

Developed for:



By:



THE "SCHOLARSHIPS AND INTER-INSTITUTIONAL COOPERATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA" IMPACT STUDY.

Programme implementation in Romania.
EEA Financial Mechanisms 2009-2014



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List of abbreviations

AIBA - the National Agency for International Education Affairs from Liechtenstein
ANPCDEFP - the National Agency for Community Projects in Education and Training from Romania
EEA – The European Economic Area
EFTA - European Free Trade Association
EHEA – European Higher Education Area
EU – European Union
GDP – Gross Domestic Product
HEI – Higher Education Institution
PA – Program Area
PO – Program Operator
RANNIS - the Icelandic Research Center
SIU - The Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Education

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I. Introduction

I.1. About the study

The main objective of the study is to offer an overview of the implementation of the EEA Financial Mechanisms in Romania in the period 2013 - 2016, and discuss the impact it had at individual, institutional and national level in terms of expected results, pre-set objectives and of beneficiaries' expectations. The analysis will focus on the EEA Scholarship programme managed by the National Agency for Community Projects in Education and Training (ANPCDEFP) and identified in this report as "the programme". The report will also discuss the results of the programme analysis focusing on the observed trends, the level of consistency among the pre-set objectives of the programme and the implementation method.

The conclusions of the multiple-level analysis presented in this report will thus offer a complete description of the programme and a multi-criteria analysis of the programme implementation. The chapters study end with a set of recommendations for enhancing the impact and the programme implementation when appropriate.

The report is designed in such a manner that will serve to several types of stakeholders involved in the design, implementation, monitoring or evaluation of the programme. The financial body can use these results to assess, from their perspective, the level of success of the programme, identify its strong and weak points. The national agency and the structures involved in the implementation phase of the programme can use this report in order to see how it can be improved in the future and, by correlating it with other relevant studies, can adapt the objectives, the rules and the framework of the programme to the needs of the academic communities. The beneficiaries – students, staff members of HEIs – can find out about the potential barriers they might face while being part of a project (mobility programme or bilateral cooperation project) financially supported through this mechanism, so that they can better prepare for the experience, and thus, enjoy it more by limiting the unpredictable. Decision-makers can use the presented statistics and the results of the analysis of the collected data for legitimising the public policies they initiate (evidence-based policy). Last, but not least, the study can also serve to researchers in the field of educational public policy (e.g. higher education researchers) as source of data or as a basis for further research questions.

It is though important to mention, the limitations of the study that are deriving from: the way data was collected, the research methods (e.g. people are not always 100% sincere in surveys, not all the participants in the focus group were previously directly involved in the exercise of implementing projects financially supported from the programme, as they were only the representatives of the universities involved in such projects), the moment of the analysis (e.g. after two years from the moment in which some of the projects were implemented) and the time and capacity of the researchers.

I.2. Context

The European Economic Area (EEA) was founded on the 1st of January 1994 and has as participants the European Union member states and the three European Free Trade Association (EFTA) states of Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway referred to as “the Internal Market”. EEA is built on the same “four freedoms” of the European Union: the free movement of goods, persons, capital and services, the EEA aims at promoting a continuous and balanced strengthening of trade and economic relations between the EEA Member States.

Starting with the increase of the number of EU members, in 2004, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway established the so called “EEA grants” and “Norway grants”, as financial mechanisms addressed to countries that were recent members of the EU or were in the adhesion process. This was their way of addressing the issue of economic and social inequalities in the European Economic Area and intended to be a mechanism of reducing these inequalities and strengthening the bilateral relationships with the 15 beneficiary states in Central and Southern Europe. The funding allocation of this mechanism/programme is directed towards 150 programmes allocated to the beneficiary countries based on population size and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita. Therefore, Romania is the second largest beneficiary state after Poland. A set of programmes are established directly between each country and the donor countries and are based on the national needs and priorities. One of these programmes is the subject of the present study, called “Scholarships and interinstitutional cooperation in higher education”

The Donor Programme Partners for this programme are: SIU, The Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Education, RANNIS, the Icelandic Research Center, and AIBA, the National Agency for International Education Affairs from Liechtenstein, which are represented in the implementation process by the Cooperation Committee, whose role is to

support the Programme Operators in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of the programme's progress.

I.3. About the programme

For the period 2009-2014, a total budget of €1.8 billion was allocated for both financial mechanisms (i.e. EEA grants and Norway grants). The 2009 -2014 main thirteen priorities together with the 32 programmes areas addressed are coherent with the EU priorities.

To be more specific, the financial mechanisms' objectives are aligned with: the European Strategic Framework for Cooperation in Education and Training 2020 (Europe 2020) – the European Union's ten-year growth strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth aiming to facilitate the recovery from the economic crisis, the EU 11 cohesion policy objectives, the Lisbon Strategy, - all of them aiming to address the needs of the member states in the attempt to overcome the challenges Europe is facing this period.

The thirteen priorities/sectors with the 32 associated programme areas (PAs) are:

1. Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
2. Environmental Monitoring and Integrated Planning and Control
3. Reduction of Hazardous Substances
4. Energy Efficiency
5. Renewable energy
6. Adaptation to Climate change
7. Funds for Non-Governmental Organizations
8. Children and Youth at Risk and Local and Regional Initiatives to Reduce National Inequalities and to Promote the Social Inclusion
9. Mainstreaming Gender Equality and Promoting Work-Life Balance
10. Conservation and Revitalization of Cultural and Natural Heritage
11. Promotion of Diversity in Culture and Arts within European Cultural Heritage
12. Research within Priority Sectors;
13. Scholarship

The programme objectives are individualised for each country. For Romania, the total allocation for the period 2009 - 2014 was 305.95 M euro (17% from the total fund, out of which: 190.8M from the EEA Grants and 115.2 M from the Norway Grants) being the second country as distribution of funding among the beneficiary states, after Poland (with

32%). The Programme objective was to enhance the human capital and knowledge base in Romania. The key areas supported by the programme were:

- Environmental protection and management;
- Climate change and renewable energy;
- Civil society;
- Human and social development,;
- Protecting cultural heritage;

The priority sectors of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009-2014 were:

- Carbon capture and storage;
- Green Industry Innovation;
- Research and scholarships;
- Human and social development;
- Justice and home affairs;
- Promotion of decent work and tripartite dialogue

Through all the above mentioned targeted directions and objectives, the Programme aims to contribute to the reduction of the economic and social disparities in the EEA, while strengthening the bilateral relations between Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein and Romania.

For the Scholarship Programme, ANPCDEFP was the institution responsible for the management of the budget of this EEA financial mechanism, in these areas, as a Programme Operator, thus being responsible for the preparation and implementation of the programme according to the rules and sound financial management, efficiency and effectiveness. The objective of this PA was to enhance the human capital and knowledge base in the beneficiary state. The expected outcomes were: increased higher education student and staff mobility between the beneficiary and EEA EFTA states and increased institutional cooperation at higher education level (HE) between beneficiary and EEA EFTA states. Main beneficiaries were HE students at all levels (including doctoral studies), teachers, trainers, managers, leaders and other staff in higher education institutions, higher education institutions with an Erasmus University Charter approved by the European Commission, associations and representatives of associations involved in higher education, relevant student, university, and teacher/trainer associations, enterprises, social partners and other representatives

organizations cooperating with higher education institutions. According to the Memorandum of understanding regarding the implementation of the EEA Financial mechanism 2009 – 2014, the allocation of the budget reflects the pre-defined priorities:

- 10% of the total funding targeted the improvement of the situation for the Roma population;
- 80% of the total amount for students and academic staff mobility;
- 20% for cooperation projects between institutions.

For the Scholarship Programme conducted by ANPCDEFP, the total grants amount was 4.500 M euro with an amount of 500,000 euro cofinanced by the Romanian Government. Given the above described objectives and priorities of the programme, eligible projects were for: students and staff mobility programmes, preparation visits, interinstitutional cooperation projects, that were all supposed to contribute to a framework of closer cooperation between HEIs within Romania and Donor states. The calls and the application rules respected the template that was already familiar to potential beneficiaries as it was previously used in Erasmus, since the beginning of the Lifelong Learning Programme.

The Scholarship programme is relevant for Romania as it aimed at financially support projects and initiatives that have the potential of contributing to the countries' strategic objectives. For example the activities that were eligible for financing through this mechanism can be an answer for Romania to reach its' own objectives defined within the Europe 2020 reform agenda. Therefore, this programme can be counted as one of the programmes that were supposed to help the EU and the Member States deliver high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion.

Furthermore, the analysed programme is a response to Romania's need in finding incentives for transforming into a reality the states' commitments made towards the Bologna Process and the development of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Within the Bologna Process, the EHEA member states voluntarily committed to work together for the same objectives. Some of the Bologna objectives are aligned with the ones of this programme – for example:

- the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué in 2009 mentioned a commitment of all member states to reach a “mobility target” (20% of the total students graduating from higher education to be part of a mobility experience, by 2020);

- the 2012 "Mobility for better learning" Strategy adopted in Bucharest highlighted the importance of raising mobility levels, for example through offering additional financial support to students that otherwise would not have had the chance to be part of a mobility programme, thus taking into consideration the principle of equity by ensuring equal access to mobility opportunities to everyone;
- and the 2015 Communiqué adopted in Yerevan, referred to the Ministers' commitment to put more efforts into promoting staff mobility as well and ensure automatic recognition of qualification – this being an argument to continue this type of initiatives till 2020.

It also complements the national efforts towards the development of internationalisation priorities– which is an important aim for HEIs in Europe and in Romania reiterated by the National Law of Education no. 1/2011 – the main regulating framework in the field of education. This is because the objectives of the Programme are aligned to some provisions of the educational public policies in Romania:

- the international cooperation relations are mentioned explicitly as part of higher education policies for long and medium period;
- the recognition and equivalence of the studies made abroad will be ensured based on a methodology, that was recently established by ministerial order. This methodology contains a special section for Erasmus (in fact, a set of principles), which is expected to ease the process in universities and thus to contribute to eliminating one barrier for students; as the students who benefitted from a grant under this Programme were considered Erasmus students, this order is an important measure of quality assurance of the students' mobility;
- the criteria related to international mobility (incoming and outgoing, students and staff) is taken into account in the mechanism of financing the HEIs (the part coming from the state budget).

Indirectly, through the projects financially supported by the Programme, it contributes to enhancing the quality of teaching and to develop the international dimension of higher education.

II. Methodological aspects

This study aims to analyse the impact of the implementation of the “Scholarships and inter-institutional cooperation in HE area” programme in Romania for the 2013-2016 period (referred to as “the programme”). Having this in mind, the authors pre-set three specific levels of the analysis effort:

- a) **A systemic analysis** – that offers a national perspective over the impact of the programme for the period of interest. In order to reach this goal, the authors tried to put the programme into an international perspective through overviewing the available specific literature and the national and international context of the HE policies. The link between the Romanian commitments at international level regarding the HE sector was briefly reviewed, as well as its reflection into the manner in which the programme was projected and implemented in Romania. Moreover, data was also collected from the annual reports and data bases of the program operator (PO) – the National Agency.
- b) **An institutional analysis** – which looked at the impact of the programme at university level. Therefore, the authors studied the perception of the academic staff regarding their institutional experience with the programme, the reports they filled in at the end of their projects, as well as the reports and other specific analysis already elaborated by the PO.
- c) **An individual analysis** – that aimed to cover the impact of the programme for the beneficiaries – students, teachers and staff. For this, the authors used the feedback forms filled in by the beneficiaries upon the end of their mobility experience that were facilitated through the programme.

The research instruments and methods used for elaborating this study are:

- a) **Literature review** – the analysis of the already available documents, reports, studies regarding the context. In order to understand how the context of the implementation of the programme could impact its success, the authors overviewed national and international policy documents, reports of institutions and organisations with responsibilities in the field, the legal framework and the specific documents of the programme – methodology, procedural documents etc.
- b) **Document analysis** – that meant going through the documents available from the part of the PO, including annual reports as well as data collected during the implementation phase of the programme.

- c) **Statistics** – analysis of the feedback forms filled in both by individual beneficiaries, and by the institutional representatives at the end of their experience within the programme. This phase of the analysis efforts was meant for understanding the individual and institutional perception over the benefits, strengths and weaknesses.

So as to look at the programme impact on the mobile students, the authors have centralised and analysed 152 questionnaires filled in by the beneficiaries of the mobility projects financed during the period 2013 – 2015.

To look at the programme impact on the teachers and university staff as beneficiaries of the projects financed through the programme, the authors have centralised and analysed the data collected through the questionnaires for the academic years 2013/2014 and 2014/2015. There were 116 questionnaires out of which 72 for the 2013/2014 academic year and 44 for the 2014/2015 academic year.

Beneficiaries focus-group discussion

The authors have chosen the focus-group method for its efficiency in data collection. It is a relevant data collection method for a homogeneous group, in our case the universities' representatives involved in the programme implementation. Thus, all the participants have the same environment background, had the same preparation time and are subjects for the same conditions. For the current analysis, the focus-group objective was to collect data for the impact analysis of the "Scholarships and interinstitutional cooperation in higher education" programme in the Romanian universities.

The focus-group was organised on September 23 2016, in Bucharest and it gathered 18 people, Romanian universities' representatives that had a role in implementing European projects regarding higher education, including those targeted by the analysis (coordinators of Erasmus offices, members of different university structures dealing with internationalisation or European projects implementation, project coordinators or members in different projects, so on). The participants came from 15 universities out of which 13 from state universities and 2 from private universities.

The focus-group stages were the following:

- 1 – Explaining the analysis objectives;
- 2 – Participants’ presentation;
- 3 – Discussions on the pre-established subjects according to our focus-group methodology;
- 4 – Consolidation of the gathered information.

The allocated time for the discussion was one hour and a half and the main targeted subjects followed the analysis’ structure and objectives and included aspects related to: the general impact of the programme for the individuals and for the institution, the implementation of partnerships, the available resources vs the needed resources, beneficiaries’ satisfaction, the beneficiaries’ interest in accessing this types of projects, recommendations for further implementations, etc. The gathered data were included in our impact report.

III. Systemic impact of the programme

III.1. Generalities about the funded projects

According to the data provided by the National Agency, there were 100 institutional projects implemented during the period 2014 – 2016, funded through this financial mechanism. Out of the total, 98 projects were coordinated and implemented by 29 HEIs accredited in Romania, from 13 Romanian university centers, and two institutions from Iceland which benefited from this mechanism:

1. Haskolinn A Bifrost Rannsoknasetur Versunarinnar (1 project)
2. Hotel Anna (1 project).

Out of the 29 benefiting institutions from Romania, 24 were public universities and 5 private universities. Altogether they implemented 98 projects, with an average of 3 projects per university: there were two universities which implemented 10 projects each and 9 universities which implemented only one project (table 1).

Table 1 Share of implemented projects per benefiting institutions

Benefiting institution	No. of implemented projects
”Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu	10
Polytechnical University of Bucharest	10
West Univerysity of Timisoara	9
”Al. I. Cuza” University of Iasi	8

University of Craiova	6
"Babes-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca	5
National University of Political Studies and Public Administration	5
"1 December 1918" University of Alba Iulia	4
"Danubius" University of Galati	4
American-Romanian University of Bucharest	4
"Ion Mincu" University of Architecture and Urbanism of Bucharest	3
"Valahia" University of Targoviste	3
Technical University of Cluj-Napoca	3
Transilvania University of Brasov	3
"Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad	2
"Carol Davila" University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Bucharest	2
"Iuliu Hatieganu" University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Cluj-Napoca	2
"Mircea cel Batran" Naval Academy	2
Polytechnical University of Timisoara	2
University of Bucharest	2
"Dimitrie Cantemir" University of Tg. Mures	1
"Dunarea de Jos" University of Galati	1
"George Enescu" Art University of Iasi	1
"Nicolae Titulescu" University of Bucharest	1
"Ovidius" University of Constanta	1
"Titu Maiorescu" University of Bucharest	1
Arts and Design University of Cluj-Napoca	1
University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Bucharest	1
University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Cluj-Napoca	1
TOTAL	98

III.2. The allocation of financial resources

The projects selected for financing through this programme (Mobility projects and cooperation projects) had a total value of 4,486,218 EUR (almost 4.5 M Euro) out of which 4,398,540.66 EUR were actually contracted and paid for the implemented projects. On average, a project was granted 27,130 EUR, but the amount varied according to the objectives and dimension of the project. The smallest amount contracted was of 900 EUR (there were 13 Preparatory Visits with this budget), while the biggest contracted amount reached 606,060 EUR, twice as much as the second biggest value (of 327,555 EUR) for Mobility projects.

The university with the biggest share of the budget received for the implemented projects was the "Al. I. Cuza" University of Iasi (1,164,180.96 EUR), followed by the University Politehnica of Bucharest with only half of the sum (648,378.94 EUR) (Figure 1).

According to the data provided by the National Agency in the last EEA annual report, the final absorption rate for Mobility projects financed in 2015 was of 61.18% while the absorption rate of the cooperation projects financed in 2015 was 85%. The low absorption rate for mobility projects is argued on the low participation of the donor states in accessing their mobility opportunities.

To maximise the absorption of funds, the National Agency reallocated the remained fund to new activities within the programme (a new call for small projects and an international conference). The new call was released in 2016 and financed 13 cooperation projects and 8 study visits between Romanian universities and Donor States universities.

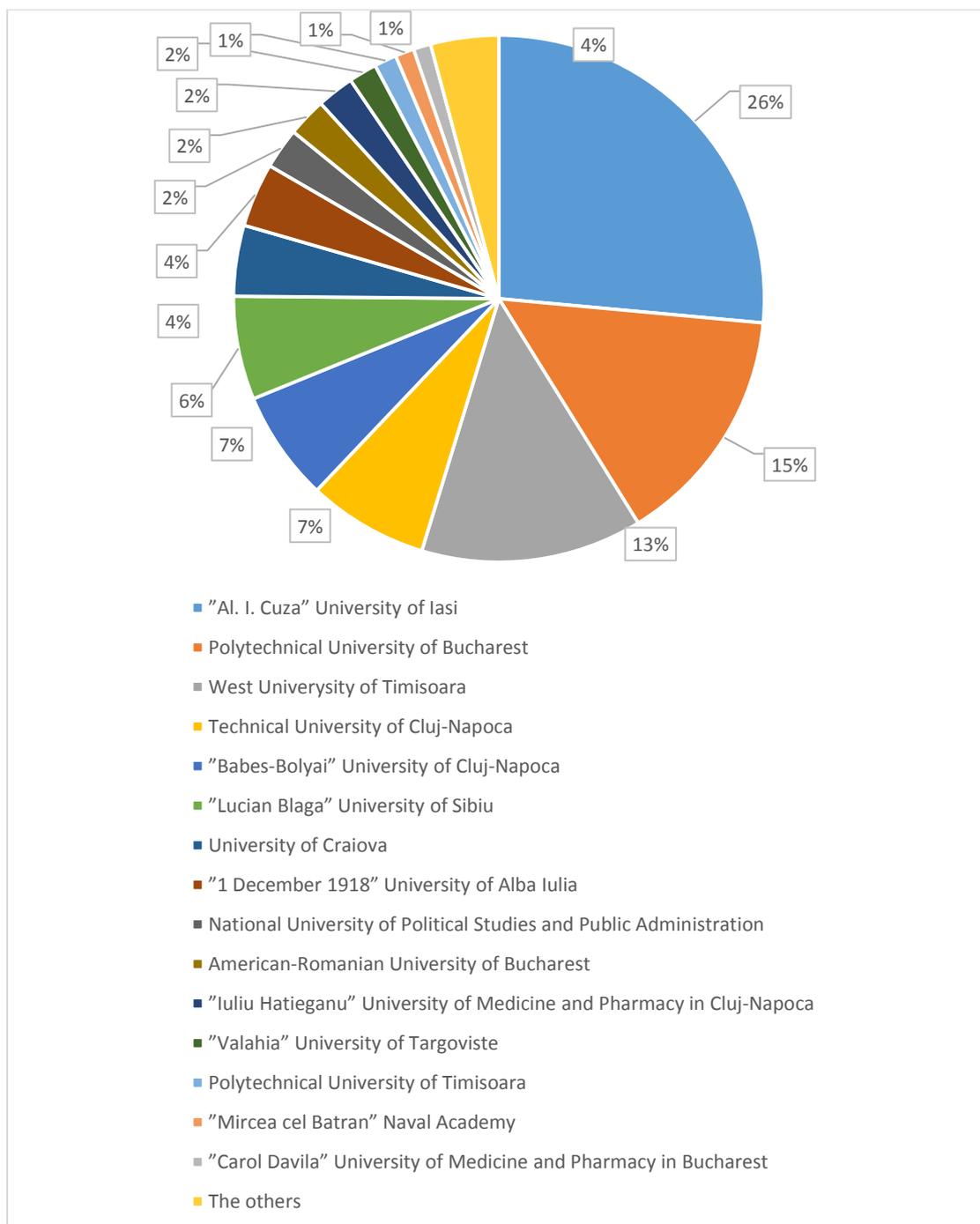


Figure 1 The share of the budget per benefiting institution (% out of the total spent sum)

III.3. Programme outputs and outcomes

At the higher education systems' level, the impact of the programme can be also assessed through the targets initially set and the final results. Furthermore, one mention might be useful to be noted: at the time of writing the current report, not all the figures reported in connection with the indicators were the final ones (the data collection from the universities was in progress and the last available data will be collected in April 2017).

Two important targets for the programme were defined by the number of mobile students and staff. By the end of the programme implementation, the mobile staff target was exceeded by 59% while the mobile students target was not reached.

Table 2

	Target	Achieved
Mobile students	350	296
Mobile staff	140	223

According to the 2016 annual Report, all the 134 mobile students (for 2015/2016) received ECTS credits, in total 3130.5 ECTS achieved during 571.25 mobility months. The average period spent abroad by a students, within the programme is 4.26 months.

In terms of quality, looking at other outcomes, one can observe that the initial targets are exceeded:

Table 3

		2015/2016
	Target	Achieved
Number of joint papers/publications/articles	8	56
Number of joint summer schools/intensive programmes	2	5
Number of seminars, workshops, conferences organised jointly	10	27

More than that, the indicator regarding the “percentage of staff declaring that they have increased their competencies” is at 100% level of completion, but an in depth analysis is presented in our report, in the following sections, based on the beneficiaries' feedback questionnaires.

IV. The impact of the programme at the university level

IV.1. Projects implemented by the universities

To assess the impact of this funding mechanism within HEIs, the beneficiaries were asked to fill in a feedback form. This section represents the analysis of their responses regarding: the purpose of the projects they proposed for funding, the results and sustainability opportunities for the implemented projects, the perceived impact of their project etc.

Out of the total number of beneficiaries only 23 answered the feedback form. The respondents represent 79% of all the beneficiaries and 12 cities across the country, out of the 13 that benefited indirectly from the funding mechanism.

Even if they represent only 23.4% of the total number of Romanian HEIs, they are widely spread across the country and represent all types of universities: small university, big comprehensive universities, specialised universities, both from small and bigger university towns, therefore their feedback about the mechanism is representative for the public Romanian HE environment – there is only one private university among the beneficiaries (Romanian – American University of Bucharest).

Most of the universities only implemented one such project (40% of the respondents), some two or three projects, while only one HEI having implemented four projects (University of Craiova).

Analysing the responses of the beneficiaries from the feedback form, it is easily observable that they targeted the development of the international dimension of their institution, through raising the number of their mobility programmes and participants and through networking with HEIs from the partner/funding countries. Some of the beneficiaries targeted raising their capacity in teaching or conducting international-level research projects with a simultaneous increase of quality of educational services provided (as seen in figure 1). Out of the topics proposed for the research projects supported through this funding mechanism there are: solid state physics and spintronics, therapy for AML (myeloid leukemia), molecular evaluation and water pollution and fish diseases. Therefore, one can conclude that the intention of the beneficiaries of this funding mechanism was to use it to raise their capacity, both in teaching and in research, through international networking and increasing their international visibility, thus developing their international dimension.

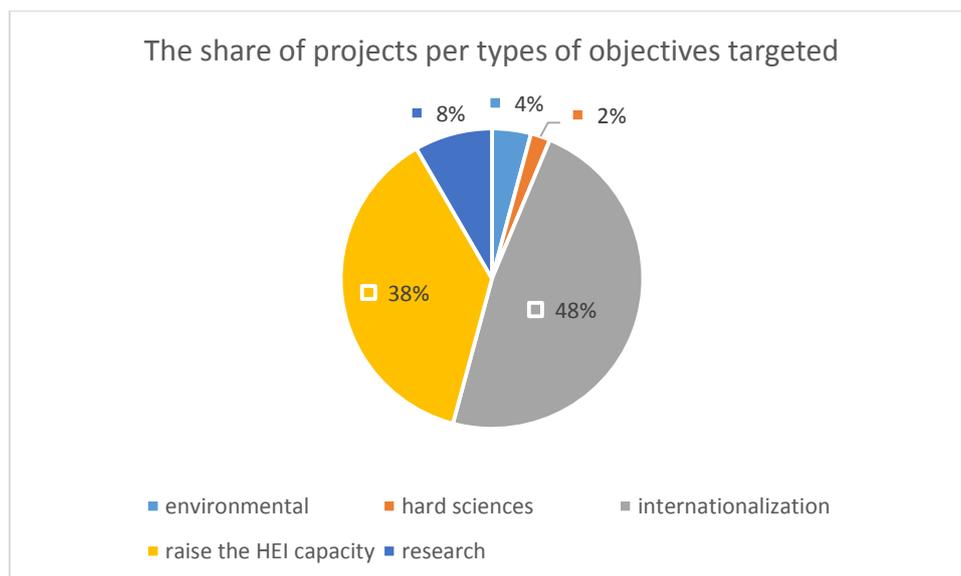


Figure 2 The share of projects per type of targeted objective

As mentioned before, 29 universities from 13 cities benefited from funding through this financial mechanism and most of them (those that responded the feedback form) directed these resources towards raising their capacity, in teaching, research, project and partnership management, aiming to capitalise this newly developed capacity to become more internationalised.

An obvious majority of them were mobility projects (85%), while only 15% were targeted cooperations in the field of research or education.

Opportunity to increase students and staff mobility

Despite the diversity of the objectives of the funding mechanism that gave the beneficiaries the opportunity to plan and implement any kind of programmes, 1/6 of them chose to also direct their resources towards mobility organisation. This type of project was appealing to HEIs on the one hand due to their previous experience in implementing similar initiatives that resulted in students or staff mobility, and on the other hand due to the attractiveness of such projects for the second-level beneficiaries, the members of the academic communities that were involved in the projects. They benefited this way from learning or teaching opportunities abroad, research opportunities in common projects with the partners that created the favourable context for personal and professional development.

Increased institutional capacity

Nevertheless, the beneficiaries assess that the projects funded through this mechanism due to their specific of encouraging knowledge transfer and good-practices exchange has helped

them to improve their institutional capacity, in teaching, research and management, and has opened opportunities for more international visibility and to set up partnership with foreign HEIs. For example, the feedback form indicated a perceived development of the capacity of the International Relations Offices.

HEIs benefiting from funding through this financial mechanism have declared that they prepared for incoming students, which inevitably had an impact over the institution through making it more ready for further attracting, receiving and ensuring a satisfying experience for the incoming students or teachers, thus increasing their institutional capacity to implement similar projects in the future. Among the actions taken by the HEIs in this sense, in the feedback form they mentioned the following: organising orientation activities through the IRO staff (58% of the respondents), setting up meetings with the involved teaching staff (58%), involving students and local NGOs in organising orientation activities (52%), ensuring that there is someone from the academic community (student or IRO staff) to greet and welcome the incoming person (50%), setting up a buddy system (47%).

44% of the respondents considered that the financed project helped them open-up collaboration opportunities with potential partners from the funding states, while 13% of the respondents appreciate that these projects have helped them strengthen the already existing relationship they had with partners.

Sustainability

5 out of the 36 respondents consider that capitalising their newly developed capacity and the already set partnership can ensure the sustainability of their project, while the rest think about continuing the project by involving their students (e.g. "The project will be sustained with the help of the scientific papers, presentation and practical scientific work with the PhD Students") in implementing it or looking for further external non-refundable grants (i.e. "sustained through other sources of funding or institutional funding"). In 30% of the situations, beneficiaries consider that successful amplification of the results depends on continuing the networking activities and the development of an international dimension.

The success of similar future projects can be ensured through the increased capacity of the HEIs to provide support for the outgoing students and staff, through the IRO which offered both organisational and academic support to beneficiaries. Moreover, the institutional capacity of implementing such programmes by the HEIs increased with the experience of

planning and implementing these projects and due to the opportunity given by this financial mechanism to develop their network and setting up contacts from the funding states.

Objective of increasing access to mobility

One of the objectives of the funding mechanism was to encourage the participation in mobility projects of disadvantaged groups. However, out of 36 respondents, only 3 (aprox. 9%) of the HEIs were able to confirm that their projects involved students coming from minority ethnic groups or from socio-economically disadvantaged groups that are usually not represented at all among the beneficiaries of similar programmes.

Problems

As observed from the cross-checking the answers of the individual beneficiaries with the feedback from the implementing institutions, there is a disruption in the level of perception over the recognition of the mobile period upon the return of the mobile student at the home university. While students still point out the problems of recognition of study periods abroad, universities do not perceive this as a problem, thus none of the 36 respondents to the feedback form has indicated any percentage of non-recognition at return (question 4.4 from Annex 1). They either indicated 0% non-recognition or not answered the question.

IV.2. Programme administration at the university level – universities representatives` perspective

To understand the perspective of the universities` representatives regarding the programme implementation, a focus group was organised by the Agency. The focus group gathered 18 participants and lasted for one hour and a half. The objectives were linked to the analysis structure and scope and targeted the general programme impact at the institutional and individual level, the available resources, the used resources, the working partnerships and the satisfaction of the final beneficiaries including the university and/or their carelessness.

The participants in the focus group were the universities` representatives dealing with the programme implementation, out of which three from the private universities and 15 from the public universities.

Challenges in the programme implementation

One challenge mentioned by the universities representatives was the low request of Nordic students to study in Romania especially compared with the staff openness to come. It seems that the Nordic students are not interested in Romanian universities for different reasons from the cultural differences to the prestige of Romanian universities.

When asking about challenges in managing a project involving a partnership with a Nordic country within the programme, one issue stood out. Regarding the selection calendar, the results were published late by the Agency. In this context, some problems appeared in the communication with the foreign university and the beneficiaries. Some of the students selected for going in a mobility gave up. More than that, there were cases when even the university partner gave up continuing the partnership. With all the efforts made by the Agency, it seems that the problem repeated the following year. Regarding the ongoing partnerships, the problem also affected the communication with the foreign university due to late submission of students' identification data.

Other issues related to the implementation of a SEE project mentioned by universities' representatives were:

- Way of working through the Treasury account,
- Issues in paying the January mobility before December 25,
- Receiving the funding in our local currency (lei) which involves a lot of bureaucratic procedures together with a very complicated way.

Instruments to boost new partnerships

The vast majority of universities' representatives praised the opportunity offered by the Agency to organise matching seminars both in Romania and abroad. It is a suitable instrument that encourages new links between universities from Romania and partner countries.

Other instruments mentioned by the participants were:

- Links developed through faculties and/or departments, universities centers of foreign languages or other fields of studies in the area. These type of links can be useful for all other faculties to reach possible partners;
- Using former projects implemented by the universities where connections were established with foreign universities;
- Using relations developed through other type of partnerships (especially research based collaborations);
- Staff mobility – through staff mobility links with the teachers from the host institution;
- Participating in international events where universities' representatives had time and space to meet possible partners;
- Online instruments developed by the Agency or other institutions as data base and lists of contacts.

Of course, not all the requests for partnerships initiated by Romanian universities received a positive response. Some of them were rejected with arguments as: lack of time, the multitude of requests received by that certain (foreign) university, the bureaucracy involved by a project (especially compared to Erasmus), the level of financing, and mismatch of field of study/collaboration.

Mobilities for staff and students

The students' willingness to access a mobility experience differs between universities: in some universities and/or fields of study there were multiple requests for the one mobility opportunity (3-4 students/place) while in others the mobility was hard to be fulfilled. The arguments are difficult to be identified but, from the universities' representatives' perception, some of them might be related to:

- promoting methods – whether the information reaches all the students,
- availability of other mobility opportunities as the Erasmus mobility places,
- insufficiency of the mobility grants – the financial reasons were often addressed by the participants,
- field of study – the mobility opportunities do not cover all the faculties,
- to access an EEA mobility, the students have to have good academic performance and this might be a barrier for other willing students,

- not all the students “have an appetite for mobility”,
- her/his former bad experience with a Nordic country and/or a mobility,
- bad stories heard from mobile students,
- cultural differences,
- lack of student services provided by the host institution (as, for example, dormitories and canteens).

Most often, the mobility opportunities are promoted through: the university official site, the Erasmus coordinator and/or international departments and in an informal way, through the good experiences of other mobile students. The lack of innovative approaches to promote these opportunities among students might be a reasons for non-participation.

In the focus group, a special attention was given to the participation of Roma students, disabled students and other under-representatd groups. The discussion was focused on their barriers in participation. The first problem mentioned by the universities’ representatives pointed the fact that, in the case of Roma students, it is hard for the university to identify them. This is due to the fact that, most often, the Roma students do not declare their ethnicity thus making it impossible to identify them among the potential or actual beneficiaries. Even if the university knows the number of their Roma students, it does not have special instruments to communicate with them (targeted instruments to attract the Roma students), arguing that they implement the same promotion instruments for all the students, no matter their ethnicity or disability. In some cases, the universities’ representatives do not know if they have disabled people as students in their universities.

Regarding the perceived barriers of foreign students coming to Romania, the mentioned arguments were related to the cultural differences, the perceived security problems, the living conditions or overall bad perception about Romania. In the case of foreign staff, these barriers do not apply because, most often, they are persons with great international experience and they have more correct information about Romania and Romanian universities.

Sustainability

When asked about the projects sustainability, some good practice examples were highlighted:

- Because of the mobility experience, some Romanian students have returned in the visited countries for new study experiences;
- Some partners have organised summer schools, events and workshops outside the projects;
- Some universities continued to invest from their own revenues in the development of the partnership (due to their internationalisation of higher education policy).

Regarding the challenges to ensure the sustainability of one partnership, the main challenge mentioned by the university representatives was related to the method of maintaining the connection with the foreign university. It seems that for a partnership to be sustainable, it needs a constant communication especially in the Norway case.

Regarding the perception of the participants on the overall impact of the programme, the responses were unanimous regarding the enhanced quality of the Romanian higher education system due to the programme implementation. Their arguments focused on the fact that the outgoing teachers learn new teaching methods that improve the overall teaching quality and the incoming teachers give all the Romanian students the opportunity to have some sort of international experience at home.

Further recommendations

The participants were asked to give recommendations for improving the programme functioning.

1. Reducing the bureaucracy

The first thought when asked about the recommendations was related to the programme bureaucracy – the multitude of documents needed for reporting within the programme. The participants had specific recommendations to reduce bureaucracy as, for example, eliminating the “conform cu originalul” signature from every document copy, correlating the programme procedures with accounting procedures (including other EU programs), etc.

2. More funding

Of course, among the top requirements, there was the desire for more funding. The needs behind the idea of more funding, from the participants perspective, were related to or had the following arguments:

- The need for more money for transportation (including within the Nordic countries);
- the high living costs in the Nordic countries;
- Resources for continuing the partnership due to the lack of universities own revenues;
- Resources for promoting Romania abroad or the mobility opportunity among foreign students;

3. Instruments for facilitating new partnerships

The mentioned instruments were data bases with new contacts and funding matching seminars. Moreover, the participants also proposed that the Agency should finance specific methods of mobility promotion.

4. Other recommendations

- Introducing the possibility for a teacher to go on a mobility more than once,
- Conducting the financial operations in euro not in the Romanian currency (lei),
- Revising the schedule of the programme, to match the academic calendar in Donor States.

V. Impact of the programme on the beneficiaries

V.1 Impact on students

This chapter discusses the benefits of the programme at individual level for the student beneficiaries of the mobility programmes. A special focus will be directed towards assessing the perceived gains in terms of: the skills development (both professional and personal), personal satisfaction (of initial expectations) and future opportunities created through benefiting from this financial mechanism. This was chosen as a focus in relationship with the fact that one of the main pre-set objectives of the programme is to enhance human capital and knowledge base, as a potential solution for overcoming the economic crisis and the social disparities among EEA.

Respondents' profile

In order to assess the above described impact, the authors analysed the data collected through the questionnaires distributed among the beneficiaries of the mobility programmes that were financed through the evaluated financial mechanism in two subsequent university years: 2013/2014 and 2014/2015. There were 152 questionnaires filled in by the beneficiaries of mobility programs: 8 incoming students (foreign students coming to study in Romania) and 144 outgoing students (Romanian students going to study/for a traineeship in one of the three host countries) (for more details about the methodology of the study check ch.II).

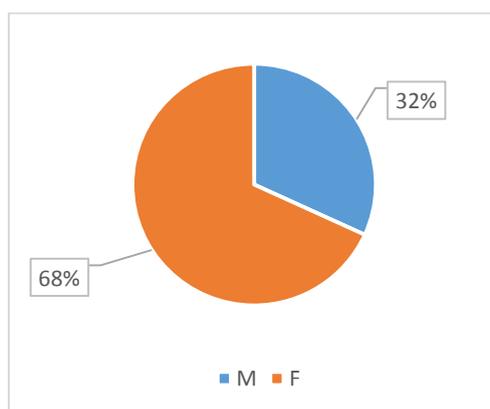


Figure 3 Gender representation of respondents that benefited from the individual mobility programmes

The respondents came from 26 universities: "1 December 1918" University of Alba Iulia, "Al.I.Cuza" University of Iasi (50% of all outgoing students), Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca (16% of them), "Ion Mincu" University of Architecture Bucharest, "Mircea cel Batran" Academy, Polytechnical University of Bucharest, Polytechnical University of Timisoara, Transilvania Business School, University of Arts and Design Cluj-Napoca, University of Bucharest, "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu, University of Craiova, Romanian-American University, University of Agronomical Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Cluj-Napoca, West University of Timisoara (11% of the outgoing students) (table 4).

The incoming students (8) came from three universities from Norway (*7 incoming students came from Norway*): Hedmark University College, Hogskolen I Sor-Trondelag, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, and one university in Liechtenstein (University of Liechtenstein) – only one student came from Liechtenstein to study in Romania, and none from Iceland.

As one can observe, there is a severe imbalance between the numbers of *incoming* and *outgoing* students, which might be explained either through the fact that Romanian students are more interested in spending some of their study period abroad, or that the students from EEA countries are not attracted by the Romanian offer (or they have not heard enough about the study and practice opportunities available in Romania), or that the Romanian students are more confident that their language skills will help them face the challenges of a study period in an EEA country, but not the way around. The authors recommend that in future implementation of the programme, some resources should be directed towards promoting the learning opportunities in Romania for foreign students and maybe for counselling universities to become more attractive for foreign students.

Table 4 Share of student beneficiaries among Romanian HEIs according to their responses

UNIVERSITY	No. of outgoing students	Percentage (out of total outgoing students) (%)
"Al.I.Cuza" University of Iasi	76	53.1
Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca	17	11.8
West University of Timisoara	11	7.7
Polytechnical University of Timisoara	8	5.6
"Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu	5	3.5
"Ion Mincu" University of Architecture Bucharest	4	2.8
Romanian- American University	4	2.8
University of Bucharest	4	2.8
Mircea cel Batran Academy	3	2.1
Polytechnical University of Bucharest	3	2.1
University of Craiova	3	2.1
University of Arts and Design Cluj-Napoca	2	1.4
"1 Dec.1918" University of Alba Iulia	1	0.7
Transilvania Business School	1	0.7
USAMV Cluj-Napoca	1	0.7
Total	143	100

The repartition per host country of the outgoing students among the respondents looks like this:

Table 5 Repartition of outgoing students among the EEA countries

Host country	No. of outgoing students
Norway	89
Iceland	48
Liechtenstein	7
Total	144

In the feedback form the beneficiaries were asked to evaluate several aspects of their mobility experience: the organisation and funding of the programme, their personal benefits and the contribution of their experience to their personal and professional development etc. Each of these aspects are discussed in the following paragraphs, highlighting conclusions when there was the case or any recommendations for future improvement of the programme (coming either from the beneficiaries or the authors of the study).

Organisational and financial aspects

While analysing the funding of the programme, the respondents were asked to grade from 1 to 5 the amount of the grant. Out of the total number of outgoing students 57% of them were very satisfied by the amount of money received through the grant and rated it with 5, thus appreciating it as sufficient. Only 1.3% of the respondent rated the grant with 2, thus considering it insufficient.

However, 53% of all the participating students declared they needed extra money to complement the received grant and that they obtained them from their family (44%), private loans (2%), state grants (2%) or their own savings (27%).

88% of the outgoing students did not encounter any severe problem during their mobility period (figure 4). However, those that declared they have encountered problems mentioned: lack of relevant/useful information in due time, having to pay money they did not anticipate (40 euro for accommodation they have not benefited of, due to the standard contract of renting which is for 5 months and not 4 - the duration of the mobility period), stolen money (duplicated debit card and illegal withdrawal of money), partial recognition of studies at the return in the home institution.

Overall 67% of the beneficiaries of an outgoing mobility were very satisfied with their Erasmus experience, while only 37.5% of the incoming students were very satisfied with their experience.

133 out of the 152 respondents said they were available for offering, in the future, help for the outgoing or incoming students, based on their own experience with Erasmus.

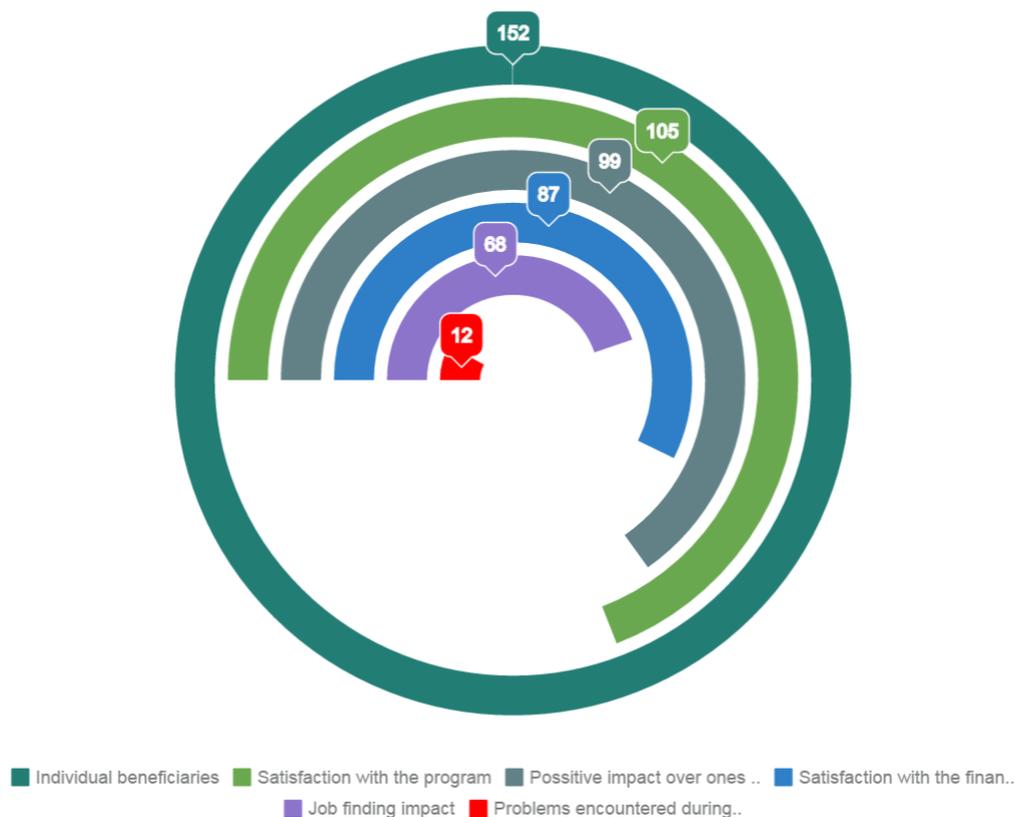


Figure 4 Share of beneficiaries (out of the total of 152 respondents) who: were satisfied with the program (and graded it with 5 on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is very unsatisfied and 5 is very satisfied), consider that the program has a positive impact over their career, that consider the program will have a positive impact over their chances of finding a job, that consider the financial support sufficient (and graded it with 5 on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is very unsatisfied and 5 is very satisfied)

Perceived personal benefits in terms of personal development

Student beneficiaries of a mobility programme financed through the analysed mechanism have been asked to grade their perceived impact of the mobility experience on their personal and professional development, from 1 to 5, where 1 is ‘not at all’ and 5 is ‘very much’. Each dimension evaluated by the feedback form is discussed over the next few paragraphs.

- a. Likelihood to consider an international job after the mobility period
- b. Impact on the career and/or job perspectives

As far as the personal benefits of the beneficiaries of these mobility go, the analysis of their answers in the feedback form filled in at the end of their mobility period showed that: 84% of the outgoing students consider themselves more capable of obtaining a job in a foreign country, and more open to look for one, due to this experience. Out of them 68.75% consider

it will definitely help them in their career, and 47% of them consider will definitely help them find a job.

c. Impact on developing intercultural skills

As far as developing intercultural skills is concerned, the average of the 149 available and valid answers was 4.42. None of the respondents consider that the experience did not contribute at all to the development of these skills, therefore no respondent rated this element with 1 and only 2 respondents rated the element with 2, considering that the experience had only a very small impact over the development of such skills. 9.39% of the respondents rated it with 3, 34.22% rated it with 4, while 54% rated it with 5, this meaning a high impact on developing intercultural skills.



Figure 5 Share of beneficiaries according to their perceived impact of the mobility experience over their intercultural skills (according to their assessment of the perceived impact on a scale from 1 – very small impact to 5 – very big impact, NA = No-Answer)

d. Impact on developing linguistic skills

As far as developing linguistic skills is concerned, the average of the 150 available and valid answers was 4.16. Seven respondents consider that the experience did not contribute at all or just very little to the development of these skills (rated the element with 1 or 2), 19.3% rated it with 3, 30.6% rated it with 4, while 45.3% rated it with 5, thus evaluating that the mobility experience has very much positively influenced the improvement of their language skills.

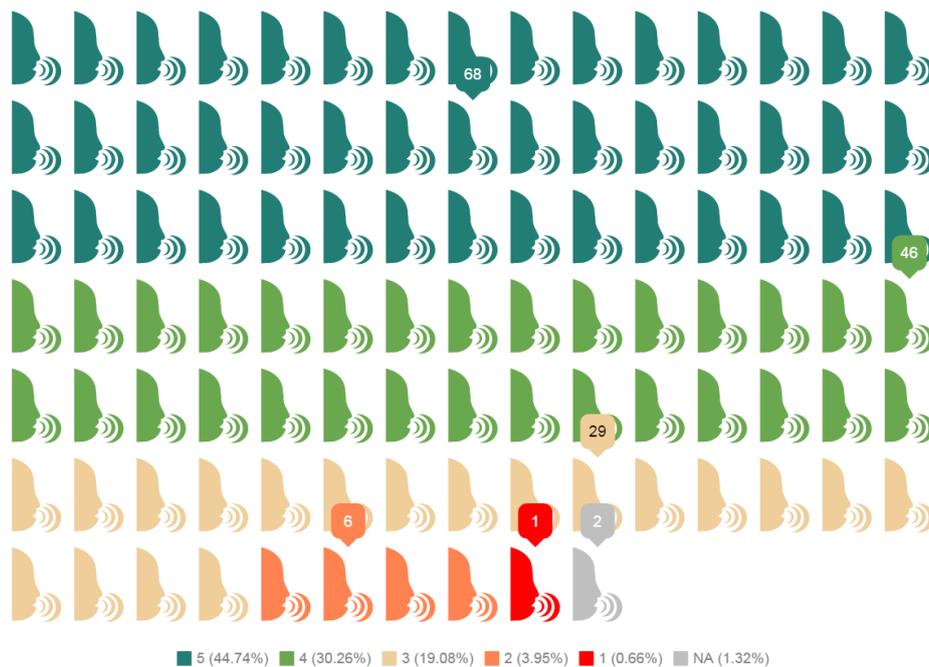


Figure 6 Share of perceived impact of the mobility experience over the beneficiaries linguistic skills (according to their assessment of the perceived impact on a scale from 1 – very small impact to 5 – very big impact, NA = No-Answer)

e. Impact on developing self-reliance

As far as developing self-reliance is concerned, the average of the 150 available and valid answers was 4.56. Only 1 respondent considers that the experience contributed only a little to the development of his/her self-reliance (rated the element with 2), while 6% rated it with 3, 30% rated it with 4, and 63.3% rated it with 5, evaluating the impact of the mobility experience over the development of their self-reliance as very big (‘very much’) (figure 7).

f. Impact on developing the feeling of independence

As far as developing the feeling of independence is concerned, the average of the 150 available and valid answers was 4.72. Only one respondent considers that the experience contributed only very little to the development of her/his independence (rated the element with 2), while 2.66% rated it with 3, 20% rated it with 4, and 76.6% rated it with 5. These last 115 respondents consider that the mobility experience has helped them become more independent (figure 8).



Figure 7 Share of perceived impact of the mobility experience over the beneficiaries' self-reliance (according to their assessment of the perceived impact on a scale from 1 – very small impact to 5 – very big impact, NA = No-Answer)



Figure 8 Share of perceived impact of the mobility experience over the beneficiaries' feeling of independence (according to their assessment of the perceived impact on a scale from 1 – very small impact to 5 – very big impact, NA = No-Answer)

g. Impact on developing self-awareness

As far as developing self-awareness is concerned, the average of the 150 available and valid answers was 4.64. Only one respondent considers that the experience did not contribute at all to the development of self-awareness (rated the element with 1), while none rated it with 2. 4% of the respondents rated this element with 3, 25.3% rated it with 4, while 70% rated it with 5. A clear majority of the respondents, 105, declared perceiving that the mobility experience has helped them develop self-awareness (figure 9).

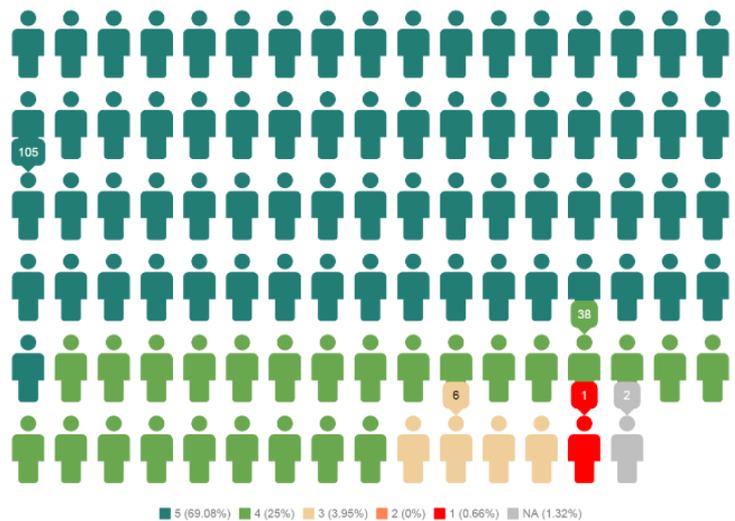


Figure 9 Share of perceived impact of the mobility experience over the beneficiaries' self-awareness (according to their assessment of the perceived impact on a scale from 1 – very small impact to 5 – very big impact, NA = No-Answer)

To sum up, table no. 6 presents the share of the respondents that consider that the mobility programme has helped them very much in developing the above discussed competences: the feeling of independence, self-reliance, linguistic skills, intercultural skills and the self-awareness feeling. It is observable that a number of 43 respondents rated all the elements with 5, thus considering that the mobility experience has contributed very much to their development.

Table 6 Share of all the respondents (144 students) that graded their perception over the impact of the mobility experience on their personal development with 5 (high) (on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is 'not at all' and 5 is 'very much')

Personal Outcome	Percentage of respondents considering that the mobility has helped develop this outcome (% out of the total outgoing students)
General judgement	55.26
Intercultural skills	53.94
Linguistic skills	44.74
Self-reliance	62.5
Independence	75.65
Self-awareness	69

Conclusions and recommendations

Students were also asked to offer recommendations for improving the programme: only 30 respondents (19.73% of all respondents) suggested some ways to improve the programme. Their proposals were linked to: communication, funding of the programme, duration of the mobility period and bureaucracy. The suggestions were as follows:

- Improving the way information about the programme is communicated to the interested parties, the relevance of the information offered and its availability to students. In this regard, it was suggested that more details about what students were expected to do or to pay for in the host country should be available on the website of the university/programme (online) – e.g. about accommodation opportunities and costs;
- Receiving the grant before the beginning of the mobility period;
- Raising the level of the fund;
- Receiving more/better support in solving logistic issues, such as finding proper accommodation in due time and at reasonable prices that the beneficiary can cover with the grant;
- Reducing the paperwork needed to be filled in for participating in the programme (before, during and after the mobility period). In this sense, a guide for the application process was suggested to be made available for the candidates;
- Requiring that all participants have good knowledge of a foreign language or making the selection process more thorough were among the recommendations of several students, thus suggesting they are disappointed with the current selection;
- Support for outgoing students to adapt to the new cultural environment (both from the part of the home institution, and from the part of the host organisation);
- Recognition of all activities and courses followed during the mobility period;
- Developing the possibility of follow-up activities – e.g. developing a double degree as a result of the mobility period.

There were nine respondents who appreciated the programme in their comments, considering it is already very well designed, organised and implemented and there is not much to improve about it – e.g. ‘excellent’, ‘for me was excellent’, ‘the whole scheme is well planned’ etc.

V.2 Impact of the programme on the university staff

To analyse the programme impact on the university staff involved in the projects, the authors have gathered data from the feedback questionnaires filled in by project beneficiaries. The analysis is based on the questionnaires for the academic years 2013/2014 and 2014/2015 filled in by 116 persons out of which 72 for 2013/2014 and 44 for 2014/2015.

Respondents' characteristics

Regarding the respondents characteristics, from the 116 beneficiaris who completed the questionnaires, 89 were from Romanian universities and 27 were incoming professors from outside the country (figure 10).



Figure 10 Share of incoming and outgoing university staff members from the total respondents

The percentage of incoming teachers is similar for both academic years analysed (22-25% of total mobile teachers) (table 7).

Table 7 No. of staff mobilities by year and type of mobility

	2013/2014	2014/2015	Total
Outgoing	56	33	89
Incoming	16	11	27
Total	72	44	116

The distribution of incoming and outgoing respondents by university is presented below (Table 8). Thus, the respondents are distributed between 15 higher education institutions in Romania. The university with the highest number of respondents (beneficiaries of the programme) is the “A. I. Cuza” University of Iasi with a share of 34% respondents out of all

the respondents in the analysed period. Regarding the other universities participating in the programme, the respondents are evenly distributed so that we can say that the results of the analysis are relevant to the total number of beneficiaries of the programme.

Table 8 Distribution of respondents by host and home HEi in Romania

	Outgoing	Incoming
Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi	26	14
University of Craiova	10	1
Danubius University	9	
West University of Timisoara	8	
Babes-Bolyai University	6	1
Transilvania University of Brasov	5	
University of Architecture and Urbanism "Ion Mincu"	4	1
Lucia Blaga University of Sibiu	4	
University of Bucharest	3	1
Polytechnic University of Bucharest	3	2
Polytechnic University of Timisoara	3	1
Romanian-American University	3	2
"1 December 1918" University of Alba Iulia	2	1
University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Cluj-Napoca	2	3
Mircea cel Batran Naval Academy	1	

Regarding the academic background of the participants, one can observe two relevant categories:

- Teaching staff for which the accessed mobility will contribute either to enhancing the teaching methods or to developing professional competences in her/his academic/research field;
- Administrative staff/ teachers from the administrative departments of universities for which the international experience can bring added value to the university' services and administrative functions.

According to the applied questionnaires, the participating teachers (94 persons) have diverse academic backgrounds. For the data to be relevant, the authors have clustered the beneficiaries' responses on the study key areas according to the Romanian distribution of study programmes. **Thereby, it can be observed that the study area that has benefited the most from the mobility projects is the area of social sciences with a share of 41% from the total participants.** From the social sciences area, the subdomain that has the most participants is the international relations (10 participants). However, one can observe a low participation of staff from the key areas that are relevant in the Romanian context, having a

great number of both teachers and students from the total academic communities in the country: **engineering sciences with only 7% of the total participants and medical sciences with 10% (figure 11).**

Regarding the subdomains (also known in Romania as “branches of science” or Bachelor fields of study), the best represented are (in order of number of participants): International Relations, Geography, Computer Sciences, Business Studies and Finance. One can observe that some important fields of study are missing from the map: Chemistry, Dental Medicine, Agronomy and many areas from Engineering (Electrical Engineering, Energetics, Transportation, etc.), Psychology, History and so on.

In this context, the authors strongly recommend implementing instruments to stimulate the specialised universities to apply in the Agency open calls: Politechnics, Medicine universities and Arts universities. Exemple of instruments might be: organising events for specific universities (e.g. events only for Polytechnic universities) or surveying the real needs to remove the barriers to submitting project applications.

Regarding the administrative staff/teachers from the administrative departaments of universities, the 18 respondents work in departaments as: the International Relations Department, PR, IT, Financial department, Educational Marketing, the department dealing with Erasmus projects, social services department, communication. One can see that, from this category, the highest number of participants were from the international relations departments or other related departments (as for example the European projects implementation department).

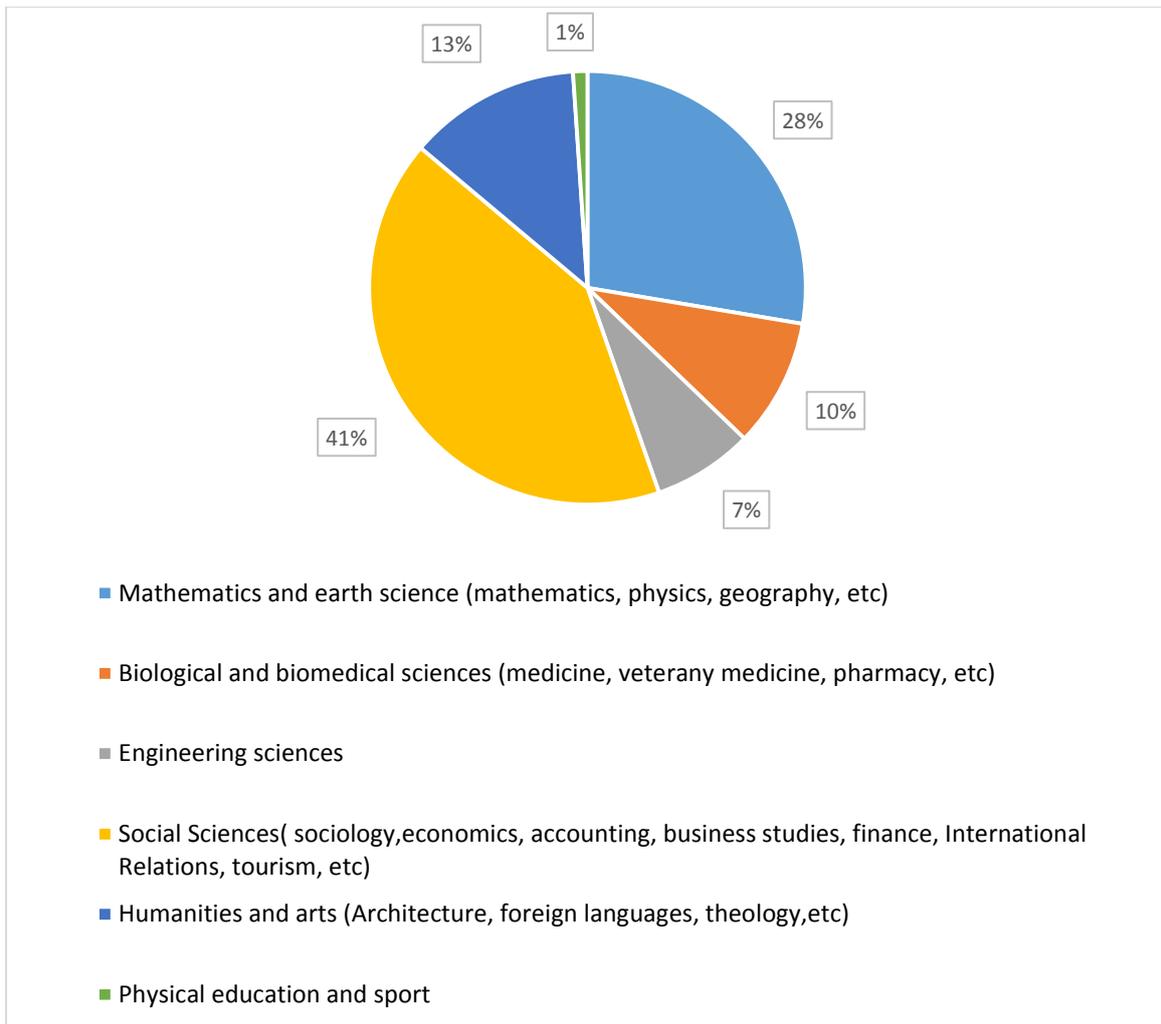


Figure 11 Distribution of respondents by academic field

Other relevant characteristic for the current analysis is the average age of the participants. The average age of the 116 participants in the teaching/training experiences is 41 years. What is more interesting is the big difference between the average age of the Romanian participants (39) and the average age of the foreign participants (49). In this context, one can conclude that, in the case of Romanian staff, a greater number of young teachers are interested in a mobility experience of teaching or training compared with the teachers that have more experience in the Romanian universities. In the last case, the teachers either had sufficient international experiences for their age or are not opened for such an experience for different reasons (cultural or linguistic barriers for example).

Regarding the country of destination (in the case of outgoing mobility) or country of origin (in the case of incoming mobility), of the beneficiaries who completed the questionnaire,

obviously, most went/are from Norway. Thus, the participants' distribution by type of mobility and partner country is as follows:

Table 9 Distribution of participants by country

	Outgoing	Incoming
Norway	51	18
Iceland	27	6
Liechtenstein	10	3

One can observe an imbalance between the outgoing and incoming participants, imbalance also found through other research methods.

Participants' perspective regarding the mobility's impact

The participants were asked to rate how the experiences had an impact on different dimensions regarding the improved skills or reached objectives on a scale from 1 to 5 (1-negative, 5 – positive). A first observation could be that, in general, the participants gave very positive points to all the dimensions. More than that, some participants (27) awarded 5 points for all the questions they were asked to evaluate.

a. Linguistic skills

In terms of the experience contribution to enhancing the ability to work in a foreign language, the average of 101 valid responses was 4.32 points (figure 12). So 3 participants considered that the experience did not contribute to improve linguistic skills, 13 participants awarded 3 points, 30 awarded 4 points and the maximum number of points was awarded by 55 participants.

b. Working in an international environment

For the participants, the outgoing mobility brought added-value for working in an international context, this dimension being among the best awarded element by the beneficiaries. Thus, from the 104 valid answers, the average of the awarded points was 4.78 (figure 13). However, one participant awarded 2 points and 2 participants awarded 3 points while 15 participants awarded 4 points.

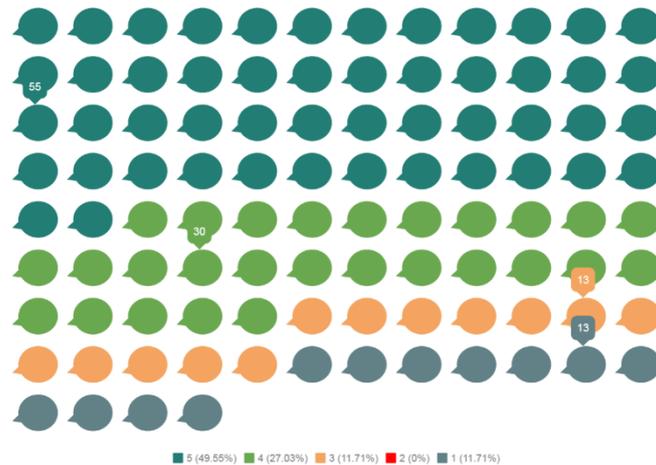


Figure 12 Share of perceived impact of the mobility experience over the beneficiaries linguistic skills (according to their assessment of the perceived impact on a scale from 1 – very small impact to 5 – very big impact, NA = No-Answer)

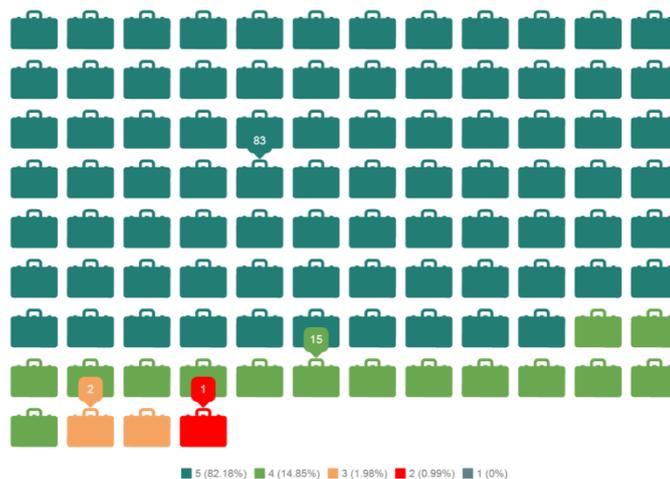


Figure 13 Share of perceived impact of the mobility experience over the beneficiaries possibilities to work in an international environment (according to their assessment of the perceived impact on a scale from 1 – very small impact to 5 – very big impact, NA = No-Answer)

c. Teamwork

Regarding the teamwork dimension, the average of 101 valid answers was 4.38. An argument for the lower score might be the short period allocated for the experience that is not sufficient for the development, integration and the effective teamwork within the host institution. Thus, 1 participant awarded 1 point, 2 participants awarded 2 points, 12 participants awarded 3 points, and 28 awarded 4 points while 58 participants awarded 5 points (figure 14).

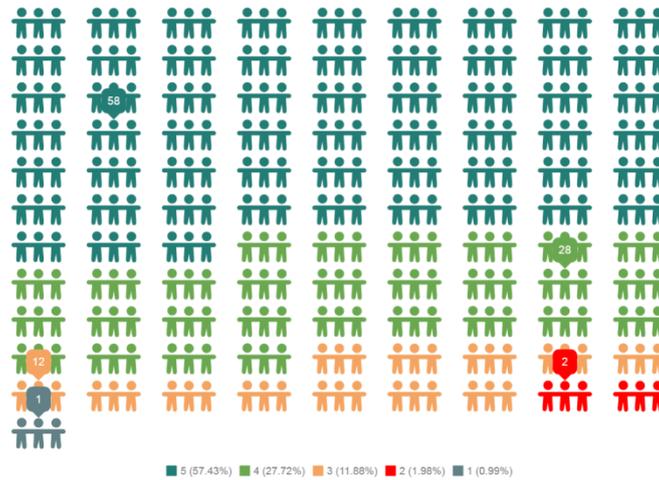


Figure 14 Share of perceived impact of the mobility experience over the beneficiaries' teamwork skills (according to their assessment of the perceived impact on a scale from 1 – very small impact to 5 – very big impact, NA = No-Answer)

d. Research skills

Of all the analysed dimensions, the contribution of international experiences to develop research skills received the lowest score. Thus, the average of 99 valid answers was 3.98. One conclusion might be that the research activities are less addressed within the programme while the teaching activities receive more focus together with the training component. 6 participants awarded 1 point, 2 participants awarded 2 points, 19 participants awarded 3, 29 participants awarded 4 and 42 participants awarded 5 (figure 15).

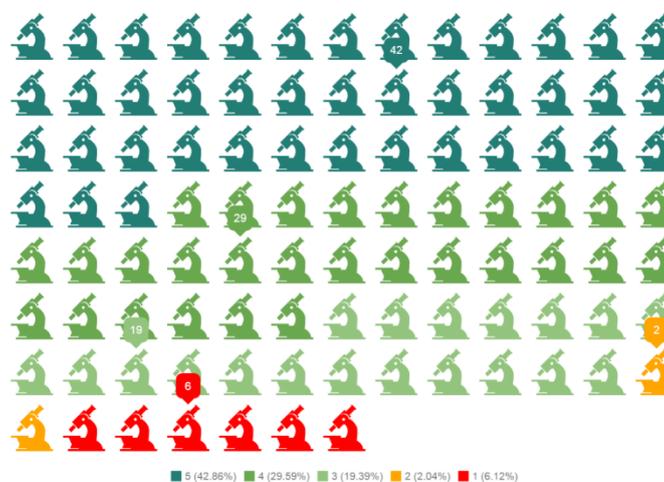


Figure 15 Share of perceived impact of the mobility experience over the beneficiaries' research skills (according to their assessment of the perceived impact on a scale from 1 – very small impact to 5 – very big impact, NA = No-Answer)

e. Using multimedia skills

Using ICT in mobility experiences was awarded an average score of 4.11 points from 100 valid responses. 3 persons awarded 1 point, 5 persons awarded 2 points, 18 persons awarded 4 points, 26 persons awarded 4 while 48 beneficiaries awarded maximum score. Of course the responses varies from one field of study to another depending on the need to use ICT instruments in a specific field of study (figure 16).

f. Networking for further cooperation

The networking activity received the second greatest score among the assessed elements with an average of 4.69 points from the 104 valid responses. More than that, the networking component is an aspect that was noted as positive by many participants in the comments from the open questions. In other words, the mobility experience is very useful in developing further cooperation between Romanian and foreign universities. No person awarded 1 or 2 points but there were 6 participants awarding 3 points and 20 participants awarding 4 points while the maximum score was awarded by 78 participants (figure 17).

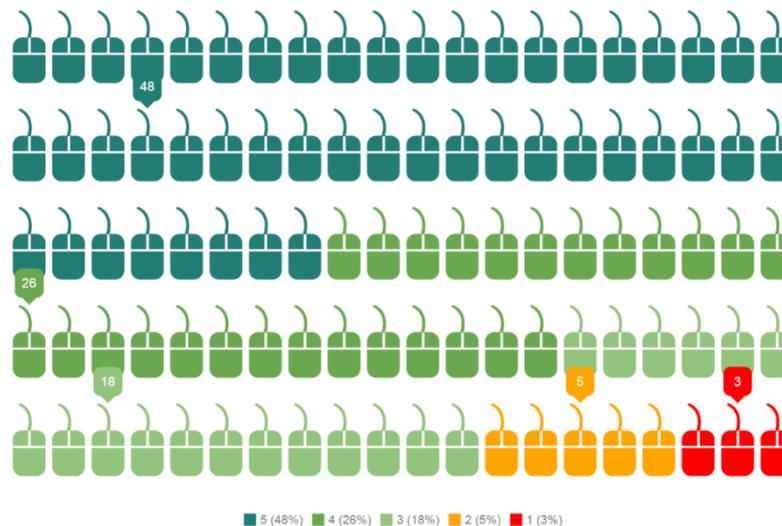


Figure 16 Share of perceived impact of the mobility experience over the beneficiaries' skills of using multimedia tools (according to their assessment of the perceived impact on a scale from 1 – very small impact to 5 – very big impact, NA = No-Answer)



Figure 17 Share of perceived impact of the mobility experience over the beneficiaries’ networking skills and availability for further cooperation (according to their assessment of the perceived impact on a scale from 1 – very small impact to 5 – very big impact, NA = No-Answer)

g. Peer learning

The peer learning process was awarded an average score of 4.08 from 95 valid responses.

h. Teaching centred on learning outcomes

Regarding the teaching centred on learning outcomes, this dimension received an average of 4.04 points from 98 valid responses. More than that, this is the analysed element that received the greatest number of 1 point from 10 persons. One possible argument might be that the people who awarded 1 point were among the participants that went in an outgoing mobility for training purposes.

In conclusion, comparing the average points obtained by all the analysed dimensions, one can observe that the greatest impact of the mobility, from the participants’ perspective, is working in an international context and the opportunity to develop further collaborations with foreign universities (this being the best awarded element). In contrast, the mobility contributed less to enhancing the research competences and, just as little, the mobility focuses on learning outcomes in the teaching activities.

Asked about the positive elements that they can note after their international experience, the responses converge towards the same strengths with some specific aspects. The positive elements with the highest frequency of occurrence are as following:

- The most common remark was related to the development of cooperation relations between the home institution and the host university and the openness shown by the host institution to develop common projects either in research or other mobility projects. More than that, there are cases when the participants came back with clear partnership agreements:
"My visit will lead to at least 2 or 3 teaching mobilities!" /" At least one proposal of a project in a field of common interest!"
"the possibility to cooperate with young research team in order to present scientifically articles with autors from both institutions"
- The high interest of students and teachers on the activities carried on by the participants (in co-teaching activities, presentations or other teaching activities),
- Organisational aspects: warm welcome given by the host institution, concern for quickly solving the problems, good conditions for different activities, etc.

Other positive aspects noted by the participants were:

- The interdisciplinary character of activities in the mobility experience,
- Enhancing their teaching methods,
- The quality of international students services within the host institution,
- Building trust between home and host institution,
- Enhancing professional and personal competences,
- Cultural and social benefits,
- Personal development,
- Making new friends.

Regarding the faced difficulties – only rarely participants noted some related to:

- Difficulties in communicating with the right persons before the visit,
- Poor funding – few money for covering all the costs in an international visit in a country where the living costs are high for transportation and accommodations.
- The bureaucratic problems – for example the fact that the money was given in cash to participants, without the possibility for electronic transfer;
- The linguistic barriers especially regarding the technical language.

Organisational and financial conditions

Regarding the organisation conditions associated with the mobility activities, the highest average score was awarded to the collaboration with the host institution while the lowest

average score was awarded to accommodation conditions. The accommodation conditions received the lowest average score due to some participants that awarded the lowest number of points meaning that there were some problems in special cases.

Table 10 Organizational and financial conditions

	Average score
Conditions relating to the mobility (cooperation with the host institution, acces to facilities, etc.)	4.92
Accomodation	4.63
EEA grant conditions	4.83

The overall quality of the mobility experience

When asked if the planned objectives were met after the international experience, with only one exception, all participants responded positively.

The overall quality of the mobility is aslo the assesed dimension that, among all the dimensions from the feedback questionnaire, received the best score: 4.8.

Table 11 Quality of the mobility period

	Average score	No. Of valid answers
Evaluation of the outcome of the mobility	4.82	106
Evaluation of social/cultural benefits of the mobility	4.89	105
Overall evaluation of the EEA mobility	4.86	105

All the responses given by the beneficiaries, validate the general added values that the EEA programme brings, be it about enhancing professional skills or about soft skills (working in an international environment, cultural skills, etc.).

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

VI.1. Conclusions

This last section of the report will answer to the question asked in the introduction regarding the programmes' impact at the individual, institutional and national level. At the end, the authors provide recommendations improving the programme implementation in Romania.

What is the individual, institutional and national impact of the programme?

This section will discuss the success of the programme on each of the dimensions proposed by this report. First, in terms of impact at individual, institutional and national level, the analysis (detailed in the previous sections of the report) has revealed the positive impact of each of these levels. At individual level, the impact of the programme was assessed using the 152 responses in the feedback form collected from the students' beneficiaries and the 116 respondents out of the total number of mobile staff.

Conclusions regarding the impact on students

Out of the 152 student respondents, 144 were outgoing students and 8 were incoming students. They were asked to assess the perceived impact of the mobility experience in their lives and:

- 84% of the outgoing students consider themselves more capable of obtaining a job in a foreign country, and more open to look for one, due to this experience;
- Out of them 68.75% consider it will definitely help them in their career, and 47% of them consider will definitely help them find a job;
- 54% of the respondents (both incoming and outgoing students) consider that the mobility experience has helped them develop their intercultural skills very much;
- 45.3% consider it has helped them improve their language skills very much;
- 63.3% consider it has helped them very much in becoming more self-reliant;
- 76.6% consider it has helped them become more independent.

Therefore, the positive impact of the student beneficiaries is undeniable. They are more prepared for a life in a global world.

Conclusions regarding the impact on staff

After analysing the 116 questionnaires filled by the beneficiaries, some important conclusions can be drawn as:

- The “Al. I. Cuza” University is the most visible university in developing and implementing projects from the analysed programme, 34% from the total staff respondents are incoming and outgoing beneficiaries from Iasi. More than that, one can conclude that the Iasi University also has the capacity and the proper links to attract a higher number of incoming staff.
- The programme managed to involve teachers from the majority of study field with an excess of social sciences teachers (41% from the total participants). However, one can observe a low participation of staff from the key areas, staff from **engineering sciences encompassing only 7% of the total participants and medical sciences only 10%**.
- A remarkable added-value identified was that the progame also contributes to enhancing the administrative services of Romanian universities due to the involvement of administrative staff in international mobility. Thus, outside the academic impact of the programme, the mobility experiences can contribute to enhancing administrative activities as: internationalisation support services, communication services, educational marketing, accounting, IT an so on.
- In the case of Romanian staff, a greater number of young teachers are interested in a mobility experience of teaching or training compared with the teachers that have more experience in the Romanian universities. In the last case, the teachers either had sufficient international experiences for their age or are not open for such an experience for different reasons (cultural or linguistic barriers for example).
- Of the total participants that filled in the questionnaire, 60% were incoming or outgoing staff from/in Norway.
- The greatest impact of the mobility, from the participants’ perspective, is working in an international context and the opportunity to develop further collaborations with foreign universities (this being the best awarded elements). In contrast, the mobility contributes less to enhancing the research competences and, just as little, the mobility focuses on learning outcomes in the theacing activities.
- The development of cooperation relations between the home institution and the host university and the high interest of foreign students and teachers for the Romanian

staff activities was among the most frequent positive elements mentioned by the beneficiaries while the accommodation conditions was among the negative aspects.

- The overall quality of the mobility is the assessed dimension that, among all the dimensions from the feedback questionnaire, received the best score.

At institutional level, the impact of the programme is linked to the opportunity offered to HEIs of planning and implementing projects that would increase the number of the members of their academic community that experience a mobile period abroad and would open up networking opportunities with the funding countries. 29 Romanian HEIs benefitted of funding for the projects they proposed. They represent almost one third off all Romanian universities, both public and private. They implemented 98 projects of a total value of 4,398,540.66 EUR and they reported to have benefitted from: learning or teaching opportunities abroad, as well as research opportunities in common projects with the partners. That created the favourable context for personal and professional development and an increased institutional capacity (e.g. the development of their International Relations Office). They also reported positively about their improved international visibility, their partnership with institutions from the funding states, the changes they went through in order to prepare for incoming students which is perceived as a positive institutional impact.

At national level the benefit can be inferred from the individual and institutional impact and is directly related to the sum invested in the program (4.5 M EUR) that translated in both individual mobility projects and inter-institutional cooperation projects. Both contributed to the raised capacity of the Romanian HEIs in terms of implementing a project, networking and organising a mobility programme. As many institutional beneficiaries decided to apply for funding for mobility projects, one of the most obvious impacts at national level is the raise in the number of mobile students and staff. This is important due to Romania's commitment to reach a level of 20% of all HE graduates who are part of a mobility period¹.

Looking at the programme indicators, until the time of the report, the mobile staff target was exceeded by 59% while the mobile students target was not reached one argument might be

¹ As part of the Bologna Process, Romania along with all the other EHEA members have agreed upon several targets regarding the international dimension of education. One of them is: *"in 2020, at least 20% of those graduating in the EHEA should have had a study or training period abroad"* and it is re-iterated within the Strategy adopted by the EHEA members in 2012, during the Ministerial Conference in Bucharest, Romania. The full text of the strategy is available, in English, here: <http://www.ehea.info/cid101043/ministerial-conference-bucharest-2012.html> - last accessed in January 2017.

the limited capacity of the universities from the donor states to absorb all the requests from Romania.

The social integration of Roma students, especially in mobility projects remain a challenge for the higher education system and needs new and innovative measures to be improved.

Were the expected results of the programme met?

One purpose of this report was to assess whether the way the programme was implemented in Romania succeeded in reaching its pre-set objectives. The scope of the programme for Romania was to enhance its human capital and knowledge base, and it was reached through the investments made both in individual mobility projects and interinstitutional cooperation projects. This is confirmed by the responses offered by the beneficiaries of the programme, positively assessing its impact and identifying among the derived benefits: personal and professional development of the mobile students and staff as well as relevant and useful opportunities of knowledge exchange with the institutional partners.

The programme also aimed to contribute to the reduction of the economic and social disparities in EEA and it was partially reached through the opportunity offered to students and teachers to study or work abroad in countries with high living costs, where the ERASMUS grants are far to be sufficient. It is most probably that such an experience would not have been available to them if they couldn't benefit from the grant offered within the program as a financial support. However, only 3% of the benefiting institutions reported a successful involvement of Roma students – a social-economic disadvantaged group in the Romanian HE area – thus proving that there is more to be done in order for the programme to reach disadvantaged groups. This is especially important due to the international and national commitments Romania has made in the areas of social inclusion and reduction of economic and social disparities.

The programme aimed **to strengthen the bilateral relations between Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein and Romania** and this objective was successfully reached as it created partnership opportunities between the HEI of these countries, establishing the context for networking and exchanging good-practice examples and knowledge. 44% of the institutional beneficiaries of the program that answered the feedback form appreciate that the programme

helped them open-up collaboration opportunities with potential partners from the funding states, while 13% of the respondents consider the programme has helped them strengthen the already existing relationship they had with partners.

In some cases, the analysis has provided insufficient information for analysing the level of achieving the programme's pre-defined priorities. One of them referred to allocating 10% of the total funding "shall target the improvement of the situation for the Roma population – the only available information is that out of the 23 HEIs that received funding for the projects proposed, only 3% reported to have contributed to this priorities. Another priority referred to allocating 80% of the total amount will go to students and academic staff mobility and this priority was met as 84% of the funded projects were mobility projects. The third priority referred to allocating 20% of the total amount to cooperation projects between institutions. This priority was reached on one side, by the inter-institutional cooperation projects and the small size cooperation projects financed from the bilateral funds and, on the other side, in reality all the projects contributed indirectly to this outcome as all the mobility projects also meant establishing a functioning partnership.

In conclusion the consistency between the pre-set objectives and the implementation has been ensured and lead to a rather successfully reach of the pre-set objectives and priorities.

Were the beneficiaries satisfied with the programme?

The report has highlighted the satisfaction of the programme beneficiaries, thus 94.4% of the student beneficiaries of an outgoing mobility were very satisfied and satisfied with their Erasmus experience, while 37.5% of the incoming students were very satisfied but all the incoming students answered very satisfied or satisfied with their experience. Regarding the staff, as shown before, the overall quality of the programme was awarded the highest score.

What are the trends observed related to the programme implementation?

The analysis has pointed out a tendency for HEIs to propose projects that will contribute to the increase of their institutional capacity and develop their international dimension. Therefore, many of the financed projects (half of those described by the respondents) were targeting increasing the international visibility of the institution; establishing new or strengthening old partnerships with HEIs from funding states, setting up knowledge transfer

and contribute to the increase in quality of HE. Fostering their previous experience in implementing mobility projects, the institutional beneficiaries chose to propose mobility opportunities for their students and staff for funding within the programme, while only 15% of them implemented a sort of research projects.

VI.2. Recommendations for the programme

Improving student mobility

- Put up efforts in order to solve the issue of full recognition of study periods abroad: cooperation between the Agency and the HEIs (the beneficiaries of the programme) is needed to solve this problem beyond creating the regulatory framework; a consistent monitoring of its implementation is needed.
- Put up efforts to better communicate the details of the mobility programmes to the beneficiaries so that they have easy online access to updated information about calls, implied bureaucratic procedures, selection criteria and relevant deadlines.
- Offer support or promoting different opportunities to beneficiaries for acquiring the necessary language skills in order to ensure the quality of the mobility programmes.

Improving staff mobility

- Implement ways to stimulate more projects from polytechnic, medicine and art universities in order to balance staff mobility on field of teaching (examples: organising promotion seminar especially for specific polytechnic/medicine/art universities, asking for their feedback in order to tackle their interest, etc.);
- Analysing the opportunity to extend the mobility period for both teaching and training.

Reducing the bureaucracy

- Conducting the financial operations in euro not in the Romania currency (lei);
- Open the possibility to work with banks not only the Treasury;
- Implement specific measures to reduce bureaucracy as, for example, eliminating the “conform cu originalul” signature from every document copy, or developing online platforms for submitting the papers required for being part in the program, for reporting upon arrival or for offering feedback etc.;

- Offer information about the entire bureaucratic process from the beginning (a complete guide for beneficiaries) in order for the beneficiaries to easily follow it and make sure they fulfil all the requirements before leaving the host country.

Allocation of funds

- The Agency could consider developing a new category of projects besides mobility and cooperation categories. This new category could finance projects aimed at promoting Romanian higher education in the DS (this will lead at attracting more incoming students and staff and also enhancing trust and building bridges for new cooperation projects). This new call could finance small initiatives regarding: university's participation in international educational fairs in the DS, seminars and workshops with students in the DS, online instruments etc. Another approach could be to finance one national initiative implemented by the Agency or by other national NGO or institution. These initiatives could promote all the HEIs, projects and activities within the programme to the DS through specific instruments.
- Other calls could fund those projects targeting to develop the capacity of HEIs to implement projects, to offer support to outgoing or incoming students or to set-up partnership with the institutions from the Donor States.
- Taking into consideration the beneficiaries' feedback to adjust the value of the grant to the real costs (allocate more money per grant or special additional grants for travelling).
- Ensure that all the mobility programmes send the grants to the beneficiaries before their departure from their home country.
- Put up efforts to continue to increase the total budget of the programme.

Instruments for facilitating new partnerships between Romanian and DS universities

- The Agency should better promote the already existing instruments while investing in developing new ones as: data bases, lists of contacts, more matching seminars, flyers, online matching instruments, etc.

Enhancing the participation of disadvantaged groups

- The PO could consider implementing a selective incentive system after the universities' feedback for them to involve in such programmes more students coming from disadvantaged groups –e.g. Roma students.

- The Agency could, for the mobility calls, to request a signed partnership between universities and NGOs dealing with roma students' issues for a certain number of mobilities. These NGOs could better manage the opportunities for roma students' mobility. They already deal with roma access to higher education and offer special scholarships for them. In this context, they might have better links with the roma student population in order to better promote the mobility opportunities.

Programme implementation

- Revising the schedule of the programme taking into account the universities' feedback;

Enhancing the Roma student participation

- The PO could consider implementing a selective incentive system after the universities' feedback.
- The Agency could, for the mobility calls, to request a signed partnership between universities and NGOs dealing with roma students' issues for a certain number of mobilities. These NGOs could better manage the opportunities for roma students' mobility. They already deal with roma access to higher education and offer special scholarships for them. In this context, they might have better links with the roma student population in order to better promote the mobility opportunities.

Other recommendations

- Increasing the transparency of the programmes by offering relevant information in a way that best suits the needs and expectations of the interested parties;
- Increase the number of universities that fill in the application thus requesting for funding for their projects (diversify the pool of beneficiaries). This could be done through a stronger promotion of the funding opportunities or other incentives for the universities that did not apply in (examples: organizing events for specific universities (e.g. events only for Polytechnic universities) or surveying the real needs to remove the barriers to submitting project applications).

Recommendations for the universities

- Put up efforts in order to solve the issue of full recognition of study periods abroad;

- Adopt a holistic approach in finding solutions to better prepare students for their period abroad both in terms of their language skills and in terms of adapting to the local culture of the host -country;
- Offer logistic support in filling up the specific paper-work, finding accommodation, prepare for the mobility period;
- Better promote the university academic offer in the DS;
- Develop the students' services for foreign students (from social services to counseling and cultural integration).
- Include the International Relation Department (IRD) in the institutional processes of developing strategies for better equipping the students and staff with the necessary information, skills and abilities they would need upon going in mobility experiences for them to adapt to the new cultural environment;
- Improve the cooperation with the partner IRD in order to ensure the cultural adaptation of the outgoing student or staff in the host institution;

About the authors

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