized actions

When comparing the system of divided management responsibilities for centralized and decentralized actions under LLP and the previous programme, the opinion of the Estonian NA staff reflects that the current set-up has brought along several important disadvantages in addition to some advantages. On the one hand, the centralized actions do enable better meeting European-

wide priorities, especially in Erasmus, and have decreased the workload of the NAs in terms of information provision on these actions. But on the other hand, there are problems. First of all, today's system has considerably distanced the local level, i.e the Estonian NA, from the centralized actions – both in terms of information provision for potential applicants as well as disseminating information on projects including Estonian partners. Secondly, the NA experts claim that the set-up effective today seems to have negatively affected Estonian participation in the centralized actions. When compared to the participation levels under the previous programmes, the current participation levels have dropped. The fact that the NAs were prohibited to provide information to potential applicants and advise them on the centralized actions appears to have drawn away target groups. Taking additionally into account the complexity of information provision on the centralized actions on the Commission website, it could be concluded that the previous system of responsibilities functioned better. As one respondent claimed: *“Everything that is closer and where advice is actually available seems to work better.”*. What is more, there are also concerns about the sustainability and relevance of the centralized projects. The distancing of the centralized actions has made questionable the issue of who and how would evaluate the importance of the projects in the national context; and how would the impact be followed up.

3.4. System of cooperation

From the Estonian point of view the weakest link in the system of cooperation between the Commission, the Executive Agency, the National Agency, the National Authority, and LLP Committee is the Executive Agency. As pointed out above (in the subsection 3.3.), the system of divided management for centralized actions has distanced the NAs from the Executive Agency and as a result the cooperation has become weaker than it used to be earlier under the old programmes.

Regarding the other parties, the cooperation functions well and there are no apparent problems. The cooperation between the NA and the NAU is functional. The experts of different educational fields of the NAU are included in the implementation of the programmes (mainly evaluation committees of sub-programmes) and through direct contacts with their respective colleagues in NA are kept up-to-date on the issues concerning the programme implementation. The NA also reports regularly to the NAU.

The interviews highlighted one aspect of informal cooperation that the Estonian NA used to appreciate a lot but now is not available – the informal meetings of the NAs of all participating countries (practice used under Leonardo). For the programme implementers, this used to be a place for discussing country experiences and programme developments as well as brainstorming for new ideas. The Leonardo unit would very much appreciate the renewal of this informal cooperation channel.

In view of management workload, both the experts of NAU and NA hold an opinion that it could be considerably lower, especially taking into account the fact that at the beginning of LLP the Commission intended to introduce higher levels of simplification and transparency into the management procedures. But on the contrary, as the NA experts claim, management workload and the level of complexity have increased. For instance, even though electronic applications have been introduced, the requirement to keep paper applications as well still stands.

Furthermore, the constant changes in rules and guidelines require more work from programme implementers. The introduction of new additional management tools that have to be run simultaneously also contribute to increased workloads of managers.

4. Conclusions and suggestions

This interim evaluation closes with overall positive conclusions. As the result of many years of solid experience in Estonia, the LLP sub-programmes have established themselves well in the Estonian education system. Despite its limited scope, LLP with its sub-programmes is instrumental in contributing to the internationalization and increased openness of Estonian education. It is also valuable for facilitating cooperation, networks and also promoting the quality of education. As the overview of the relevance of the programme suggested there are no serious alternatives to the current programme activities in Estonia. Importantly, established cooperation networks of LLP have even paved the way for introducing complementary internationalization schemes to Estonian education.

The implementation of LLP has been so far quite successful. The views of implementers were in general positive. The analysis of the selection of beneficiaries' feedback as well as monitoring and other documents suggests that there have been no serious difficulties on the side of the beneficiaries. There have been occasional challenges but no major drawbacks.

Still, the evaluation outlined some areas of discontent regarding the implementation of the programme. The most obvious problems that need addressing from the European Commission are related to the dysfunctional management tools, disturbing and frequent changes in the programme procedures, delays in documentation provision and insufficient budgets (primarily Grundtvig).

Finally, the evaluation concludes with a set of **concrete suggestions and recommendations to the Commission:**

1. Direct attention to dysfunctional management supporting tools and minimize duplication.

One critical area needing considerable improvement on the side of the Commission is related to the management supporting tools, especially the LLP Link. A dysfunctional tool together with insufficiently instructed users is a remarkable source of inefficiency in the programme and needs to be addressed very soon. Similarly, the introduction of alike and often duplicating management tools need to be analyzed from the aspect of administrative burden and the respective inefficiencies should be reduced.

2. Provide more stability and less change in the programme.

During the first three years of the LLP the programme and its implementers have witnessed a lot of changes and high levels of instability. They are therefore very much looking forward to a much more stable period of implementation where modifications are less frequently introduced to the programme.

Both the programme implementers and policy makers in Estonia emphasized the importance of stability, maintaining the activities that are well-functioning and recognized among the target groups. The latter principle should also be followed when planning the new programme period. The results of the evaluation in Estonia brought clearly out that it is expected the new programme to carry on with the same functional structure and content without introducing any dramatic changes.

3. Allow countries to have a say in approved partnerships.

In a situation where competition for partnerships is intense and finances clearly limited, it would be important to ensure countries an opportunity to have a say in approved partnerships co-funded from their national share of LLP budget. Some kind of approval

mechanism would guarantee that countries would be able to primarily fund partnerships that have higher national value.

4. Review sub-programme's budgets.

The review of sub-programme's budgets is especially critical in case of Grundtvig where the management activities are disproportionately large compared to the distributed grants. The efforts made to promote the programme and invite potential beneficiaries to participate are disproportionate considering the marginal resources available for supporting actual projects and mobilities.

In addition, the overall budgetary review in view of the overall demand for the sub-programmes would also be needed in order to identify budget deficits.

5. Timely provision of implementation documentation.

Another clear aspect of improvement is related to the timely provision of programme documentation. For the programme to run smoothly and without any major obstacles, it is vital to set out the rules for the NAs in due time. It is especially critical when the rules introduce important changes and require a series of steps to be taken by the NA or the beneficiaries.

6. Bring the centralized actions closer to target groups.

The evaluation suggested that the centralized actions have been less successful in including Estonian participants under the LLP set-up. This is said to be the case due to the minimized role of the NA and the distancing of the centralized actions from its target groups. Therefore, to facilitate more active participation of Estonian organisations in the centralized actions and to link the centralized actions more with the national needs, it would be important to increase the role of NAs in managing these actions. It was implied during the interviews that the set-up regarding the division of management responsibilities for centralized and decentralized actions used under the previous programme period could be brought back.

7. Avoid unreasonable regulation.

It appeared in many cases during the evaluation that the rules of the programme are sometimes too rigid and inflexible affecting the implementation negatively. Even though standardization of procedures and rules across countries is intended to facilitate implementation quality, overregulation could also have negative effects. Therefore, it would be reasonable to allow for some room for discretion at the NAs. For example, the particular financing rules regarding Erasmus or Leonardo mobilities could be made more flexible; or the requirements set for Grundtvig could be made more proportional to the scope of the sub-programme. Overregulation could not only increase administrative burden but could also have undesirable effects.

5. Annexes

Annex 1

Abbreviations used:

HEI	Higher education institution
IVT	Initial vocational training
MER	Ministry of Education and Research
NA	National Agency
NAU	National Authority
PLM	People in the labour market
VET	Vocational education and training
VETPRO	Vocational education and training professionals

Annex 2

Table 10. LLP in the context of Estonian education funding, 2007-2009.

Area of education	State budget expenditure (EUR) 2007-2008*	ESF /ERF expenditure (EUR) 2007-2009	LLP budgets (EUR) 2007-2009	LLP Sub-programme
General education	845 785 970	3 450 721	3 309 614	Comenius
Vocational education	176 771 130	49 638 273	4 676 652	Leonardo
Higher education	332 293 118	52 102 877	7 991 429**	Erasmus
Adult education	989 352	3 596 094	829 115	Grundtvig
			124 609	Study Visits

*Statistics for 2009 not available; **Excludes MER co-funding for Erasmus of 900 000 EUR for 2007-2009.

Source: Ministry of Education and Research; Statistical reports on LLP provided by the NA.

Annex 3

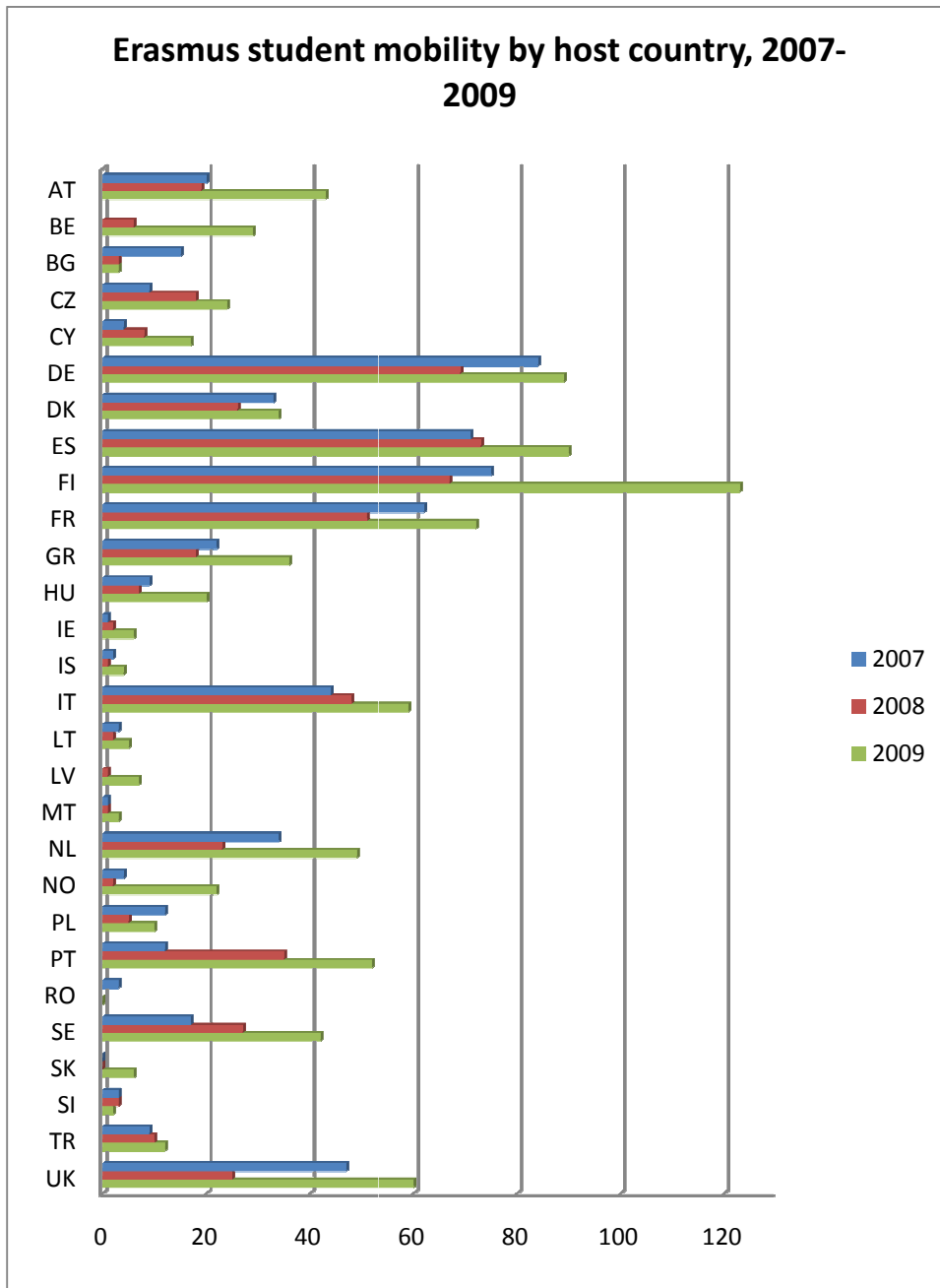


Figure 13. Erasmus student mobility by host country, 2007-2009.

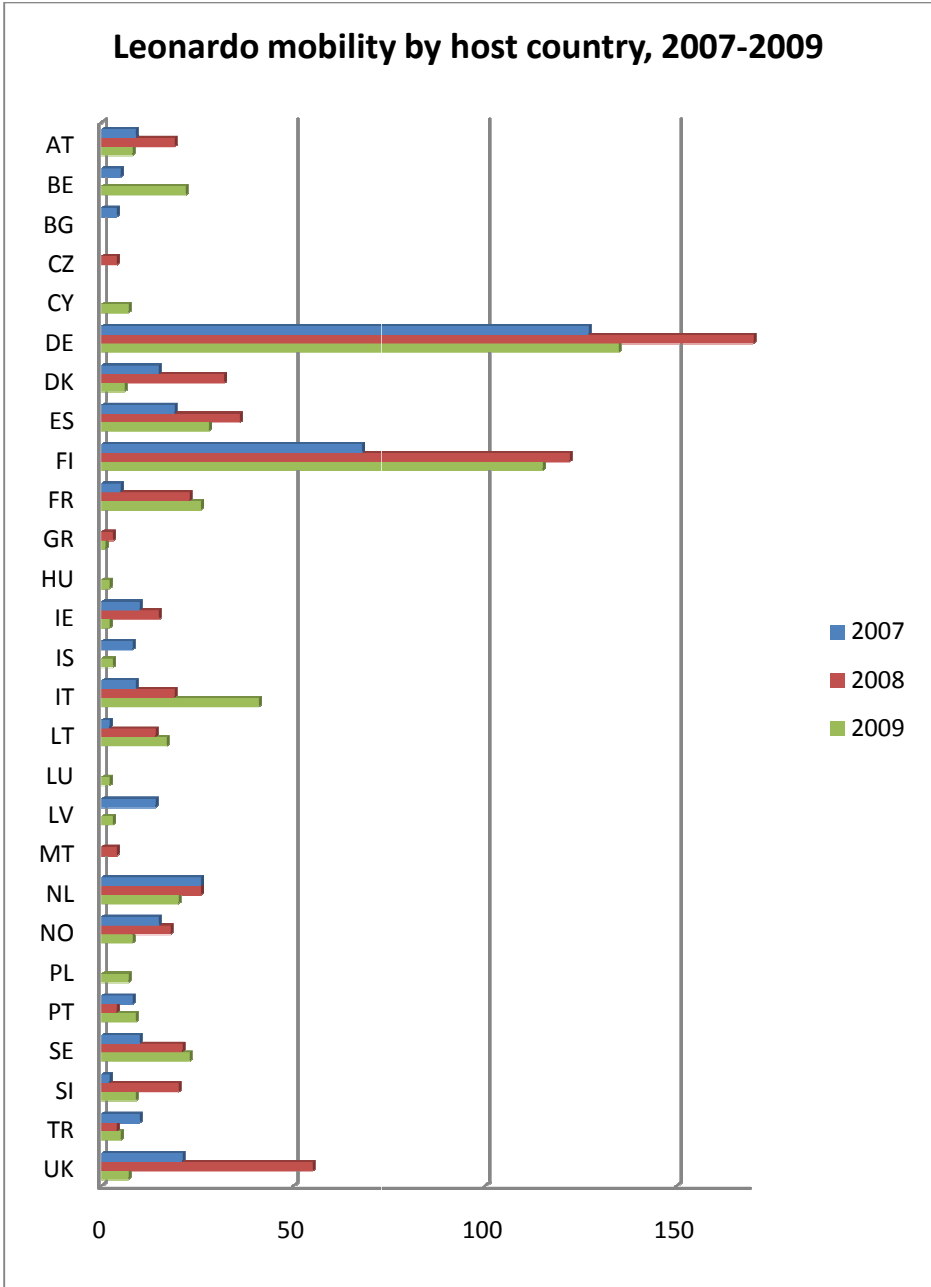


Figure 14. Leonardo mobility by host country, 2007-2009.

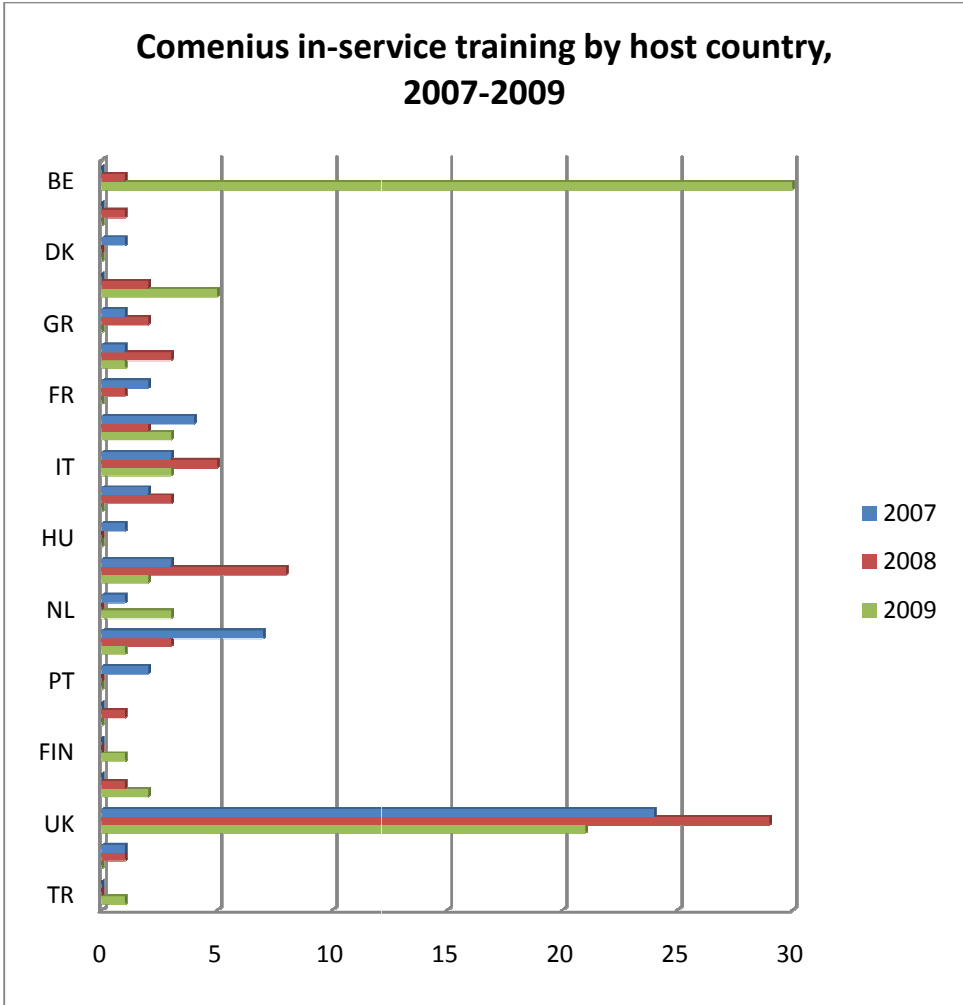


Figure 15. Comenius in-service training by host country, 2007-2009.

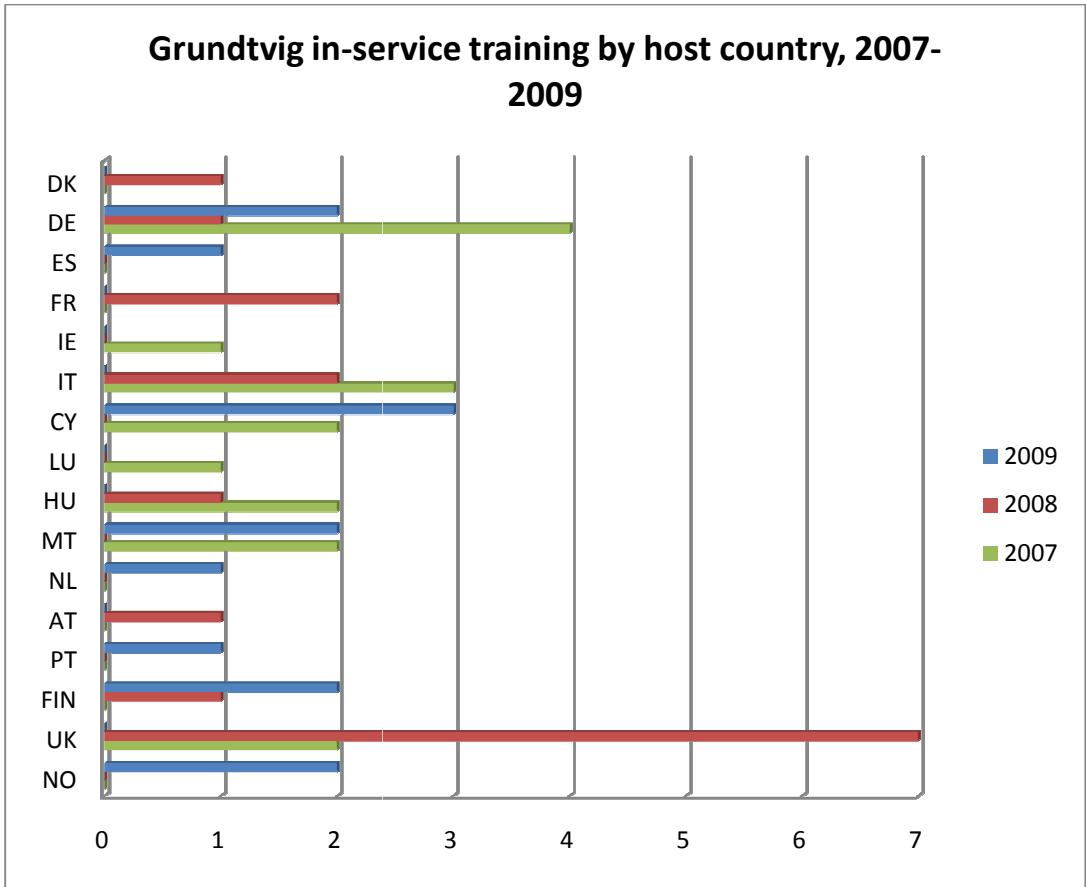


Figure 16. Grundtvig in-service training by host country, 2007-2009.

Annex 4

Overview of Erasmus mobility participants' reports database, 2007-2008.

Did you have problems with receiving the grant on time?	
Yes	14%
No	82%
NA	4%
Total	100%

How would you evaluate the help provided by HEI with finding accommodation? (Evaluate on scale of 5; 1-very bad, 5 very useful)	
1	13%
2	8%
3	11%
4	16%
5	47%
NA	5%
Total	100%

How would you evaluate Erasmus experience in regard of academic studies? (Evaluate on scale of 5; 1-very bad, 5 very useful)	
1	1%
2	5%
3	17%
4	29%
5	47%
NA	1%
Total	100%

How would you evaluate Erasmus experience in regard of personal experience? (Evaluate on scale of 5; 1-very bad, 5 very useful)	
1	0%
2	1%
3	4%
4	14%
5	81%
NA	1%
Total	100%

Annex 5

Table 11. Erasmus student mobility by area of study, 2007-2008

	Erasmus students				Students in Estonia		
	2007	2007 %		2008	2008 %	2008	2008 %
Agricultural sciences	20	2,8%	Agriculture and Veterinary	24	3,2%	1 504	2,2%
Architecture, Urban and Regional Planning	19	2,6%					
Art and Design	125	17,4%					
Business Studies, Management Science	119	16,6%					
Education, Teacher Training	17	2,4%	Education	12	1,6%	4 787	7,0%
Engineering, Technology	79	11,0%	Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction	99	13,1%	9 077	13,3%
Geography, Geology	14	2,0%					
Humanities	21	2,9%	Humanities and Arts	233	30,7%	8 394	12,3%
Languages and Philological Sciences	75	10,5%					
Law	44	6,1%					
Mathematics, Informatics	10	1,4%					
Medical Sciences	57	7,9%	Health and Welfare	62	8,2%	5 691	8,3%
Natural Sciences	1	0,1%	Science, Mathematics and Computing	37	4,9%	6 495	9,5%
Social Sciences	79	11,0%	Social sciences, Business and Law	226	29,8%	27 108	39,6%
Communication and Information Sciences	21	2,9%					
Other Areas of Study	16	2,2%	Services	65	8,6%	5 343	7,8%
Total	717	100%		758	100%	68 399	100%

Annex 6

Table 12. Objectives of education and training systems 2010

Objective	Sub-objective	
1. INCREASING THE QUALITY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEMS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving education and training for teachers and trainers • Developing skills for the knowledge society <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Increasing literacy and numeracy ○ Updating the definition of basic skills for the knowledge society ○ Maintaining the ability to learn 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring access to ICTs for everyone <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Equipping schools and learning centres ○ Involving teachers and trainers ○ Using networks and resources 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing the recruitment to scientific and technical studies 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making the best use of resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Improving quality assurance ○ Ensuring efficient use of resources 	
	2. FACILITATING THE ACCESS OF ALL TO EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open learning environment • Making learning more attractive • Supporting active citizenship, equal opportunities and social cohesion
	3. OPENING UP EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEMS TO THE WIDER WORLD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening the links with working life and research, and society at large
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing the spirit of enterprise 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving foreign language learning 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing mobility and exchanges 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening European co-operation 		

Indicators, reference levels by 2010:

- An EU average rate of no more than 10 % early school leavers should be achieved.
- The total number of graduates in mathematics, science and technology in the European Union should increase by at least 15 % while at the same time the level of gender imbalance should decrease.
- At least 85 % of 22 year olds in the European Union should have completed upper secondary education, the percentage of low-achieving 15 years old in reading literacy in the European Union should have decreased by at least 20% compared to the year 2000.
- The European Union average level of participation in Lifelong Learning, should be at least 12.5% of the adult working age population (25-64 age group).