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## Acronyms

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<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AT</td>
<td>Advocacy Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COIL</td>
<td>Collaborative Online International Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECTS</td>
<td>European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System</td>
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<tr>
<td>ENP</td>
<td>European Neighbourhood Policy</td>
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<td>EVE</td>
<td>Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange</td>
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<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic product</td>
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<td>IaH</td>
<td>Internationalisation at Home</td>
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<td>iOOCs</td>
<td>Interactive Open Online Courses</td>
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<td>MIT</td>
<td>Massachusetts Institute of Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOOCs</td>
<td>Massive Open Online Courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OFD</td>
<td>Online Facilitated Dialogue</td>
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<tr>
<td>TEPs</td>
<td>Transnational Exchange Projects</td>
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Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange (EVE) was a pilot project, run by the European Commission from 2018 to 2020. EVE provided an accessible, ground-breaking way for young people to engage in intercultural learning experiences online through a range of activities. EVE expanded the scope of the Erasmus+ programme through online collaborative learning activities known as Virtual Exchanges (VE) and training programmes. Virtual Exchange is defined as technology-enabled people-to-people educational programming, facilitated and sustained over a period of time\(^1\). Working with youth organisations and universities, the project was open to any young person aged 18-30 residing in Europe and the Southern Mediterranean\(^2\), with a target of 25,000 participants engaged by December 2020.

**Key characteristics and relevance of VE**

The present day is characterised by a social and political context of growing polarisation, increased discrimination, racism and Islamophobia where social media are used to propagate hate speech, fake news, cyberviolence against women. Youth unemployment remains a problem, above all for marginalised groups. In 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic struck the globe and has presented challenges in all sectors, not least education and youth work. A transition to the digital in various spheres may have been accelerated but COVID-19 highlighted the lack of preparedness for this. Existing inequities have been exacerbated, with women and minoritised groups affected the most, and social tensions are likely to grow. In higher education and youth work, international exchanges have been drastically reduced and there is little understanding of how long this impact will last.

In this dramatic context, EVE involved young people, educators and youth workers in experiential online and intercultural programmes which use technology to foster social proximity and build relationships across geographic and cultural differences. Unlike many online learning programmes where the focus is primarily on content, VE is based on people-to-people interaction and dialogue. The learning goals of VE include soft skills that are generally not formally recognised in other educational contexts, such as the development of intercultural awareness, empathy and the ability to work collaboratively in groups. The role of trained facilitators or educators in supporting learners to explicitly address intercultural issues and to engage with difference is a key tenet of VE, which is about pedagogy, mutual learning and exchange, not about technology.

**EVE training and exchange activities**

In contrast to informal participation in social networks, VE initiatives are structured and intentionally designed to produce learning outcomes. From 2018-2020 several models of Virtual Exchange and training courses were implemented, all of which shared a core component, facilitated dialogue sessions led by trained facilitators. In terms of development and administration of the exchange activities, some broad models can be defined:

- *“ready-made” VEs*, which were developed and administered by members of the implementing consortium, and successfully brought together large numbers of students from a wide range of contexts. These were Online Facilitated Dialogue programmes\(^3\) (OFD) and interactive open online courses\(^4\) (iOOCs) which were both characterised by weekly two-hour online facilitated dialogue sessions;

- *Advocacy Training*\(^5\) (AT) which entailed training debate team leaders who recruited local teams and led them in online debates and debate competitions;

- *“Grassroots” Transnational Exchange Projects (TEPs)*, small scale, bi- or multilateral exchanges co-developed by educators or youth workers following training\(^6\).

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1. See definition by the Virtual Exchange Coalition: http://virtualexchangecoalition.org/
2. The project was implemented by a consortium which consisted of the following organisations: Search for Common Ground, Anna Lindh Foundation, UNIMED, Sharing Perspectives Foundation, Soliya, UNICollaboration, Kiron Open Higher Education, and Migration Matters.
3. Developed and implemented by Soliya www.soliya.net
4. Developed and implemented by Sharing Perspectives Foundation
5. Developed and implemented by Anna Lindh Foundation
6. Developed and implemented by UNICollaboration
To support these models several training courses were run:

- Training for facilitators;
- Training for debate leaders (AT);
- Training to develop transnational exchange projects (TEPs).

These exchanges were often integrated in some way into formal and non-formal learning programmes. Young people’s participation in VE and their acquisition of competences was recognised in the form of badges, and in some higher education institutions also through the awarding of grades and ECTS credits.

Over the three years of its implementation, the project involved 33,541 persons: 28,426 (85%) youth participants engaged in the different VE models, and 5,115 (15%) individuals trained in Online Dialogue Facilitation, Debate Leadership or to develop Transnational EVE Projects. Thus, the target of 25,000 participants set by the European Commission was largely exceeded. It is worth noting that 2020 saw a great increase in demand, which exceeded the capacity of the initiative.

Research aims and methodology

This Final Impact Report is a follow-up to the 2018 and 2019 editions. It brings together results from the three years of the project and evaluates the impact of EVE in terms of:

- Attitudinal change: self-esteem, curiosity, intercultural communication, and attitudes towards people from different ethnic and religious groups;
- Perceived improvement in 21st century skills, which include active listening, critical thinking, digital competences, team-work and collaborative problem solving, English and/or foreign language skills;
- Perceived improvement in global competences, that is the ability to communicate or work in a culturally diverse setting; knowledge and/or interest in global events; knowledge about the relationship between and across different societies;
- Activation, which includes building meaningful relationships, becoming interested in further intercultural experiences through VE or study abroad, sharing information about what they were learning with others and challenging media misrepresentations.

The Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) team adopted a mixed-methods approach to this cross-national comparative research study. Pre- and post-exchange questionnaires were used to gather quantitative data to measure the impact on participants. Interviews and focus groups were conducted in order to properly understand the mechanisms through which change in participants took place and to understand what factors led to change and perceived improvements, as well as to explore the differences between the different models.

Summary of main findings

- A statistically significant increase in participants’ self esteem and curiosity and above all perceived effectiveness in intercultural communication was found overall.

- Participants’ feelings towards people with different ethnic and religious backgrounds improved significantly in exchanges that were intentionally designed to address dividing lines. Some changes were found to last at least up to 18 months after the end of the programme, and confidence in communication skills was found to have significantly increased further over time.

- Participants perceived improvement in their 21st century skills, above all active listening (91%), critical thinking (84%) and English and/or foreign language skills (79%).

Developed and implemented by UNICollaboration
• In terms of global skills, knowledge and/or interest in global events was found to have grown (85%) as well as understanding of the relationships between different societies (79%) and participants built meaningful relationships (72%).

• Participants were activated through their experience, 86% of respondents shared information about what they learnt with others and 61% also challenged media misrepresentations. 80% became interested in further intercultural encounters both through VE and 80% in taking part in an educational period abroad.

• Participants engaged with multiple activities available within the rich ‘ecology of Virtual Exchange’ that EVE offered.

• Experiences were evaluated very positively by exchange participants. The factor that most contributed to their positive evaluations were the encounters with peers across Europe and Southern Mediterranean and engaging with a diversity of perspectives and experiences.

• There were minor differences in terms of impact on some of the measures according to the gender of participants, but significant differences per region. Generally participants in Southern Mediterranean countries reported a higher improvement in their skills.

• The majority of EVE participants had not spent more than three months abroad (69% of respondents) and for them the change in intercultural communication and perceived improvement in 21st century skills was significantly greater than it was for students with experience of mobility.

• There were some differences across the four models of exchange piloted in terms of level of impact and specific skills which improved. This was expected, and can be attributed to differences in the specific objectives and the design of the programmes and the demographics of the groups involved. Differences were mitigated through having a range of programmes, which all together contributed to reaching the EC’s objectives.

• “Ready-made” models can offer an impactful and lasting experience to large numbers of participants, reaching a broad geographic scope with equal numbers of participants from European and Southern Mediterranean countries.

• TEPs and Debates, which are smaller-scale exchanges, can be more easily customised to different languages and specific partnerships but are more difficult and required more time to scale up.

• Satisfaction with all training courses was high and factors contributing to the positive experience were the quality of the trainers and materials, and the learning experience through interactions with fellow trainees who came from a wide range of backgrounds.

• Strong communities of educators, youth workers and debate leaders developed in the three years of the project and will continue to be active in Virtual Exchange and in bringing life to their communities.

• The facilitator community was key to the success of the EVE initiative, as facilitators led dialogue sessions in each of the four activities as well as in the TEP training. They were instrumental in assuring the quality of exchanges and creating safe spaces for participants to engage deeply also with divisive issues.

• There was a strong increase of interest and participation in exchanges and training in 2020 due to the impact of COVID-19. Participants appreciated the quality and relevance of activities to their new needs, and the opportunities offered for exchange and dialogue, which they felt were missing from many other online activities.
Recommendations

Based on the challenges faced and lessons learnt through the project a series of recommendations have been made to the European Commission.

- Adopt a clear definition of Virtual Exchange to be used across all ECU-supported initiatives, promote strong messaging around its core values and principles, and provide clear guidelines to implementers on the methodology.

- Integrate references to VE in relevant strategies to highlight its contribution to broader EU education and youth policy objectives, as has been done in the Digital Education Action Plan.

- Establish a multi-year VE programme which institutions will be able to invest in, to foster institutional buy-in and thus create long-term partnerships.

- Introduce a funding mechanism to support both VE providers running large-scale programmes, and coordinating institutions and organisations.

- Include both “tried and tested” models of VE, training programmes for educators and youth workers and opportunities for developing and piloting new formats in future initiatives.

- Support a range of VE models and work with multilingual facilitators and educators from different regions to guarantee that exchanges are offered in different languages.

- Provide funding for the purchase of devices, mobile data, the setup of tech labs, and support to vulnerable groups.

- Ensure any future VE initiatives are supported by trained facilitators and a robust quality control system, and allocate corresponding funding for trained facilitators and quality control for VE in Erasmus+ Proposal Applications that include VE.

- Grow and nurture the VE facilitator community, by ensuring investment in community-building and professional development activities, enabling further professionalisation, of this line of work and developing an incremental pay structure.

- Given the value of VE during COVID-19, continue to invest in VE initiatives as they provide safe opportunities for social proximity and engagement at a time when many people are feeling isolated, vulnerable and experiencing trauma.
Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange (EVE) était un projet pilote géré par la Commission européenne de 2018 à 2020. Le programme Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange offrait aux jeunes un moyen accessible et innovant d'approfondir leurs connaissances interculturelles en ligne, à travers un ensemble d'activités. EVE a permis d'élargir la portée du programme Erasmus+ par le biais d'activités d'apprentissage collaboratif en ligne appelées « échanges virtuels ». Les échanges virtuels sont des programmes pédagogiques interpersonnels, portés par la technologie et qui s’inscrivent dans une certaine durée. Mis en œuvre avec des universités et des organisations de jeunesse, le projet était ouvert à tou.te.s les jeunes âgé.e.s de 18 à 30 ans vivant en Europe et au sud de la Méditerranée, et avait pour objectif d’attirer 25 000 participante.e.s au cours d’une période de trois ans, se terminant en décembre 2020.

**Caractéristiques principales et pertinence des échanges virtuels**

Nous vivons une époque de polarisation croissante, dans laquelle se développent la discrimination, le racisme et l’islamophobie, et où les réseaux sociaux servent à propager des discours haineux, des informations fausses et la cyberviolence à l’encontre des femmes. Le chômage des jeunes reste un problème, surtout pour les groupes marginalisés. En 2020, la pandémie de Covid-19 a frappé le monde entier et créé des difficultés dans tous les secteurs, notamment l’enseignement et le travail avec les jeunes. Sans doute la transition vers le numérique a-t-elle été accélérée dans divers domaines, mais le Covid-19 a montré à quel point nous y étions mal préparés. Les inégalités existantes ont été exacerbées, ce qui a concerné au premier chef les femmes et les groupes minoritaires, et il est probable que les tensions sociales continueront de s’accroître. Dans les domaines de l’enseignement supérieur et du travail de jeunesse, les échanges internationaux ont été réduits de façon drastique et l’on ne sait guère combien de temps cet impact va durer.

Dans ce contexte dramatique, EVE a réuni des jeunes, des éducateur.rice.s et des travailleur.se.s de jeunesse dans le cadre de programmes interculturels qui utilisent la technologie afin d’encourager la proximité sociale et bâtir des relations qui dépassent les différences géographiques et culturelles. Contrairement à de nombreux programmes d’apprentissage en ligne, centrés surtout sur le contenu, les échanges virtuels visent l’interaction et le dialogue entre individus. Leurs objectifs d’apprentissage comprennent l’acquisition de compétences personnelles qui ne sont d’habitude pas officiellement reconnues dans d’autres contextes éducatifs, comme le développement de la sensibilité interculturelle, l’empathie et le travail en collaboration au sein d’un groupe. Le rôle que jouent les éducateur.rice.s et les facilitateur.rice.s qualifié.e.s afin d’aider les participant.e.s à aborder explicitement certaines questions interculturelles et à s’exposer à la différence est un pilier essentiel des échanges virtuels, dont les objectifs sont la pédagogie, l’apprentissage mutuel et l’échange plutôt que la technologie.

**Activités de formation et d’échange EVE**

- À l’opposé des échanges informels qui ont lieu au sein des réseaux sociaux, les projets d’échanges virtuels sont structurés et délibérément conçus afin de réaliser des objectifs pédagogiques. En 2018-2020, plusieurs modèles d’échanges virtuels et de formations ont été mis en œuvre, avec en commun un composant de base : des séances de dialogue facilité, animées par des facilitateur.rice.s qualifié.e.s. En termes de développement et d’administration des activités d’échange, plusieurs modèles peuvent être définis :
  - Les échanges virtuels « prêts à l’emploi », développés et gérés par des membres du consortium chargé de la mise en œuvre, qui ont réuni avec succès de nombreux étudiants issus de contextes très divers. Il s’agissait de programmes de dialogue en ligne facilité (OFD) et de cours interactifs ouverts en ligne (iOOCs), qui comportaient tous deux des séances hebdomadaires de dialogue facilité de deux heures ;
  - La formation au plaidoyer (AT), dans le cadre de laquelle des Team Leaders étaient formés puis recrutaient des équipes locales et les encadraient au cours de débats et de concours de débat en ligne :

8 Voir la définition de la Virtual Exchange Coalition : http://virtualexchangecoalition.org/
10 Développés et mis en œuvre par Soliya www.soliya.net
11 Développés et mis en œuvre par Sharing Perspectives Foundation
12 Développés et mise en œuvre par la Fondation Anna Lindh
Les projets d'échange transnationaux (TEPs), qui sont des échanges à petite échelle, bi- ou multilatéraux, développés par des éducateur.rice.s ou des travailleur.se.s de jeunesse suite à une formation13.

Plusieurs formations ont été données en soutien à ces modèles :

• Formation à la facilitation de débat ;
• Formation de chef.fe.s d'équipes de débat ;
• Formation au développement de projets d'échange transnationaux.

Ces échanges ont fréquemment été intégrés à des programmes d'enseignement formels et informels. La participation des jeunes aux échanges virtuels et leur acquisition de compétences ont été reconnues par l'attribution de badges, et dans certains instituts d'enseignement supérieur par l'attribution de notes et de crédits ECTS.

Au cours des trois années de mise en œuvre, le projet a attiré 33 541 participant.e.s : 28 426 (85 %) jeunes ont participé aux divers modèles d'échange virtuel, et 5 115 personnes (15 %) ont suivi une formation à la facilitation au dialogue en ligne, à la direction d'une équipe de débat ou au développement de projets transnationaux d'échange virtuel. L'objectif de 25 000 participant.e.s fixé par la Commission européenne a donc été largement dépassé. Il convient de noter qu'en 2020 la demande a fortement augmenté, au point de dépasser la capacité de l'initiative.

Objectifs et méthode de l’étude

Ce Rapport d’impact final fait suite à ceux de 2018 et 201914. Il résume les résultats des trois années du projet et évalue l’impact d’EVE en matière de :

• Changement d'attitude : estime de soi, curiosité, communication interculturelle, attitudes envers les personnes issues de groupes ethniques et religieux différents ;
• Amélioration ressentie au niveau des compétences du XXIe siècle, dont : écoute active, réflexion critique, compétences numériques, travail en équipe et résolution collaborative des problèmes, compétences linguistiques en anglais et/ou dans une autre langue ;
• Amélioration ressentie au niveau des compétences générales, c'est-à-dire : capacité à communiquer ou à travailler dans un environnement culturellement divers, connaissance de et/ou intérêt pour l'actualité mondiale ; connaissance des relations entre et dans des sociétés diverses ;
• Activation, dont la mise en place de relations authentiques, envie de participer à d'autres expériences interculturelles sous la forme d'échanges virtuels ou d'études à l'étranger, partage d'informations sur ce qui a été appris avec les autres, remise en cause des représentations erronées véhiculées par les médias.

Dans le cadre de cette étude de recherche comparative transnationale, l'équipe de suivi et d'évaluation (S&E) a adopté une démarche mixte. Des données quantitatives ont été collectées au moyen de questionnaires pré- et post-échange afin de mesurer l’impact sur les participant.e.s. Des entretiens et des groupes de discussion ont été organisés afin de bien comprendre les mécanismes qui ont amené les participant.e.s à changer et les facteurs qui ont conduit à ces changements et améliorations ressenties, et aussi d'évaluer les différences entre les différents modèles.

Résumé des principales conclusions

• Une augmentation statistiquement significative de l’estime de soi et de la curiosité des participant.e.s, et surtout de leur capacité ressentie à communiquer de manière interculturelle.

13 Développés et mis en œuvre par UNICollaboration
14 Available at https://op.europa.eu/s/oFUu and https://op.europa.eu/s/oFUv, respectively.
La perception par les participant.e.s des personnes issues de communautés ethniques et religieuses différentes a été améliorée de manière significative lors des échanges spécifiquement conçus pour traiter de sujets controversés. Certains de ces changements d'attitude ont perduré encore 18 mois au moins après la fin du programme, et la confiance des participant.e.s dans leurs compétences de communication se sont améliorées de manière significative au fil du temps.

Les participant.e.s ont ressenti une amélioration de leurs compétences du XXIe siècle, principalement l’écoute active (91 %), la réflexion critique (84 %) et leurs compétences linguistiques en anglais et/ou une autre langue (79 %).

Dans le cas des compétences générales, la connaissance de et/ou l’intérêt pour l’actualité mondiale s’est accru (85 %) de même que la compréhension des relations entre sociétés différentes (79 %), et les participant.e.s ont noué des relations authentiques (72 %).

L’expérience a eu un impact concret sur les participant.e.s : 86 % des répondants ont partagé des informations concernant ce qu’ils/elles avaient appris des autres, et 61 % ont remis en cause les représentations erronées véhiculées par les médias. 80 % se sont intéressés à autre rencontres interculturelles, sous la forme d’échanges virtuels et (80 %) d’un séjour d’études à l’étranger.

Les participant.e.s se sont impliqué.e.s dans les activités multiples proposées dans le cadre de ‘la riche écologie de l’échange virtuel’ du projet EVE.

L’avis des participant.e.s concernant leurs expériences a été très positif. Le facteur qui a le plus contribué à ces réponses positives a été les rencontres avec leurs homologues d’Europe et du sud de la Méditerranée ainsi que la confrontation à des expériences et perspectives diverses.

En termes d’impact, certaines mesures ont légèrement varié en fonction du genre des participant.e.s, et de manière significative en fonction de leur région d’origine. De façon générale, les participant.e.s des pays du sud de la Méditerranée ont estimé avoir davantage amélioré leurs compétences.

La plupart des participant.e.s à EVE n’avaient pas passé plus de trois mois à l’étranger (69 % des répondants), et pour ceux-là, le changement apporté par la communication interculturelle et l’amélioration ressentie de leurs compétences du XXIe siècle a été nettement plus important que chez les étudiant.e.s ayant une expérience de la mobilité.

En termes d’impact et d’amélioration de compétences spécifiques, des différences entre les quatre modèles d’échange ont été constatées. Ce fait était attendu et peut être attribué aux différences entre les objectifs spécifiques et la conception des programmes ainsi que la composition démographique des groupes concernés. Ces différences ont été atténuées par la diversité des programmes, qui ensemble ont permis d’atteindre les objectifs de la CE.

Les modèles « prêts à l’emploi » offrent à de nombreux participant.e.s une expérience marquante et durable sur une vaste zone géographique, avec un même nombre de participant.e.s originaires d’Europe et du sud de la Méditerranée.

Les projets d’échange transnationaux et les débats ont lieu à une plus petite échelle, mais peuvent être adaptés plus facilement à des langues différentes et à des partenariats spécifiques. En revanche, il est plus long et plus difficile d’accroître leur échelle.

Toutes les formations se sont déroulées à la grande satisfaction des participant.e.s ; la qualité des formateurs et des matériels ainsi que l’apprentissage à travers des interactions avec d’autres apprenants issus de milieux très divers ont contribué à ce succès.

Au cours des trois années qu’a duré le projet, des communautés fortes d’éducateur.rice.s, de travailleur.se.s de la jeunesse et de chef.fe.s d’équipes se sont développées et continueront de travailler dans le domaine de l’échange virtuel et d’enrichir leurs communautés.

La communauté des facilitateur.rice.s a joué un rôle essentiel dans le succès de l’initiative EVE : ils/elles ont encadré les séances de dialogue dans le cadre de chacune des quatre activités et lors de la
formation des Projets d'échange transnationaux, et ont contribué à garantir des échanges de qualité ainsi qu’à créer des espaces sûrs qui permettaient aux participant.e.s d’évoquer en profondeur des sujets controversés.

- En raison de l’impact du Covid-19, l’intérêt pour et la participation aux formations et aux échanges s’est fortement accrue au cours de l’année 2020. Les participant.e.s ont apprécié la qualité et la pertinence des activités à leurs nouveaux besoins ainsi que lesopportunités d’échange et de dialogue, qu’ils/elles estimaient absentes de nombreuses autres activités en ligne.

**Recommandations**

Sur la base des défis créés par ce projet et des enseignements qui en ont été tirés, un ensemble de recommandations ont été présentées à la Commission européenne.

- Adoption d’une définition précise de l’échange virtuel qui serait utilisée dans le cadre de l’ensemble des initiatives financées par la CE, promotion de la diffusion de messages forts concernant ses valeurs et principes de base, et fourniture de directives méthodologiques précises aux personnes chargées de la mise en œuvre ;

- Intégration dans les stratégies concernées de références aux échanges virtuels afin de mettre en valeur la contribution de ceux-ci à l’enrichissement des objectifs de l’UE relatifs à l’éducation et aux politiques de jeunesse, ainsi que cela a été fait dans le Plan d’action en matière d’éducation numérique\(^\text{15}\) ;

- Mise en place d’un programme pluriannuel d’échanges virtuels dans lequel les institutions pourront investir, afin d’encourager la participation de celles-ci et de mettre en place des partenariats à long terme ;

- Mise en place d’un mécanisme de financement afin de soutenir les fournisseurs d’échanges virtuels qui gèrent des programmes à grande échelle ou qui coordonnent des institutions ou des organisations ;

- Inclure à la fois des modèles d’échange virtuel qui ont fait leurs preuves, des programmes de formation pour les éducateur.rice.s et les travailleur.se.s de jeunesse, et des opportunités de développement et de pilotage de nouveaux formats dans le cadre d’initiatives à venir ;

- Soutenir plusieurs modèles d’échange virtuel et travailler avec des facilitateur.rice.s et éducateur.rice.s polyglottes originaires de régions diverses afin de garantir que les échanges soient proposés en plusieurs langues ;

- Financer l’achat de matériel, de données mobiles, de laboratoires technologiques ainsi qu’un soutien aux groupes vulnérables.

- Veiller à ce que toutes les initiatives d’échange virtuel à venir soient encadrées par des facilitateur.rice.s qualifiée.e.s et disposent d’un système de contrôle qualité robuste, et prévoir un financement correspondant pour la formation des facilitateur.rice.s et le contrôle qualité des échanges virtuels dans les propositions Erasmus+ incluant des échanges virtuels ;

- Développer et encourager la communauté des facilitateur.rice.s d’échanges virtuels en veillant à investir dans des activités de développement de cette communauté afin de professionnaliser encore davantage leur activité ; développement d’une grille de rémunération ;

- Compte tenu de l’importance des échanges virtuels pendant la pandémie, continuer d’investir dans les initiatives d’échanges virtuels, qui permettent de rapprocher les personnes et de les faire dialoguer en toute sécurité à un moment où elles se sentent seules, vulnérables et traumatisées.

1 Introduction

Launched by the European Commission (EC) in 2018 for a maximum duration of three years\(^\text{16}\), the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange (EVE) pilot initiative aimed to expand the reach and scope of the Erasmus+ programme through online, collaborative learning activities known as Virtual Exchanges (VE). VE as a pedagogy is defined as technology-enabled, people-to-people educational programming, facilitated and sustained over a period of time. In other words, it engages participants in sustained online intercultural collaboration and communication with peers under the guidance of trained facilitators and/or educators.

The specific objectives of this innovative project included:

- Encouraging intercultural dialogue through online people-to-people interactions;
- Promoting various types of Virtual Exchange as a complement to Erasmus+ physical mobility, allowing more young people to benefit from intercultural and international experience;
- Enhancing critical thinking and media literacy, and the use of Internet and social media;
- Fostering the development of soft skills in participants, including the practice of foreign languages and teamwork, notably to enhance employability;
- Supporting the objectives of the 2015 Paris Declaration to promote citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education;
- Strengthening the youth dimension of the EU neighbourhood policy with Southern Mediterranean countries.

From its launch in January 2018 until its conclusion in December 2020, EVE provided an accessible, groundbreaking way for young people to engage in intercultural learning experiences online. Open to any young person aged between 18 and 30, from Erasmus+ Programme Countries\(^\text{17}\) and the Southern Mediterranean region\(^\text{18}\), the pilot was also intended for those working with youth — such as teachers in higher education or youth workers — who wished to design and/or offer Virtual Exchange activities to their students or members of their organisation. With a target of 25,000 participants over the three years of implementation and a yearly budget of just under 2 millions euros, EVE was the largest, most comprehensive initiative to date in Europe to promote and integrate VE as a structured and accredited form of digital international learning for young people, as part of their formal or non-formal education.

This Final Impact Report is a follow-up to the 2018 and 2019 editions\(^\text{19}\). It brings together results from the three years of the project, and presents an analysis of data from the first 30 months of implementation, that is five “semesters” of exchanges.\(^\text{20}\)

\(^{16}\) Following a tender procedure launched in 2017, the EVE project was established under a contract with the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) in 2018, and financed by the European Union’s budget. The original one-year contract was renewed twice on the basis of successful completion of deliverables and meeting of key performance indicators.

\(^{17}\) The 27 EU Member States, the UK (until 31 December 2020), Iceland, Liechtenstein, North Macedonia Norway, Serbia (since 2019), and Turkey.

\(^{18}\) As defined in the European Neighbourhood Policy: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine*, Syria, and Tunisia. (*This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the Member States on this issue.)*

\(^{19}\) Available at https://op.europa.eu/s/oFUu and https://op.europa.eu/s/oFUv, respectively.

\(^{20}\) To ensure that there would be sufficient time for an in-depth analysis of the project data, it was decided to limit it to the information gathered during the first 18 months of implementation. The data collected over this period was deemed sufficient for an accurate assessment of EVE as a whole, as no major changes were expected in the final months.
The report begins with a short overview of the European policy context for launching EVE and an overview of present-day challenges it seeks to address, before outlining why VE is relevant to this context and how it aims to attain the EC’s objectives (Chapter 2). This background presentation is followed by a brief outline of the project’s structure and the different models of Virtual Exchange developed (Chapter 3).

After a description of the research methodology adopted for this study (Chapter 4), the report provides an overview of participation demographics (Chapter 5), before delving deeper into EVE’s overall impact in terms of attitudinal change(s), perceived improvement of 21st century skills, global competence and activation of participants (Chapter 6). Subsequently, the characteristics of the four different VE models piloted under this project are compared based on an in-depth analysis of each activity, looking at its demographics, learning outcomes and specific strengths (Chapter 7). Insights into the long-term impact of EVE are presented with a summary of findings from longitudinal case studies on selected EVE participants and a quantitative study of the effects of one of the exchange activities up to 18 months after the exchange (Chapter 8).

EVE stakeholders were not only exchange participants, but also educators and youth workers who took part in training courses, some of whom developed their own Virtual Exchanges (Chapter 9). Another key element to EVE’s success was the facilitator community, whose involvement was essential to guarantee the quality of participants’ VE experience: after intensive training, online facilitators supported hundreds of dialogue groups over the three years of the project across the four activities (Chapter 10).

As the EVE initiative was intended to pilot and test the most effective VE models to complement Erasmus+ physical mobility, the report also explores the relations between Virtual Exchange and Erasmus mobility (Chapter 11), and concludes with a presentation of the main challenges encountered in the development, communication and implementation of the project; the lessons learnt over these three years; and recommendations for future VE initiatives (Chapter 12).
2 Background and literature review

2.1 Legal and Policy Context

As stated in the tender specifications, EVE fell under the European Union’s (EU) Youth Strategy, which set out a framework for cooperation covering the years 2010-2018. The strategy followed two main objectives: to provide more and equal opportunities for young people in education and the labour market, and to advance active participation of young people in society.

Other relevant policy developments referred to in the tender specifications were:

- The Paris Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education. This declaration marked a recognition of the challenge in safeguarding pluralistic societies and called for education systems and policies to promote greater social inclusion and positive interactions in diverse societies;

- The “Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy” (2015) whereby the EU puts youth at the core of its cooperation with neighbouring countries, particularly the Southern Mediterranean countries. This policy document prioritises youth employability and economic development, modernisation and investment, as well as engagement with civil society, especially youth organisations by creating people to people contacts and networks for young people of all ages in the EU and neighbouring countries, to foster mutual respect, understanding and open societies.

- Furthermore, the promotion of EVE was a result of the recognition of the limitations and existing constraints which mean international mobility through Erasmus+ is not available for all would-be participants — particularly those in Southern Mediterranean countries.

2.2 Societal Challenges

The Paris Declaration — which was signed by European education ministers in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in Brussels and Paris — highlighted the need for promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education. More recently, the EC’s communication “A Union of equality: EU anti-racism action plan 2020-2025” stated that “Discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin is prohibited in the European Union (EU). Yet such discrimination persists in our society. It is not enough to be against racism. We have to be active against it.”

According to the European Network Against Racism (ENAR), between 2014 and 2019, hate crimes targeting racial and ethnic minorities went up. This rise has been linked to a growing polarisation both at a political level and within communities, and to an increase in racist rhetoric and incitement towards violence and hate. In the aftermath of political events (whether these are political statements or terrorist attacks), Muslims or those perceived as Muslims are particularly vulnerable to hate crimes in Europe, and since 2015 there has been an increase in hate crimes against migrants. Islamophobia is gradually being recognised as a systemic form of racism in Europe, and ways to address this problem are being sought at policy levels. Racism and prejudice are present across the Euromed region, not only in Europe, with widespread discrimination against asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants in particular.

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26 https://www.enar-eu.org/Frequently-asked-questions-1160
Mainstream and social media play key roles in the creation and dissemination of narratives and discourses about the “other”, which can promote hate speech and exacerbate societal tensions. Serious concerns have also been raised about the dissemination of “fake news” in political campaigns and elections, as well as the use of social media to incite violence. Cyber-violence against women is a widespread phenomenon: estimated to have already affected one in ten women, it has spiked with the increased use of the internet due to lockdowns and social distancing measures. Moreover, while the Internet and social media offer opportunities to connect with people all over the world and to achieve the vision of a “global village”, this rarely happens in reality. The phenomenon of “homophily” — that is, interacting with those who are similar to us — is prevailing both online and offline. In other words, rather than seek contact with groups of people who differ from us we tend to keep to our silos or “echo chambers”.

Youth unemployment is a problem both in Europe and Southern Mediterranean countries. Although it has been decreasing in many contexts, it remains twice as high as general unemployment, and more so for vulnerable, marginalised groups. Education and training systems are not seen as either fit or relevant “for the digital and green economy”.

Last but certainly not least, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic — which struck the world in March 2020 — will be felt for many years to come and on all areas, including free movement, employment, education and social cohesion. It has been reported that “social injustice, inequity and the digital divide have been exacerbated during the pandemic and need unique and targeted measures if they are to be addressed”. In the youth sector, the pandemic has exposed many injustices and forms of oppression experienced by the most vulnerable groups, and it is feared that it will also roll back the progress made in achieving women’s independence in the past decade in Europe. As a result, while COVID-19 is seen to have accelerated a transition to the digital in many sectors — including education — it has also highlighted the lack of preparedness and exacerbated inequities.

2.3 Policy frameworks and priorities for formal and non-formal education

Education was identified as one of the key areas through which the challenges mentioned above can and should be addressed. Indeed, quality education was designated as one of the sustainable development goals. In recent years, international organisations have developed skills and competence frameworks outlining the abilities which they think young people should acquire, such as global competences and 21st century skills.

“21st century skills”

21st century skills is a broad term, used in many educational frameworks to refer to transversal skills, many of which are also related to employability:

28 https://rm.coe.int/media-coverage-of-the-refugee-crisis-a-cross-european-perspective/16807338f7
30 Paolini et al., 2018
34 Bozkurt et al. 2020
35 https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/72351197/Briefing+2+-+An+Introduction+to+research+on+the+impact+of+Covid-19+on+the+youth+sector.pdf/a3ab22b2-10c5-d727-1f45-e1a6b2c14217
37 https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/education/
38 https://www.battelleforkids.org/networks/p21,
Digital literacy, critical thinking and media literacy

The EC’s Digital Education Action Plan was updated in September 2020, following a public consultation in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. It identifies digital literacy as “essential for life in a digitalised world”, emphasising the importance of developing people’s understanding of digital technology’s risks and opportunities, and of encouraging its healthy, safe and meaningful use. The main challenges identified are information overload, the lack of effective ways to verify information, and the need for learners to be actively engaged and motivated in their (increasingly digital) formal and non-formal education.

Teamwork

The ability to work effectively in teams — in particular online and international teams (global virtual teams or distributed teams) — is one of the most sought-after competencies by employers. It has been estimated that by 2016, more than 85 % of working professionals were part of virtual teams of some sort, indicating the importance of this skill — further heightened by the COVID-19 outbreak. This ability is transversal and goes beyond any individual sector of employment. However, although its benefits have been recognised, collaboration in cross-cultural groups has been found to be challenging even within face-to-face university contexts.

Communication and FL skills

Communication and foreign language skills belong to the key competences identified by the European Commission and were identified as core employability skills. The Council of Europe places a strong focus on plurilingual and intercultural education, which covers the acquisition of competences, knowledge, dispositions and attitudes, diversity of learning experiences, and construction of individual and collective cultural identities. In 2016, about three quarters (73.3 %) of the EU’s population aged 25–34 reported that they knew at least one foreign language. Increasingly, outside the UK, this language is English. Still, considerable differences in levels between different countries remain, as well as between different socio-economic groups.

“Global citizenship/competence”

UNESCO’s definition of global citizenship education highlights the need for knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development and lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, and a culture of peace and non-violence. Appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development are also key to global citizenship. The OECD has developed a global competence framework which prioritises:

- knowledge of and the ability to evaluate issues and situations of local, global and cultural significance (e.g. poverty, economic interdependence, migration, inequality, environmental risks, conflicts, cultural differences and stereotypes);
- the ability to understand and appreciate different perspectives and worldviews, interact successfully and respectfully with others;
- taking responsible action toward sustainability and collective well-being.

40 Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020
41 Mittelmeier et al. 2018
42 https://rm.coe.int/16806ae621
43 https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Foreign_language_skills_statistics#Analysis_of_those_knowing_one_or_more_foreign_languages
45 Gazzola, 2016
46 https://en.unesco.org/themes/gced/definition
Global competences are also perceived to be important attributes which can boost employability⁴⁷.

UNESCO links global citizenship to the need to take action on global issues. That is, having a global predisposition or mindset is not sufficient; global citizens need to take on active roles in promoting a certain form of global society⁴⁸.

### 2.4 30+ years of Erasmus mobility: achievements and potential for improvement

Mobility — that is study, work or volunteering experiences abroad — has been one of the European Commission’s main approaches in supporting young people in developing 21st century skills and global competences, with Erasmus — and later, Erasmus+ — as the flagship programme supporting this approach in both education and youth work.

The Erasmus programme was developed and promoted by the European Commission to promote “European citizenship”, based on the assumption that bringing together students of different nationalities will instil or enhance a sense of European identity and shared sense of community, which will in turn serve as a path to creating truly European citizens. A theoretical basis for this assumption can be found in social psychology’s contact hypothesis⁴⁹, which highlights the value of transnational and intergroup contact as means for identity-formation, and for reducing intergroup bias. The contact theory has been supported by work in the field of social cognitive neuroscience, which has found that contact between groups in conflict can reduce hostility and negative stereotypes⁵⁰.

The Erasmus programme has encountered a great success, celebrating 30 years in 2017 with 9 million participants⁵¹ overall, including 4.4 million higher education students and 1.4 million in youth exchanges. However, there has been growing recognition of the limitations of mobility programmes in terms of accessibility and inclusion⁵². Most countries of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) have fallen short of the target of 20% graduates experiencing international mobility during their studies, set by the EC for 2020⁵³. Even where this goal was achieved, 80% of students were not reached by the programme. In addition to financial issues, which constitute significant barriers, other factors may pose limitations, such as caring responsibilities and family reasons. Funded international mobility opportunities for youth outside of higher education are fewer than for HEI, and it was estimated that 7.5% of youth overall have experiences of international mobility⁵⁴.

The geographic scope and reach of Erasmus+ is also limited. Since 2015, participation was widened to partner countries, including in the Southern Mediterranean, paving the way for making international cooperation a priority⁵⁵. However, places are limited and exchanges are unbalanced. Moreover, mobility is mainly directed towards Europe, with few European students going to Southern Mediterranean countries.

Several studies⁵⁶⁵⁷ have found that European universities are falling short of meeting student expectations regarding global opportunities and skills development. They argue that HEIs need to devote significant effort at providing students with global opportunities and support to stimulate intercultural growth through engagement with difference, and a better understanding of the nature of intercultural skills. There is concern regarding the prioritisation of internationalisation abroad for

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⁴⁸ https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000227729
⁴⁹ Allport, 1954
⁵⁰ Bruneau & Saxe, 2012
⁵⁵ https://www.uni-med.net/en/erasmus-days-mediterranean-mobility-matters/
⁵⁶ Spencer-Oatey & Dauber, 2019
⁵⁷ Barkhoff et al. 2020
the benefit of an elite subset of students, rather than investment in internationalisation at home with
global and intercultural learning outcomes for all\textsuperscript{58}. Recent years have seen a strong push for more
“comprehensive internationalisation”, including from the EC\textsuperscript{59}. This comprises internationalisation at
home (IaH), defined as “the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into
the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments”\textsuperscript{60}.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of internationalisation at home, having
further limited international mobility in both the youth and HEI sectors, creating an impact likely to
be lasting\textsuperscript{61}. While universities made many courses available online\textsuperscript{62}, opportunities for meaningful
student interaction and engagement with each other has often been limited. Researchers have
highlighted how trauma, psychological pressure and anxiety are being experienced by many in this
context and necessitate a pedagogy of care, affection and empathy\textsuperscript{63}. The response to COVID-19 in
education has been described as a “pivot” to “emergency remote education”, which is quite different
from planned and intentionally designed online learning allowing for collaborative student learning. In
many contexts, emergency remote education has focused on ensuring continuity of “course delivery”.
Furthermore, it has served as a tool for continuing student mobility through “virtual mobility”, that is
students taking online courses delivered by the “host” university for credit mobility. However, students
have been reporting that in many of these remote courses, they were missing the opportunity to
interact with fellow students.\textsuperscript{64}

**How Virtual Exchange can enrich Erasmus+**

Within this scenario, Virtual Exchange is well-positioned not to replace physical exchanges but to
complement and strengthen international mobility by drawing on the advantages of transnational
communication, exchange of ideas and knowledge, and above all to provide meaningful learning
experiences for young people which can support social cohesion. It does so by building on the
opportunities offered by technology to broaden the scope of international exchange by connecting
young people from geographically and culturally distant communities through intentionally designed
dialogue and exchange programmes. Virtual Exchange is also well-positioned to complement and
enhance online learning and open up opportunities for collaborative online international learning in
both formal and non-formal education.

VE is an experiential learning approach. It creates opportunities for intercultural encounters and
experiences of difference that may challenge participants’ viewpoints and ideas, thus supporting
intercultural learning. Recent studies in social psychology have shown that virtual contact, both
instead of and in addition to contact in a physical space, can be effective in building intergroup
trust and compassion\textsuperscript{65}. However, it can only do so if Virtual Exchanges are intentionally designed to
develop learning pathways and group processes that will challenge participants’ assumptions and
perspectives and engage them in reflection.

The field of Virtual Exchange is not new. In fact, it has been in existence for several decades now, having
started with “class-to-class” exchanges which were developed almost as soon as the Internet made
this possible\textsuperscript{66}. A considerable body of literature was developed around this model of Virtual Exchange
in foreign language learning contexts (see for example O’Dowd & Lewis, 2016 for an overview) and
international education\textsuperscript{67}.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{58} de Wit & Altbach, 2020  
\textsuperscript{59} https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2013/EN/1-2013-499-EN-F1-1.Pdf  
\textsuperscript{60} Beelen & Jones, 2015, p. 69  
\textsuperscript{62} https://esn.org/covidimpact-report  
\textsuperscript{63} Bozkurt et al. 2020  
\textsuperscript{64} https://esn.org/covidimpact-report p.16  
\textsuperscript{65} Amichai-Hamburger & McKenna, 2006; Amichai-Hamburger, 2012  
\textsuperscript{66} Warschauer, 1995  
\textsuperscript{67} Starke-Meyerring & Wilson 2008
\end{flushleft}
Another model of Virtual Exchange has developed drawing on the practice of intergroup dialogue, which is used in peace studies, conflict resolution and intergroup relations. In the practice of intergroup dialogue, facilitators who are trained in neutrality and multi-partiality seek to ensure that all participants, regardless of differing backgrounds or power dynamics, feel represented and respected in the group. Virtual contact in online dialogue programmes that are sustained over a period of time can expand the geographic scope, reach more people and enhance or maintain the effects of direct contact.

In recent years, funded VE programmes have led to a number of large-scale research studies in the field of business and initial teacher education. VE is found to have reduced prejudice towards different cultural groups, and enhanced self-efficacy and the perceived ability to complete tasks in collaboration with people from other countries. It can lead to slight, but steady growth in intercultural competence, digital-pedagogical competence and foreign language skills, and has been shown to foster interest in future international collaboration and study abroad.

The Stevens’ Initiative, which supports Virtual Exchange between the United States and the MENA region, has also carried out large scale impact studies and found a statistically significant increase in “knowledge of the other country or culture” (more so for US students than those in MENA countries), in empathy or warmth towards the other, and in cross-cultural communication.

**Addressing societal challenges and expanding the scope of Erasmus+ through Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange**

EVE built on existing research and expertise in the field of Virtual Exchange, bringing together the established models of VE mentioned above, and developing new models in an ambitious project which targeted Europe and the Southern Mediterranean region. It sought to address some of the challenges described at the beginning of this chapter.

Prejudice, discrimination and Islamophobia were addressed by promoting intercultural dialogue programmes bringing together youth in European and Southern Mediterranean countries. By intentionally designing intergroup encounters across national, regional, ethnic and religious divides EVE offered opportunities to challenge and change perceptions of and attitudes towards the “other”.

“Fake news”, cyber violence and hate speech were tackled through exchanges designed to support the creation of counter-narratives that can contrast these phenomena by facilitating contact and dialogue with individuals from a variety of contexts, allowing them to get to know and humanise the “other”, critically engage with media and co-create new understandings.

Young people’s employability was promoted by targeting 21st century skills, in particular digital competences, languages and communicative competence, the ability to work in a team, critical thinking, and media literacy. EVE participants were engaged in experiential learning, in which they used digital tools and foreign languages to communicate with one another, collaborate in virtual teams, and watch and critically engage with media on a range of issues and subjects. The development of communication and foreign language skills were addressed by providing authentic contexts in which participants could express themselves and communicate with people whose first language may be different from their own.

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68 https://www.soliya.net/about/about-us
69 Tyszblat, 2019
70 Bruneau, n.d;
71 Taras et al. 2013
72 The Evaluate group, 2019
73 Taras et al. 2013, The Evaluate group, 2019
74 The Evaluate group, 2019
75 Taras et al. 2013
76 https://www.stevensinitiative.org/
EVE sought to foster global competences and activate young people by explicitly addressing global issues. Virtual Exchanges were designed to address the relationships between different societies and to allow participants to build knowledge of and engage with different perspectives and experiences of global issues such as migration, gender equality and the climate crisis. EVE also strived to activate participants through “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it”\textsuperscript{77}, taking the Freirian notion of praxis whereby it is not sufficient to acquire knowledge: one also has a responsibility to act in order to make the world more just and equitable.

\textbf{Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange aimed to make Erasmus+ more accessible and inclusive} by involving young people who had not yet experienced international mobility and those from less advantaged backgrounds and contexts, who may not have considered a physical mobility experience for themselves. Taking part in an online programme does not require spending months abroad, nor does it present so many socio-economic or psychological barriers. Virtual Exchange was intended to support the development of more open attitudes and self confidence, and make physical mobility and other intercultural encounters a more viable option for participants.
3 An overview of Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange

The general objective of Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange, as stated in the contract, was “to set up and implement the “Erasmus+ Virtual Exchanges” initiative, called EVE, linking countries’ young people (aged 18 to 30 years), youth workers, youth organisations, students and academics from Europe and the Southern Mediterranean using online learning activities and technology-enabled solutions in order to strengthen people to people contacts and intercultural dialogue.”

The Tender Specifications laid out that these objectives were to be met through the development of a community of facilitators and the promotion of four different types of Virtual Exchange activities. These Virtual Exchanges were set up and implemented through the three years of the project with the support of the facilitators and training programmes.

The Facilitator Community and Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange Activities

The facilitator community

Facilitators are at the core of promoting intercultural dialogue by creating safe spaces for discussion, especially when touching on contentious issues. They also played a key role in ensuring consistency across the four models of Virtual Exchange developed through EVE. All facilitators deployed across EVE activities underwent a two-step training programme followed by a practicum in order to become qualified to facilitate online dialogues (see chapter 10). The facilitators developed a “code of conduct” and a community of support and engagement. The facilitator community operated based on a strong Quality Assurance framework, including co-facilitation mechanisms, peer-feedback, coaching and evaluation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facilitator community</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online Facilitated Dialogue (OFD)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transnational Exchange Projects (TEPs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy Training (AT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive Open Online Courses (iOOCs)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Figure 1 The facilitator community and Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange Activities

Models of VE

Several exchange models were developed and implemented in EVE, all sharing the common approach of bringing together young people across geographic and cultural divides through technology-enabled interaction and collaboration. However, they differed in specific objectives, pedagogic approach, design, duration, and number of real-time dialogue sessions (see Chapter 7 for detailed information about different models and implementation). All models were based on established forms of VE or educational activities taking their roots in different fields, and included facilitated dialogue sessions led by trained facilitators.

A distinction can be made between two broad types of VE developed and implemented under EVE: “ready-made” and “grassroots” Virtual Exchanges.

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80 Helm, Guth, Shuminov & van der Velden, 2020
‘Ready made’ models

“Ready-made” VE were developed and implemented by organisations from the implementing consortium. This entailed designing and refining the curriculum, and taking care of the more technical aspects, such as the maintenance of the exchange platform, the distribution of participants into dialogue groups, the mobilisation of dialogue facilitators and scheduling of the synchronous dialogue sessions. The organisations in charge also ensured the monitoring and quality control, reporting on participants’ attendance and completion of assignments. The “ready-made” models are based on tried and tested mechanisms and consequently have the capacity to accommodate large numbers of participants in high-quality VE activities. Around 83% of all participants in EVE went through one of the ready-made VEs. The Online Facilitated Dialogue (OFDs) activity was developed and implemented by the NGO Soliya, the Advocacy Training by the Anna Lindh Foundation, and Interactive Open Online Courses (iOOCs) by the Sharing Perspectives Foundation. Whilst activity implementers were responsible for the development and management of the exchange activities, local coordinators (that is educators in HEIs or workers youth organisations) promoted the activities within their institutions. For educators at HEIs, this entailed finding a way to integrate the activity into curricula, usually by including it as a course component or as a stand alone elective. Local coordinators signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the activity promoters, recruited participants, had them register on the platform and supported them in various ways — for example by organising meetings to discuss and debrief with participants, and by finding spaces for young people to connect from during live sessions, such as computer labs.

Figure 2 The engagement model for “ready-made” Virtual Exchanges

Online Facilitated Dialogue (OFD)

The Online Facilitated Dialogue activity is grounded in intergroup theory and conflict resolution and was first developed in 2003. In EVE, OFDs — also known as the Connect Programme — connected young people from Europe and Southern Mediterranean countries in non-formal dialogue sessions to expose them to diverse cultural perspectives, and give them an opportunity to develop their language competence and employability skills. These online dialogues, held in small groups of eight to 12 people from diverse geographic and cultural backgrounds, were guided and moderated by EVE facilitators. The two-hour dialogue sessions were sustained over several weeks in the different versions of the Connect Programme (lasting four, five or eight weeks) available in EVE, thus allowing group members to build trust. Facilitators supported this process by creating a safe space to explore perspectives on timely and potentially divisive topics, such as social media, identity, Islamophobia, politics, women’s rights, and religion. Because these exchanges brought together participants from a wide range of
countries, English was the main language of communication. Shorter exchanges called “Social Circles” (lasting 12 days) — which were developed to draw in youth who were not necessarily affiliated to HEIs or youth organisations — were also offered in French and Arabic.

**Advocacy Training (AT)**

This new model of VE was based on the consolidated practice of debating, and brought young people from different backgrounds together to develop parliamentary debating skills with the support of trained debate team leaders. Face-to-face debates are a consolidated practice in certain European educational contexts and in many Southern Mediterranean countries, where they have been promoted through the Young Mediterranean Voices programme82. Online debates were first experimented in online contexts in 2018 with the EVE project, which added a transnational dimension to the YMV debates. Debate leaders were trained in an intensive six-hour online session during which they learnt how to deliver local debate training for the teams in their communities, before recruiting, registering, and leading them in an Intercultural Online Debate. The debates themselves brought together two local teams that were then re-organised into transnational teams to discuss two different motions. In 2019, follow-up dialogue sessions were introduced to enhance this model of VE: during the two-hour debrief session, participants reflected together, with the support of a dialogue facilitator, on the motions they addressed in the previous week. In addition to regular debate sessions, EuroMed Debate Competitions were also organised to attract an even larger number of participants. To cater to a diverse public, training sessions and debates were held in English, French and Arabic.

**Interactive Open Online Courses (iOOC)**

This model combines online facilitated dialogue (as described above) with content on specific themes, assignments and reflective journals. Most of the content is in the form of bite-sized videos, either produced specifically for the exchange or developed by other organisations. The content supports the exchange of ideas amongst participants in the form of sustained dialogue sessions with the support of EVE trained facilitators. Programmes were either developed from scratch, or from existing resources such as online courses (for example, “Combating Hate Speech” was originally developed by European Alternatives, and “Gender In/Equality in the Media” was produced in the context of the EC-funded project AGEMI83) or MOOCs, adding interactive assignments and facilitated dialogue sessions to increase the intercultural learning dimension of these courses. While most exchanges were offered in English, two iOOCs — namely “Technology and Society” and “Youth, Peace and Security” — were developed and offered in Arabic, to serve a more diverse audience.

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82 https://youngmedvoices.org/
83 https://www.agemi-eu.org/
Grassroots models

Transnational Exchange Projects

The engagement model for “grassroots” Virtual Exchanges was quite different than for the ‘ready made’ models. The exchanges were developed and/or implemented by educators and youth workers who followed specific training programmes to prepare them for this activity. They were also supported in the implementation of the models by UNICollaboration — the organisation running the TEP training — and by members of the EVE facilitator community.

TEP exchanges bring together two or more groups of young people — whether through university classes or youth organisations — to interact and collaborate on VE projects that are developed and implemented by university educators or youth workers. The aim of these exchanges is to allow youth participants to come into contact with different perspectives on specific issues in their courses, to learn how to collaborate with international peers on projects and to develop soft skills. This model of VE has its roots in foreign language education and networked or connected classrooms.

After following a basic training, based on a “learning by doing” approach, teachers and youth workers partnered up with at least one other organisation during the advanced course to co-develop an exchange which would meet the specific needs of their own contexts. For youth workers, both steps were combined into a single course, as this approach was best suited to their specific needs.

Topics addressed in university courses ranged from health care to political science, engineering to foreign languages. In the case of youth organisations, the exchanges were designed around specific issues being addressed by the organisations, such as the environment, cyberbullying, volunteering. While the training courses were delivered in English, French, and Arabic, the exchanges themselves could be monolingual, bilingual or multilingual, and lasted from three weeks to several months. Participants engaged in both asynchronous communication (through forums, social media, virtual learning environments) and synchronous (through text or video chat), either in small groups or pairs. Facilitated dialogue sessions led by EVE facilitators were also integrated into a number of these grassroots exchanges.

Transversal activities

The implementation of these Virtual Exchanges was supported by a number of transversal activities. While these are not the subject of the present impact report, they are nevertheless worth noting:

* Strong governance mechanisms were established, notably through the constitution of an Advisory Board whose members supported the quality assurance process throughout the project. Board members were experts in formal and non-formal education who were familiar with intercultural learning in both higher education and youth sectors;

* The promotion of the initiative was made possible through the development of a solid communication infrastructure, including an easily identifiable EVE identity, the development of communication materials, and the regular dissemination of new posts through social media. Outreach activities such as webinars and in-country events were regularly organised to recruit new participants and partner institutions;

* A dedicated EVE Hub was launched in March 2018 on the European Youth Portal. This central entry point into the project provided information about the different Virtual Exchange activities and training opportunities, project news, and impact stories and data, and allowed young people, educators and youth workers to register for the different activities;

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84 Where it has become known as telecollaboration, (Guth and Helm, 2010; Dooley 2017), Online Intercultural Exchange (O’Dowd and Lewis, 2016), and COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning) (Guth & Rubin 2015)
85 https://europa.eu/youth/erasmusvirtual
• Participation in EVE activities was recognised through an ecosystem of Open Badges, relying on a comprehensive competence framework. Badges were awarded not only to young people, but also trainees, qualified facilitators, and coordinators within partner organisations;

• Last, but certainly not least, considerable time and effort were invested into the rigorous monitoring and evaluation of all activities to ensure their quality, as well as to identify possible challenges, gather lessons learnt, and issue recommendations for the development of future VE activities. This process was supported by the Advisory Board, whose members were regularly called upon for advice and guidance.
4 Research aims and methodology

This chapter begins with an outline of the research questions and hypotheses of this study. It is followed by an overview of the research design of this mixed methods study and the target groups addressed in the research. A description of the qualitative and quantitative measurement tools adopted is provided, together with the data gathering techniques and an explanation of how the data were analysed and triangulated in order to provide a rich explanation of the research findings. The chapter ends with a discussion of the limitations of the research approach, and how these were mitigated.

This study is a follow-up to the 2018 and 2019 impact studies. In 2018, the research tools were piloted and a first set of findings provided valuable input on the impact of the exchanges implemented, allowing for improvements in their design. In 2019, the research study replicated the findings from 2018 and explored the four different models included in the pilot. The aim of the present report is to provide a consolidated account of the findings from the three years of implementation, and to assess the extent to which EVE met the objectives set by the European Commission, that is:

• Encouraging intercultural dialogue and increasing tolerance through online people-to-people interactions, building on digital, youth-friendly technologies;
• Promoting various types of Virtual Exchange as a complement to Erasmus+ physical mobility, allowing more young people to benefit from intercultural and international experience;
• Enhancing critical thinking and media literacy, particularly in the use of the Internet and social media, to develop resistance to discrimination and indoctrination;
• Fostering the soft skills development of students, young people and youth workers, including the practice of foreign languages and teamwork, notably to enhance employability;
• Supporting the objectives of the 2015 Paris Declaration to promote citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education;
• Strengthening the youth dimension of the EU neighbouring policy with Southern Mediterranean countries.

4.1 Research questions and hypotheses

During this assessment, the team tested both EVE’s overall results, and those of each exchange model. This was important because the initiative brought together models of VE which shared some goals and underlying values, but which were also quite diverse in terms of pedagogic design, administrative models and scale. Limiting the study to the overall impact would omit valuable information from those interested in understanding the benefits and limitations of each approach.

EVE’s impact was explored in terms of change in participants’ intercultural communication skills, self-esteem, curiosity, and attitudes towards people from different ethnic and religious groups, measured through pre- and post-exchange surveys. The research questions (RQ) guiding this assessment were framed as follows:

RQ1: Did EVE have an impact on participants’ perceived effectiveness in intercultural communication?
RQ2: Did EVE have an impact on participants’ self esteem and curiosity?
RQ3: Did EVE have an impact on participants’ affect towards people from different ethnic and religious groups?

Each of these questions was directly related to a specific aim pursued by the initiative, namely:
• To encourage intercultural dialogue;
• To foster skill development and enhance employability;
• To increase participants’ tolerance.
The initiative’s outcomes were also evaluated in terms of exchange participants’ self-perceived improvement with regards to 21st century skills, global competences and activation. The study is organised around the following research questions:

**RQ4:** Did participants feel they improved their 21st century skills (active listening, critical thinking, digital competences, team-work and collaborative problem solving, English and/or foreign language skills)?

**RQ5:** Did participants feel they improved their global competences (ability to communicate or work in a culturally diverse setting; knowledge and/or interest in global events; knowledge about the relationship between and across different societies)?

**RQ6:** Were participants “activated” through EVE? That is, did they build meaningful relationships? Did they become interested in further intercultural experiences through VE or study abroad? Share information about what they were learning with others? Challenge media misrepresentations?

**RQ7:** How did participants evaluate their EVE experience and what were the drivers of their satisfaction and further engagement?

**RQ8:** How did gender affect impact and perceived improvement?

**RQ9:** How did the region of participants (Europe or Southern Mediterranean) affect impact and perceived improvement?

**RQ10:** Was the impact and perceived improvement higher for participants with no or limited (less than three months) experience of international study or living abroad?

**RQ11:** Were there differences in participant evaluations according to region?

**RQ12:** Did the impact and perceived improvement differ according to the exchange activity?

**RQ13:** What were the long-term implications of participation in Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange?

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Research hypotheses (RH) were as follows:

**RH1:** EVE will have a positive impact on perceived effectiveness in intercultural communication.

**RH2:** EVE will have a positive impact on self esteem and curiosity.

**RH3:** EVE will have a positive impact on participants’ feelings towards people from different ethnic and religious groups.
Finally, evaluators examined participant, facilitator and trainees’ evaluations and satisfaction with the activities and drivers for satisfaction, and delved into the strengths and weaknesses of each of the exchange models and training courses implemented, seeking to answer the following questions.

RQ14: What are the strengths and weaknesses of the different activity models?

RQ15: How were educators and youth workers involved in EVE and how did they evaluate their EVE experience?

RQ16: How did facilitators evaluate their EVE experience and what were the drivers of facilitator satisfaction and further engagement?

It was hypothesised that each model would have its own strengths, based on the design of the exchanges, the demographics reached and the outcomes achieved. It was hypothesised that facilitators, educators and youth workers who completed the training would generally be satisfied with their experience, and analysis of the qualitative data was intended to identify drivers of satisfaction and further engagement.

4.2 Study design

The M&E team adopted a mixed-methods approach to the study, as it has been argued that this is particularly well-suited for cross-national comparative research, where highly diverse cultural contexts are studied. Pre- and post-exchange questionnaires were used to gather quantitative data to measure the impact on participants. Interviews and focus groups were conducted in order to properly understand the mechanisms through which change in participants took place and to understand what factors led to change, as well as to explore the differences between the different models. All participants were invited to fill out pre-and post exchange surveys, and focus groups and interviews were carried out with volunteer participants, facilitators and implementers. The advantage of a mixed methods approach is that it allows for the triangulation of the data, which adds to the explanatory
power of the research. This methodology was previously adopted in several large-scale studies, which explored the impact of VE on the development of global and/or intercultural competences, attitudes towards difference, programme or subject specific knowledge, digital literacies and critical thinking. Like in the present impact assessment, authors of these studies used both pre-post surveys and open questions on perceived learning outcomes.

The present research study followed an explanatory sequential design, using the interviews and focus groups to support the interpretation of the quantitative data, as illustrated by the figure below:

**Target groups**

The study covered most groups of beneficiaries of the EVE programme. The main beneficiaries are young people participating in the exchanges, who are the largest target group. Other important beneficiaries include the facilitators, a key component of the EVE programme; educators and youth workers who followed training programmes and/or coordinated EVE activities; and staff from National Agencies and National Erasmus Officers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beneficiaries</th>
<th>Region and sector</th>
<th>Type of data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants in 4 EVE activities</td>
<td>Europe and South Mediterranean countries</td>
<td>Pre and post-surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(young people aged 18-30)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitation trainees</td>
<td>HEI and non-HEI</td>
<td>Focus groups and interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitators (all 4 activities)</td>
<td>Global</td>
<td>Post-training survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trainees</td>
<td>Global</td>
<td>Community survey, focus groups and interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VE coordinators (all 4 activities)</td>
<td>HEI and non-HEI (educators and youth workers)</td>
<td>Interviews, community gatherings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National agencies and NEOs</td>
<td>HEI and non-HEI</td>
<td>interviews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 EVE beneficiaries and research participants
4.3. Measures, data gathering and analysis

Quantitative measures

Pre- and post-exchange surveys were developed in 2018, at the outset of the project: based on a thorough literature review and analysis of the tools already in use by each activity promoter, a single tool was created to be used across all EVE activities. The number of items included in the surveys was kept to a limit in order to ensure completion by as many participants as possible. After analysis of the data gathered in 2018, the language of some of the questions was slightly adjusted in 2019 to reduce social desirability bias. Furthermore, open questions were added to the post-exchange survey in order to collect rich data from a wider body of participants than interviews and focus groups could reach.

Pre- and post-exchange survey items were designed to measure EVE’s impact in terms of change in intercultural communication, self-esteem and curiosity. Respondents were asked to identify how strongly they agreed with a series of statements, on a five-point Likert scale. To measure inter-group affect, that is attitudes towards people with different ethnic and religious backgrounds, a tool similar to a feelings thermometer was used whereby participants were asked how “cold” or “warm” they felt towards people with different ethnic or religious backgrounds from their own. The feelings thermometer is often used in studies investigating attitudes towards a variety of social groups, and was also used in the Stevens Initiative’s Impact Study. (see Annex 1 for pre and post surveys)

Post-exchange items targeted participants’ satisfaction with their VE experience and the quality of the relationships they had developed, and the perceived improvement in 21st century skills, global attitudes, and activation. They also examined participants’ interest in opportunities for further engagement, sharing information about their experience with others, and challenging media misrepresentations.

In 2019, a harmonised evaluation survey was developed for the different training activities implemented through EVE (facilitation and TEP training), given the high number of trainees involved. This tool allowed for the exploration of the different competence areas addressed by all training courses, and for the evaluation of the different components of each training track. Lastly, in 2020 — the final year of implementation — the team carried out a study on the growing EVE facilitator community to understand the drivers of their continued engagement in facilitation, their experience facilitating different models of VE and their needs in terms of support and professional development.

Quantitative data collection

All exchange participants were invited to complete pre- and post-exchange surveys. Pre-exchange surveys were administered upon registration for the activity, while post-exchange surveys were carried out between one to two weeks after the end of the exchanges. As for post-training surveys, these were conducted upon completion of the training courses for each of the activities. In order to answer RQ13 on the long-term implications a three-wave longitudinal design was used, with participants from three cohorts of the Connect Programme answering the post-survey six, 12 and 18 months after the exchanges.

Data was gathered from activity implementers every six months (in June and December every year), allowing for the aggregation of data over multiple iterations of project activities. This approach also provided insights on the successive rounds of each activity, which enabled the consortium to address issues arising during the implementation. This aspect was of particular importance for newly-developed activities and training courses.
Qualitative data

Online interviews and focus groups

Interviews and focus groups were carried out to reveal aspects which were not captured in the surveys, and to support interpretation of quantitative data. This additional, qualitative data allowed for a better understanding of how participants experienced VE, to find evidence of critical thinking and attitudes towards difference, and examine how participants were activated through Virtual Exchange. Interviews and focus groups also allowed for the acquisition of a more nuanced understanding of the different exchange models, including their strengths and limitations, from the perspective of participants, facilitators and coordinators.

With regards to participants, volunteer interviewees were recruited by the activity promoters and either put in touch with the M&E team, or invited to contact the team directly. Interviewees were selected based on criteria such as good attendance records — to ensure they had sufficient exposure to the programme — and seeking a balanced gender and regional representation (See Annex 2 for qualitative measures and Annex 3 for participants in focus groups and interviews).

Coordinators are essential for the integration and mainstreaming of VE. Therefore, it was important to gain insights into their perspectives on the value of Virtual Exchange, how they integrated Virtual Exchange in their contexts, the difficulties faced within their institutions or organisations, and the challenges of engaging young people in Virtual Exchange activities. Coordinators also played a critical role in helping the consortium gain a better comprehension of "hard-to-reach" youth and understand reasons for attrition from activities. Thus, exploring coordinators’ views played a major role in addressing the inevitable bias in participant interviews, which arose from the fact that volunteers are generally high performing and satisfied participants in the first place.

Representatives from national agencies (in Erasmus+ countries: Finland, Italy, Poland, Serbia) and national Erasmus+ officers (in Morocco, Tunisia) were also interviewed. The aim was to explore the extent of their understanding of VE, and how they assessed the needs of universities and youth organisations in their countries in this regard, both in light of the COVID-19 outbreak, and as a means to support mobility and the NA/NEO’s activities.

Facilitators were interviewed and took part in focus group discussions during all phases of the project. In the first year of implementation, they were consulted to understand the perceived learning of participants in the different activities, as well as the opportunities and challenges they were facing in their own role as exchange opportunities were growing. The interview and focus group protocols were adapted to explore different issues over the three years of the project, and for the different target groups. Interviewers adopted a semi-structured approach, using a series of guiding questions while keeping flexibility in following respondents’ interests. While in 2018 and 2019 the focus was above all placed on the learning experiences of participants, in 2020 attention turned to coordinators of VE activities, that is educators and youth workers. By doing so, the M&E team were able to explore coordinators’ experience of VE, and examine how they were integrating it into their activities.

Site visits

Two site visits were organised in 2019, in Tunisia and Italy. These two countries were selected because they had the highest numbers of participants in 2018. Institutions where more than one model of the EVE activities was being implemented were identified, in order to carry out focus groups and interviews with implementers. Here, the M&E team used convenience sampling, with activity promoters and institutional partners identifying and recruiting focus group participants. Each focus group involved participants from just one EVE activity, engaged in the process on a voluntary basis. In addition to focus groups, interviews were carried out with coordinators from local partner institutions.

Longitudinal case studies

Case studies allow for a long-term examination of people's experiences, development, and participation in their communities. In the context of EVE, case studies allowed for the exploration of participants’ trajectories through the ecology of the initiative, that is the various opportunities offered by such a
large scale project, and the intercultural learning experiences “triggered” by their involvement in VE. Case studies thus allow for a close examination of participants’ “activation” — i.e. the ways in which their experiences have either personally led them to further engage with intercultural exchange, or to bring other members of their communities to do so — and generate insights into the long-term impact of Virtual Exchange on individuals and, in some cases their institutional contexts. They are however neither representative nor generalisable to other individuals. The M&E team selected case studies from interviewees who took part in different activities, and with whom the main researcher managed to maintain contact over an extended period of time through email and interviews. They were also purposefully chosen to ensure that the two target regions (Erasmus+ programme countries and Southern Mediterranean), and the different EVE activities would all be included.

Quantitative data analysis

In looking at change in participants’ attitudes, the mean difference between post and pre measurement for all attitude items was measured and analysed for statistical significance and effect size. This analysis provided answers to research questions 1–3.

The post-exchange survey items measured perceived improvement in several overlapping competence areas. To reduce the complexity and identify groups of variables, the team carried out a factor analysis (see annex 4), and identified three groupings. These were found to correspond to different competence areas as outlined in the literature review, namely 21st century skills, global skills, and what has been defined as activation, which is considered an important aspect of global competence or global citizenship. The factor analysis found groupings that closely correspond to identified clusters of skills in the research literature on these competence areas.

- **“21st Century skills”** consists of five items, namely: active listening, critical thinking skills, English and/or foreign language skills, team-work and collaborative problem-solving skills and digital competences. All of these are related to the demands of modern employers, as outlined in the literature review.

- **“Global Skills”** brings together three items, which are: knowledge and interest in global events, knowledge of the relationship between different societies, and the ability to work in diverse settings.

- **Activation** comprises five items. Some are related to the activation of respondents, such as building meaningful relationships, and becoming interested in having new opportunities for Virtual Exchange or for travel/study abroad. It also covers the activation of others, that is sharing what they learnt or experienced with others in their communities, and challenging media misrepresentation

By analysing the data across these factors, the team addressed RQs 4–6.

Items pertaining to participant satisfaction were not part of the factor analysis and were analysed separately in order to answer RQ7.

Finally, comparisons were made across four independent variables: gender (male, female), region (Europe and Southern Mediterranean countries), model of Virtual Exchange (OFD, TEP, Debate, iOOC) and experience abroad, thus enabling evaluators to answer RQs 8–12.

91 This factor explained 22% of the variance, with the factor loadings ranging from 0.612 to 0.781. A reliability check found a Chronbach’s Alpha of 0.846

92 This factor comprises three items, and explains 10% of the variance with factor loading ranging from 0.309 to 0.535. A reliability check found a Chronbach’s Alpha of 0.754

93 This factor explains 19% of the variance with factor loadings ranging from 0.342 to 0.859. A reliability check found a Chronbach’s Alpha of 0.794.
Analysis and triangulation of data

The interview and focus group data was coded through qualitative content analysis (QCA). QCA is a well-established technique based on the interpretation of the content of text data, the identification of themes or patterns, and their systematic classification through codes.

Triangulation with findings from the quantitative data allowed for rich explanations and responses to the research questions, addressing, for example, how participants saw their attitudes change, and providing concrete examples of challenges participants faced or how they became activated. This also helped in identifying which components of the VE activities contributed to participants’ learning. In presenting the findings of the study, the quantitative data is interspersed with qualitative data to provide explanations and illustrations of the impact.

The qualitative data was also triangulated to draw in multiple perspectives on phenomena observed, and provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of Virtual Exchange, with insights from a wide range of stakeholders from different contexts. This approach served above all to answer RQs 13–16, which were linked to the long-term impact, the strengths and weaknesses of the different models and the experiences of various stakeholders. This also allowed for a better understanding of the needs and challenges they faced in their contexts as they engaged with VE.

The researchers were also able to present and discuss their research findings and analyses at different stages of the project with the consortium and promoters of each activity in order to test their hypotheses and interpretations and seek possible alternative explanations.

Limitations of research approach

While the mixed methods approach proved effective in yielding different types of data, thereby allowing the team to evaluate numerous aspects of the initiative, it is worth noting that some limitations remained.

The lack of control groups is a limitation of the research design. However, the complexity of an initiative combining four different models would have made it complex and resource intensive, as suitable control groups for all four activities and a similar geographic scope to EVE would have been required. This limitation was in part mitigated by the fact that there were separate implementation rounds and findings were replicated in the different cohorts, and as such are reliable (see 2019 Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange Impact Study).

Self-reporting proved valuable in assessing perceived improvement in linguistic, intercultural and digital competences across all the activities, though perceived improvement is not a direct measure of competence as it is based on subjectivity. Indeed, respondents may not share the same understanding of the questions asked and concepts addressed, leading to a possible response bias and different interpretations of the scales used for the self-assessment, which poses a problem. Triangulating the quantitative with the qualitative data — in line with recommendations by Rienties et al. (2013a, 2013b) — supported the explanations provided. A further limitation of the quantitative tool used is its limited usefulness in highlighting distinctions between the models adopted. This issue was also identified in other large scale VE evaluations which bring together different models of VE™. For this purpose, the qualitative data was thus found to be of greater value.

94 NVivo, a software tool that supports analysis of qualitative data was used to support the analysis
95 Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009
96 Stevens Initiative 2019
Organising focus groups with participants proved challenging, as recruited participants did not always turn up for the group. Thus, numbers were sometimes too low to constitute a focus group, which was then turned into a group interview. On-site visits in Tunisia and Italy were an opportunity to engage with multiple stakeholders, and acquire a better understanding of different contexts of implementation, however the COVID-19 outbreak put a halt to subsequent field trips.

The main researchers of the project and authors of the report were closely involved in EVE throughout the implementation of the project. This was a strength in that it allowed for an in-depth understanding of the project, facilitated access to research participants and allowed
for presentation and discussion of the findings with the consortium. However it may also be seen as presenting a risk and an inability to ‘take a distance’ from the research. This risk was mitigated by presenting and discussing the research and findings to the EVE Advisory Board who were asked to engage critically with the research. Furthermore, for this final research study an external consultant was appointed to engage critically with the research team. In the period from 2018 to 2020, the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange project reached 33,541 persons, including 28,426 (85%) youth participants engaged in the different VE models, and 5,115 (15%) individuals trained in Online Dialogue Facilitation, Debate Leadership or to develop Transnational EVE Projects. Thus, the project largely exceeded its target of 25,000 participants by December 2020, set by the European Commission.
5 Demographics in Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange between 2018 and 2020

The graphs below show how participants and trainees are spread across the different VE models and training courses. The demographics per activity are further broken down in chapter 7 where each model is analysed.

Participants per Activity

![Bar chart showing participants per activity](image_url)

Figure 7: Breakdown of participants per activity
As illustrated by figure 7 below, 61% of the 28,426 participants were female. The predominance of female participants has been consistent in the three years of the project. According to European Institute for Gender Equality’s knowledge indicators for 2020, 26.3% of women are graduates of tertiary education, against 25.3% of men, while 17.2% of women participate in formal or non-formal education as opposed to 16.2% of men.\(^7\)

In terms of geographic scope, 49% were residents in or nationals of Southern Mediterranean countries and 51% of Erasmus+ programme countries. This shows geographic balance between the regions, which is quite distinctive from participation patterns in mobility exchanges.

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The chart below helps visualise how EVE participants were spread across the 44 eligible countries. Italy and Tunisia are leading with each a little over 3,000 participants, while Iceland and Liechtenstein are closing the ranks, with respectively three and one youth involved. Following Italy, the European countries with the highest number of participants were France, the United Kingdom, Poland, the Netherlands and Germany, each counting over 1,000 participants. On the Southern Mediterranean side, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Algeria were also represented by over 1,000 participants each. EVE has a strong reach in economically disadvantaged areas (by GDP) located in the Southern Mediterranean. This is a very positive factor and demonstrates one of EVE’s great benefits, namely its relative accessibility in economically vulnerable regions. Internet connectivity is also an issue in many countries in the Southern Mediterranean region. Whereas in Europe Internet penetration is 87% with gaps above all in rural areas, it is much lower in most of the Southern Mediterranean countries, above all in Syria (43% penetration rate), Egypt (48%), Morocco (64%), Tunisia and Palestine (66%)\(^98\). Furthermore, where fewer people have access, it is also less affordable, less reliable, and less accessible to women\(^99\) and there may be limits on the tools available, due to a number of factors: sanctions imposed from the outside, unaffordable taxes or restrictions posed by national governments, and Internet shutdowns and/or slowdowns. However, this has not led to disparity in participation as the numbers of participants from the two regions was more or less equal.

Finally, the vast majority (82%) of the participants in EVE were between 18–25 years old. The 4% of participants older than 30 were allowed into the project as they joined as part of a group, i.e. a class of students, for which an exception of the age eligibility criteria was made.

### Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-21</td>
<td>44.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-25</td>
<td>50.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30+</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 10: Breakdown of participants by age

\(^{98}\) Internet World Stats, 2020
\(^{99}\) Mozilla Foundation, 2019
6 Impact on participants

This chapter delves into the whole initiative’s ability to trigger attitudinal change in participants (RQs 1-3) based on the comparison of pre- and post-exchange scores (see Chapter 4), and examines participants’ perceived improvement in 21st century skills, global skills and activation (RQs 4-6). In both instances, particular attention is paid to gender and regional differences. The findings presented here are tied to the following research hypotheses:

RH1: EVE will have a positive impact on perceived effectiveness in intercultural communication

RH2: EVE will have a positive impact on self-esteem and curiosity

RH3: EVE will have a positive impact on participants’ feelings towards people from different ethnic and religious groups

RH4: Participants will perceive improvement in their 21st century skills

RH5: Participants will perceive improvement in global competences

RH6: Participants will be “activated” through VE

RH8: Impact and perceived improvement will vary according to gender

RH9: Impact and perceived improvement will be greater for participants from Southern Mediterranean region

6.1. Attitudinal Change

Research questions 1 and 2 aimed at assessing whether EVE had an impact on participants’ perceived effectiveness in intercultural communication, on their self-esteem, and their curiosity. These were measured using five-point Likert items, ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. Whereas the measure for self-esteem is a single item, curiosity and intercultural competence are both measured by two item scales. For this analysis, the M&E team only considered cases where respondents had filled out both the pre- and post surveys, and where no data was missing on any of the attitudinal change measures. The final sample consisted of 5,440 cases.

Results showed a slight, but consistent and statistically significant improvement in self-esteem, curiosity and intercultural competence when looking at EVE exchanges overall (see Table 6.1).

Changes in measures such as self-esteem and curiosity generally occur over large time-spans, therefore changes that occur in relatively short time-spans, even with small effect sizes, can be considered meaningful.

The greatest change of the three concerns intercultural competence: while it may appear small at first, it is important to take into consideration the existence of variations across exchanges (explored in Chapter 7), as well as the effect of individual predispositions and environment, which both play an important role in understanding how VE enhances these attitudinal changes. Thus, the study’s findings confirmed research hypotheses 1 and 2, demonstrating that EVE indeed had a positive impact on perceived effectiveness in intercultural communication, as well as participants’ self-esteem and curiosity.

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100 From the second quarter of 2020, a number of participants outside the two target regions were exceptionally allowed to participate in the exchanges.

101 Both curiosity and intercultural competence a t-test was used as this can be appropriate for multi item measures. As self-esteem is a single item measure a Wilcoxon signed rank test was used.

102 The 2014 Erasmus+ Impact study (p.89) used Cohen d values to measure the impact of mobility on the Memo factors, which include Memo© Factor Confidence and Memo© Factor Curiosity. Change between ex ante and ex post was 0.14 and 0.12 respectively, and Cohen d values 0.159 and 0.136.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>Mean Pre</th>
<th>Mean Post</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Z-Score</th>
<th>Significance</th>
<th>Effect size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Esteem*</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>5440</td>
<td>Wilcoxon Signed Rank</td>
<td>-9.407</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curiosity</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>5440</td>
<td>Wilcoxon Signed Rank</td>
<td>-9.446</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercultural Competence</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>5440</td>
<td>Wilcoxon Signed Rank</td>
<td>-20.338</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 Attitudinal changes in pre- post measures

*This measure is a single 5 point Likert scale, as such the mean is not a very meaningful statistic; it is reported here however to show the direction of the change.

**Gender**

It was hypothesised that impact would vary according to gender. Therefore, the team measured the change in each of the attitudes for each gender, using the difference between the pre-and post-surveys. Such a measurement can fluctuate from -4 to 4, with a negative score indicating that the attitude has changed negatively as a consequence of the programme, 0 meaning that no change has taken place, and a positive score signalling that the impact of the programme on the attitude was positive. The final sample for this analysis consisted of 5,367 cases. The results are presented in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>T-test sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curiosity</td>
<td>0.0636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Esteem</td>
<td>0.0835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercultural Competence</td>
<td>0.1448</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (6.2) Attitudinal Change (difference in pre and post scores) by gender

Women showed a larger increase in all measurements, and the differences between men and women were found to be significant for the measurement of intercultural competence at the level of p<0.05. This suggests that EVE activities may have a larger impact on female participants when it comes to intercultural competence.

The differences between the pre-exchange survey results for men and women — presented in the table below — provide some insights. Indeed, scores on both self-esteem and intercultural competence differed significantly between men and women pre-exchange, with men scoring themselves higher in both cases.

---

103 Three results for Gender were recorded; Male, Female, and Prefer not to say. The category “Prefer not to say” was however excluded from the analysis, as it only concerned 23 subjects. Cases for which the gender was missing were also omitted for this analysis.

104 The comparison for self-esteem was made using a Mann-Whitney U Test, and curiosity and intercultural competence were both measured using t-tests.
Table (6.3). Pre-exchange attitudinal measures by gender
*This measure is a single 5 point Likert scale, as such the mean is not a very meaningful statistic; however as the difference between the distributions was significant it is included.

These measures were further explored, and as shown by the figure below, the distribution between men and women on self-esteem is indeed remarkably different. Where 71% of men “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” with the statement “I have high self-esteem, only 61% of women do. The effect of gender on intercultural competence as measured in the pre-exchange surveys is less pronounced: 16% of men scored a five, meaning they answered both questions measuring the attitude with “Strongly Agree”, as opposed to 10% of women.

**Gender and Self-Esteem**

![Gender and Self-Esteem](image)

In conclusion, when it comes to the impact of EVE with regards to gender and attitudinal change, female participants had a statistically significant lower point of entry when it came to self-esteem and intercultural competence than male participants. This is in line with a consistent body of research that shows males consistently report higher self-esteem than females\(^\text{105}\). Women also showed statistically significant higher growth on intercultural competence than male participants.

While differences across genders were also explored in relation with changes examined in the rest of this chapter (attitudes towards people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, perceived improvement in 21st century skills, global skills and activation), no significant effects were found in the majority of cases. As such, only findings that show significant impact are presented in the main report; the other findings can be found in Annex 5.
Southern Mediterranean and Europe

Another variable that was explored was the participants’ region. It was hypothesised that impact would be greater for participants from the Southern Mediterranean (RH10) than for those from European countries because this is the pattern that has been found in other reports with Euro-Mediterranean comparisons, such as the Erasmus+ Impact Report (2019) and Anna Lindh Foundation’s Intercultural Trends reports. 5,315 cases were considered for analysis, and the difference between the regions for attitudinal change is presented in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>T-test sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E+</td>
<td>Southern Med</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curiosity</td>
<td>0.0815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Esteem</td>
<td>0.1206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercultural Competence</td>
<td>0.1907</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (6.4) Differences in attitudinal change by region.

The analysis showed improvement on these attitudinal dimensions overall, with slight differences between the regions: respondents from Erasmus+ countries showed slightly higher gain for curiosity and self-esteem, while those from the Southern Mediterranean showed a slightly higher positive impact for intercultural competence. However a t-test for these differences shows that in this case, the differences are not statistically significant. As such, it can be concluded that improvements across regions are similar.

Differences for the pre-exchange survey on these scores based on region were explored. The results of this examination are presented in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean Pre</th>
<th>Mean Post</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Z-Score</th>
<th>Pooled Standard deviation</th>
<th>Significance</th>
<th>Effect size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Esteem</strong></td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>5315</td>
<td>Mann-Whitney U Test</td>
<td>-24.809</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Curiosity</strong></td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>5315</td>
<td>T-Test</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intercultural Competence</strong></td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>5315</td>
<td>T-Test</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (6.5). Pre-exchange attitudinal measures by region

*This measure is a single 5 point Likert scale, as such the mean is not a very meaningful statistic, however as the difference between the distributions was significant it is included.

---

For the purposes of this project participants were defined as being from European countries if they were residents of any of the Erasmus+ programme countries, and from the Southern Mediterranean if they were residents of any of the countries in the European Neighborhood Policy. All other participants were defined as being from the region “other”. For the purposes of this analysis the participants from the region defined as “other” will not be considered.
As clearly shown above, regional differences between participants’ pre-surveys are not only all statistically significant, but also substantial. As gender was found to have some influence on the pre-exchange scores, this aspect was further explored by the team as it might provide an explanation for the differences observed between regions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E+</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>68.94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Med</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>65.97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>34.03%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (6.6) Gender per Region

However, as shown in the table above, the difference in gender between regions is not striking, although a Chi-square analysis, which measures association between categories, does show that it is significant (p=0.022)\textsuperscript{107}. To look deeper into this difference, the team split the data into male and female observations, and reran the previous analyses. The results were similar, with higher mean scores for Southern Mediterranean women than for their European counterparts. The same pattern was also observed for men, with a statistically significant difference on all factors for both men and women. Had the difference in gender been driving the different scores between regions, said difference could have been expected to disappear in this analysis. Another possibility is that the age range of participants might be different across regions. A t-test however shows that the difference between ages across regions is not significant (p=0.112). As such, the effect can be linked to the region of the participants,\textit{ thus confirming that the gain in effectiveness in intercultural competence was greater for participants from Southern Mediterranean countries}. Nevertheless, the question of why remains. A likely option could be that what is being observed here is cultural bias in how these questions are answered, that is participants from Southern Mediterranean countries tended to answer all the questions more highly than those from Erasmus+ countries. The Erasmus+ Impact Study (2019) regarding mobility found a similar tendency for ‘higher gain’ in responses from students in partner countries and hypothesised it could be a result of the exposure to new methods of teaching and learning.

**Qualitative data**

Many participants explicitly mentioned increased self confidence and learning to communicate with others in their responses to the open questions as the most important thing they learnt through the programme. In the interviews and focus groups, a pattern emerged whereby many participants reported that they initially felt anxious about their participation in the exchange. Several factors contributed to this anxiety related to language, meta-perceptions and lack of familiarity with VE. Regarding language, participants expressed concern that their foreign language skills would not be sufficient, that they would not be able to make themselves understood, or would not understand their peers. They were also concerned about stereotypes or perceptions others might have towards them or their national groups, also known as meta-perceptions\textsuperscript{108}. The slight anxiety was also in some cases due to not having an idea about what the exchange would be like, beginning a completely new and unknown experience. However, in almost all cases, they were able to overcome these fears and challenges. Moreover, in many instances there was a shift to becoming a confident participant, proving themselves able to interact with others through a video conferencing platform and have meaningful interactions. This contributed significantly to their self-esteem, in particular for those in the Southern Mediterranean region and Southern European countries who were less confident about their language skills and felt proud in being able to “measure up to” their international peers.

\textsuperscript{107} As Chi-Square tests are oversensitive to differences above 500 observations this was checked using a G-test in the DescTools library in r, which also comes to a p of 0.022.

\textsuperscript{108} Moore-Berg, Aniori-Karlinsky, Hameiri & Bruneau, 2020
“Most important thing I learned was how to find the confidence to speak in front of a group” 
Female, 25, Turkey

Connect Program Express program was a great and unique experience for me, I gained a lot of skills through it, like dialogue skills (listening & talking) and it supported my self-confidence because I was in international conversation with a group of people who I don’t know them, for example in the first session I felt a little nervous and stress then These feelings faded away in the second session, I felt more free and comfort. I learned to respect and accept others ideas, opinions and their different cultures.” Female, 22, Palestine

The Erasmus + Virtual Exchange was among the best experiences in my life. On a personal level, I would say that I have acquired more self-esteem, confidence, and courage to speak up my mind and express my opinion freely. On a professional level, I have developed new debating and public speaking skills taking into consideration the fact that I am a newbie to the debating world.” Female, 21, Morocco

6.2. Attitudes towards others

Research question 3 asked if EVE would have an impact on participants’ affect towards people from different ethnic and religious groups. Pre- and post-exchange feeling thermometers, measured on a scale of 0 to 10 — from very cold/unfavourable to very warm/favourable — were used to measure feelings towards people with a different ethnic and religious background. Fewer participants answered these questions, as they were added in 2019, after the programmes had already been running for a year. A total of 3,544 participants answered both the pre- and post- questions. As can be seen in table 6.7 below, there was statistically significant growth overall for both measures, and effect size was 0.22 for religious background and 0.19 for ethnic background. RH3 can thus be confirmed: EVE had a positive impact on participants’ feelings towards people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds.

It is worth highlighting that the growth and effect size for both of these measures is somewhat higher than the growth on curiosity and self-esteem. This could be linked to the data collection tool which used an 11-point scale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean Pre</th>
<th>Mean Post</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Z-Score</th>
<th>Significance</th>
<th>Effect size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religious background*</td>
<td>7.76</td>
<td>8.20</td>
<td>3544</td>
<td>Wilcoxon Signed Rank</td>
<td>-12.836</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Background</td>
<td>8.01</td>
<td>8.39</td>
<td>3544</td>
<td>Wilcoxon Signed Rank</td>
<td>-11.557</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (6.7). Pre- and post-exchange scores on feeling thermometers
Regional differences

Growth in warmth towards people with a different ethnic background

Figure 6.1 Difference between pre- and post exchange scores for ethnic and religious diversity

The two charts above show the difference between the pre- and post exchange scores on the items measuring attitudes towards others. Specifically, the pre-exchange score on the items is deducted from the post-exchange score, creating a measure ranging from -10 to 10. Any negative number shows a decrease in warmth towards others, while a positive score indicates growth in warmth towards others. In the charts above, it seems clear that there is indeed a difference here between the European and Southern Mediterranean participants. The charts indicate that Southern Mediterranean participants experience more growth in feelings of warmth towards others than their European
peers. Furthermore, statistical testing confirmed that the warmth towards people with a different religious background is statistically significant (Mann Whitney U, N=3494, Z=5.766, p<0.001, effect size=0.1), and although the effect size is small, it is larger than for some other differences observed here: while Europeans show an average growth of 0.27, the average growth in participants from the Southern Mediterranean is at 0.70. The same is true for warmth towards people with a different ethnic background (Mann Whitney U, N= 3494, Z=6.006, p<0.001, effect size=0.1), where Europeans show an average growth of 0.20, opposed to the 0.67 growth by Southern Mediterranean participants.

These findings could be explained by the fact that in the pre-exchange survey europeans start at in the pre-exchange survey than their Southern Mediterranean counterparts, as can be seen in table 6.8, which shows the pre-exchange means per region.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Warmth towards people with a different:</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Southern Med</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic background</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>7.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Background</td>
<td>7.92</td>
<td>7.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (6.8) Pre-exchange means and region

However, this by itself does not explain the higher gain. In order to test this, it should be verified whether participants who scored lower on the pre-exchange survey show a higher growth.

Mean Delta Ethnic Background
This aspect was examined in the two error bar charts above, which show the mean score (and the 95% confidence interval) of the growth on both variables across the different levels of the pre-exchange measure. It appears that participants sitting at the level 0 of the pre-exchange ethnic thermometer scored themselves around 6.5 points higher in the post-exchange questionnaire on average. This large difference on the lower levels can likely be attributed to either random clicking, or misunderstanding of the question in the pre-exchange survey, a potential limitation as mentioned in chapter 4. However, the relationship seems to hold across the higher levels as well, where the confidence intervals are much narrower and where it can thus be more confidently stated that these levels reflect the actual attitudes of the participants. This effect is not entirely surprising, as the higher a participant scores themselves on the pre-exchange, the lower their potential for growth is, as confirmed in the charts below.
For this analysis, the M&E team examined the variation on levels five and above by region — level five was selected as the cutoff as lower levels only accounted for few cases (level four was the highest with 36, while level five counted 581). Whereas the ethnic thermometer shows no variation, participants from the Southern Mediterranean show higher growth at all levels of the pre-exchange measure for the religious thermometer. While the effect is small, it is nonetheless statistically significant.

This finding is in line with research findings from the Anna Lindh/Ipsos Survey on Intercultural Trends regarding whether meeting people from the other region has changed one’s views. While 29% of European respondents said that their views had changed positively after meeting people from Southern and Eastern Mediterranean (SEM) countries, and 55% had stayed the same; 48% from SEM
countries indicated that their views had changed in a positive direction after meeting people from European countries and 33% did not change their views.\(^{109}\)

**Qualitative data**

In the responses to open questions, interviews, and focus groups, many participants reported engaging with difference and becoming more open to and interested in getting to know people with different backgrounds. However, reference was more often made to either difference in general or culture than to religious or ethnic differences. For the majority of participants, getting to know a diverse range of people and perspectives was the best thing about their experience in the Virtual Exchange:

"I learned to be even more respectful towards people from different cultures and now I want to understand WHY people think what they think and not just WHAT they think. I also learned to listen and be more confident with my English." **Female, 20, Finland**

"We can deal with people from different background if we delete our previous thoughts about them and we deal with them as human" **Female, 30, Syria**

"The most topics that I enjoyed talking about were political and religious topics because I feel that these things are what is causing problems between people and standing as a barrier between people coming closer to each other, and also having much needed knowledge about them and I was able to discuss them with ease." **Male, 25, Algeria**

During interviews and focus groups, participants discussed the ways in which their attitudes had changed, and acknowledged previous misperceptions they may have had of others. Several of them reported more nuanced understandings of other cultures, and of their own:

"I had the stereotype that women rights are not respected in the MENA region, but things are improving, many of these women were lawyers, this changed my view, but there are other steps to do, the majority had the right to travel abroad, but in rural areas there are problems of education and travel, in Western countries the main problem is violence against women, gap in wages, abortion stigma, they say that in the West we achieved more rights, and we overcome all problems, but we mentioned that there are still problems, they were surprised, there are still problems regarding women." **Female, 22, Italy**

"I am braver in the virtual world, than in the actual world, we discussed a lot of important topics, such as Islamophobia, the reaction from the other participants was great, they supported all Muslims." **Female, Tunisia, 24**

Perceptions of how they believe they are perceived by others (meta-perceptions) were also explored and sometimes challenged.

"They think that we think they are all terrorists and this is a bit sad for them, I realized that they think we are the perfect countries, but we tried to state that we have problems as well" **Female, 23, Italy**

"We started the group, divided among East and West, they were taking a defensive position, everyone would judge them as terrorist, but nobody had these stereotypes. This was more in their mind, we were an open group, very happy to discuss, we could feel in the way we were positioning in the dialogue. The main thing that we realized about them, and they realized about Europe, that we are very close, and much more similar, we want the same things in life." **Male, 28, Italy/Brazil.**

6.3. 21st Century Skills

Research question four sought to determine whether participants felt they improved their 21st century skills. 21st century skills are a group of competences which includes the ability to listen actively, critical thinking, digital competences, teamwork and collaborative problem-solving skills, and English and/or foreign language skills. These were measured only in post-exchange survey items, there was without a pre- post comparison.

Table (6.9) below lists the overall scores of EVE activities on the items making up 21st century skills\(^{110}\). These items appear from highest to lowest rated based on the percentage of respondents who “Agree” or “Strongly Agree”. Participants most commonly agreed that the activities had an impact on their ability to listen actively. This was indeed by far the measure which most people agreed with (91.25%), followed by critical thinking, and English and/or foreign language skills.

RH4 can thus be confirmed, as the majority of participants perceived improvement in their 21st century skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>total</th>
<th>Percentage agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ability to listen actively</td>
<td>N 23</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>1424</td>
<td>1505</td>
<td>3210</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 0.72%</td>
<td>1.43%</td>
<td>6.60%</td>
<td>44.36%</td>
<td>46.88%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>91.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>critical thinking skills</td>
<td>N 33</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>1575</td>
<td>1116</td>
<td>3213</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 1.03%</td>
<td>2.52%</td>
<td>12.70%</td>
<td>49.02%</td>
<td>34.73%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>83.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English and/or foreign language skills</td>
<td>N 134</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>776</td>
<td>2462</td>
<td>1902</td>
<td>5497</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 2.44%</td>
<td>4.06%</td>
<td>14.12%</td>
<td>44.79%</td>
<td>34.60%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>79.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>team-work and collaborative problem-solving skills</td>
<td>N 83</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>907</td>
<td>2527</td>
<td>1815</td>
<td>5574</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 1.49%</td>
<td>4.34%</td>
<td>16.27%</td>
<td>45.34%</td>
<td>32.56%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>77.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>digital competences</td>
<td>N 92</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>990</td>
<td>2637</td>
<td>1496</td>
<td>5459</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 1.69%</td>
<td>4.47%</td>
<td>18.14%</td>
<td>48.31%</td>
<td>27.40%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>75.71%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (6.9) 21st Century Skills overall scores

\(^{110}\) As the active listening and critical thinking questions were only added later during the programmes not only will the responses of participants who have scores on all questions be considered, but also those where data is missing. As such we have different counts for the different questions. In cases where the composite score is considered, only full responses are counted, in this case we have 3208 cases.
The above figure illustrates the difference between regions on the composite of 21st century skills. Here, there is a clear discrepancy, with Southern Mediterranean participants rating the impact an average of 4.17 and Europeans rating it 3.98. It should be noted that this difference is both statistically significant (Mann Whitney U, N=3162, Z=12.641, p<0.001, effect size=0.22), and rather large with an effect size of 0.22. Looking more closely at the different items making up the composite measure, the team found these regional differences to be true on all individual measures, and to be following the same direction. In order to determine if this arose from an overall answer bias (i.e. do participants from Southern Mediterranean countries simply rate all questions higher?), each item making up the composite was checked. The aim here was to find out if there was a difference between regional means at different levels of the composite score.

Indeed, if there were cultural bias Southern Mediterranean participants would be expected to score each item different at all levels of the composite score. This verification was done using a Univariate model, and the table below presents the results for all items, only looking at the effect of the region:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Digital Competences</td>
<td>2.363</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.363</td>
<td>6.395</td>
<td>0.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking</td>
<td>0.903</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.903</td>
<td>3.026</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team-Work</td>
<td>4.114</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.114</td>
<td>12.679</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Listening</td>
<td>0.296</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.296</td>
<td>1.207</td>
<td>0.272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Skills</td>
<td>0.00001</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.00001</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.999</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (6.10) 21st Century Skills and region

As can be seen in the table above, a bias is (or seems to be) observed on digital competences, critical
thinking and teamwork as respondents from the Southern Mediterranean countries consistently perceive the impact of the activities on these skills higher than their European counterparts. As this is not true for all the skills composing the measure 21st century skills, the perceived development of 21st century skills can only be in part explained through cultural bias. Other possible explanations could include the fact that these competencies are less frequently addressed in their university curricula or non-formal activities. In fact, the Erasmus+ Impact Study (2019) found that respondents from partner countries reported bigger gains in terms of competence development relevant to employment and a cohesive society, as well as in personal attitudes much more often than those from programme countries (p.66). In conclusion, the analysis above shows that RH4 is confirmed, and thus may be concluded that EVE positively contributes to the development of 21st century skills. As the higher increases for Southern Mediterranean participants can only in part be explained by cultural bias, we also conclude that EVE had a greater impact on the development of 21st century skills among Southern Mediterranean participants than for their European counterparts.

**Qualitative data**

Many participants indeed mentioned learning to listen or “active listening” in the interviews and also responses to the open questions in the survey, and gave examples of how it changed their behaviour also in other contexts. The design of the videoconferencing technology was mentioned by a few in relation to this, which was designed so as not to allow participants to interrupt when somebody is talking.

"Not being able to interrupt one another in the group chat also contributes to an even power dynamic. Usually I am a very talkative person and probably am a more dominant contributor to a conversation. I also sometimes catch myself interrupting someone in real life, because there is something I really want to say. Often then I only realize afterwards how disrespectful and impolite that was. Therefore, I was happy that I could train my listening skills in this conversation because I really didn’t want to be rude. The facilitator also did a great job at trying to encourage everybody to contribute to the conversation, not only the ones who would naturally do so.”

Female, 22, Germany

"I have learned how important is it to hear different point of views about a specific subject, it helps you to understand it better." Female, 21, Palestine

When it comes to digital literacies, participants felt that they had above all developed their ability to communicate online. They became comfortable communicating through video tools which many had previously been unfamiliar with:

"For me it was the first time that I used the digital video-conferencing platform, for example. I have used the platform many times after. Before I would be scared a bit, I wouldn’t feel that natural, and comfortable, but later I felt that it was like talk, about being engaged in the debates in the lectures. I personally was helped by this experience.” Female, 20, Palestine

In interviews and open responses to survey questions, some respondents also demonstrated critical digital literacy, in terms of understanding the mediating effect of different technologies and the impact they can have on power dynamics:

"The most polarising topic during our discussions was the impact of social media on how we perceive ourselves and their contribution in shaping our personality and identity... the use of social media implies a mediated form of interaction (based on screen to screen posts or tweets) which produces the loss of all the typical nuances of a direct communication (i.e. the tone of the voice and the conversation, the mimic expressions, etc.) even though I recognise the irony of making such a claim during a Virtual Exchange program which didn’t let us meet personally.”

Male, 24, Italy

After the COVID-19 outbreak, with the so-called pivot to emergency remote education, online communication became the “new normal”. Several participants reported that they felt prepared for this new situation, often more than peers in their local contexts who had not had experience with VE. They had learnt how to engage and build meaningful social relations online which is something
they valued. Several also commented that they were not able to interact or get to know peers and collaborate in other online spaces, in particular educational platforms.

Participants in some of the activities reported learning **how to collaborate in groups**, developing problem-solving skills between group members, and openly discussing the challenges they were facing collectively:

*The team-work for our group was good. When somebody had a question or somebody didn’t understand something, the whole group worked together to make it clear and help the other person to understand.* **Female, 23, Germany**

*I never have had to work on a whole project and carry out a presentation with others with our sole interactions being over a screen and technology. In addition I have never worked on something with nearly every person being from a different country and university.* **Female, 21, Ireland**

*To debate with others and take part in the group with people from different countries, it is a good opportunity to enhance your abilities, your team work, to be a good member, an active member in the team. I also found interesting to distribute the tasks for the other members of the team, it was very easy doing interactions with the others.* **Male, 26, Palestine**

Several comments suggested that it took time to get to know one another, build trust and be able to collaborate effectively. This would seem to be an advantage that the longer exchange programmes can offer. The “real world” relevance of these skills was commented upon by several students:

*The big difference was that we did never meet in person and had to do everything virtually. In the beginning, conversation was rather difficult between the team members because we did not know each other and have not had common themes like being from the same university in the beginning. However, we developed as a team over time and over the weeks I could see a real progress in our team dynamics and reliability on team members that I had not seen in face-to-face teams before.* **Female, 22, Germany**

*Well firstly it was hard to manage time with others from different places and countries, harder to schedule and work. Of course it feels more really in the context of communication in real work.* **Female, 24, Czech Republic**

**Language and communicative competence**

Many of the participants enrolled in the activities in order to improve their language skills, either because it was part of a language programme, or because they saw it as an opportunity to use their skills outside of the classroom. The most important outcomes reported were overcoming their anxiety and fear about communicating in a foreign language, and using language in meaningful ways, that is being able to talk about issues that were relevant to them, their own opinions and engage in meaningful interaction without being concerned about making mistakes.

*We didn’t have native speakers, we could talk without fearing about mistakes.* **Female, 23, Italy**

*The best thing about the Connect program was to speak English without pressure.* **Female, 24, Finland**

*I learned from them how to break the wall of speaking in another language, English is a second language in my country and it is difficult to speak English with people, they speak Arabic here* **Female, 20, Jordan**

Understanding the specificity of communicating in online contexts, and the importance of being effective in such spaces, was perceived as important:

*In light of covid-19, Virtual Exchange and virtual collaboration becomes more and more important. These ways of communication face even more obstacles than real meetings, hence*
being aware of them becomes crucial for successful communication. I see a potential hazard for communication to fail to accomplish, if people are not aware of those subtleties.” Female, 25, Germany

Several respondents reported what could be described as a “collaborative ethos” towards communication in the interactions. Participants and facilitators helped one another in expressing themselves and making themselves understood - through translation, using online tools to support themselves or each other, paraphrasing and explaining:

Another important point with regards to the dialogue is that we spoke in English during our sessions. [...] We did not grow up expressing ourselves in English but, even if we are not expert users, we discussed about politics, poetry, economy and history in a successful way. When somebody did not know a specific term, others explained to him or her. Not being native speaker makes your behaviour modest, and you can feel free to ask for explanations. On the other hand, it is also true that this situation did not enable us to talk normally as we do in our mother tongue. However, it may prompt us to improve our English and to gain some confidence.” Female, 23, Italy

Participants also acquired vocabulary and terminology related to specific issues that were addressed in the exchanges, to the activity itself, and to the competences derived from it. The language used for debates for example is quite different from the dialogue terminology. Within these interactions, the language used is quite different, which was reflected both in the answers to open-ended survey questions, and in the interviews.

Critical thinking and media literacy

Several participants reported having developed skills related to critical thinking and media literacy, such as understanding that words can have multiple meanings and that a shared comprehension should not be assumed. They described how they were exposed to different perspectives on issues discussed — not “single truths” — and acquired an awareness of how their own and others’ perspectives and opinions are influenced by multiple factors, such as the grand narratives that the media may expose them to, families and cultural factors, historical and geo-political issues and dimensions of power:

“I enjoyed discussing what the word conflict means to everyone one of us. Turns out, it could be really different depending on culture, country, and background. Plus, we discussed our personal conflicts and how we deal with them.” Female, 24, Syria

“It is important to know what is happening in other countries talking with people that live there. We can’t trust media all the time.” Male, 21, Spain

In some exchanges, media literacy and critical thinking were intentionally addressed with support materials and activities related to media issues such as hate speech, fake news, gender and equality:

“I learn that there are so many things in this world that are sometimes overseen and gender inequality, especially in the media field is serious issue that should raise awareness and should be improved.” Female, 20, Romania

“(I have learnt ) that my experience isn’t a worldwide experience, we may all see the same stories but interpret them in different ways due to our experiences.” Female, 20, Ireland
6.4. Global Skills

Research question 5 was formulated to assess whether participants felt they improved their global skills, a group of competences comprising the skills to communicate or work in a culturally diverse setting, knowledge and/or interest in global events and knowledge about the relationship between and across different societies. All valid cases were considered for the overall scores. For the composite score only full responses were considered, leaving 5,362 cases.

Activities overall obtained quite high scores. The results in table (6.11) are presented in a descending order of agreement based on the answers “Agree” and “Strongly Agree”. The ability to communicate or work in a culturally diverse setting found the highest agreement rating, followed closely by improved knowledge/interest in global events.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>total</th>
<th>Percentage agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>skills to communicate or work in a culturally diverse setting</td>
<td>N 47</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>488</td>
<td>2734</td>
<td>2218</td>
<td>5564</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 0.84%</td>
<td>1.38%</td>
<td>8.77%</td>
<td>49.14%</td>
<td>39.86%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>89.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my knowledge and/or interest in global events</td>
<td>N 62</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>607</td>
<td>2828</td>
<td>2064</td>
<td>5722</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 1.08%</td>
<td>2.81%</td>
<td>10.61%</td>
<td>49.42%</td>
<td>36.07%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>85.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my knowledge about the relationship between and across different societies</td>
<td>N 69</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>833</td>
<td>2620</td>
<td>1679</td>
<td>5421</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 1.27%</td>
<td>4.06%</td>
<td>15.37%</td>
<td>48.33%</td>
<td>30.97%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>79.30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (6.11) Perceived improvement in Global Skills
As can be seen from the bar chart above, the distributions across gender of the composite measure for Global Skills look quite similar. A Mann Whitney U test however shows a significant difference across these distributions ($Z=-3.136$, $p=0.002$, $N=5289$): women tend to rate the impact of the programmes on these skills higher than men, with a mean score of 4.17 as opposed to 4.10.

This difference is interesting, even though the effect size is very small (0.04), and worth exploring further. When the individual variables that make up global skills across gender are tested, a significant difference across gender appears on two variables, namely “skills to communicate or work in a culturally diverse setting” (Mann Whitney U test, $N=5489$, $Z=-3.265$, $p=0.001$, effect size=0.04), and, “my knowledge and/or interest in global events” (Mann Whitney U test, $N = 5548$, $Z=-4.355$, $p<0.001$, effect size=0.06). The third variable however does not show significant difference across genders. Although the difference is small, it appears that the larger effect size is present for the “knowledge and/or interest in global events” variable.

It is thus possible to conclude that women rate the impact of the activities on global skills slightly higher than men do.
As illustrated by the figure above, there is a considerable difference between European and Southern Mediterranean participants when it comes to the impact on global skills. Participants from Erasmus+ programme countries have a mean score of 4.04, while Southern Mediterranean participants have a mean score of 4.26. This difference is statistically significant (Mann Whitney U, N=5275, Z=11.959, p<0.001, effect size=0.16). As in previous instances, the M&E team explored the possibility that this difference was caused by cultural biases, and found that once again, Southern Mediterranean participants scored the programmes higher on each individual item. Therefore, the team explored the variance at each level of the composite. As can be seen in the table below, two of the items show significant differences between the regions on all levels of the composite score.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>skills to communicate or work in a culturally diverse setting</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.061</td>
<td>0.805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my knowledge about the relationship between and across different societies</td>
<td>1.141</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.141</td>
<td>4.946</td>
<td>0.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my knowledge about the relationship between and across different societies</td>
<td>1.125</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.125</td>
<td>4.706</td>
<td>0.030</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (6.12) Global Skills and region

Consequently, it can be concluded that there are significant differences between European and Southern Mediterranean participants when it comes to the impact of the EVE activities on the Global Skills. It should be added that some of this difference is likely attributable to cultural bias.

Qualitative data

Participants reported engaging in discussions on a wide range of “global issues” and events, exchanging on specific cultures or societies, and exploring the relations between societies. The approach to these topics varied considerably according to the specific exchanges they took part in (see Chapter 7 for a
more in-depth analysis). Some of the exchanges addressed specific issues, such as gender and media, populism and nationalism, and migration, and many participants reported that their exchanges were a space to talk about topics that they do not tend to discuss with friends or family.

This intentionality in addressing global issues and activating students in relation to these themes is perhaps what distinguishes several of the EVE activities from Erasmus+ mobility: while the 2019 Erasmus+ Impact Study found that 68% reported they were interested in discussing political topics seriously, and 50% of respondents were more interested in social and political events/developments at European/international level\(^{111}\), 85% of EVE post-exchange survey respondents reported a perceived gain in knowledge and/or interest in global events. Although these two studies examine items which are not strictly comparable, it is of interest to explore further how VE engages participants and furthers their interest in global issues.

“We discussed about gender issues and inequalities. And the situation in our countries. In the real life I don’t talk about gender issues with my friends.” Male, 24, Italy

“We discussed about religion and politics. I have seen the Turkish case where politics and religion are linked. Egypt is not the same.” Male, 22, Egypt

In some comments, as well as interviews and focus groups, participants reported on the impact of hearing about other participants’ experiences of migration, and conflict, inequities. This seemed to be a trigger for activation, in the sense of becoming interested in knowing more about the specific issue or taking action:

“As I said in the last group meeting it was great to meet new people from other countries and sharing ideas and thoughts on important matters such as Youth Peace and Security, listening to other people’s perspectives and experiences may really broaden individual’s views” Male, N/A, Lebanon

“The most important thing I have learnt is) By far how other people are thinking about the inequality and different opportunities that men and women have. And of course how we can deal with this issue.” Male, 29, Greece

6.5. Activation

Research question 6 focused on whether participants were activated through their engagement in the exchange. In other words, it aimed at finding out if they built meaningful relationships, shared information about what they learnt with others in their communities, became interested in further opportunities to engage in VE or actually study abroad, and determine whether they took action in terms of challenging media misrepresentations of other groups. (see Table 6.13).

All valid cases were considered for the overall scores. As such, there are different numbers of cases per question. In cases where the composite score is considered, only full responses were counted — 5,298 cases in this instance.

\[111\] These were amongst the items with lowest scores in the Erasmus+ Impact Study
### Activation overall

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>total</th>
<th>Percentage agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I shared information about what I was learning through virtual exchange with my friends and/or other people in my community</td>
<td>N 47</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>599</td>
<td>3222</td>
<td>1875</td>
<td>5921</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 0.79%</td>
<td>3.01%</td>
<td>10.12%</td>
<td>54.42%</td>
<td>31.67%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>86.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am interested in having further opportunities to engage in virtual exchange.</td>
<td>N 100</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>760</td>
<td>2187</td>
<td>2401</td>
<td>5700</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 1.75%</td>
<td>4.42%</td>
<td>13.33%</td>
<td>38.37%</td>
<td>42.12%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>80.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in this virtual exchange increased my interest in taking part in an educational programme abroad.</td>
<td>N 75</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>785</td>
<td>1808</td>
<td>2426</td>
<td>5308</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 1.41%</td>
<td>4.03%</td>
<td>14.79%</td>
<td>34.06%</td>
<td>45.70%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>79.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I built positive/meaningful relationships by participating in this virtual exchange</td>
<td>N 122</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>1135</td>
<td>2620</td>
<td>1626</td>
<td>5872</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 2.08%</td>
<td>6.28%</td>
<td>19.33%</td>
<td>44.62%</td>
<td>27.69%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>72.31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have challenged media misrepresentation of other groups since participating in this virtual exchange</td>
<td>n 77</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>1839</td>
<td>2496</td>
<td>1126</td>
<td>5923</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 1.30%</td>
<td>6.50%</td>
<td>31.05%</td>
<td>42.14%</td>
<td>19.01%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>61.15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (6.13) How participants were activated
The items are presented in descending order. The exchanges activated participants insofar as they shared information with others about their experiences, which is of importance as it has the potential to spread the impact of EVE beyond direct participants. The fact that such a high percentage agreed that they were interested in further VE opportunities as well as physical mobility suggests that their curiosity was activated, as well as their desire to learn and engage more — again, a very positive outcome. On the other hand, challenging media misrepresentation seems to have received a considerably lower rating, which is perhaps to be expected as it is a rather specific action which requires putting oneself on the line. Furthermore, the question was asked immediately after the end of the project, at a time when participants may not have yet had the opportunity to challenge misrepresentations. Again, a loose comparison could be made to the Erasmus+ Impact Study, where only 48% of respondents confirmed that they were committed to stand against discrimination, intolerance, xenophobia or racism.

**Activation and Region**

The above figure shows the regional difference between participants with regards to the impact of EVE activities on what has been called “activation”, a cluster of measures which refer to behavioural change and agency. Here, a large difference can clearly be observed, with Europeans scoring 3.81 on this cluster of items, and Southern Mediterranean participants scoring 4.22. This difference is significant (Mann Whitney U, N=5215, Z=23.185, p=0.000, effect size = 0.32), and the effect size is quite large compared to the other differences found. As in previous instances, all individual items were scored higher by participants from the Southern Mediterranean region.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I shared information about what I was learning through Virtual Exchange with my friends and/or other people in my community</td>
<td>24.967</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24.967</td>
<td>75.274</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am interested in having further opportunities to engage in Virtual Exchange</td>
<td>17.952</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17.952</td>
<td>56.383</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in this Virtual Exchange increased my interest in taking part in an educational programme abroad.</td>
<td>1.613</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.613</td>
<td>4.337</td>
<td>0.037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I built positive/meaningful relationships by participating in this Virtual Exchange</td>
<td>0.098</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.098</td>
<td>0.265</td>
<td>0.607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have challenged media misrepresentation of other groups since participating in this Virtual Exchange</td>
<td>7.123</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.123</td>
<td>14.256</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (6.14) Activation and region

The table above shows a significant variation per item of this cluster of items defined as activation, indicating the presence of a cultural bias in the answers. Interestingly, European participants appear to have a positive bias in two instances, namely with regards to the “challenging media misrepresentation” and “sharing information with friends and family”.

It can thus be concluded that the activities’ impact does differ across regions. It is clear that some of this difference is attributable to cultural bias, although the analysis shows that there is positive bias on two items by Southern Mediterranean participants — interest in having more Virtual Exchange experiences, and increased interest in taking part in a study abroad programme — while for European participants the positive bias was in sharing information and challenging media misrepresentations.
Qualitative data

Activation, as reported in the literature review, can be considered in different ways. Building meaningful relationships — that is establishing friendships which carry on beyond the duration of the exchange and outside of the platform — is important, as it is at the basis of positive peace-building and cohesive societies\(^\text{112}\). It is also seen as part of creating empathy and contributing to the “humanisation of the other”, which is of fundamental importance if we acknowledge that conflicts and tensions arise from the dehumanisation of the other.

“\begin{quote} It was a really good experience, we are still keeping in contact, I am happy to meet some of the people who were in my group, I was the only refugee in my group, I was especially interested in knowing how natives would see us, to hear about their opinion about this refugee crisis, so it was a very good opportunity, it is very emotional as I said, we are still in contact through a Facebook group, I am planning to see them anytime soon. \end{quote} Male, 27, Germany

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, being able to establish relationships through VE and have a sense of social proximity — based on the shared experience of living a global pandemic — was valued by many participants. Several of them reported on the increased relevance of building connections and developing the ability to collaborate, given how the pandemic has highlighted the interdependency of people across different parts of the globe.

“\begin{quote} I am going to be honest with you guys, at the first I was so worried, and nervous because I don’t know hows it going to be. But we started the first session, the facilitator and the group were friendly, the best thing I liked about this program, that they are able to connect the whole world together, introducing you to different cultures, building relationships across the world (united) among these conditions (Covid 19 virus). \end{quote} Female, 21, Palestine

Activation of the self

Activation was also framed in terms of personal transformation and seeking to further what participants had started to learn. Evidence of this was found in individuals reporting how they were actively seeking out further information about specific issues addressed, or having acquired the confidence and/or curiosity to look for other opportunities for intercultural engagement, whether through more Virtual Exchange experiences — several interviewees had taken part in more than one VE activity and some went on to follow the facilitator training — or through study abroad. Some participants who were enrolled at university were activated to study VE further, and a few reported intending to write their theses about VE.

“\begin{quote} To keep informing myself besides mass media and to keep discussing things instead of being afraid to say the opinion. \end{quote} Female, 23, Germany

“\begin{quote} The most exciting topic that I discussed and I enjoyed the most was about the LGBT community legalization. This topic motivated me to search more about this issue to learn more and in the end, I had the opportunity to form a more structured opinion about the topic. \end{quote} Male, 21, Greece

“\begin{quote} During these 4 weeks I have not only learned about peacebuilding and the transformation of conflict, I also learned how to build a sustainable peace and how to verbalize our needs. This Virtual Exchange helped me to understand how powerful are young people and how many changes they can do. We, the youth, truly are the future of our earth and only we can see the world with fresh eyes and understand what changes are needed to be done. \end{quote} Male, 18, Moldova

\(^\text{112}\) Galtung, 1969; Van Hoef & Oelsner, 2018
A further form of activation was putting into practice what they learnt through the VE into other contexts:

“Learning how to listen actively and analyze my own behaviour in disagreements or conflicts with those I live, as well as looking from a more objective way at my own thoughts and thus being able to change my behaviour when I would see myself acting more towards ineffective way of resolving a conflict rather than an effective one” Female, 27, Spain/Slovakia

Some of the VE activities were more explicit in their intent to activate participants: for example, some exchanges involved them in the design of an advocacy campaign, and the “Youth, Peace and Security” iOOC was specifically developed for young peacebuilders. In this case, those who had chosen to take part in the exchange were doubtless more open to activation.

“I am even more so interested in following through with creating more connections with youths across the globe to build a solidarity platform on how to better address the conflict situations in our different countries. Indeed I have found the courage to connect, to question our failing system and motivation to keep speaking and doing my own bit to transform my society. Peace is possible.” Male, 29, Netherlands/Nigerian

“I think my whole perspective on peacebuilding changed after this program. Recognizing the importance of the youth in this process has been really empowering. Getting the ability to share my perspective with people from different ethnical, religious backgrounds and getting to know their perspectives through actively listening immensely helped me.” Female, 19, Lebanon

Activating others also entailed participants telling members of their communities about their VE experiences, sharing stories, and encouraging others to take part in VE activities. Again, some of the activities intentionally included such components in the design of the exchanges. For instance, some iterations of the iOOC and OFD included assignments that required participants to video-record interviews with members of their communities about certain issues, and for these same community members to respond to others from other communities via video, thus engaging in an asynchronous conversation.

Triggers for activation were explored in the analysis of qualitative data, paying particular attention to the two activities with the highest numbers of participants (OFD and iOOCs). One of the most frequently reported triggers — in particular by participants from Erasmus+ programme countries — was the exposure to other group members’ experiences, often negative ones: discrimination, colonisation, living in conflict areas, among others. Hearing these stories often created discomfort, which several European participants linked to their privilege and structural inequities within and between societies. As a result, this experience led to change not only in attitudes towards others, but also their perception of self.

“I was impressed that there was this guy from Syria, he was from such a difficult place, he put you in perspective of which life we conduct here.” Female, Belgium

On the other hand, participants in Southern Mediterranean countries sometimes reported how they had shared their struggles and felt pleased or surprised at being listened to by their European peers.

Discussion of findings

Analysis of the data has revealed the overall positive impact of EVE on participants, both in European and Southern Mediterranean countries. Research hypotheses 1-6 have been confirmed. There was significant improvement in pre- and post-measures on self-esteem, curiosity and above all intercultural communication. Whilst the actual size of the change may seem small, it is important to highlight that this is statistically significant, and it has been consistent over multiple iterations of analysis (see 2019 Impact report comparing data from 2018 and 2019). Furthermore, it is worth considering that the intercultural experience here is not an immersive study abroad but a “Virtual Exchange” where contact is not direct but mediated by technology. While contact through video conferencing technology is not the same as being in the same space, findings show that it can be engaging and sustained over time, and allows participants to build relationships with others.
There was also significant change in attitudes towards people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, which is a very important finding if we are to consider the aims of the project in terms of increasing tolerance and fostering social cohesion. What emerged from the participant accounts of the exchange were the quality of the interactions they had, the meaningful relations developed with people with whom they do not normally have opportunities to interact with. Furthermore, in many cases they were able to address what are considered divisive topics which, as several mentioned, they do not often talk about with their peers.\textsuperscript{113}

These are all factors which contributed to the “activation” of participants in terms of wanting to learn more about the issues they discussed and the areas fellow participants come from, seeking further opportunities for engagement through either more Virtual Exchange experiences and/or study abroad - and over the three years of EVE several participants did indeed take part in multiple activities and also many went on to follow the facilitator training (see chapter 10). Many participants reported talking about their experiences to people in their communities, which can have a ripple effect, that is the impact can extend to beyond the direct beneficiaries of the project. And significantly, a number of respondents also reported taking action to challenge media stereotypes - which is a powerful contributor to social change. Having direct contact and access to people across the different regions empowers people to actively seek information as they become more interested in events, and can “put a face” to the news they hear. Activation can thus be associated with personal and collective agency.

Participants also perceived improvement in 21st century skills. At least three quarters of participants agreed or strongly agreed with all measures, above all for active listening (91%), followed by critical thinking (84%). They also perceived improvement in their global skills. The ability to communicate or work in a culturally diverse setting found the highest agreement rating, followed closely by improved knowledge/interest in global events.

There were some differences in impact according to gender on some of the measures, but this was not a major trend across the data. There were, however, significant differences across regions with Southern Mediterranean respondents giving higher scores overall, thus RH9 is confirmed. Whilst in some cases this could be attributed to cultural bias in responses, it could also be due to the fact that VE offered opportunities to develop skills that are not often experienced in their own contexts. In response to questions asking in what ways these interactions were different from other interactions, both online and offline and their university experiences many of the interviewees highlighted the difference from their university classes in terms of the amount of interaction they engaged in and topics addressed. In terms of social interactions it was the topics addressed. Another theme which emerged from analysis of the qualitative data was that for participants in some contexts, it was one of few opportunities they had for interactions with international peers.

\textsuperscript{113} Amichai-Hamburger & McKenna, 2006
7. Comparing the different EVE Models of Virtual Exchange

In this chapter, attention will be paid to the differences between the VE models offered under EVE, through the exploration of RQs 12 and 13, namely:

RQ12: Did the impact and participants’ perceived improvement differ according to the exchange activity?

RQ13: What are the strengths and weaknesses of the different models?

Here, the research hypothesis proposed that the impact and perceived improvement would differ depending on the exchange activity, specifically with regards to each exchange’s design features, the diversity of participants engaged, and the number of facilitated dialogue sessions they participated in. Therefore, in order to answer these questions, the M&E team explored the specificities of each model, that is how each of them contributed to meeting the aims of EVE.

The chapter starts by outlining the main features of the four exchange models piloted under EVE, and compares the impact created by each type of activity, as well as participants’ perceived improvements. It further presents and analyses each model’s pedagogic design and adaptations during the three years of implementation, and looks deeper into the number of participants and their demographics for each model. Thematic analysis of the qualitative data obtained from responses to open questions and from the focus groups and interviews with participants, facilitators, and coordinators provide further insights.

EVE models of Virtual Exchange activities

Virtual Exchange is a complex field, with several different models emerging. While these have in common the practice of using technology to bring young people together across geographic and/or cultural divides, with the aim of improving intercultural understanding, they differ in many ways. Two broad “typologies” of exchange can be identified in EVE, namely “ready-made” exchanges that were developed and rolled out by members of the project consortium, and “grassroots” exchanges led by educators or youth workers who followed specific training programmes. Further distinctions can be made in terms of the content, activities that participants engage in, duration in terms of weeks and also “dosage” of activities, that is how much time is spent on each type of activity. This is helpful in understanding the level of participants’ engagement in the VE activities.

Table 7.1 below seeks to summarise some of the key characteristics of the four different VE models implemented under EVE, using an adaptation of the Virtual Exchange Typology developed by the Stevens’ Initiative.

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lead institution or partnership type programme</th>
<th>Online Facilitated Dialogue</th>
<th>Interactive open online courses (IOOCs)</th>
<th>Transnational Exchange Project (TEP)</th>
<th>Advocacy Training/Debate (AT)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soliya</td>
<td>Sharing Perspectives Foundation</td>
<td>HEI or youth organisation partnerships with support from UNICollaboration</td>
<td>Debate leaders with support from Anne Lindh Foundation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme Administration Type</td>
<td>4 VE programmes run the same way across multiple sites</td>
<td>Multiple VE programmes run the same way across multiple sites</td>
<td>Co-designed VEs</td>
<td>Single VE programme led by trained team leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Content or Topics</td>
<td>Empathy, global competences</td>
<td>Empathy, global competences, IOOC specific content</td>
<td>Intercultural communication, collaboration, subject specific content</td>
<td>Debating skills (develop an argument, refute an argument..), topics of debate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VE Activity type</td>
<td>Dialogue (sometimes also project)</td>
<td>Dialogue, videolectures, interactive assignments</td>
<td>Asynchronous task or project-based activities, dialogue</td>
<td>3 hr debate + 2 hr dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>2, 4, 5 or 8 weeks</td>
<td>5 or 9 weeks</td>
<td>usually from 4-8 weeks</td>
<td>1-2 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dosage/Amount of activity by type</td>
<td>2 hrs live dialogue weekly. Dependent on length of programme. E.g. for 8 weeks: dialogue 16 hrs, assignments 8 hours</td>
<td>2 hrs live dialogue weekly. Dependent on length of programme. For 9 weeks: dialogue 18 hrs, videolectures 13.5 hours, assignments 50+</td>
<td>Asynch and synch activities 10-30 hours; dialogue 2-4 hours live dialogue total</td>
<td>3 hr debate + 2 hr dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total no. of participants 2018-2020</td>
<td>14,288</td>
<td>9,305</td>
<td>2,716</td>
<td>2,117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key participant demographics</td>
<td>56% S.Mediterranean, 44% Europe</td>
<td>46% S.Mediterranean, 54% Europe</td>
<td>8% S.Mediterranean, 92% Europe</td>
<td>72% S. Mediterranean, 28% Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality control</td>
<td>mini-web surveys, post-exchange evaluation, coach/observation</td>
<td>mini-web surveys, post-exchange evaluation, coach/observation</td>
<td>mini-web surveys, post-exchange evaluation, mentors,</td>
<td>mini-web surveys, post-exchange evaluation, adjudicators,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>facilitator community, coordinator meetings, training sessions and/or resources to address specific issues</td>
<td>facilitator community, coordinator meetings, training sessions and/or resources to address specific issues</td>
<td>TEP community, drop-in office hours, online resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7.1 Model overview
7.1 Comparing the impact of the different VE models

The differences between models with regards to their impact on attitudinal changes were examined using an ANOVA test. As there was no homogeneity of variance, the M&E team used a Welch test. This showed that there were significant differences between the models on self-esteem, intercultural competence and curiosity. These effects are presented in tables 7.3 and 7.4. In order to provide some insight into the impact by model, pre- and post- scores were compared per model. The effect size for intercultural competence can be considered quite positive for reporting small effects in three out of the four activities. The results are presented in table 7.2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Pre</th>
<th>Post</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Z</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>Effect Size</th>
<th>Percentage agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AT</td>
<td>Self-Esteem</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>414</td>
<td>-6.982</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intercultural Competence</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>414</td>
<td>-7.629</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Curiosity</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>4.62</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>414</td>
<td>-4.817</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iOOC</td>
<td>Self-Esteem</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>1133</td>
<td>-5.667</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intercultural Competence</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>1133</td>
<td>-7.187</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Curiosity</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>4.62</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>1133</td>
<td>-4.692</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>OFD</td>
<td>Self-Esteem</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>3460</td>
<td>-6.607</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intercultural Competence</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>3460</td>
<td>-18.179</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Curiosity</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>3460</td>
<td>-7.680</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEP</td>
<td>Self-Esteem</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>433</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td>0.999</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intercultural Competence</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>433</td>
<td>-2.032</td>
<td>0.042</td>
<td>0.10</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Curiosity</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>433</td>
<td>-0.479</td>
<td>0.632</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (7.2) Attitudinal change per activity

In the Stevens’ Initiative report (2019), effect sizes of at least 0.2 (20% of a standard deviation), were considered a reasonable threshold for reporting small effects.
### Robust Tests of Equality of Means

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Statistica*</th>
<th>df1</th>
<th>df2</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curiosity</td>
<td>Welch</td>
<td>1.992</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1195.099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercultural Competence</td>
<td>Welch</td>
<td>9.457</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1165.456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Esteem</td>
<td>Welch</td>
<td>7.303</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1154.028</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Asymptotically F distributed.
Table (7.3) ANOVA results model difference

### Multiple Comparisons

#### Games-Howell

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>(I) Model</th>
<th>(J) Model</th>
<th>Mean Difference (I-J)</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval</th>
<th>Lower Bound</th>
<th>Upper Bound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercultural Competence</td>
<td>AT</td>
<td>OFD</td>
<td>-0.05812</td>
<td>0.02596</td>
<td>0.114</td>
<td>-0.125</td>
<td>0.0087</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>iOOC</td>
<td>0.02684</td>
<td>0.03032</td>
<td>0.813</td>
<td>-0.0512</td>
<td>0.1049</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>TEP</td>
<td>0.11046*</td>
<td>0.04264</td>
<td>0.048</td>
<td>0.0007</td>
<td>0.2202</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>OFD</td>
<td>iOOC</td>
<td>0.08496*</td>
<td>0.02373</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>0.146</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>TEP</td>
<td>0.16857*</td>
<td>0.03823</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.0701</td>
<td>0.2671</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iOOC</td>
<td>TEP</td>
<td>0.08361</td>
<td>0.04132</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>-0.0228</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>AT</td>
<td>OFD</td>
<td>0.12674*</td>
<td>0.03349</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.0405</td>
<td>0.213</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>iOOC</td>
<td>0.09271</td>
<td>0.03774</td>
<td>0.068</td>
<td>-0.0044</td>
<td>0.1898</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>TEP</td>
<td>0.21981*</td>
<td>0.05207</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.0857</td>
<td>0.3539</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>OFD</td>
<td>iOOC</td>
<td>-0.03403</td>
<td>0.02792</td>
<td>0.615</td>
<td>-0.1058</td>
<td>0.0377</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>TEP</td>
<td>0.09306</td>
<td>0.04546</td>
<td>0.172</td>
<td>-0.0241</td>
<td>0.2102</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iOOC</td>
<td>TEP</td>
<td>0.12710*</td>
<td>0.04867</td>
<td>0.045</td>
<td>0.0018</td>
<td>0.2524</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.
Table (7.4) Attitudinal change per activity
The differences between the models are summarised in table (7.4), with the statistically significant effects presented in bold.

From this comparison, it is difficult to make conclusions as many factors must be taken into consideration, as explored later on in this chapter. What clearly appears here is that Advocacy Training (AT) has the highest effect size on the attitudinal measures of curiosity, intercultural competence and self-esteem. This may be surprising when considering that this activity has the shortest duration — with a total of three to five hours for participants who engaged in a single debate, or a debate followed by a dialogue session, and ten hours for Debate Team Leaders. The effect size for those who take part in the longer VE activities on the other hand (OFD, TEPs and iOOCs) is lower. This result may be due to various reasons. One possible factor is the demographics of the participants in AT, who were predominantly from Southern Mediterranean countries and, as reported in chapter 6, tended to evaluate their experience more highly overall. Another possible explanation is the Dunning-Kruger effect\(^\text{116}\), whereby a limited change in students’ self-assessment, or even a reduction, may actually indicate greater awareness of the complexity of the process once they have actually engaged in it for a sustained period, rather than the initial, “idealised” conception of intercultural communication. In practice, intercultural communication and collaboration is often much more complex than expected and takes time to develop, which is why a high increase in perceived effectiveness in intercultural communication is not necessarily a positive result. A further possible explanation is that the post-exchange survey was administered immediately after the activity, and in some cases just a few hours after the pre-exchange survey. This may have led to a bias in the data as participants may have remembered their initial self-evaluations and thus wittingly indicated change, which is unlikely to be the case for other activities where several weeks passed between evaluations.

The OFD and iOOC models reveal similar patterns in terms of impact, although the effect size for intercultural competence for OFD is 0.1 higher than it is for iOOCs. These results may be explained by the fact that these two models are similar in many ways, in that their core component resides in multiple two-hour facilitated dialogue sessions involving participants from a wide variety of countries.

TEPs have the lowest effect size and minimal growth in both curiosity and self-esteem. Again, identifying a specific reason is difficult, but there are several possible explanations. First of all in terms of demographics, the majority of participants were from European countries and, as seen in chapter 6, tended to evaluate not as highly as those from the Southern Mediterranean region. Secondly, there is considerable variability across the many different TEPs (sub-activities) which were carried out, instead of a single exchange model. Furthermore, many of the exchanges were “first-time” iterations of exchanges designed and piloted by collaborating educators or youth workers, as opposed to replications of time-tested models of VE such as OFDs and iOOCs. Although the coordinators had taken part in professional development to prepare them for the design and implementation of the TEPs, few of the exchanges were “tried and tested”. Finally, while the number of facilitated dialogue sessions integrated in TEP exchanges grew over the three years of implementation, few of the exchanges in this model included more than one or two facilitated dialogue sessions. Thus, participants did not have the intense and sustained synchronous video interactions with diverse groups that OFD and iOOC offered.

\(^{116}\) Dunning, Kruger & Dunning, 1999
Differences between models regarding attitudes to others - ethnic and religious diversity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Pre-Exchange Mean</th>
<th>Post-Exchange Mean</th>
<th>Z</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>Effect size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OFD</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>8.13</td>
<td>-9.265</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iOOC</td>
<td>985</td>
<td>8.19</td>
<td>8.65</td>
<td>-7.859</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEPs</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>8.85</td>
<td>8.87</td>
<td>-0.198</td>
<td>0.843</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>8.38</td>
<td>8.63</td>
<td>-1.363</td>
<td>0.173</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (7.5) Warmth towards other ethnicities per model

The above table shows the differences between the models in their impact on participants in terms of warmth towards people with other ethnic backgrounds, based on pre- and post exchange measurements. As can be seen from the table, there is a significant difference between the models. OFDs and iOOCs both show significant growth while ATs and TEPs do not. While part of this might be explained by the relatively high pre-exchange scores of both the ATs and TEP, it could also be a genuine difference: indeed, as the models of the OFDs and iOOCs are relatively similar, they may be better suited for increasing warmth towards people with different ethnic backgrounds than the other two.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Pre-Exchange Mean</th>
<th>Post-Exchange Mean</th>
<th>Z</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>Effect size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OFD</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>7.38</td>
<td>7.96</td>
<td>-12.092</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iOOC</td>
<td>985</td>
<td>8.06</td>
<td>8.47</td>
<td>-6.87</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEPs</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>8.59</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>-1.436</td>
<td>0.151</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>8.45</td>
<td>8.67</td>
<td>-0.586</td>
<td>0.558</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (7.6) Warmth towards people with a different religious background per model

The above table shows similar results for the measure of warmth towards people with a different religious background: again, both OFDs and iOOCs show a larger increase than the other two models. In light of this confirmation it could be concluded that of the four models tested, these two are best for building warmth towards others — the reasons for this will be explored later in this chapter.
Differences between models regarding post-exchange surveys

The effects of the different models on the different post-exchange measures that make up activation, global skills, and 21st century skills were also explored. The table below indicates the mean score on these measures per model.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>21st Century Skills</th>
<th>Global Skills</th>
<th>Activation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OFD</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>3.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iOOC</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>4.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEP</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>3.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>4.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (7.7) Model differences by factor

As shown here, in all cases the strongest impact was observed on the “global skills” factor, which includes variables that can be interpreted as measuring the substance of a course (for instance: “Participating in this Virtual Exchange improved: my knowledge and/or interest in global events”). All models explicitly address similar issues in the framework of their respective Virtual Exchange, at least to some extent. As such, the most straightforward explanation is that all different models have a larger impact on the primary effects (i.e. things that are explicitly discussed within a Virtual Exchange) as opposed to their secondary effects.

7.2 Online Facilitated Dialogue (OFD)

Participation / engagement and demographics.

This activity involved the highest number of participants of all EVE activities, with a total of 14,539 over three years, including 12,768 who engaged in the various iterations of the Connect Programme, and 1,771 taking part in different cycles and language options of Social Circles. The majority of participants joined through higher education institutions that established partnerships with the activity implementers. OFDs received an excellent response, with 83% of participants rating their satisfaction as High or Very High on a five-point scale.
Table (7.8) OFD participants by year, gender, sector, region and age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participants</strong></td>
<td>4,370</td>
<td>4,862</td>
<td>5,056</td>
<td>14,288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Male</strong></td>
<td>1,607</td>
<td>1,853</td>
<td>1,814</td>
<td>5,274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female</strong></td>
<td>2,752</td>
<td>2,969</td>
<td>3,163</td>
<td>8,884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prefer not to say</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unknown</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HEI</strong></td>
<td>2,910</td>
<td>3,938</td>
<td>4,147</td>
<td>10,995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>non-HEI</strong></td>
<td>1,460</td>
<td>923</td>
<td>909</td>
<td>3,292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unknown</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Europe</strong></td>
<td>1,746</td>
<td>2,318</td>
<td>2,230</td>
<td>6,294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Southern Med</strong></td>
<td>2,624</td>
<td>2,544</td>
<td>2,826</td>
<td>7,994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unknown</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>18-21</strong></td>
<td>2,310</td>
<td>2,171</td>
<td>2,217</td>
<td>6,698</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>22-25</strong></td>
<td>1,620</td>
<td>1,965</td>
<td>2,011</td>
<td>5,596</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>26-30</strong></td>
<td>290</td>
<td>474</td>
<td>637</td>
<td>1,401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>30+</strong></td>
<td>150</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unknown</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participation was well-balanced between the regions, with a slight majority of participants from Southern Mediterranean countries over each of the three years. With regards to gender, the activity attracted a considerable majority of female participants.

From the start, this activity reported high participation numbers, which was made possible by different factors: firstly, this was an already established and scalable model, which relied on a strong curriculum and pedagogical approach. Secondly, implementers could rely on a number of already trained facilitators who were brought into EVE. Thirdly, activity promoters built on a strong regional presence in Southern Mediterranean countries, above all in Tunisia.

**Development of the model**

Online Facilitated Dialogues were implemented through several modules of the Connect Programme and Social Circles, all of which provided opportunities for multilateral engagement to youth from various countries across Europe and the Southern Mediterranean. During non-formal dialogue sessions, participants were exposed to diverse cultural perspectives on global issues, and practised
21st century skills. Held in small groups of eight to 12 people from diverse geographic and cultural backgrounds, these online dialogues were led by trained EVE facilitators. The two-hour sessions were sustained over several weeks in the different Connect Programme modules using time-tested, pre-existing curricula which were updated throughout the project based on current events, dynamics, and feedback collected at the end of each iteration (see table 7.9 below). Connect Global, as an eight-week programme, included the highest number of both facilitated sessions, and numbers of participants overall, followed by Connect Express. Social Circles, on the other hand, consisted of a new format developed specifically in the context of EVE, with the aim of providing a “taster” to participants. It was also intended to draw in young people who were not affiliated with HEIs or youth organisations, as an open enrollment programme requiring lower levels of commitment. In addition, they were an opportunity for Connect alumni to engage in further activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main theme</th>
<th>No. of facilitated dialogue sessions 2018-2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Connect Global</strong> (eight weeks)</td>
<td>Global and social challenges (some weekly themes selected by the groups)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eight facilitated dialogue sessions, set of required readings, final project, peer engagement activities, reflective paper</td>
<td>2,704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Connect Express</strong> (four weeks)</td>
<td>Constructive engagement in digital spaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>four facilitated dialogue sessions, final reflective paper</td>
<td>1,252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Connect Collaborate</strong> (five weeks)</td>
<td>Two focal themes each semester (included gender, migration, media, health, the environment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative project to design an infographic, complemented with five facilitated dialogue sessions</td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Circles</strong> (12 days)</td>
<td>Each Social Circle addressed a specific theme. These included gender equality, global health crisis and solidarity, climate change, discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>two facilitated dialogue sessions and asynchronous engagement activities</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7.9 Main themes and facilitated sessions"
Participant learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OFD</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active Listening</td>
<td>1.07%</td>
<td>1.83%</td>
<td>7.16%</td>
<td>46.45%</td>
<td>43.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking</td>
<td>1.57%</td>
<td>3.50%</td>
<td>15.05%</td>
<td>49.39%</td>
<td>30.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence Work Communicate Cultural Diverse</td>
<td>1.17%</td>
<td>1.74%</td>
<td>10.67%</td>
<td>50.21%</td>
<td>36.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Information</td>
<td>0.80%</td>
<td>2.84%</td>
<td>12.13%</td>
<td>57.98%</td>
<td>26.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge Relationships</td>
<td>1.53%</td>
<td>3.29%</td>
<td>11.79%</td>
<td>37.43%</td>
<td>45.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge Global Events</td>
<td>1.35%</td>
<td>2.91%</td>
<td>11.66%</td>
<td>52.15%</td>
<td>31.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Skills</td>
<td>2.32%</td>
<td>3.96%</td>
<td>13.34%</td>
<td>45.87%</td>
<td>34.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest Physical Mobility</td>
<td>1.45%</td>
<td>4.22%</td>
<td>15.32%</td>
<td>35.06%</td>
<td>43.96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Competencies</td>
<td>1.74%</td>
<td>4.07%</td>
<td>17.92%</td>
<td>48.08%</td>
<td>28.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest Further Dialogue</td>
<td>2.16%</td>
<td>5.50%</td>
<td>16.72%</td>
<td>40.56%</td>
<td>35.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Work</td>
<td>1.76%</td>
<td>4.50%</td>
<td>18.04%</td>
<td>45.26%</td>
<td>30.44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Relationships</td>
<td>2.36%</td>
<td>7.59%</td>
<td>22.50%</td>
<td>44.83%</td>
<td>22.73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenged Media</td>
<td>1.28%</td>
<td>6.93%</td>
<td>32.48%</td>
<td>41.92%</td>
<td>17.39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (7.10) OFD impact on participants

The scores on post-exchange survey items for this activity were particularly high. Taking into account participants who either “agree[d]” or “strongly agree[d]”, “active listening” and “critical thinking” received the highest ratings overall, followed by “building confidence to work and communicate in culturally diverse contexts”. The development of “increased knowledge about the relationships between societies” scored the highest when looking at the percentage of respondents who “strongly agree[d]” only. This exchange model addressed above all the relationship between European and Southern Mediterranean societies, especially in the Connect Global programme. Intentionally addressing this theme in the programme design is undoubtedly one of the factors that contributed to its strong impact on reducing prejudice towards people with different ethnic and religious backgrounds, as well as improving participants’ knowledge about global issues and relations between societies.

Despite some individual differences in terms of groups dynamics and group members’ engagement — which to some extent influenced the way participants evaluated their experience — there is a striking similarity between participants’ feedback regarding the most important learning outcomes and influential factors. During interviews and focus groups, respondents highlighted details of stories shared by their peers, and how they felt that they had changed in some way by hearing other people share their experiences and/or due to their groups’ engagement during the dialogue sessions.
Active Listening

Many respondents mentioned active listening as the most important thing they learnt from their participation in the exchange. Listening is key to relationality, to learning from and with others, and building strong relationships. This kind of active listening can bridge gaps between people and requires patience, attentiveness and responsiveness: “listening (is) an active, relational, and interpretive process that is focused on making meaning . . . Listening is fundamentally about being in relationship to another and through this relationship supporting change or transformation.” Participants mentioned becoming more patient as others spoke, understanding the importance of not interrupting others and giving them time to articulate what they wanted to say in order to create more equitable spaces for interaction, particularly if there were imbalances due to different levels of language proficiency. All of these aspects of listening lie at the basis of intercultural understanding and conflict resolution.

“"The most important thing I learned through the Connect Programme is that cross-cultural communication is possible and beneficial for all the parts involved. I learned that listening is as important as sharing their own opinion. The programme is also a great way to learn skills which are useful in real life." Female, 19, Italy

Engaging with divergent opinions

Another theme which emerged frequently in the analysis of responses to the open questions about learning was “engaging with different opinions” on a wide range of topics. The diversity of perspectives and opinions was highly appreciated and reported as contributing to participants’ personal enrichment and learning, and was made possible by the demographics of the groups. As mentioned in the literature review, communicating about both commonalities and differences and learning to appreciate difference are key to facilitating intergroup understanding, as well as key aims of EVE.

“"The most important thing I learned is to surround myself more with people who don’t have the same perspectives as me, to challenge myself and understand and appreciate perspectives unlike my own." Female, 20, Netherlands

Building relationships with their groups

Building relationships with their group contributed to the participants’ enjoyment and learning. Being a group member became part of a new shared identity participants acquired through the exchange which brought cohesion to the group. The experiences and perspectives participants disclosed to one another through the group dialogue process became part of their “common ground”, and provided the conditions for successful intergroup contact and building strong relationships. From the interviews, it appeared that those who had participated in the longer programme (eight weeks) managed to build stronger relationships than those who had taken part in the four-week programme, with many expressing strong bonds with their group members. Some regretted having not seized the opportunity at the beginning of the exchange. However the longitudinal study (see Chapter 8.) reveals that there was no significant difference in terms of long-term impact between the four and eight-week programmes.

“"We have been through such a difficult time and this situation requires each of us to develop our own defence mechanism which is not easy to predict what kind of things it necessitates. Being in touch with our close circle helps to stay in a healthy state of mind for sure but communicating with a bigger circle absolutely would make these days better, not just in terms of mental health but also for improving our consciousness about international solidarity and global citizenship." Female, 23, Turkey
Changing attitudes

Some of the responses showed evidence of introspection and critical self-reflection as the participants mentioned how they saw the world before, became more aware of their own situatedness, and how their background and experience influenced their world view. Several reported a shift in their own perspectives after acquiring knowledge and hearing other participants’ experiences or perspectives on issues, and the motivations behind these.

Facilitators commented on the tangibility of shifts in attitude. They could identify “aha moments” or “earth-shattering moments when you see the penny drop” in the participants, for example when new information and/or perspectives of an issue that participants knew nothing or little about emerged in the dialogue session. But they also observed the cumulative effect of the dialogue on participants, “slow burners” which are more difficult to capture but can be seen as “seeds that are being sown”.

7.3 Interactive Open Online Courses (iOOCs)

Demographics

In the past three years, the iOOCs attracted a total of 9,305 registered participants and were offered by 86 partners to their students and their networks. Participant numbers were high from the initiative’s outset, and gradually increased over the three years of implementation, with demand exceeding capacity in the final year of the project. As for all other activities, there were more female participants than male. Initially, there were slightly more participants from Southern Mediterranean countries than Europe, but the gap closed considerably in the second year of the project. Finally, 91% of the participants rated their satisfaction as High or Very High on a five-point scale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>iOOC</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>1,925</td>
<td>2,634</td>
<td>4,746</td>
<td>9,305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>814</td>
<td>1,082</td>
<td>1,709</td>
<td>3,605</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1,087</td>
<td>1,515</td>
<td>2,858</td>
<td>5,460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEI</td>
<td>1,290</td>
<td>1,803</td>
<td>3,197</td>
<td>6,290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-HEI</td>
<td>635</td>
<td>566</td>
<td>1,549</td>
<td>2,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>1,502</td>
<td>811</td>
<td>2,677</td>
<td>4,990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Med</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>1,823</td>
<td>2,069</td>
<td>4,239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Development of the model in EVE

iOOCs are specific courses based on the Virtual Exchange model developed by the Sharing Perspectives Foundation in 2012, structured around three main pillars:

- Academic or expert content (based on MOOCs or other online resources);
- Facilitated online dialogues for participants to discuss content with peers;
- Interactive and collaborative assignments.

This model has worked in two ways:

- enhancing existing (online) courses with facilitated online engagement and interactive and collaborative assignments on specific (thematic) content.
- creating newly-designed iOOCs with the development of the content curricula

Enhanced Courses

In 2018, four courses were identified to be enhanced through VE. The first round of enhancement was aimed at testing different varieties of the VE methodology for iOOCs, thus generating lessons that informed improvements for 2019 and 2020 iterations. Partnerships were established with organisations that had developed their own content on topics of interest and were keen on experimenting with new, more interactive formats. Important lessons were learnt in the first round of implementation of some courses. For example, solely relying on asynchronous interactions — as experimented in the first round of “Gender In/Equality in Media” — proved insufficient to keep participants engaged. Consequently, all subsequent iterations included facilitated dialogue sessions as a key course component. It also appeared that Virtual Exchange does not work with self-paced MOOCs or courses, since a cohort is needed to engage in facilitated dialogue sessions.

Newly-designed iOOCs

During the three years of the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange project, the consortium designed eight different iOOCs. Based on the lessons learnt from cycles of implementation, iOOCs were further refined and improved, and new courses were designed. Two main formats were developed: a longer format, spanning over nine or ten weeks, and a shorter one lasting five weeks. Video content was either produced specifically for the iOOC in the form of short video lectures/talks, or were curated from freely available online resources. Participants engaging through partnering universities were accredited ECTS credits and gained additional support from local professors. This proved to be an effective mechanism to engage a large number of students in high quality virtual exchanges. All of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-21</td>
<td>475</td>
<td>1,042</td>
<td>1,987</td>
<td>3504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-25</td>
<td>648</td>
<td>1,012</td>
<td>1,742</td>
<td>3402</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>541</td>
<td>991</td>
<td>2062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30+</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (7.11) iOOC participants by year, gender, sector, region and age
these iOOCs followed the same format, with similar assignments. The main differences were the duration and the main themes addressed. All iOOCs were developed and run in English with the exception of “Technology and Society”, offered in Arabic, and “Youth, Peace and Security”, developed in both Arabic and English. (See Annex 6 for descriptions of iOOCs developed and implemented).

The table below shows participants’ engagement for each of the courses offered throughout the pilot.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Course title</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enhanced courses</strong></td>
<td><strong>Countering Hate Speech</strong></td>
<td>621</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Gender in/equality in media</strong></td>
<td>677</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Sustainable Food Systems</strong></td>
<td>499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>European Culture &amp; Politics</strong></td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Newly-designed iOOCs</strong></td>
<td><strong>Introduction to Dialogue Facilitation</strong></td>
<td>491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>European Refuge/es (10 weeks)</strong></td>
<td>512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Newcomers &amp; Nationalism (10 weeks)</strong></td>
<td>1,343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Sharing Perspectives on 2018</strong></td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>**Cultural Encounters</td>
<td>Perspectives on Populism (10 weeks)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Technology &amp; Society (Arabic) (5 weeks)</strong></td>
<td>858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Youth, Peace &amp; Security</strong></td>
<td>844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>**Cultural Encounters</td>
<td>The Big Climate Movement (9 weeks)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>All iOOCs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>9,305</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7.12 Number of participants per course
Participant learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OFD</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Active Listening</strong></td>
<td>0.11%</td>
<td>0.57%</td>
<td>5.62%</td>
<td>37.04%</td>
<td>56.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Critical Thinking</strong></td>
<td>0.33%</td>
<td>0.25%</td>
<td>4.76%</td>
<td>43.82%</td>
<td>50.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Confidence Work Communicate Cultural Diverse</strong></td>
<td>0.23%</td>
<td>0.80%</td>
<td>7.11%</td>
<td>49.08%</td>
<td>42.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shared Information</strong></td>
<td>0.40%</td>
<td>1.11%</td>
<td>6.16%</td>
<td>44.55%</td>
<td>47.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge Relationships</strong></td>
<td>0.27%</td>
<td>1.09%</td>
<td>6.00%</td>
<td>41.27%</td>
<td>51.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge Global Events</strong></td>
<td>0.90%</td>
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<td>5.81%</td>
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<td>59.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language Skills</strong></td>
<td>0.44%</td>
<td>2.35%</td>
<td>6.18%</td>
<td>45.30%</td>
<td>45.73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interest Physical Mobility</strong></td>
<td>0.80%</td>
<td>2.80%</td>
<td>9.91%</td>
<td>29.03%</td>
<td>57.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Digital Competencies</strong></td>
<td>0.82%</td>
<td>2.91%</td>
<td>9.64%</td>
<td>42.18%</td>
<td>44.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interest Further Dialogue</strong></td>
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<td>3.39%</td>
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<td>36.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Team Work</strong></td>
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<td>2.69%</td>
<td>15.64%</td>
<td>42.75%</td>
<td>36.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive Relationships</strong></td>
<td>1.53%</td>
<td>5.45%</td>
<td>19.89%</td>
<td>48.37%</td>
<td>24.76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Challenged Media</strong></td>
<td>1.04%</td>
<td>4.26%</td>
<td>25.37%</td>
<td>43.79%</td>
<td>25.54%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (7.13) OFD impact on participants

As with the other models, “active listening” received the highest score, followed by “confidence to work in culturally diverse teams”, which over 50% of respondents strongly agreed with. “Knowledge of global events” and “relationships between societies” were highly ranked, in comparison with other activities. These learning outcomes were likely supported by the collaborative and interactive assignments, and the sustained dialogue included in this model, as well as a considerable amount of content in the form of videos. Like OFDs, this model contributed to changing people’s attitudes towards others with different religious or ethnic backgrounds. Again, this is likely due to the intentional design of the model in addressing this aspect of learning, and the high diversity amongst participants.

Participant learning

The analysis of the data revealed that many themes were common to iOOCs and OFDs, which is inevitable given that the key component of both models is the sustained online facilitated dialogue, with two-hour sessions spread over five to ten weeks. Both models had participants develop active listening skills and engage with a diversity of opinions on a range of global issues. The analysis below places more emphasis on the themes that distinguished the iOOC responses.
Building knowledge and understanding of global issues

Many interviewees and focus group participants reported on the topical knowledge they had acquired through the programme, on populism, nationalism, migration, gender and media. This model of VE, which includes short video lectures, equipped participants with the terminology associated with the concepts they were addressing, in turn creating greater understanding of those concepts. Participants were thus able to talk about identity, difference and “othering”, gender and media in a more complex and nuanced way. In their evaluations, participants made reference to the video resources, which provided them with some context for their sessions and a shared knowledge base, which served as a starting point for their discussions.

Learning from a wide diversity of people and perspectives

One of the themes that emerged in most of the interviewees and focus groups, as well as the responses to the open questions, was the diversity amongst the people in the groups with regards to not only geographic origin but also their perspectives on the issues discussed, life experiences, values and beliefs. This was not only the main contribution to participants’ learning, but also what they enjoyed most about their exchange. Students in Europe — even those who had studied abroad — recognised the diversity of participants’ backgrounds as an important factor of their learning: as some of their group members came from countries they had never visited (and sometimes from conflict zones), they brought to the table voices that are often marginalised, silenced or demonised in public discourse and the media. Although there are asylum seekers and refugees in European cities, few of the interviewees had interacted with them or been engaged with the organisations working with these groups. Of particular impact on the European participants in the focus group discussions were their interactions with students in Syria and Palestine. These interactions were also mentioned by some of the facilitators as particularly impactful and were cited as moments where the change in participants was tangible.

"I chose it not thinking so much, I had no particular expectations. Listening to people talking about political situation, how they live and so it was quite shocking for some aspects, for example the girl from Gaza – it was shocking hearing about her experience – she talked about bombs striking. There were five minutes of silence and no-one knew what to say because we were all very sad and then everyone shows their empathy with her." Female, Italy, 20

The interviewees in Southern Mediterranean countries on the other hand mentioned that they have fewer opportunities than European students to engage with the outside, and their societies were seen as more homogeneous. They enjoyed the opportunity to engage with young people in Europe, but also felt the need to challenge the view they felt Europeans had of them. This gave them the possibility to feel listened to, and the ability to offer alternative perspectives than those they felt European youth acquired through the media.

"My family didn’t let me go out of the country, so I tried to find anything online. It was my window for the world, I dream to travel, I worked to find an internship but I don’t know if my family will allow me to go." Female, Syria, 28

Developing critical thinking and media literacy

Navigating difference is an important part of developing critical thinking, as are talking and listening to people who have different points of view, understanding the situatedness of one’s own perspectives and acquiring new knowledge through experience and interactions with others. Developing critical thinking is also the ability to see complexity and recognise that there is no single right or wrong way of seeing. It is a key component of intercultural competence and of media literacy, as it enables people to recognise bias and challenge media representations with counter-narratives and alternative perspectives to the “single stories” that they are often exposed to — one of the key aims of the EVE initiative.

"I learnt how to enroll positive dialogue, that nothing is a uniface, we can see things from other sides, and that differences are an opportunity" Female, 31, Algeria
Activation

iOOCs were particularly effective in activating participants by making them feel they can contribute to “making a difference” and enacting change in society. This was explicitly addressed in some of the exchanges, for example “Gender in/equality in the media”, “Countering hate speech”, and “Youth, Peace and security”, where assignments included developing campaigns. In addition, other assignments such as the videologue project also engaged participants’ communities through filmed interviews.

During these 4 weeks I have not only learned about peacebuilding and the transformation of conflict, I also learned how to build a sustainable peace and how to verbalize our needs. This Virtual Exchange helped me to understand how powerful are young people and how many changes they can do. We, the youth, truly are the future of our earth and only we can see the world with fresh eyes and understand what changes are needed to be done.  

Female, 18, Moldova

The ambassador programme also proved powerful in activating participants interested in opportunities to promote EVE and recruit new participants around them: alumni who had volunteered to enter this track organised information sessions at their universities or within their youth organisations, supported new participants and took part in EVE advocacy events. Their involvement was recognised through the delivery of an EVE ambassador badge.

7.4 Transnational Exchange Projects (TEPs)

Participation / engagement and demographics

Over the three years of the project, a total of 2,716 participants engaged in TEP activities, with a clear growth in the number of participants in TEPs, due to the increase in the number of exchanges implemented: while 15 TEPs were rolled out in 2018, this rose to a total of 37 in 2020. It is also worth noting that 77% of participants rated their satisfaction with the TEPs as High or Very High on a five-point scale.

From the second quarter of 2020, a number of participants outside the two target regions were exceptionally allowed to participate in the exchanges
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
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<td>441</td>
<td>943</td>
<td>1775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unknown</strong></td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>1,218</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>874</td>
<td>1534</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>22-25</strong></td>
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<td>201</td>
<td>421</td>
<td>849</td>
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<td><strong>26-30</strong></td>
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<td>47</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>30+</strong></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>92</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Unknown</strong></td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (7.14) TEP participants by year, gender, sector, region and age

The patterns of engagement remained similar across the three years and distinguish this model from the others in several respects. The vast majority of participants were from Higher Education contexts, with only 12% of participants from non-HEI contexts. Furthermore, the vast majority of participants were European, with less than 10% of all participants coming from Southern Mediterranean countries. This reflects, to a degree, the nature of the partnerships established in developing TEPs, most of which were between educators in different European countries. Of the 71 exchanges implemented, only 14 involved both European and Southern Mediterranean partners, and two were developed between partners in Southern Mediterranean countries. There are several possible reasons for this: first of all, the majority of people completing the training originated from European countries. Secondly, subsequently offering training in French and Arabic meant people from the two regions did not “meet” in the training courses, which was one way to establish partnerships. Other partnerships were created through existing relations and contacts which, again, are predominantly intra-regional, and in the case of inter-regional partnerships prioritise certain countries such as the United States and China. 

recent European Universities initiative has further increased interest in intra-European exchanges. The predominance of intra-regional exchanges — and hence greater cultural similarity between participants — in this model of exchange is one possible reason for its lower impact in terms of intercultural competence and attitudes towards people of different ethnic or religious backgrounds in comparison with other models.

Development of the model

TEPs are “grassroots” Virtual Exchange, usually co-designed by educators or youth workers for specific groups of participants. In the context of EVE, educators and youth workers followed training courses where they could co-design their Virtual Exchange. This format finds its origins in class-to-class exchanges, which have a long history in foreign language education above all.

Three broad TEP models gradually emerged through EVE, following different and replicable formats, namely:

- **Class to class exchanges**: The class-to-class VE was the format most commonly adopted by HEIs, bringing together two or three classes in a project-based exchange. Students were generally organised in pairs or small groups, and collaborated on activities using both synchronous and asynchronous communication tools. These exchanges generally lasted from four to eight weeks, with some (longer) exceptions. While these exchanges were most frequently related to language, culture and intercultural communication, business-related topics gained popularity, as well as health care, tourism, history, theatre, STEM and technology in a few cases. It should be noted that over the three years of the project, several TEPs were reiterated.

- **Blended virtual exchanges**: This model integrates VE with physical mobility, for instance to support existing activities such as Erasmus mobility exchanges, short-term mobility projects, or exchanges for incoming international students. These were sometimes developed by a single university. Another example of blended exchange was developed by partner educators who had themselves planned and found funding for a short mobility at some point of their exchange.

- **Youth TEPs**: Fewer youth TEPs than hoped were actually implemented (14 in total). While the numbers of partners and participants varied from one youth TEP to another, the end of EVE saw the emergence of a model of exchanges involving multiple partner organisations — though the development and coordination of the exchange itself was led by one or two partners. All the youth exchanges included facilitated dialogue sessions with trained EVE facilitators.

Facilitated dialogue sessions

Over the three years of EVE, more and more TEPs included facilitated dialogue sessions supported by EVE-trained facilitators, with the aim to foster relationship building, allow participants to get to know each other better before engaging in collaboration, and in some cases during debriefing sessions. Facilitated dialogue sessions — which were welcomed by participants and received positive feedback — were more prevalent in blended and youth exchanges. Initially, integrating these sessions into TEPs had proved a challenge. However, through improved support materials explaining their purpose and logistics, better communication between facilitators and educators, and the inclusion of facilitated dialogue in the TEP training, they came to be well integrated into TEPs, with the demand exceeding the availability of facilitators. While 51 dialogue sessions were held in 2018, in 2020 this number went up to 242.

The number of participants differed significantly from one TEP to another, ranging from 10 young people to over 150. In some cases, this was linked to the number of partners involved, while in others it had more to do with the size of the classes involved. There was also considerable variety in the duration of the exchanges, with some lasting only three weeks, the majority between four and eight weeks, and some spanning over 12 weeks. While most of the exchanges used English as their vehicular language, several were delivered in French and some involved multiple languages, in particular French, Spanish, German and Italian.
Participant learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEPs</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active Listening</td>
<td>0.78%</td>
<td>3.13%</td>
<td>13.28%</td>
<td>57.03%</td>
<td>25.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>3.15%</td>
<td>22.83%</td>
<td>55.12%</td>
<td>18.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence Work</td>
<td>0.58%</td>
<td>2.62%</td>
<td>6.69%</td>
<td>52.33%</td>
<td>37.79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate Cultural Diverse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Work</td>
<td>2.81%</td>
<td>9.46%</td>
<td>15.35%</td>
<td>48.59%</td>
<td>23.79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Information</td>
<td>2.05%</td>
<td>6.32%</td>
<td>8.85%</td>
<td>54.19%</td>
<td>28.59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge Global Events</td>
<td>2.30%</td>
<td>9.46%</td>
<td>16.62%</td>
<td>51.41%</td>
<td>20.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Competencies</td>
<td>2.81%</td>
<td>8.18%</td>
<td>18.41%</td>
<td>47.83%</td>
<td>22.76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge Relationships</td>
<td>1.39%</td>
<td>5.56%</td>
<td>14.58%</td>
<td>47.22%</td>
<td>31.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Skills</td>
<td>6.12%</td>
<td>13.12%</td>
<td>18.37%</td>
<td>40.82%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest Further Dialogue</td>
<td>2.30%</td>
<td>5.92%</td>
<td>15.46%</td>
<td>42.76%</td>
<td>33.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest Physical Mobility</td>
<td>2.63%</td>
<td>6.24%</td>
<td>22.17%</td>
<td>37.93%</td>
<td>31.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Relationships</td>
<td>3.96%</td>
<td>8.86%</td>
<td>25.95%</td>
<td>43.20%</td>
<td>18.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenged Media</td>
<td>1.90%</td>
<td>10.74%</td>
<td>43.13%</td>
<td>37.12%</td>
<td>7.11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (7.15) TEP impact on participants

The first three items on the post-exchange surveys are the same as for the other activities, though the percentage is somewhat lower. However, the high score awarded to the “ability to work in a team” distinguishes the TEP model from the others: indeed, this competence was intentionally addressed in many of the exchanges developed by requiring participants to work with partners or in small teams to complete specific tasks or project-based work. As a result, this competence was mentioned by a large number of respondents as one of their newly-acquired skills, although this acquisition was not without some difficulties.

Collaboration online and teamwork

In project-based exchanges that required teamwork, many participants reported having learnt how to collaborate with others and/or work in a team, and this even though they were distant from one another. Even in cases where this proved challenging, it provided a learning opportunity for the participants. Online international collaboration has been identified by many as a key employability skill, as working in international, interdisciplinary teams is becoming more commonplace. Yet, young people’s social media activity does not generally entail collaboration for the completion of tasks or projects, nor does higher education tend to address this competence. For many TEP participants, the exchanges provided a new form of experience, and an awareness that it is not necessarily straightforward.

Favourite topics discussed
Culture, countries, music, differences, food, cinema, hobbies, experiences, stereotypes, travelling and employment. These topics which are more commonly addressed in foreign language courses, intercultural communication, and business which tend to give preference to “safe” topics.
That every country has a different mentality concerning getting work done in time. You have to pull through maybe even push them to get the work done and delivered in time.” Female, 23, Germany

Increased knowledge of other cultures

Several participants reported gains in knowledge of other cultures and increased openness to cultural difference, which was generally equated with national differences. Respondents and interviewees reported acquiring knowledge about different aspects of culture, understanding and interpretations of cultural and historic events and traditions, how the job market works in different countries, public health systems, tourist attractions, and young people’s attitudes towards certain issues. They reported on dismantling stereotypes that they had about others.

Partly because these exchanges tend to be bi- or tri-lateral — that is, involving groups from two or three countries — there was a tendency towards a comparative approach, comparing attitudes to issues or beliefs in one another’s countries, and exploring the relationship between them.

“... That every country has a different mentality concerning getting work done in time. You have to pull through maybe even push them to get the work done and delivered in time.” Female, 23, Germany

Increased confidence in language and communication skills

The analysis of the qualitative data identified an increased confidence in communicating in a foreign language — usually English, sometimes Spanish, French, and Italian — and with people from different cultures as one of the most important learning outcomes. Some participants mentioned specific language skills such as learning new vocabulary and phrases.

“I learned that I was able to have a full conversation with an English speaker outside the university frame, and that I feel confident talking in English.” Female, 25, France

Building relationships with individuals

For many participants, making friends and developing a relationship with their peers was a strong motivating factor to engage in the exchange — which in some cases was satisfied, but not always. These links were most commonly established through interactions in dyads or small groups, which distinguishes this model from OFD and IOOCs where participants engaged with larger groups.

Disclosure seemed to support relationship building: sharing more personal and intimate thoughts and moments with their peers was both a result of and further consolidated the construction of strong relationships. This kind of personal relationship was often supported by video communication. When positive relationships were built, participants tended to interact more and beyond the specific activities they were assigned. However, a perceived lack of reciprocity in the exchange and interactions led to frustration and negative evaluations of the exchanges. This is perhaps exacerbated in this model of VE, particularly when participants collaborate and interact mainly in dyads, as the success of the exchange will depend on the relationship built with one individual.
7.5 Advocacy Training (AT)

Participation/Engagement and demographics

Over the three years of the project 2,117 young people took part in the Advocacy Training activity, with a consistent growth over the three years of the project, coming to a peak in 2020. Developing this completely new model of VE and strengthening it through the training of Debate Team Leaders took time. These efforts resulted in a high satisfaction rate among participants, with 88% of them rating it as High or Very High on a five-point scale.

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<th>Debate</th>
<th>2018</th>
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<th>2020</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (7.16) AT participants by year, gender, sector, region and age

Of all the activities, this model originally showed the greatest gender balance with almost equal numbers in the first year — however, in the final year, 60% of participants were female. The majority of participants in this model of VE came from Southern Mediterranean countries, although the final year of the project there saw more equal participation from European countries due to increased outreach efforts and growing interest from European partners. The number of participants enrolled in 2020 was also considerably higher than in previous years. The vast majority of youth joined through non-formal education institutions rather than HEIs. The strong Southern Mediterranean presence in
this activity is partly due to the partners’ existing networks and familiarity with debating (in face-to-face contexts) through the Young Arab Voices — then Young Mediterranean Voices — initiative, with many debate team leaders coming through this experience.

Development of the model in EVE

This format is based on the consolidated practice of debating, which while widely practiced in face-to-face contexts is a new model of VE. It brings young people from different backgrounds together to develop parliamentary debating skills with the support of trained debate team leaders.

Debate leaders were trained in intensive six-hour online sessions, during which they learnt how to deliver local debate training for teams which they were responsible for recruiting. The debate leaders then registered the debaters and led them in a transnational, intercultural online debate. The local teams were re-organised into transnational teams to discuss two different motions in each debate. The sessions, which followed the rules of parliamentary debate, were three hours long and moderated by two team leaders. The first 30 minutes were reserved for teams to prepare and coordinate, and a short debriefing session followed each debate.

In 2019, follow-up dialogue sessions were introduced to create a space for participants to reflect on the critica. These two-hour sessions led by trained EVE facilitators gave young people a chance to reflect on their real views on the topics debated, think about what shaped their understanding and opinions of the topic, and discuss how it related to their communities.

In 2020, a Debate Cycle was rolled out, with the aim of defining a clear engagement scheme for trainees and participants (see the figure below). A total of ten Debate Cycles were implemented in 2020, including one in Arabic and one in French.

The Debate Cycle

In addition to regular debates, project promoters introduced Euro-Med Debate Competitions as a way to promote the activity towards a wider audience and to provide additional sessions with a competitive component. First piloted in summer 2019, this format was replicated twice in 2020. The competition included a total of six rounds and followed a knockout process, whereby the winning team of each debate moved to the next round. Adjudicators drawn from the network of online debate trainers determined the winner of each debate and the competition’s winning team following an adjudication process based on four main elements:

- Ability to develop deep and well-structured arguments using the Statement Analysis Illustration Link (SAIL) method;

- Ability to effectively refute the arguments presented by the competing team;

- Fulfilment of the roles, teamwork and coherence of the arguments and case;

- Ability to present intercultural arguments from another country of the Euro-Med region and engaging with them.
Exchanges:

As can be seen in the table below, the number of debate and post-debate sessions grew considerably over the three years of the project, with almost four times as many sessions in 2020 as in 2018. The competition format led to a high number of debate sessions, though it included fewer post-debate dialogues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVE Year</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online Debate</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Debate Dialogue</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total of regular sessions</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition Debates</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition Post-Debate Dialogue</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total of competition sessions</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total of all sessions</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (7.17) Debate sessions by year
## Participant learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AT</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active Listening</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.42%</td>
<td>2.08%</td>
<td>47.08%</td>
<td>50.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.42%</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
<td>42.50%</td>
<td>48.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence Work Communicate Cultural Diverse</td>
<td>0.42%</td>
<td>0.83%</td>
<td>8.75%</td>
<td>30.83%</td>
<td>59.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Information</td>
<td>0.32%</td>
<td>0.32%</td>
<td>4.36%</td>
<td>33.12%</td>
<td>61.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge Relationships</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.79%</td>
<td>6.51%</td>
<td>52.07%</td>
<td>40.63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge Global Events</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.77%</td>
<td>8.32%</td>
<td>45.65%</td>
<td>45.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Skills</td>
<td>0.68%</td>
<td>2.05%</td>
<td>9.34%</td>
<td>53.08%</td>
<td>34.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest Physical Mobility</td>
<td>0.16%</td>
<td>1.77%</td>
<td>7.26%</td>
<td>51.29%</td>
<td>39.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Competencies</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>1.55%</td>
<td>9.48%</td>
<td>43.71%</td>
<td>45.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest Further Dialogue</td>
<td>1.16%</td>
<td>1.74%</td>
<td>13.15%</td>
<td>44.68%</td>
<td>39.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Work</td>
<td>0.81%</td>
<td>2.26%</td>
<td>11.77%</td>
<td>49.19%</td>
<td>35.97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Relationships</td>
<td>0.79%</td>
<td>2.37%</td>
<td>15.78%</td>
<td>50.10%</td>
<td>30.97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenged Media</td>
<td>1.29%</td>
<td>3.87%</td>
<td>21.13%</td>
<td>45.48%</td>
<td>28.23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (7.18.) AT impact on participants

As in other activities, “active listening” and “critical thinking” received the highest score in the post-exchange survey, followed by a “growth in interest for further intercultural encounters through mobility or Virtual Exchange”. The knowledge component — namely the “increased knowledge about global issues” and about “the relationships between societies” — was also deemed important. This may be because participants had to research the debate topics in order to find out more about the different perspectives on these issues and argue for and against different positions.

**Favourite topics**

Climate change, social media, freedom of speech, education, gender, abortion, health issues, Covid-19, artificial intelligence
Increased confidence and communication skills

Interviewees reported having developed increased confidence and communication skills, particularly debate-specific competences: building arguments and counter-arguments, working under time pressure, defending other opinions, teamwork and public speaking, learning how to think with a different perspective, and presentation. Additionally, Debate Team Leaders indicated that their participation bolstered their organisational and leadership skills.

“I found that debate skills helped me a lot, I am now student representative of the University council, I attend meetings with the teachers, debate skills helped me to talk well in front of people and express my thoughts in a good way. I am using my debate experience to train people in high schools and debate clubs in my University to get more experience in debating to find new opportunities in the future.” Male, 24, Morocco

While several of the young people interviewed had participated in debates in Arabic and French, the majority took part in the English language track. English proved to be a pull factor for involving youth in the debates, as they felt they were developing competences in a language that is perceived to be of value for their future careers.

Acquiring knowledge on the topics debated

Debaters and Debate Team Leaders reported acquiring knowledge about a wide range of topics thanks to the research they carried out to become familiar with all possible sides of an argument. Having perspectives and information from team members from different countries also expanded their knowledge on the issues they debated.

“The topics I debated about were really challenging since I knew little about them, so I spent hours searching, but it was really interesting. It has improved my debating skills, and gave me enough courage to say what’s on my mind, and I would definitely love to join again if I have the chance.”

Intercultural skills and access are benefits of moving from face-to-face to online debate

Interviewees mentioned the opportunity to participate in online competitions, the chance to share experiences and learn from international peers, and the availability of a safer space for women and members of the LGBTQ+ community as distinct advantages of this activity. Debating online was thus seen as a way to solve challenges related to mobility within the Southern Mediterranean region, and to complement the limited opportunities for mobility towards Europe available to young people from the Southern Mediterranean. Finally, online debates were a way to solve logistical issues within countries where travelling is more challenging, for instance because of long distances.

“A lot of people can’t go to Europe, so it is a solution for a mobility problem for many, I have been doing these meetings three times in 6 months, we facilitate debates, we have mixed teams from North and Southern of the Mediterranean. There are no winners or losers, we all work together, with different people, with different backgrounds.” Female, 43, Tunisia

Virtual debates added an international and intercultural component to face-to-face debates: some interviewees reported that this introduced them to different perspectives that they would not have been exposed to had the debates remained local or national. Last but not least, debating in an online space also allowed them to develop their digital skills.

Perspective change on specific issue

Some participants reported changing their perspectives as they researched or listened to arguments on topics that were against their own views. Debating for a motion that one does not necessarily agree with increased empathy, drove participants to engage with views they would not normally listen to, and allowed them to put themselves in others’ shoes.
"I learned that it is possible to propose an idea which normally you are truly against it. In my debate session it came out that the participant who was opposing the motion ‘religion is the cause of hate and division in societies’ himself was an atheist! This is a priceless experience that opens new perspectives.” Male, 23, Greece

Post-debate dialogue sessions

The post-debate dialogue sessions were successful with participants, as they responded to a need to engage in less formal and structured interactions than the debates themselves. Those who participated in the debrief sessions found that these were valuable in creating more personal connections with their team members and were a factor that contributed to increased engagement in the debate activity overall.

"Yes, something I would change, you can get more of a personal experience if the way of the debate wouldn’t be so strictly organized; more of a free dialogue, you would get more on the culture of the others, or a second part where you can talk about yourself. That would be nice to get to know people a little better.” Male, 23, Germany

Which strengths and challenges do these VE models present?

Drawing on the data collected from participants, facilitators and activity implementers, this section focuses on the strengths and challenges shared by the different VE models.

Strengths

There is considerable overlap between the “ready-made” models of OFD and iOOC in terms of design, demographics, and learning outcomes. They both provided powerful opportunities for meaningful intercultural dialogue between young people in European and Southern Mediterranean countries, with more or less equal levels of participation from the two regions.

Both models had a statistically significant impact on participants’ perceived intercultural competence, with an effect size above 0.2, and an even stronger effect on participants’ attitudes towards those of different ethnic or religious groups. The scores on post-exchange survey items were consistently high on all measures, above all active listening and critical thinking. In terms of meeting the EVE objectives, both enhanced participants’ critical thinking and promoted tolerance, non-discrimination and deep engagement with and acceptance of difference. Both models explicitly addressed intergroup relations, such as that between European and Southern Mediterranean societies, “newcomers” and “nationalists”, or refugee and non-refugee groups. They thus contributed strongly to meeting the objectives of the 2015 Paris Declaration and the EU neighbouring policy with the Southern Mediterranean.

These aims were achieved through programmes which were specifically designed to foster active listening skills, build meaningful relationships between diverse identity groups, and support participants in welcoming conflict and understanding the difference between the display of emotions, which are always legitimate, and the expression of verbal violence, which is seen to clash with the dialogue. The following aspects of the learning experience, all of which emerged as relevant to the respondents/interviewees, were identified as strengths in the design of the programmes:

• The wide range of topics — above all the potentially divisive ones — that can be addressed in the dialogue groups thanks to the safe space provided by facilitators who are trained to accept that conflict is a normal part of any dialogue between different identity groups;

• The facilitators who led the sessions were trained to enable the development of active listening. They followed an intensive training course and practicum prior to facilitating, and were supported by a rich curriculum which included activities to help develop active listening and allow participants to build meaningful relationships with one another (sharing life stories, role reversing, feedback rounds etc.). Facilitators could also rely on coaches who observed a number of sessions and provided them with feedback;
• The distribution of participants into small groups (eight to 12 people), allowed for everyone to speak up and be heard, while the occasional use of “break out rooms” allowed participants to interact in even smaller groups (dyads or triads). Discussion groups included young people from a wide range of backgrounds, thus bringing a variety of experiences and perspectives on issues;

• The semi-structured nature of the dialogue, which included activities such as those mentioned above, as well as topic-specific discussion questions, and allowed significant time for free-flowing conversations among participants;

• The fact that dialogues were sustained over multiple weeks, allowing participants to gradually feel more and more comfortable in the online space week after week, slowly building relationships with their group members. Between sessions, young people had time to reflect on and discuss their experiences, and talk about the perspectives they encounter to members of their communities, thus expanding the benefits of the activity to the wider community;

• The design of the platform, which served as a simulation for the “talking stick” methodology.

In terms of the design, administration and scalability the models were effective in several ways. Both reached large numbers of participants from the outset of the project because they brought to EVE a tried and tested design, and a team of already trained facilitators. They were also able to accommodate growing numbers of participants as time went by. The models have thus proved their scalability and can provide large numbers of participants with impactful and comparable experience because of:

• the quality of the tried and tested curricula (which provide some core content and a range of activities facilitators can select on the basis of group interest) for dialogue which all facilitators use,

• The adaptation of an established model to a variety of formats and duration of exchanges to meet different needs (e.g. four, five, and eight-week Connect Programmes; five and ten-week iOOCs; Social Circles);

• The facilitator training, coaching, quality control and support mechanisms in place for the facilitators;

• The immediate response mechanisms in place to address problems as they arose;

• The modest effort required on the part of coordinators who integrated this experience into activities at their higher education institutions or youth organisations, and the information materials and support systems to support them in their role;

• The monitoring and evaluation and the constant feedback loop that went into each iteration of the programme.

The TEP model of VE contributed above all to the fostering of soft skills of participants, notably the ability to collaborate online, that is to work in transnational teams on specific tasks and projects. It also served to develop participants’ intercultural competence, foreign language and communication skills, openness to difference and a broader understanding of subject-specific content or issues addressed in the exchanges, as well as knowledge of the relationship between cultures.

In terms of the design, administration and scalability of the model, what distinguishes it from the others is that educators and youth workers (who have followed a specific training course) designed and implemented the VE with the support of trainers and mentors. The retention rate in HEI is high because the exchange was generally an integral and compulsory component of a course. This, together with challenges participants (but also the educators) may have faced in collaboration with their peers, may have contributed to the slightly lower satisfaction rate in comparison to other models. The strengths of this model lay in:
The flexibility of the model in terms of:

- the specific learning aims a VE can be designed to meet,
- the language(s) used for the exchange,
- the openness in terms of themes that can be addressed and activities designed,
- the duration of the exchange and start and end dates, the tools used, and the number and types of partnerships established,
- the number of participants
- the design of the exchange and activities,
- the number of facilitated dialogue sessions included in exchanges.

Building the capacity of HEI educators and youth workers through the training programmes and the process of collaborating with partners in the design and implementation of an exchange (see Chapter 9). They reported acquiring intercultural communicative competence, digital and collaborative competences and above all the motivation and enthusiasm required to design and implement the exchanges. This model thus contributed to meeting the Erasmus agenda of innovating higher education and youth work, through pedagogically sound, inclusive and people-centred approaches to digitalisation and the modernisation of higher education and youth work;

- The integration of online facilitated dialogue sessions in TEPs, which was a new innovation to the long-established co-designed (also known as telecollaborative) model of Virtual Exchange. These sessions supported relationship building and intercultural dialogue amongst participants;

- Strengthening and consolidating partnerships between HEIs and youth organisations. The bi or multilateral partnerships required to design an exchange allowed the collaborating educators/youth workers to build strong relationships, which some have reported led to the development of other collaborations, for instance mobility or research projects;

- As educators and youth workers are key multipliers, this model is scalable and can lead to increasing numbers of participants as more educators and youth workers implement them;

- TEPs were also a good testing ground for potentially new models of larger scale exchanges such as iOOCs.

The Advocacy Training model also contributed to the aim of developing the transversal competences of youth to increase their employability. Participants specifically developed their communication skills, in particular those related to debate. These supported their confidence building, with a very high impact on perceived intercultural competence.

The strengths of this model lay in:

- The clear structure of the debates which followed an established format that can be easily replicated, and was clear to all participants;

- The flexibility in terms of:

  - the topics to be debated
  - the language used for the debate (English, French or Arabic)
  - the dates of debates

- The development of an online debate cycle with a post-debate facilitated dialogue session supported by EVE facilitators. This contributed to meeting participants’ desire to engage with one another on a more personal level, and reflect on the learning outcomes of the debate experience.

- The scalability of the programme through the online training of debate team leaders who are key multipliers. Though the majority of debates have taken place in non-HEI contexts, the model can also be applied to HEI institutions.
• The potential in **strengthening and consolidating partnerships** between youth organisations in different areas of the same country, as well as across countries. Indeed, the bilateral partnerships required to implement an online debate allowed the Team Leaders to build collaborative relationships;

• The EuroMed Debate Competition which brought together large numbers of youth in debating current topics, as the competitive component was a motivating factor for many of the participants.

**Lessons learnt**

**Building relationships** and learning from others is a core value and the main strength of all the models of VE. It is what participants liked most about the activity and what distinguishes VE from many online pedagogies focusing on content, and on self-paced and individualised learning pathways. Participants develop relations with their (more experienced) facilitators and team leaders who, by modelling behaviour, potentially inspire young people to engage more with the activity through training or seizing other opportunities. Participants also develop relationships with their peers, which vary depending on the activities and how the exchanges and interactions are designed and implemented. OEFD and IOOC participants evolve as a group, though they may also develop relations with individual members. The group provides a shared identity, which becomes stronger over time. Debate participants develop relationships with their local teams, but also the intercultural “team” with whom they debate. TEP participants are members of a class, in a specific context, and in most of the exchanges interacted with individual partners or small groups.

The success and impact of each of the exchange activities thus depends not only on the individual, but also on relationality, that is the relationships they develop with their peers — whether it be a single partner (in the case of some TEPs) or partner class, their team (in the case of debates), or their group (in the case of OFDs and IOOCs). The experience of all individuals — and thus their engagement with VE — was influenced by the commitment of their peers to the exchange, that is the extent to which they felt a mutual interest, respect and reciprocity in their exchanges.

The main challenges faced in relation to this were ensuring engagement and commitment from participants. It was found that when the exchange was well integrated into a course or an organisation’s activities, participants’ retention and engagement were generally good. The coordinators’ understanding of the exchange and the ability to convey the commitment expected from participants was important, as was providing access to technology for access in certain contexts.

There is a tension between having participants take part in VE as a compulsory activity or a voluntary one. Engaging young people who were not initially interested or curious in engaging with others was in fact one of the aims of the EVE initiative, as this is where much of the transformational potential and impact lies. Yet it can present challenges in terms of their level of engagement in the exchange and in dialogue sessions — which has an impact on other participants. A further challenge was the lack of understanding of VE on the part of participants, and what was expected from them. Language proficiency was a barrier to participation and engagement when participants could not understand what was being said, or were not able to express themselves fully. Finally, the lack of access to technology and a quiet space from which to connect were also major hurdles for many participants.

**Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange** offers a powerful lesson on interdependence and an antidote to the competition and individualism prioritised in many education systems, in internationalisation, and study abroad. The core values of all EVE activities were exchange, reciprocity, and mutuality, with an attention to issues such as inequities and power dynamics. If ignored, these aspects can hinder mutual learning and lead to exchanges which are unequal and advantage some to the detriment of others. The intentional design of the different VE models, the expertise of those who are involved in developing, facilitating and coordinating these activities, the support of the coordinating institutions, and the monitoring and evaluation of the activities are all key to successful implementation.
Discussion of findings

This research was based on the hypothesis that the impact and perceived improvement would differ depending on the exchange activity (design features of the exchange, diversity of participants, number of facilitated dialogue sessions). There were indeed statistically significant differences between the activities in terms of impact, specifically regarding improved intercultural competence, and positive attitudes towards people with different ethnic or religious backgrounds — that is, reduction of prejudice. OFD and iOOCs were the two models which had the strongest impact in this respect, which can be attributed to the intentional design of the models in addressing these outcomes. The curriculum design, the intentionality in addressing divisive issues in safe spaces and with the support of trained facilitators, the sustained nature of the programmes lasting from four to ten weeks, and the diversity of the groups that participants were part of are important factors.

Perceived improvement was high across all the models, with differences in terms of which skills areas were seen to improve more. Again, this was an outcome of the intentional design of these exchanges, and what the participants were expected to do: researching and/or engaging with content and perspectives on global issues led to perceived gains in knowledge, having to collaborate with transnational peers in tasks or projects — with all the challenges that this may have presented — led to perceived gains in teamwork, as well as collaboration and communication in diverse groups.

The strengths of the different models can also be assessed in terms of the numbers reached, and the advantages brought to different stakeholders in the communities involved. OFDs and iOOCs were extremely successful in offering a high quality experience to high numbers of participants, due to the scalability of the design and the number of trained facilitators available to support these exchanges. The quality control mechanisms put in place ensured high satisfaction from participants and coordinators, and the fact that the activity promoters took responsibility for managing, designing and implementing the exchanges did not place a heavy burden on exchange coordinators. TEPs and AT reached lower numbers of participants overall, though they gradually grew over the three years of the project. The strength of these models lies in building the capacity of coordinators (educators, youth workers, debate leaders) to develop and design their own exchanges so as to meet their specific needs and target groups. While these models are also scalable, they require more time to be able to reach high numbers of participants.

Together, the different models piloted in this initiative provide a rich “ecology of VE experiences” that different stakeholders could engage with. Although offering these different formats brought complexity to the initiative, this variety also created opportunities for mutual learning and “cross-pollination” in the development of the different models. The gradual integration of facilitated dialogue sessions across all four models led to improved outcomes and learning experiences for all participants, and is a feature which distinguishes EVE from other large scale VE initiatives across the globe.
8 Long-term implications of participation in EVE

This chapter will address RQ13, namely “What were the long-term implications of participation in Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange?".

This question is examined in two ways:

• Through an analysis of longitudinal case studies and qualitative data gathered during interviews and focus groups, to look at the construct of “activation” through EVE;

• Through a longitudinal study based on quantitative data gathered from the OFD activity, and carried out by an independent researcher, not directly involved in the EVE project, Dr. Sandy Schumann (University College London). This study looked at prejudice, behaviour in support of the outgroup, perceived confidence in intercultural interactions and knowledge about Western-Muslim relationships.

Pathways of engagement

Longitudinal case studies were used to explore some of the long-term implications of participation in EVE regarding participants’ activation — that is building friendships and actively seeking further opportunities for intercultural engagement. The six case study subjects were selected not as representative of “typical” EVE participants, but with the aim of covering the different activities as entry points into VE, and with the geographic scope of the project in mind. When the research team first engaged with these young people, they had taken part in one or two activities — their full “pathways” had not yet been defined. The main researcher had several interviews and email exchanges with the case study subjects over the course of the project. (See Annex 7 for Case Studies)

The analysis of these case studies provided insight into the “pathways of long term engagement” through the EVE ecology, that is some of the ways participants became involved in multiple activities, and how they applied what they learnt through VE in other spheres of their life. It also provides insights into the impact that EVE has extended to others who were not directly involved in the project.
Table 8.1 - Case study subjects and ‘pathways of engagement’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVE Year</th>
<th>2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shadi (female, international student studying in Italy and Tunisia)</td>
<td>iOOC on Countering Hate Speech &gt; Youth, Peace and Security &gt; Introduction to Facilitated Dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ikram (female, Morocco)</td>
<td>Facilitator &gt; Senior Facilitator &gt; Coach &gt; Facilitation Fellow &gt; Debate Team Leader &gt; Post-debate dialogue facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aloisia (female, Germany)</td>
<td>TEP Basic Training &gt; TEP Advanced Training &gt; TEP implementer &gt; French Basic Training &gt; Introduction to Facilitated Dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephan (male, Netherlands)</td>
<td>Facilitator training &gt; Facilitator for Connect Global &gt; iOOC Countering Hate Speech &gt; C-STEP TEP &gt; TEP Youth Worker Training &gt; co-trainer for TEP youth workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tareq (male, Syria)</td>
<td>Social Circles (Gender equality) &gt; iOOC Gender In/Equality in Media and Journalism &gt; Cultural Encounters: Perspectives on Populism &gt; iOOC Ambassadors programme &gt; Youth Peace and Security &gt; Countering Hate Speech &gt; Introduction to Online Dialogue Facilitation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The case study subjects had different experiences of study or living abroad. Two of them were actually abroad when the case studies started: Stephan was in France studying, and had already experienced Erasmus mobility as a student. Shadi too was an international student, in Italy, on a Master’s course which also took her to Tunisia and France for study abroad. Matteo and Tareq had not had experiences of study abroad. Ikram had not spent more than two months abroad, but had taken part in a five-week exchange programme in the US. Aloisia was a university language teacher and had spent several years abroad.

Matteo took part in his first VE (the OFD) during his time at university, as an extracurricular activity for which he did not receive credit. Though he faced initial challenges with the technology, which was not immediately accessible to him, he managed to overcome these hurdles with the support of facilitators and staff, and found it had activated him to seek further opportunities for intercultural engagement after graduating. He took part in several other activities once he had already graduated, as they provided him with opportunities to make connections with people across the world, some of whom he was still in contact with two years after completing the exchange. He particularly appreciated learning about conflicts in the world, which he continues to follow through the media and his contacts. He also initiated an exchange which he did not complete due to changes in personal circumstances. He highlighted developing listening skills which he applies in other inter-religious dialogue contexts he takes part in.

Tareq was a student of dentistry in Syria when he first experienced EVE through a Social Circle on gender equality, which was the beginning of a long-term engagement. He followed many of the EVE activities, particularly after graduation when he had more time on his hands. He was interested above all in the social and global issues that were addressed in the project. Tareq had experience with many other online courses but he highly valued the human connections and relationships he was able to develop through EVE, especially because international mobility for him is very difficult. He was also able to build his skills and confidence in communicating in English and public speaking as he became an EVE ambassador and talked about Virtual Exchange at many online public events and
became a strong advocate, seeking to bring other young people into Virtual Exchange. There are major challenges with connectivity and also electricity in Syria which have caused participation problems for him — and most other Syrian participants. His case highlights the extreme importance of Virtual Exchange in providing engaging opportunities for young people in conflict zones such as Syria to have contact with the outside world. At the same time it allowed him to make Syrian voices heard directly and be listened to, providing different narratives to the media stories, and so providing a window into Syria for the outside world. Furthermore, EVE was seen to provide free and engaging skill-building opportunities and contacts which he hoped could lead him to further opportunities — ideally a study mobility programme.

Shadi was an international student in Venice, who also spent three months in Tunisia and then in France as part of her MA course on Mediterranean studies. Like Tareq, Shadi had extensive experience of online courses outside of EVE and highlighted the value and specificity of Virtual Exchange in terms of opportunities for interaction and building relationships, and above all learning from and with others. This is what they saw as distinguishing EVE from other online courses. They both highlighted the importance and particular value of these opportunities for young people in countries where there are fewer opportunities for international engagement, and Shadi expressed frustration that this opportunity was not available for young people in Iran, her country of origin. Her and Tareq's long-term engagement in the activity stemmed from their interest in the issues that were addressed, the learning opportunities and opportunities to create contacts, but above all to contribute to social change. Shadi in fact described herself as an activist who was part of an advocacy team working with the United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY). Through her networking and advocacy an iOOC was developed through EVE in collaboration with UNOY. Though she was not directly involved in the course development, she completed it as a participant in 2020.

Stephan was a Dutch student completing a Master’s degree in Intercultural Management in France. He had previously had several international experiences, first as a Bachelor’s student where he took part in Erasmus mobility as an international volunteer facilitating learning for ESN, and finally as a youth worker. He found out about EVE facilitator training through the SALTO-Youth platform121, and completed it to become a dialogue facilitator. He also followed the iOOC “Countering Hate Speech” in order to further explore and understand the world of VE. He subsequently did an online internship — which was a course requirement for his MA — with UNICollaboration as he was interested in furthering his understanding of VE learning, and became engaged in training programmes for youth workers. He has become a strong advocate for Virtual Exchange and making use of opportunities for “giving forward”, bringing more people into the Virtual Exchange experience.

Ikram entered EVE as an already “qualified” facilitator and became strongly involved in facilitation through EVE, taking up the many engagement opportunities available: coaching and becoming a facilitator fellow, as well as taking part in many dissemination events. She also took up the opportunity to become a Debate Team Leader and saw the differences and complementarity between the different approaches to Virtual Exchange. She brings what she has learnt through facilitation to her volunteering work as vice-president of an NGO working on environmental issues, cleaning cemeteries. It has made her a better communicator, able to deal with conflicts and support volunteers in taking ownership of the activity they do. As she has become “activated”, she seeks to activate others.

Aloisia came to EVE through the TEP training for educators to develop VEs. Though she had experience of VE she was interested in learning more about the scope of activities in EVE. After following both Basic and Advanced training, she implemented several TEPs which included facilitated dialogue sessions, having learnt about and experienced them during the training. She found that these live discussions added to the students’ experience, as reflected in their feedback. She later signed up for the Introduction to Dialogue Facilitation Training herself to learn more and be able to apply facilitation techniques in her teaching. Her engagement has also led her to present her exchange to other educators in the EVE community through webinars, and also provide support to her institution’s international office in developing a VE strategy.

This range of backgrounds and experiences of study and living abroad found in participants highlight the value of VE not as a lesser “replacement” for study abroad, but as a learning activity in and
of itself both for people with and without international experience. Their different entry points and pathways through EVE activities show how they were activated by their participation to seek further learning opportunities through EVE. They also brought their learning to others in their communities in different ways, thus showing how the long-term impact of EVE extended beyond the immediate beneficiaries of the programme. As mentioned in the introduction, these are case studies and their activation is not representative of any specific group or of all participants. There were others who developed similar pathways and continued to engage through the communities developed — such as the facilitator community (see Chapter 10) which both Ikram and Stephan were part of, and the TEP community that Aloisia belonged to (see Chapter 9). There were also, inevitably, some participants who did not return to engage further.

The aim of this analysis was to assess the short- and long-term implications of participation in different Connect Programs semesters. Participants of three cohorts - spring 2018, fall 2018, spring 2019- were invited to complete three surveys respectively (i.e., three-wave longitudinal design). The 'pre-survey' was filled in before the start of the program; participants answered the ‘post-survey’ immediately after ending the program (four or eight weeks lag); the ‘follow-up’ survey was distributed six months after the spring 2019 cohort had finished their program (i.e., with a 12 and 18 month lag for the fall 2018 and spring 2018 cohort respectively).

Sample
A total of N = 471 participants completed all three surveys. The participants were on average Mage = 22.56 years old (SDage = 2.60; range: 17 - 41); 65% were female, 34% male, 45% preferred not to state their gender. Participants from Tunisia were most represented (27%), followed by Italians (16%), participants from Egypt (13%), Morocco (12%), Turkey (7%), and Palestine (6%). The remaining participants came from Germany, Hungary, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, the Netherlands, Sweden, Syria, and the UK (11 participants and fewer from each country; data based on information from N = 235 participants).

Measures
All measures were taken at all three waves. To capture their prejudice, students reported in each wave how “cold” or “warm” they felt towards others who have a different ethnic and different religious background (feeling thermometer; from 1 = cold to 10 = warm). Lower values indicate higher prejudice. We further included two measures that addressed outgroup behaviour. Participants reported their agreement with the statements ‘I have challenged media misrepresentation of other groups since participating in the Connect Programme’ and ‘I have spoken out or acted to promote awareness about an issue related to the relationship between Western and predominately Muslim societies’ (1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree). Finally, we assessed ‘Confidence about communicating/working in culturally diverse environment’ and perceived ‘Knowledge about Western-Muslim relationships’ (1 = very low, 2 = low, 3 = Average, 4 = High, 5 = Very high)
### Results

Average levels of the analysed variables across all three measuring points are reported in Table 8.2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Pre-measure</th>
<th>Post-measure</th>
<th>Follow-up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M (SD), N = 461</td>
<td>M (SD), N = 453</td>
<td>M (SD), N = 471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote awareness about Western-Muslim relationships</td>
<td>3.22 (.90)</td>
<td>3.77 (.87)</td>
<td>3.82 (.87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenged media misrepresentations about Western-Muslim relationships</td>
<td>3.33 (.93)</td>
<td>3.87 (.90)</td>
<td>3.86 (.93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence about communicating/working in culturally diverse environment</td>
<td>3.77 (.80)</td>
<td>4.10 (.70)</td>
<td>4.24 (.71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge about Western-Muslim relationships</td>
<td>3.07 (.75)</td>
<td>4.13 (.79)</td>
<td>3.63 (.81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings towards others with a different ethnicity*</td>
<td>N = 338</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.85 (2.10)</td>
<td>N = 187</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.31 (1.81)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8.20 (1.87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings towards others with a different religion*</td>
<td>N = 338</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.69 (2.11)</td>
<td>N = 187</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.10 (1.89)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8.01 (2.00)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. * = variables were only examined in the Fall 2018 cohort.

Table 8.2 Average levels of analysed variables
Repeated analyses of variance showed, firstly, main effects of time for all dependent variables (Table 2). Post-hoc comparisons further demonstrated that confidence about communication in culturally diverse environments improved between the pre- and post-measure (Mean difference: -0.33, SE = 0.04, d = -0.80, p < .001) and continued to improve further between the post-measure and follow-up (Mean difference: -0.16, SE = 0.04, d = -0.19, p < .001).

Conversely, participants reported an increase in knowledge between the pre- and post-measure (Mean difference: -1.05, SE = 0.05, d = -1.07, p < .001) but also a significant decrease of knowledge between the post- and follow-up measure (Mean difference: 0.50, SE = 0.05, d = 0.50, p < .001). The values recorded at the follow-up, however, were still higher than the pre-measures (Mean difference: -0.56, SE = 0.05, d = -0.56, p < .001).

Willingness to promote awareness for Western-Muslim relationships also increased between the pre- and post-measure (Mean difference: -0.54, SE = 0.05, d = -0.53, p < .001) but did not change significantly between the post-measure and the follow-up (Mean difference: -0.09, SE = 0.05, d = -0.09, p = 0.074). Similar patterns were observed for intentions to challenge media misrepresentations; values increased between pre- and post-measure (Mean difference: -0.53, SE = 0.06, d = -0.46, p < .001) but no change was recorded between the post-measure and follow-up (Mean difference: 0.05, SE = 0.06, d = 0.04, p = 0.388). The difference between the pre and follow-up measure remained, however, significant (Mean difference: -0.58, SE = 0.06, d = -0.50, p < .001).

Prejudice about others with a different ethnicity improved between the pre- and post-measure (Mean difference: -0.55, SE = 0.14, d = -0.27, p < .001). No significant differences between post- and follow-up measure (Mean difference: 0.23, SE = 0.14, d = 0.12, p = 0.107) and marginal significant differences between follow-up and pre-measure (Mean difference: -0.33, SE = 0.14, d = -0.17, p = 0.045) were identified. Similar patterns were identified regarding prejudice towards others with a different religious background; the measures improved between the pre and post-measure (Mean difference: -0.54, SE = 0.15, d = -0.26, p = 0.001). No significant differences between post- and follow-up measure (Mean difference: 0.21, SE = 0.15, d = 0.10, p = 0.156) and follow-up and pre-measure (Mean difference: -0.33, SE = 0.15, d = -0.16, p = 0.062) were reported. All trends are plotted in Figure 1. The reported p-values are adjusted for multiple comparisons by applying a Holm correction.
As participants had completed the Connect Programme in three different cohorts, the follow-up measure reflected a delay from the post-measure of approximately 18, 12, and six months respectively. To examine whether long-term developments differed between the cohorts, the latter was introduced as a between-subject factor in the repeated measures ANOVAs. Results (Table 3) showed that no difference in values across all measuring points was reported for confidence in communication skills and willingness to challenge media misrepresentations. Regarding the promotion of awareness about Muslim-Western relationships, the main effect of ‘time’ as well as the interaction between the factors ‘time’ and ‘cohort’ (F(4, 880) = 3.26, p = .011) were significant. The spring 2018 cohort reported higher values in the pre and follow-up measure. For knowledge about Western-Muslim relationships, the main effect of ‘cohort’ was also significant (Table 8.3), with the spring 2018 cohort achieving higher values across the three waves. This analysis could not be completed for the outcomes ‘feelings towards others with different ethnicity’ or ‘religion’, as these measures were only taken in one cohort.

Figure 2. Changes in knowledge about and promoting awareness of Muslim-Western relationships over time for participants with a follow-up of 18 months (condition 1), 12 months (condition 2), and six months (condition 3) after program completion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Pre-measure</th>
<th>Post-measure</th>
<th>Follow-up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>F(2, 884) = 81.83, p &lt; .001</td>
<td>F(2, 440) = 2.46, p = .086</td>
<td>M (SD), N = 471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>3.77 (.87)</td>
<td>3.82 (.87)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote</td>
<td>F(2, 880) = 251.98, p &lt; .001</td>
<td>F(2, 440) = 4.09, p = .017</td>
<td>3.86 (.93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>F(2, 880) = 98.22, p &lt; .001</td>
<td>F(2, 440) = 5.71, p = .004</td>
<td>4.24 (.71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings towards others with a different ethnicity*</td>
<td>F(2, 880) = 68.00, p &lt; .001</td>
<td>F(2, 440) = 2.70, p = .068</td>
<td>3.63 (.81)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = variables were only examined in the Fall 2018 cohort.

Table 8.2. Effect of time, cohort and program type effects
Summary

Taken together, the findings show that participation in the Connect programme significantly reduced participants’ prejudice, enhanced behaviour in support of the outgroup, as well as increased perceived confidence in intercultural interactions and knowledge about Western-Muslim relationships. These changes were maintained also after the program ended with respect to outgroup behavior and knowledge; confidence in communication skills, indeed, increased further. Prejudice, however, appear to have returned towards the pre-program levels. Specifying the duration of long-term implications, analyses further highlighted that the documented trends are supported for up to 18 months after the end of the program.

Conclusions

This chapter explored the long-term implications of participation in Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange (RQ13) through two different approaches.

Through the analysis of longitudinal case studies insights were gained into some participants’ ‘pathways of engagement’ through the ecology of EVE. These showed different entry points in exchange activities and training programmes, and the active exploration and engagement in a range of the activities available. This continued engagement can be seen as a form of ‘activation’ as discussed in previous chapters, actively seeking opportunities for intercultural engagement and learning. The case study subjects also provided rich examples of how they put what they learnt through EVE into use in other contexts.

The quantitative study provides important findings on the longitudinal implications of participation in the OFD, that is the facilitated dialogue programmes. It focused specifically on intergroup relations, and used just some of the measures explored in chapters 6 and 7 of this study: feelings towards others who have different ethnic and religious backgrounds (which measure prejudice); challenging media misrepresentation of other groups and speaking out or acting to promote awareness about an issue related to the relationship between Western and predominantly Muslim societies; confidence about communicating/working in culturally diverse environment’ and perceived ‘Knowledge about Western-Muslim relationships’. It found that Connect programme significantly reduced participants’ prejudice, enhanced behaviour in support of the outgroup, and increased perceived confidence in intercultural interactions and knowledge about Western-Muslim relationships. Most of the changes were maintained, and confidence in communication skills was found to increase further.
9 TEP and Advocacy Trainees

In answer to RQ 15, this chapter will explore how educators and youth workers were involved in EVE, and how they evaluated their EVE experience. Educators and youth workers were involved above all through the training programmes available in EVE, in particular the TEP training. Youth workers were also involved in the Advocacy Training for Debate Team Leaders. Following the training, some also became involved in the design and implementation of TEP Exchanges, and in recruiting and leading teams in debate exchanges and competitions.

9.1 TEP Training

Several training programmes were developed over the three years of the initiative, all based on an experiential approach whereby trainees would acquire understanding of VE through direct experience, as if they were participants in a VE. The training also included facilitated dialogue sessions with trained Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange facilitators. Throughout the project, the training courses were adapted, developed in different languages and enriched with additional resources to meet the needs expressed in participants’ feedback. While the same courses were initially offered to HEI and youth organisations, it soon became clear that the needs of these two groups differed quite significantly. This realisation led to the development of a dedicated track specifically catering to youth organisations.

Training courses for HEIs

The training for HEIs comprised two levels, “Basic” and “Advanced”, as described below. First developed in English only, the Basic Training was adapted in French in 2019, followed by the Advanced Training in autumn 2020.

- The “Basic TEP Training” for HEIs was designed for educators and any university staff interested in acquiring a better understanding of Virtual Exchange as a concept. Furthermore, this course allowed them to learn how VE can support the development of participants’ intercultural understanding and 21st century skills, and serve to complement HEIs’ internationalisation agendas/strategies. Based on participants’ input concerning the challenges of understanding the different opportunities available through EVE, the Basic Training was adapted to provide an overview of the initiative, the options available to HEIs in terms of “ready-made” VE models accessible to them without prior training (OFDs and iOOCs) and the potential of developing their own grassroots Virtual Exchange projects (TEPs). Additional resources included case studies of how institutions integrate Virtual Exchange in their activities, the handbook for International Relations Officers, and interventions by invited speakers in training sessions — including international relations officers (IROs) who had implemented VE strategies, and past trainees who had developed TEPs.

- The Advanced TEP Training was developed for those who had completed the Basic Training and wanted to actually design and implement a TEP. In this course, participants collaboratively went through the phases of designing a VE for their specific contexts and partnerships. A stronger focus on mentoring was introduced to the Advanced Training in 2019, in order to support trainees in the setting up and implementation of a VE. This additional support followed the realisation that several trainees faced a number of challenges that prevented them...” or instead of challenges: problems, issues, obstacles, etc. a number of which prevented them from implementing the TEPs they had planned.

Training for youth workers

After noticing that the two-step training did not suit the needs of youth workers, who found it difficult to engage with two different courses, project promoters developed a six-week training specifically designed for this particular group built on a project-based learning approach, and adjusted over the different iterations based on comments received from trainees. Consisting of weekly synchronous
sessions with both tutoring and facilitated dialogue sessions, the course enabled trainees organised into small groups to develop their proposal for a VE — an approach which proved to be successful. Initially offered in English, this training was adapted in 2020 into a shorter (four-week) version, proposed in Arabic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training courses</th>
<th>Training courses held 2018</th>
<th>No. of trainees 2018</th>
<th>Training courses held 2019</th>
<th>No. of trainees 2019</th>
<th>Training courses held 2020</th>
<th>No. of trainees 2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic TEP English</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced English</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic TEP French</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced French</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth English</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Arabic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9.1 TEP Training courses 2018-2020, iterations and number of participants.

Participation in the TEP training grew over the three years of the project, with a significant growth in 2020. This surge was in part due to the increased visibility of Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange through webinars and other outreach activities, past trainees informing colleagues, and the increased perceived relevance of VE given the limitations on international mobility in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, in 2020, the increased number of trainees was mainly due to non-teaching HEI staff (mainly international officers) joining the Basic Training course in English to understand VE and promote it in their institutions as a complement to their mobility programmes and a means to foster internationalisation at home. While most trainees were completely new to the field and wanted to learn about Virtual Exchange, some were already experienced practitioners wishing to improve their existing activities and become part of a networked community.

**Demographics and age of TEP trainees**

Overall, there were significantly more trainees from the HEI sector (76%) than non-HEI, due to the higher number of courses offered and more generally, a greater interest. Training courses offered in English attracted a majority of trainees from European countries, whereas those held in French and Arabic mainly appealed to participants from Southern Mediterranean countries.

There is undoubtedly a gender bias, as approximately two thirds of registered trainees were women, and this was consistent over the three years of the project. Finally, the majority of trainees were above 30 rew a lot of registrations (See Annex 11 for demographics of TEP trainees).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>Total 2018-2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trainees</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>721</td>
<td>1444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown/prefer not to say</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEI</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>565</td>
<td>1100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-HEI</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>481</td>
<td>839</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Med</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Med</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>510</td>
<td>858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9.2 Demographics of TEP trainees

**Motivations**

Motivations for enrolling in the Basic Training varied: while many meant to use Virtual Exchange as a tool to support the internationalisation of their teaching practice or youth work, some saw it as a way to bolster their involvement in other EC funded projects such as Key Action (KA) 1\(^\text{123}\) learning mobility programmes and KA2\(^\text{124}\) programmes, which entail cooperation for innovation, the exchange of good practices, and the development of strategic partnerships. In addition, a more recent motivation was to support European University Alliances. In short, this training filled a perceived gap in professional development for university staff, both academic and non-academic, in fostering internationalisation at home and online international collaborations.

Those joining the Advanced Training were inclined to design and implement a Virtual Exchange as part of their courses or organisation’s activities.

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123 https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus/actions/key-action-1-learning-mobility-individuals_en
"My university is a partner in ERASMUS+ KA2 project. Virtual Exchange is foreseen as a big part of total project mobilities. We deeply need knowledge what it is, where to start and how to implement VE between project partners." Female, Latvia

"This academic year we are focussing on internationalisation at home. As part of lecturer professionalisation we would like to create an offer for lecturers that are interested to introduce Virtual Exchange in their courses. Following the basic training will empower me in the topic of Virtual Exchange and in how to implement it in the organisation." Female, Belgium

"I believe that Virtual Exchange will be useful for the development of the activities of our European University Alliance, therefore I would like to learn more about how it works in order to help the alliance implement it." Female, Italy

Those joining the training for youth workers were interested in learning more about VE, and understanding how to design their own TEPs to support their existing work, such as youth exchanges, training courses, dialogue programmes, among others:

"My interest in developing Virtual Exchanges is to enhance inclusion of non-formal education and intercultural dialogue initiatives in difficult to reach groups of young people due to a variety of factors (e.g. geography, personality or other obstacles)" Female, Greece

"First of all it’s a new experience for me. Learning something new for it’s always important. As I write youth Exchange projects it will be useful to increase the outcomes and benefits of my project." Female, Latvia

Course completion

Completion rates for the training were high, considering that these were offered as free online courses, outside any compulsory professional development programmes (see Annex 9.2 for detailed table). Completion is understood as meeting all the criteria in order to obtain an Open Badge, which means engaging in 75% of activities, attending at least one facilitated dialogue session, and completing all required assignments.

The Advanced training showed the highest completion rate (varying from 67–82% per year). This is easily understandable, as participants had first completed the Basic Training and found a partner with whom to develop an exchange, which was a criterion to join most Advanced courses. Similarly, completion rates in the training for youth workers increased over the three years, rising from 56% to 81%, thanks to the steps taken to adapt the design to their specific needs, and a more stringent selection process. The Basic Training had somewhat lower completion rates: ranging between 41-56% per year for the courses held in English, and 12-31% for those in French. One of the French Basic training courses held in 2019 — which was widely advertised in Southern Mediterranean countries — drew a lot of registrations but was only completed by a minority of trainees, although many had actually started the course. In the follow-up survey, most respondents indicated time as their reason for not completing the course, while some reported that they had not understood what the course was about prior to registering.

Completion rates generally improved as courses were consolidated. The last ones to be introduced — namely the French and Arabic tracks — had the lowest completion rates, which may in part be due to the fact that they had not yet been tried and tested. It may also arise from an unaddressed need for further adjustments to the regional context. Indeed, these tracks predominantly attracted trainees from Southern Mediterranean countries, but were adaptations from training sessions which had been tried and tested with European educators above all.

It is worth mentioning, however, that many participants did not necessarily meet the criteria for successful completion of the course, but nonetheless participated actively. Many trainees continued to return to the course to access materials and resources well after the end of the training.
9.2 Advocacy Training

Over the three years of the project, the consortium ran 49 iterations of the Debate Team Leader training, and organised regular Debate Exchanges across both target regions, recruiting debaters through calls for participation.

Consisting of a single, six-hour synchronous session, the course equipped future Debate Team Leaders with the knowledge necessary to the successful delivery of a “Training and Exchange” session, and gave them the chance to work in small groups on designing their training plan. While the majority of training sessions were held in English, 2019 and 2020 saw the delivery of sessions in French (one each year), and Arabic (two in 2019 and one in 2020). There was little demand for training in these languages. All sessions were overseen by qualified individuals who had previously followed a “Training of Trainers” specifically designed for EVE. Moreover, in 2019, project promoters introduced Debate Competitions, which called for the delivery of a specific training for the future competition leaders, which provided additional information about the competition, on top of the regular training content.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVE Year</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Debate Team Leader Training</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition Debate Team Leader Training</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9.3 Distribution of Debate Team Leader trainees per year

In terms of demographics (see Table 9.2), the majority of trainees came from Southern Mediterranean countries, although the number of trainees from Erasmus+ programme countries significantly increased in 2020. Similarly, the number of young women following the training grew considerably compared to previous years. The overwhelming majority of trainees joined outside of formal educational contexts. Finally, participation rates increased significantly in 2020, exceeding the total of the previous years. This growth in interest was most likely linked to the COVID-19 pandemic on the one hand, and an outcome from the consortium’s outreach work on the other.
## Table 9.4 Demographics of TEP trainees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>Total 2018-2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trainees</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>395</td>
<td>776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>452</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEI</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-HEI</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Med</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-21</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-25</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30+</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Completion was understood as meeting all the criteria in order to obtain an open badge, which included engaging a team to participate in a debate and a post-debate dialogue following the training. Thus the number of badge "earners" was considerably lower than actual trainees. Nevertheless, there was a marked growth over the years; while in 2018 only 12% of trainees earned badges, the share of trainees completing the cycle increased to 22% in 2019, and 34% in 2020.
9.3 Evaluations of training courses

Quantitative data

From June 2019 onwards, a harmonised post-training evaluation form was sent to all trainees\(^{125}\). The table below provides aggregated data from all TEP and Advocacy Training courses delivered between June 2019 and September 2020, with responses from 392 individuals. Data from the Arabic Youth and French Advanced Training courses were not available at the time of data collection for training (see Annex B for course-specific data).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How would you rate the following aspects of the training?</th>
<th>Very low</th>
<th>low</th>
<th>Neither low nor high</th>
<th>high</th>
<th>Very high</th>
<th>Total high</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of the trainers</td>
<td>0.53%</td>
<td>0.79%</td>
<td>5.01%</td>
<td>40.63%</td>
<td>53.03%</td>
<td>93.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your learning experience during the synchronous live sessions</td>
<td>1.03%</td>
<td>2.31%</td>
<td>13.85%</td>
<td>50.77%</td>
<td>32.05%</td>
<td>82.82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your learning experience through written interactions</td>
<td>0.70%</td>
<td>2.46%</td>
<td>29.12%</td>
<td>44.91%</td>
<td>22.81%</td>
<td>67.72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course content</td>
<td>0.51%</td>
<td>1.28%</td>
<td>14.80%</td>
<td>48.72%</td>
<td>34.69%</td>
<td>83.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall experience of the training</td>
<td>0.26%</td>
<td>1.28%</td>
<td>11.76%</td>
<td>50.13%</td>
<td>36.57%</td>
<td>86.70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9.5 Evaluation of training courses overall (TEP and Advocacy Training)

\(^{125}\) Prior to this, a short informal survey was sent; however, it was not harmonised for the different training courses.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Total agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent do you agree with the following statements? Participating in this training helped me develop:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communication skills</td>
<td>1.02%</td>
<td>4.09%</td>
<td>19.95%</td>
<td>49.87%</td>
<td>25.06%</td>
<td>74.94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>active listening skills</td>
<td>1.02%</td>
<td>1.79%</td>
<td>15.86%</td>
<td>52.17%</td>
<td>29.16%</td>
<td>81.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>digital competences</td>
<td>1.03%</td>
<td>4.10%</td>
<td>24.62%</td>
<td>44.10%</td>
<td>26.15%</td>
<td>70.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leadership skills</td>
<td>2.30%</td>
<td>11.76%</td>
<td>39.90%</td>
<td>32.23%</td>
<td>13.81%</td>
<td>46.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>language skills</td>
<td>1.30%</td>
<td>8.83%</td>
<td>28.05%</td>
<td>43.64%</td>
<td>18.18%</td>
<td>61.82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intercultural awareness</td>
<td>1.76%</td>
<td>2.46%</td>
<td>12.68%</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
<td>33.10%</td>
<td>83.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The training improved my understanding of Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange</td>
<td>0.77%</td>
<td>0.51%</td>
<td>3.32%</td>
<td>36.83%</td>
<td>58.57%</td>
<td>95.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I shared information about what I was learning in this training with colleagues, friends and/or family.</td>
<td>0.26%</td>
<td>2.56%</td>
<td>7.16%</td>
<td>48.34%</td>
<td>41.69%</td>
<td>90.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I discovered that some of my assumptions about people from other cultures were not true through participating in this training.</td>
<td>4.35%</td>
<td>15.86%</td>
<td>46.80%</td>
<td>21.99%</td>
<td>11.00%</td>
<td>32.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The training improved my confidence to communicate or work in a culturally diverse setting.</td>
<td>1.02%</td>
<td>3.07%</td>
<td>26.09%</td>
<td>45.01%</td>
<td>24.81%</td>
<td>69.82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have acquired the necessary tools and knowledge to design and implement an Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange</td>
<td>1.08%</td>
<td>1.08%</td>
<td>12.97%</td>
<td>47.57%</td>
<td>37.30%</td>
<td>84.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have acquired the necessary tools and knowledge to explain what Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange is to my colleagues.</td>
<td>0.49%</td>
<td>1.47%</td>
<td>7.84%</td>
<td>57.35%</td>
<td>32.84%</td>
<td>90.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am interested in having further opportunities to engage with Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange activities.</td>
<td>0.56%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>3.91%</td>
<td>30.45%</td>
<td>65.08%</td>
<td>95.53%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9.6 Further training impact
The training courses received very positive evaluations, with 86.7% of total respondents rating their overall experience as high or very high. Across all courses, respondents cited the quality of the trainers as the most appreciated element (93.67% rated this as high or very high). While the learning experience offered by the synchronous sessions was valued more highly than written interactions (83% as opposed to 68%), the latter were still highly appreciated. Indeed, participants valued synchronous communication due to its ease of use and the social presence it affords, the feeling of getting to know one another, and the possibility of interacting in small groups which was found to be highly motivating.

With regards to competences, participants most frequently felt that these training courses allowed them to develop their intercultural awareness, followed by active listening skills and communication skills.

The item regarding assumptions about other cultures not being true received the lowest rating of all. This may be due to a desirability bias in the question: in other words, agreeing with this statement would suggest that the respondent was perhaps prejudiced prior to joining the course, which is perceived negatively.

Similarly, items related to leadership skills received lower ratings, with considerable differences between the different training programmes: for example, 69% of trainees in the Advocacy Training agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “participating in this training helped me develop leadership skills”, as opposed to only 43% of participants in the Advanced TEP Training and 35% in the Basic Training. These results highlight one of the main differences between the different training programmes and exchange models. Indeed, since TEPs are essentially co-designed courses which require collaboration skills above all, leadership may be perceived negatively. On the contrary, the Advocacy Training was designed to support trainees to prepare and lead their teams for a debate, placing a focus on leadership.

The percentage of respondents who reported having developed their language competence was also quite low overall, with a considerable variety across the training programmes: while 80% of participants in the Advocacy Training agreed with this, only 64% and 47% of those respectively enrolled in the Basic TEP Training courses in English and French concurred. On the other hand, only 49% of Advocacy Training participants felt that they developed digital competences, as opposed to 91% of Youth TEP Training participants, 78% of those who took part in the Basic Training in English, and 70% of respondents who had engaged in the Basic Training in French.

**Qualitative data**

Open responses to the survey questions and interviews with trainees provided further insights into their evaluations of the training, and their post-training experiences during the actual implementation of exchanges.

**TEP training**

Responses to the survey indicated an increased understanding of EVE and a strong interest in further engagement opportunities. The Basic course equipped trainees with the tools and knowledge to explain VE to colleagues and peers, whilst the Advanced and Youth and Advocacy Training helped them acquire the tools and knowledge to design and implement an exchange.

As reflected in open comments, the experiential modelling approach was the most appreciated feature of the training courses, and this amongst all participants. Giving trainees a chance to actually experience a form of VE allowed for a better understanding of the concept. This aspect is fundamental in seeking to support the development of VE within HEIs and youth organisations and in recruiting and supporting participants.

"The programme delivery used many of the techniques that would be deployed in a VE delivery so it was a very useful illustration of how people and the technology can interact." Male, Ireland, Basic Training
"Exchange thoughts and views between people connecting together with different backgrounds from all over the world so all of us have an intercultural experience." **Female, Palestine, Basic Training**

**Evaluations of TEP Training by HEI staff**

By participating in the Basic Training, HEI staff gained a sense of the students’ Virtual Exchange experience, which made it easier for them to explain this concept to colleagues and students. Virtual Exchange is complex, and the “ecology” of Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange included several different models, which participants had to get acquainted with.

"It’s great that participants of these trainings had the possibility to be in the student role and try various activities by themselves." **Female, Lithuania**

Respondents from the French Basic Training — who were predominantly from Southern Mediterranean countries — reported the highest scores for the three competence areas which the course sought to develop.

"I really appreciated the interventions of the participants, whether during the synchronous sessions or by reading their writings in the forums. This allowed me to enrich my skills in the field of distance education and Virtual Exchange which have recently been imposed on us because of the pandemic." **Female, Morocco**

Participants in all training courses placed a very high value on the transnational nature of the training, and the opportunity it offered to interact with and learn from the experience of their fellow trainees.

"(The best thing about the course was) the possibility of interacting with individuals from different nations and cultures. Identify people with whom we share the same interests and objectives and to be able to work on projects." **Male, Morocco**

"It is an opportunity meeting other colleagues. In my case I have noticed a colleague and we have planned to set up a transnational module. Our goal is to improve the skills of the students when working in a transnational team and context." **Male, France**

Since the Advanced Training focused on developing courses, trainees were asked whether this experience helped them develop international collaborative skills and ideas for new teaching practices. This question generated the highest level of consensus: the very concrete experience of designing a VE was appreciated, as was understanding its different components, such as the facilitated dialogue sessions and how they can enhance a TEP:

"I liked the step by step approach to build a course concept. Actually, starting from there, I went further, and looked into more design options." **Female, Germany**

"The synchronous facilitated sessions were important and interesting to me since I do aim to implement such sessions in our VE with students. It was very valuable to experience this first hand. This experience provided me with insights as to what I need to think about when organising my next VE, and what I might ask the trained facilitators to focus on in our project." **Female, Sweden**

126 Translated from French: «J’ai beaucoup apprécié les interventions des participants que ça soit pendant les séances synchrones ou en lisant leurs écrits dans les forums. Ceci m’a permis d’enrichir mes compétences dans le domaine de l’enseignement à distance et l’échange virtuel qui sont imposés dernièrement à cause de la pandémie.»

127 Translated from French: «La possibilité d’échanger avec des individus de différents [sic] nations et culture. Identifier des personnes avec qui nous partageons les même intérêts et objectifs et de pouvoir travailler sur des projets»

128 These questions were also asked in the Erasmus+ Impact Report for staff who had participated in physical mobility.
"Practice what you preach always works. And working with a partner is great!" **Female, Netherlands**

The badges were also valued by many of the trainees, as they provided recognition and evidence that their activity was part of a "bigger project", not just an individual practice. Several of them shared their badges on professional networks such as LinkedIn, on their email signatures and institutional pages, and in presentations of their VE activity at conferences.

"The awarding of a digital badge for completion is a good incentive at a personal level and a recognition which can be shared at institutional level" **Female, Ireland**

**Evaluations of TEP Training by Youth workers**

Youth worker respondents reported having appreciated different aspects of the training. Several mentioned the blend of asynchronous and synchronous activities as particularly valuable, in particular the synchronous communication, which they found more engaging:

"It is interesting the mix between asynchronous and synchronous activities" **Male, Italy**

"The idea of weekly synchronous sessions was fun, where we exchange different ideas and viewpoints, leading to the acquisition of new skills" **Female, Egypt**

The training also equipped them with a better understanding of how to run online activities and meetings, an understanding of dialogue and the role of online facilitators in creating a safe and friendly space for interaction and a common reflection on the group process. Several also mentioned the value of learning to use collaborative writing tools in order to design projects, as well as other online tools which they could immediately put to use in their work.

"Working in small groups which helped building trust, enhanced communication and very nice and motivating atmosphere, gaining experience in how to combine synchronous and asynchronous activities; tutoring sessions and OFD taster sessions gave insight in how to facilitate virtual meetings" **Male, Germany**

The training was also appreciated for the networking opportunity it offered by establishing linkages with youth workers from other countries, and providing a space to exchange practices and create opportunities for future collaboration in project development.

"This training is a great opportunity to form partnerships among youth organisations and put project ideas in practice. It also provides a valuable opportunity to share best practices from different organisations." **Female, Turkey**

"[A strength was] the participation of many Arab countries, and the multiplicity of cultures and experiences" **Male, Egypt**

Following their participation in one of the TEP training courses, a number of respondents shared their intention to deepen their experience with VE by taking the facilitation training, recognising the added value brought by facilitators to online interactions.

The training was also strongly appreciated by trainees coming from the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector, who deemed it highly relevant to their field. Several of them saw a great potential for the integration of VE into their work, while recognising the specific challenges faced by VET — participants' language skills in particular.

"I would like to continue to improve my digital, linguistic and specialist knowledge I will participate in online courses but also face to face courses. The knowledge acquired through this course will help me in VET projects (especially in implementation)." **Female, Romania**

"I have applied for advanced facilitation training - I am transferring what I have learnt in to an opportunity for the VET context." **Female, Italy**
From TEP training to implementation

The number of trainees who went on to implement a TEP was relatively low, considering the overall number of training participants. However, it should be noted that the engagement cycle was long and took time: in some cases, educators and youth workers trained in 2018 implemented their first exchanges in 2020, while in others the TEPs never materialised. Still, many reported that the training was nonetheless useful, particularly during the switch to remote education and youth work imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

To HEI trainees, follow-up after the Advanced Training, and a degree of mentoring during the implementation of the exchange they had developed were particularly important. After completing the training course, they were invited to join the VE community in Moodle, where resources were shared and members came together to discuss their VE experiences during “show and tell” sessions. This informal opportunity for “international continuing professional development” was highly valued by the trainees.

Supporting the implementation of exchanges developed by TEP trainees entailed developing a series of measures aimed at overcoming the hurdles they faced.

- **Finding a partner** to start an exchange with and ensuring the sustainability of this partnership over time was the main challenge faced by trainees.

  - **Solutions**: While training courses were a good opportunity for finding partners, this did not always work. “Partnering fairs” were therefore organised on a regular basis to give educators looking for partners an opportunity to meet. The Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange Community was also useful in this regard.

  - Time investment was a further challenge for educators, often cited as a reason for not implementing an exchange. Indeed, designing and rolling out this type of project takes considerable time, often more than originally expected.

  - **Solutions**: A number of TEP trainees eventually decided to take on the role of coordinators for “ready-made” exchanges that did not require prior training (OFDs and iOOCs), which they introduced to their institutions. This provided a way for them to engage their students in VE, without creating too much pressure in terms of time spent on recruitment, coordination and integration of the VE. Some of them presented how they had integrated OFD or iOOCs during TEP Community meetings and at dissemination events, and have published case studies on this experience. In other cases, educators also implemented both TEPs and “ready-made” exchanges.

- **A limited number of youth organisations** actually implemented a Virtual Exchange following their training, with several of them reporting that they would first have to bring their experience back into their organisations and discuss with their teams how to integrate it into future activities:

  "I will share knowledge with colleagues and Boss and see where we could establish a VE within the Organisation.” *Female, Germany*

Others indicated that they would integrate VE into their future activities, and had already started building it into their applications for funding — some had even secured said funding by the end of the initiative. A few also mentioned the potential for developing “blended mobilities”:

"I think I can use the knowledge I take from the course to integrate other project we already developed” *Male, Italy*

"I plan to teach my team of the knowledge gained and to add it as an element to the new Erasmus plus projects that our organisation will be applying for starting with the deadline of today” *Male, Germany*

- The main issue preventing youth organisations from taking the leap was the **limited resources available**. Indeed, following the TEP training, designing a VE, and recruiting and supporting youth
during a VE requires time and resources. Organisational structures differ from one youth organisation to another, and while some do have paid staff and available resources, many are based on voluntary work. Volunteers cannot always be expected to dedicate the necessary time to following a training and/or coordinating a VE, nor to ensure participation via regular follow-up with young people. Granting paid staff time to train in VE and develop a new exchange also generates costs for organisations, which are not always in a position to bear them.

- **Connectivity and the access to the necessary equipment** is a major issue faced by young people in the Southern Mediterranean as well as in Erasmus+ programme countries such as Italy and Germany, as observed during the COVID-19 outbreak:

  - "One of the issues we are discussing in Italy - not all young people have the right tech to be connected, we lost a lot of youth because they were not able to stay connected - this was a problem above all in the VET field - in the VET system there are a lot of people that can't manage to buy a laptop or mobile phone" *Female, Italy*

  - "Not everybody has access to wifi - how to make sure people have access to online tools is a big conversation in Germany as well - and money is very important" *Female, Germany*

- **Solution**: In some cases, youth organisations set up spaces that participants could use in order to take part in VE activities to mitigate the lack of connectivity at home — in Tunisia for instance.

**Advocacy Training**

Participants in the Advocacy Training activity highlighted having acquired different skills through the debates than those usually developed through the formal education system. They further noted the relevance of these new competences to both their formal education and youth work, as well as their civic engagement. Simulations during the Debate Team Leader Training were considered as the strongest part of the course, together with the opportunity to develop debate-specific skills:

- "The strengths of the training include skills of leadership, commitment, responsibility, respect, mutual understanding, as well as the ability to be democratic and tolerant." *Female, Tunisia*

- "This training helps Debate moderation skills and improves confidence to communicate or work in a culturally diverse setting" *Male, Egypt*

The training was found to be somewhat intense, and some trainees suggested splitting it into two separate sessions. On the other hand, a single course ensured a better retention.

Following their participation, some debate trainers “activated” their newly-acquired skills and transferred what they learnt in the online context to their communities, in their own languages. For instance, one of the debate trainers organised debates between young people from North sub-Saharan Africa, seeking to create more connections within the continent, which he feels are missing.

**From training to implementation**

During interviews, some debate trainees reported that recruiting debaters for their teams was a major challenge, particularly for those who were not members of debate clubs. Language skills and self-confidence were also listed as barriers, as debating requires considerable mastery of the language used, and a high degree of self-assurance. On the other hand, the opportunity to practice a language — English in particular — was a pull factor for many.

The Euro-Med Debate Competition which was designed and piloted in the summer of 2019 proved to be an effective way to recruit participants, and an opportunity for the trainers to further develop their leadership, digital, intercultural and transversal skills.

**Connectivity** was also an issue for many participants in the Debate activities, particularly since the majority were in Southern Mediterranean countries.
Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 outbreak in early 2020 marked a turning point in terms of interest and engagement in all of the training courses. The limitations on mobility resulting from the pandemic forced both youth organisations and university international offices to use digital media in their work, and explore how Virtual Exchange could be used to support their international partnerships and offer engaging online and international experiences. Consequently, while the number of HEI educators involved did not increase significantly, there was a surge in the engagement of international office staff.

For many youth workers, the pandemic offered time to engage with online courses and tools. As expressed by a German youth worker who followed the TEP Training: “people got bored in corona time - and wanted to get productive”. During this time, several youth workers/vocational educators who had previously expressed interest in following the training but had not completed it decided to give it another try.

“Covid was disorienting for teachers and VET schools - but also an opportunity for VET - they see it now as an opportunity for future - organising activities in small groups - need to readapt and re-elaborate and use it to re-motivate and do things with other youth” Female, Italy

Similarly, registrations for the Debate Team Leader training peaked during the pandemic, with a high degree of interest in the activity and increased participation. Furthermore, the two competitions held in 2020 recorded a higher than in previous years.

Discussion of findings

This chapter sought to provide insights into how educators and youth workers evaluated their EVE experience. Results from the surveys showed that the training opportunities made available through EVE were highly valued, above all due to the engaging and experiential approach adopted. The different training courses provided a greater understanding of what Virtual Exchange is, and how it can be implemented by immersing trainees in the experience. Trainees valued the quality of the trainers, learning from the interactions they had with their fellow trainees who came from a range of different contexts, and the networking opportunities the training offered. While there were some differences in the main competences training participants felt they acquired depending on the focus of the course, most of them reported having improved their intercultural awareness, active listening, and digital competences.

Not all trainees implemented exchanges, and it appeared that the “engagement” cycle was often long, with gaps between training and implementation. Nonetheless, even without actually leading to an exchange, the training courses were perceived as valuable. Finally, online communities of practice developed as a result of the training courses and provided a space to continue learning and support.
This chapter explores RQ16, namely: “How did facilitators evaluate their EVE experience, and what were the drivers of facilitator satisfaction and further engagement?” The full facilitator experience involved the completion of two training courses and a practicum in order to become “qualified”. This chapter looks at facilitators’ demographics, the evaluations of the training programmes, the support provided to ensure the quality of facilitation, the facilitator community, and the factors that keep facilitators engaged.

Facilitators and Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange

Facilitators were an essential part of Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange activities: they ensured the quality of VE programmes and the building of meaningful relationships amongst participants. Facilitators are multi-partial and neutral process leaders, who seek to elicit self-group awareness and understanding, by providing a safe and effective learning environment. EVE provided training for hundreds of facilitators, who were equipped with the necessary dialogue facilitation tools, the use of technology and conflict resolution skills to guide and deepen cross-cultural conversations.

The facilitator role grew substantially in the three years of the EVE project. Initially, facilitators were deployed in the Online Facilitated Dialogue and iOOC exchange activities, for which weekly two-hour facilitated dialogue sessions were the key component. Over the three years, facilitators were increasingly deployed across all EVE activities as cross-fertilisation of the different VE models occurred.

Over the course of the project, a total of 495 members of the EVE facilitator community (351 Female / 143 Male / 1 prefers not to say) were active across all project activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>OFD</th>
<th>TEPs</th>
<th>Debate</th>
<th>iOOC</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total no. of facilitated sessions 2018-2020</td>
<td>4,455</td>
<td>359</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>2,600</td>
<td>7,498</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Feedback gathered from participants through open answers to surveys and in interviews and focus groups highlights the essential role of facilitators in the dialogue process. There was almost unanimous admiration and respect for the facilitators and the important role they played in leading the sessions. Facilitators were seen as key to making participants feel comfortable and safe in the online space, supporting them in getting over the awkwardness of the initial encounters, so participants could get to know one another.

“They are very useful, especially in the first sessions when nobody speaks and you don’t know the people and you don’t want to say anything wrong, in the following weeks it became more and more a marginal role, we started discussing with no interventions from the facilitators, we were able to sustain the conversation in English with no help.” Female, 21, Italy

“At the beginning I thought that the facilitator were not good because they didn’t talk enough. Then I realized why. I like when they speak when nobody has any idea, they start to make us thinking, they are very nice.” Female, Syria, 28

The facilitators were seen as key to ensuring the participation of all participants and keeping the dialogue focused:

“In my opinion, the role of the facilitator is crucial for this project, and our facilitator, […], handled it perfectly. She was very polite and always stayed neutral, as a facilitator should be. She engaged with us, asking us questions and kept the conversation flowing. Thankfully to her, everyone had the place to express their views and ideas.”
10.1 Facilitator Training

EVE provided two training programmes for facilitators, at introduction and advanced levels. In order to become a qualified EVE facilitator, trainees had to complete the Advanced course (accessible either upon successful completion of the Introduction course, or after the submission of an application for trainees with previous facilitation experience), and a practicum. Most of the training programmes were delivered in English. In addition, a course in Arabic was set up in 2020, and a French training was developed but cancelled due to limited interest.

Through the training programmes, prospective facilitators learnt how to utilise a diverse set of facilitation tools to foster constructive communication and safe space, promote critical thinking and address group dynamics.

The training courses provided:

- An opportunity to get hands-on experience facilitating cross-cultural dialogue;
- Extensive training relevant to both in-person and online group facilitation;
- An occasion to develop 21st century skills such as leadership, critical thinking and problem solving, cross-cultural communication and collaboration;
- Access to an international community of professionals from a variety of fields.

The Introduction to Dialogue Facilitation consisted in a four-week, ten-hour paced online course which provided the foundations of dialogue facilitation and basic facilitation tools. It became a completely asynchronous programme from the second half of 2018, and was constantly revised on the basis of feedback from participants.

The Advanced Facilitation Training was made available in two formats: intensive (five weeks) and long (ten weeks), and was offered both in English and Arabic. The 20-hour course consisted of live training sessions which focused on advanced dialogue facilitation skills and techniques. Trainees had to have previous experience on facilitation or mediation on an aligned dialogue model. In order to qualify as a trained facilitator, trainees had to successfully complete a practicum in the Online Facilitated Dialogue or iOOC activities. During the practicum, the facilitators were paired with another, usually more experienced facilitator.

The successful completion of the Advanced Facilitation Training and practicum qualified participants to facilitate in the different Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange programmes, and to receive a United Nations endorsed certificate, as well as EVE badges.

During the 2018-2020 period, the consortium ran a total of 26 training courses involving 2,893 trainees, of whom 1,270 successfully completed the training they were enrolled in. These included 13 rounds of the Introduction to Dialogue Facilitation course, 13 rounds of the Advanced Facilitation Training (seven in intensive format, and six in long format). The above includes three rounds of introductory training in Arabic and French, and one round of the advanced training in Arabic. Of the 2,893 total trainees, 807 participated in the Advanced Facilitation Training, 501 of whom passed successfully and became qualified to facilitate.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of course</th>
<th>Iterations 2018-2020</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to Dialogue Facilitation Course</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4 weeks</td>
<td>2,033 of whom 751 ready for advanced facilitation training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Facilitation Training</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10 weeks</td>
<td>477 of whom 279 ready for facilitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensive Advanced Facilitation Training</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5 weeks</td>
<td>314 of whom 214 ready for facilitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French Introduction to Facilitation Training</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 days</td>
<td>7 all of whom ready for advanced facilitation training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic Introduction to Facilitation Training</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4 weeks</td>
<td>46 of whom 11 ready for advanced facilitation training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic Intensive Advanced Facilitation Training</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5 weeks</td>
<td>16 of whom 8 ready to facilitate and 2 recommended to repeat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10.1: Facilitation training courses

Demographics

Interest in facilitation grew over the years, with a peak in 2020 which saw the courses reach full capacity well before the end of the year. More and more alumni of exchange programmes applied to follow the facilitator training as they were “activated” to further engage with difference through the opportunities offered by EVE. Furthermore, the facilitation training and then the practice of facilitation itself was a way to continue practicing their English for many. A few of the trainees from the TEP training, both for youth workers and educators went on to do the facilitation training, as well as some of the coordinators of the Connect Programme, iOOCs and Debate Leaders. Distribution across Erasmus+ programme countries and the Southern Mediterranean region was quite well balanced, and there were also high numbers of facilitators from other parts of the world. Similarly, distribution across age groups was also quite even.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>622</td>
<td>1,020</td>
<td>1,889</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>599</td>
<td>1,143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Med</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>441</td>
<td>532</td>
<td>1,141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>611</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-21</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-25</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>779</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>372</td>
<td>685</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30+</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>562</td>
<td>1,008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10.2 Number of facilitated sessions across activities

**Evaluation of the training**

The training courses were evaluated using post-training questionnaires. Some of the results are presented below.

**Trainees in introduction training**

The Introduction to Online Dialogue Facilitation training received positive feedback, and participants perceived improvement in their facilitation and leadership skills, as well as their communication and active listening abilities:

- 82.1% of introductory trainees rate their facilitation skills as high or very high;
- 83.1% introductory trainees agreed or strongly agreed that through this training they developed leadership skills;
- 96.1% of introductory trainees agreed or strongly agreed that through this training they developed communication and active listening skills;

The training was rich in resources, providing them with concrete examples of situations they might find when facilitating, and a “toolbox” which equipped them to deal with difficult situations. Although participants did not have live synchronous sessions, they did receive personalised feedback on the assignments they were required to do, which was appreciated by the trainees.

“I think that the main strengths are the online simulation and the constant attention paid by trainers. Feedbacks are really personalised, they didn’t mind to give feedbacks until we got the point and I think this is not so common or obvious in online courses.” **Female, 32, Italian, “Introduction to Dialogue**
"As a result of this course I feel more comfortable approaching discussions around culturally/politically sensitive or divisive issues in my community. The course improved my confidence to communicate or work in a culturally diverse setting." Male, 40, Slovakia, “Introduction to Dialogue Facilitation”

"The strength of the course are the knowledge you have learned, tools to deal with participants, real experiences, situation and examples in dialogue sessions which make your learning journey rich and knew how to deal with this situation and the information in this course were important and covered all the toolbox we could use while we facilitated. It was an amazing experience and I learned a lot, thank you.” Female, 24, Syria, “Introduction to Dialogue Facilitation”

Trainees in advanced training

- 76.3% of advanced trainees rate their facilitation skills as high or very high;
- 81.6% of advanced trainees rate their leadership skills as high or very high;
- 96.6% of advanced trainees feel prepared to facilitate;
- 97.6% of advanced trainees agreed or strongly agreed that through this training they developed communication and active listening skills;
- 64% of advanced trainees rate their ability to facilitate a group in conflict as high or very high post training;
- 95.9% of advanced trainees agreed or strongly agreed that the training prepared them to manage conflict dynamics that could occur in their online groups.

It may seem surprising that the percentage of Advanced trainees who rated their facilitation and leadership skills as high is slightly lower than that for the Basic Training, but this reveals rather an understanding of the reality and complexity of facilitation that only the experience of dialogue facilitation can provide. Advanced trainees felt prepared to facilitate and believed they had improved their communication and active listening skills, but were aware that facilitating a group in conflict can be challenging. It appears that they came out of the training ready for further learning.

"I think that now I am more aware of this different role, facilitator, and its characteristics. Before, my knowledge and capability in practicing it was much more limited. Now, I can see how important it is as well as the value of dialogue, the real possibility and breaking barriers, understanding among people from different cultures. I do feel that I have prejudices, and by this training, I feel some more able to spot them, as well as in the others. I had already experienced how possible and beautiful is to breaking barriers. This training reinforced my hope that it is possible, although at times can be hard and demanding much effort.” Male, 31, Italy “Advanced Facilitation Training”

"I realized that facilitation learning process is a powerful tool to create meaningful and honest peace dialogue, and go deeper in our beliefs, not stay only in the emotions and values in the surface. I am definitely using my improved facilitation skills as a competence for life, for improving the quality of my personal relations (active listening, good treatment relations versus power relations) and for my job as youth trainer and facilitator.” Female, 51, Spanish, “Advanced Facilitation Training”
Challenges with training

Retention was the biggest challenge in implementing the Introduction to Facilitation Training course, although this improved over the project. This was partly because it was an online, asynchronous course that anyone could sign up for, without selection. Measures taken to improve retention included the design of mechanisms allowing activity implementers to better track participants’ engagement in the course and support them in its completion. Particular emphasis was also put on what is unique to this training as compared to other online courses, such as personal feedback from trainers.

The Advanced training had higher completion rates, though not all trainees qualified to become a facilitator, and were sometimes advised to repeat the course. Barriers to qualifying as a facilitator were issues pertaining to neutrality and multipartiality, which are key competences facilitators must master, as well as English language skills.

Before the COVID19 pandemic, there was room for more applications and trainees to be added to the training courses. But from the start of the pandemic in Europe, the number of applications submitted rose considerably, without substantial outreach efforts. Additional funding was also required to serve all those who were interested in acquiring online dialogue and facilitation skills, and to ensure that the increased number of Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange participants brought by the COVID-19 outbreak could be supported and accommodated through EVE.

Ensuring quality of facilitation

From 2018, the consortium used a standardised approach to present the Facilitator Code of Conduct to new recruits, and have all facilitators sign the EC-validated Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDAs). The non-disclosure agreement was important for the formalisation of the protection of the privacy of all participants and maintaining the safe space for dialogue.

The code of conduct (see annex 10), which was developed with a group of key facilitators, represents the commitment of facilitators to professional standards and ethics which ensure respectful exchange. It provides details on the facilitator roles and responsibilities, the quality of the process and the importance of reflective practice and implementation. Activity implementers ensured an appropriate orientation of incoming facilitators to the goals and expectations of the exchange activity they signed up for.

Facilitators can access different levels depending on their experience, their commitment to facilitation and role in the quality control, as well as the level of competences and skills acquired. Three levels are recognised through the system of badges developed under EVE: facilitator, senior facilitator and facilitation fellow. There was also a coach badge. (see Annex 11)

Monitoring and quality assurance of facilitation took place through regular observation, coaching and feedback mechanisms. In addition, 30 coaches supported the programmes, most of them playing a dual role of facilitator and coach.

Through the hands-on advanced training, combined with opportunities for various thematic skill-building workshops, facilitators were well equipped to manage the difficult dynamics in the exchange programmes, including managing conflict. Facilitators had multiple avenues to seek support during programmes, some designed for urgent responses and others for longer-term support. These mechanisms included access to a more experienced co-facilitator, coach or staff, and a “Community Lounge” on the Exchange Portal — an asynchronous space for facilitators to exchange experiences, and share common dynamics and best practices, thus encouraging peer learning. Over the course of the project there were 69 Senior Facilitators, 37 Facilitation Fellows and 30 coaches.
10.2 The facilitator community

Community-building

The facilitator community grew in a healthy and steady way over the three years, with a regular flow of new facilitators, complemented with returning facilitators taking on increased roles based on their demonstrated facilitation skills.

Steps were taken throughout to reinforce the sense of community among EVE facilitators, provide opportunities for a continued development of their facilitation skills, and share best practices. This was partly in response to the perceived need on the part of the facilitators to have some contact also between one exchange programme and another, and to engage more with the “soft side” of the community. Some facilitators underscored the need to engage in social interactions with the community, because their facilitation role required them to remain multi-partial and not express viewpoints during dialogue sessions. Since the topics discussed were of interest to them, they also wanted to engage in dialogue about these issues with the global facilitator community, in order to develop their own knowledge and understanding of the issues at stake.

All EVE facilitators received updates on the project through quarterly newsletters, and facilitator meet-ups were organised on a quarterly basis. These were occasions to keep facilitators informed about EVE opportunities and to explore the different VE models in depth, and provided opportunities to learn from facilitators’ experiences, including their needs, aspirations and suggestions for the future. A closed LinkedIn group was created in 2019 to further foster a sense of community. It was used to amplify invitations to facilitate for specific activities, post “last minute” calls for facilitators at activity implementers’ requests, and share relevant resources among community members.

In April 2020, a survey was sent out to all members of the facilitator community in order to gain further insights into different aspects of the EVE facilitator experience. This included community members’ confidence in facilitation, the values of facilitators and what kept them engaged, support mechanisms and the community building efforts put in place. A total of 71 responses were received.

Demographics of facilitator community survey respondents

Respondents came from all over the world. 77% of them were female, with an average age of 34. 25% were students and the majority were in some form of employment.

89% of respondents had facilitated for the Connect Programme, which is the EVE activity with the highest number of participants and the greatest need for facilitators. 31% had facilitated the Social Circles activity, 38% iOOCs, 13% Debates and 11% TEPs.

Around one third of respondents reported having experience of facilitating dialogue outside of Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange in offline contexts, for example dialogue programmes for youth, refugees and/or community leaders in their local contexts, for the European Youth Parliament, non-violence programmes in their universities, in their work for NGOs or other organisations. Facilitation skills are thus recognised valuable and put into practice in multiple contexts.

Engagement and retention of facilitators

The two elements that facilitators value most in this community were the ability to contribute to social change, and the opportunities for learning and professional growth (both of which scored 93% in the survey) whereas professional recognition (OpenBadges) and visibility on the project Hub scored lowest (35% and 20%).

Contributing to social change

This element was the driving factor: it emerged clearly in the focus groups and interviews with facilitators, and drew them back to the programme. Though the facilitators came from a range of backgrounds and life experiences, what was striking was the core values that they shared — their belief in the power of dialogue, of exchange to make the world a better place. For several it was
conceived of almost as a “mission”. Facilitation is, for many, a “compelling” experience, something that the facilitators have difficulty keeping away from and which is constantly on their minds.

“A humanitarian duty - making the world a better place” Male, Egypt

“And I found myself thinking about it even in another part of my life, [...] I’m working on a really separate thing but then I just got an idea how to make interaction in my group more meaningful and so yeah it made me think of new ways on how to really to see the impact of this experience on the students, so that’s why I’m loving it and I can’t help myself getting” Female, Tunisia

Dedication to the ideals and values of dialogue facilitation through VE consistently appeared as much stronger motivating factors than the facilitator stipend or the Erasmus+ badges in both interviews and in the community survey.

Tangibility of change

Most facilitators said they had experienced VE as a transformative experience when they were participants, and it was the feeling that they were making a difference, and witnessing this transformation in the participants that motivated them to start and continue facilitating

“So why I facilitate is because I see the change .... I feel how the world is connected and how small it is and I like helping others to have that amazing wonderful feeling that makes me happy at least, and yeah this feeling of connection” Female, Sweden

“It’s really great when you can be part of a change of someone else and at the same time you feel the change in your life” Female, Morocco

“I really appreciate the effort of Connect Programme, to spread the values of understanding and dialogue among young people as a way of bringing about values of peace and dialogue. I feel that it is my duty, as an intellectual in my society and as a participant who has witnessed the change this program has had on my life, to be a part of and participate in spreading such values in society.” Male, Morocco

“The best thing about facilitating Connect Global was getting to listen to and facilitate a diverse group with participants from many different origins. It was refreshing seeing them have “aha!” moments when they discussed how their cultures/countries/religions are different yet have many similarities. I felt very proud listening to them repeatedly mention that the Connect Global gave them a safe space to explore other cultures/religions and that they appreciated having diversity because it taught them to engage with difference and address it.” Female, Egypt

In discussing the tangibility of change, several facilitators made an interesting distinction. On the one hand there are those “aha” or “earth-shattering moments” “when you see the penny drop”, which are easy to detect. On the other hand there is the cumulative effect of Virtual Exchange, “slow burners” which are more difficult to capture, the “seeds that are being sown”. Examples of “aha moments” that facilitators observed were cited as when a new issue and/or perspectives of an issue that participants knew nothing or little about emerged. This was particularly significant when some of the participants living in situations of conflict as in Syria or Gaza shared their experiences with other group members.

Learning opportunities

Facilitation was seen as an opportunity for learning in many respects. The heterogeneity within and across groups was one of the driving forces for the facilitators, who said it was precisely the unexpected factor of each group that led to their personal learning. They had to find ways to creatively address the dynamics of the different groups, and found that what worked for one group would not necessarily be effective for another. The diversity of participants’ experiences and perspectives also led to valuable learning for facilitators.
In the community survey facilitators reported having improved specific skills: this included their communication skills such as active listening, curiosity and asking questions, empathy, and the ability to engage more easily with conflict/heated discussions. Other equally valuable and related skills include cultural awareness, group management and leadership, critical self-awareness, session design, technology and online communication, multi-partiality, empathy, and collaboration.

In the facilitator community survey, 97% of respondents indicated high/very high levels of confidence in facilitating Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange. Facilitators overwhelmingly indicated the growth opportunities (81%) and skill building/master classes (68%) provided by respective implementing partners as key elements impacting their current confidence levels, while 58% of respondents indicated E+ meet-ups as impacting their confidence as facilitators.

When asked what could be provided to support confidence, those that responded (48%) primarily noted more facilitation experience, growth opportunities (paid offers) and skill building opportunities as primary ways to support their confidence levels. Support mechanisms offered were overall well received by the EVE facilitator community. The most highly rated include: facilitation resources (96%) which were rated as very important, observations/feedback during the program semester (94%), and facilitator gatherings/meet-ups (90%).

"I have facilitated 4 rounds so far and I must confess that I feel transformed: I'm more aware of my capacities and skills, more self-confident with the language and the controversial themes we deal with. I feel ready for a solo-facilitation now but I love working with different people too much." **Female, Italy**

"I realized this semester that I’ve improved a lot in terms of handling situations where I get triggered and that it is easier for me to detach my personal feelings, and instead focus on understanding the other person’s view and experiences. I feel I’ve also become better at filtering information, synthesizing what’s been said, and summarizing the main points." **Female, Turkey**

Another important element of the professional development and continued engagement was the different levels of engagement available — from facilitator to senior facilitator and fellow — and the activities of observation, coaching and training which were seen to open a wide range of opportunities for growth.

Facilitators saw the developments in EVE and facilitating across different activities as expanding the opportunities for personal and professional development available to them. Indeed, some of them became involved in a variety of contexts in which facilitated dialogue was implemented, and met more and more facilitators. They also saw EVE as raising the profile of online dialogue facilitation as a professional field.

"When I started facilitating in the Connect Programme, I had the feeling that online dialogue facilitation was a “niche thing”. However, especially, the corona crisis has shown that it is not the case. Businesses are dependent on alternative convening methods. For example, I work for a Think Tank that brings together national parliamentarians from across EU member states for dialogue on policy issues. My experience in online facilitation proved really valuable in the beginning of the crisis as I could provide my team with insights and tips into facilitation even if process and participants are not the same." **Female, Germany**
Main Challenges

Facilitation is not an easy task and can present several challenges to facilitators. The main issues related to participants' engagement, which affects the quality of the session for all participants, and included:

- different levels of engagement in the sessions;
- participants being present but not engaging in dialogue sessions;
- arriving late and/or leaving early;
- participants missing multiple sessions.

In some cases, the lack of engagement was due to an inadequate understanding of what VE entailed on the part of partners/coordinators, which was more common with new partner institutions and organisations. Facilitators felt they were spending more time explaining the basics of Virtual Exchange, and being asked questions about local integration of the programme — which should have been coordinators' responsibility — rather than working on the dialogue process and achieving the learning goals. This was later addressed in the programme with preparation sessions for coordinators and manuals that served to equip the coordinators for their role, allowing them to better understand the commitment they were making, and better explain it to their students.

Continued engagement of facilitators

97% of facilitators said they planned to continue their involvement in Erasmus+ activities. When asked what factors impacted this decision, 80% of respondents said "more facilitation opportunities".

Interestingly, stipend opportunities had higher ratings when asked about retention, as 76% said this impacted their decision to return, whereas when asked what they valued most in the EVE community, stipend opportunities were not at top of the list. Institutional recognition again was rated highly by only 38% of respondents. While passion and enthusiasm for VE as a whole is clear, diverse facilitation and stipend opportunities seem to be significant factors when it pertains to continued engagement.

Ideas for the future

In response to an open question asking what fields and potential audiences they felt would be a valuable addition to Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange, the facilitators' mentioned an older age group (EVE was limited to the 18-30 demographic) and greater geographic scope (that is, beyond Europe and Southern Mediterranean countries). They also suggested expanding EVE to include community groups, social action groups and even businesses. This demonstrates a strong interest in expanding the scope of Virtual Exchange and increasing the social change the facilitators see VE as bringing to societies.

"The majority of the VE community are from Europe and countries around the Mediterranean. I hope if we have more from Africa, Latin America, and Asia"

"I have noticed that in the programs I've facilitated, the majority of participants are from the MENA region. This is great! However, I'd be thrilled to see more balance and a greater range of countries represented by participants. I have only had a small number of European participants, and only one American in my groups. I've never facilitated a group that had a Central American, Southern American, Asian, or Australian participant. Having a wider range of voices participating in the conversations held would be of great benefit to all participants."
11 Relations between Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange and international mobility

It starts with a brief summary of findings of the 2019 Erasmus+ Impact Report which are relevant to VE. It then looks at the experiences of mobility amongst EVE participants, and seeks to answer RQ10: Was the impact and perceived improvement higher for participants with limited (less than three months) or no experience of international study or living abroad?

The chapter also examines what distinguishes VE from mobility, whether Virtual Exchange can serve as a stimulus to encourage young people to take part in mobility, and how it can complement mobility — also in the form of “blended mobility” — for staff as well as for students and youth.

11.1 Summary of findings from the 2019 Erasmus+ Impact Study

The 2019 Erasmus+ Impact Study provides a useful point of departure. It found that the main motivations driving student mobility are to experience life abroad (72%), improve their language (62%) and soft skills (49%) and improve their career chances (49%). The report found that for students from disadvantaged backgrounds the Erasmus+ grant is a main driver for participation. At the same time, financial concerns are the most frequent reason for students not to spend part of their studies abroad for two thirds of the respondents, and personal circumstances such as family or personal relationships were the main cause for one third.

The study also looked at psychometric measures of several dispositions, attitudes and behaviours (that is self-confidence, goal orientation, cultural and social openness) using the Memo© tool. It found that there is a significant difference between mobile and non-mobile students in terms of social and cultural openness — however, this difference exists before departure for mobility. That is, students who decide to go abroad are exceptional in their openness to new ideas, more tolerant towards other cultures and more willing to meet new people and establish new friendships (p.117). Furthermore, this difference between mobile and non-mobile students was found to be greater than the actual gain in mobile students after their mobility experience. After mobility, there was a statistically significant gain of 0.11 on average on the Memo© values measured. This was greatest in self-confidence (0.13), followed by goal orientation and social openness (both 0.09). However, cultural openness improved only by 0.02, perhaps because there was not much space for further growth given their high starting points. It was also found that travelling to non-neighbouring countries leads to higher gains on intercultural openness. For non-mobile students there was virtually no development over similar periods of time.

Erasmus mobility is also associated with the development of skills linked to employability and social cohesion. The study found that nine in ten former Erasmus+ students reported improvements in adaptability, interactions with people from other cultures, communication skills and intercultural competences. Furthermore, more than half of Erasmus+ participants reported to have improved their digital skills. Regarding social cohesion, 95% reported having learnt to get along better with people from different cultures and 93% an improvement in their ability to take cultural differences into account. The Erasmus+ Impact Study also looked at social and political engagement, which included: involvement in the local community, critical thinking, commitment to fight discrimination, intolerance, xenophobia or racism. It found that “When asked to what extent they are more interested in social and political events/developments at the European/international level after the Erasmus+ mobility, 50% of the former Erasmus+ participants reported to be interested “to a greater extent” than they were before their mobility. 48% confirmed that they are even more committed to stand against discrimination, intolerance, xenophobia or racism and 40% reported to have increased their commitment to help disadvantaged people” (p.85).
11.2 Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange

There are, of course, many differences between Erasmus+ mobility programmes and EVE. The main driver for mobility, experience of living abroad, can clearly not be satisfied through a Virtual Exchange. EVE participants do not experience mobility, hence they do not have the cultural and linguistic immersion that living and studying abroad entails. Nor was the aim for EVE to substitute mobility, but rather to see how they can complement one another.

EVE activities, above all OFDs and iOOCs, brought together participants from a wide range of countries which are considered “culturally distant” — that is European and Southern Mediterranean countries — thus offering greater diversity than most Erasmus mobility programmes which are predominantly intra-European. While socio-economic factors influence access to Internet — and can thus be a considerable barrier for VE — this is a lesser hurdle than finances needed for physical mobility and visa restrictions. Hence, EVE was open to participants from a wider range of socio-economic backgrounds than mobility programmes (though the impact study did not directly identify participants’ socio-economic situation). For participants in some of the countries involved in EVE, mobility was almost impossible due to their political and economic situation, for instance in Syria, and in Gaza. The demographics of EVE (see Chapter 5) show that this type of programme allows for exchanges which involve equal numbers of participants from European and Southern Mediterranean countries, with both high and low GDPs.

The survey tools adopted for the EVE Impact study are not the same as those used for the 2019 Erasmus+ Impact Study, as these were not publicly available at the time the EVE evaluation tools were developed. Thus, both studies are not directly comparable. However, they do address similar attitudes and skills, and can thus provide some insights which are useful to understanding the relationship and synergies between the two programmes and their impact.

EVE participants and study abroad experiences

EVE participants were asked “Have you spent an extended period of time (three months or more) abroad, or participated in a physical exchange programme?” In total, 6,804 responses were gathered, and 69% of respondents indicated that they had not spent an extended period of time abroad. 2,076 respondents provided a short description of their time abroad, with 26% mentioning Erasmus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spent Time Abroad</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OFD</td>
<td>69.93%</td>
<td>30.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iOOC</td>
<td>69.62%</td>
<td>30.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEP</td>
<td>62.80%</td>
<td>37.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT</td>
<td>68.60%</td>
<td>31.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>68.58%</td>
<td>31.42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (11.1) Time spent abroad per model

129 Al Mqadma & Al Karriri, 2020
130 This question was added to the pre-exchange survey in 2019 to measure the impact of EVE on participants with no extended experience of mobility with more accuracy.
As shown in table 11.1, the distribution of people who have spent and extended time abroad and those who have not is relatively equal across the models. The only deviation is for the TEPs, where a substantially higher percentage of participants have spent time abroad. This is likely due to the fact that most participants were from Erasmus programme countries (see Chapter 7 for differences between models).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Time Abroad</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Prefer not to say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>62.79%</td>
<td>36.78%</td>
<td>0.43%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>67.68%</td>
<td>31.50%</td>
<td>0.82%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>64.36%</td>
<td>35.08%</td>
<td>0.56%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (11.2) Time abroad and gender

There is also a difference in gender between those who have spent time abroad and those who have not. As table 11.2 shows, women appear to be more likely to have spent an extended period of time abroad than men, as was also noted in the Erasmus+ Impact Report.

**Attitudinal change measures**

The Erasmus+ Impact Study and many others (refs) have provided indications that physical exchanges have an impact on attitudinal change measures. It was therefore hypothesised that participants who have had an extended experience abroad would have higher scores on these measures before the start of the exchange. It was also hypothesised that VE would have a stronger impact on those participants that have not had an extended international experience beforehand. That is:

**RH10:** Impact and perceived improvement will be higher for participants with no or limited (less than three months) experience of international study or living abroad;

The attitudinal dimensions: As reported in chapter 6, attitudinal dimensions — namely self-esteem, curiosity, and perceived effectiveness in intercultural competence — were measured with five questions using a five-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree” in pre- and post-exchange surveys.

To answer the first hypotheses, the difference in pre-exchange scores between those who spent time abroad and those who did not was measured in the pre-exchange survey. Only those participants who filled out both a pre- and a post-exchange survey are included in this analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Z</th>
<th>sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Esteem</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>2515</td>
<td>Mann-Whitney U</td>
<td>-1.344</td>
<td>0.179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curiosity</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>2515</td>
<td>Mann-Whitney U</td>
<td>-6.239</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercultural Competence</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>2515</td>
<td>Mann-Whitney U</td>
<td>-9.536</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (11.3) Attitudinal change and time abroad

There was a significant difference for two out of the three measures: people who have spent an extended time abroad had higher measures of curiosity and intercultural competence at the outset. As seen in Chapter 6, the pre-exchange scores for participants from the Southern Mediterranean are
higher on these measures. As the only regional difference is the large demographic difference between the participants who spent time abroad and those who did not, it can reasonably be concluded that this difference is not a demographic artifact and indeed represents the positive impact on these measures of extended time spent abroad.

In order to answer RH10, the difference between the scores on the pre- and post-exchange questionnaires were explored. This was done by subtracting the score on the pre-exchange questionnaire from the score on the post-exchange questionnaire. This score was then compared between those who had spent time abroad and those who did not.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Z</th>
<th>sig</th>
<th>effect size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Esteem</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>2524</td>
<td>Mann-Whitney U</td>
<td>-0.896</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curiosity</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>2524</td>
<td>Mann-Whitney U</td>
<td>-1.277</td>
<td>0.202</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercultural Competence</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>2524</td>
<td>Mann-Whitney U</td>
<td>-5.194</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (11.4) Attitudinal change and time abroad impact

The results of this are presented in table 11.4. RH10 is partially confirmed as there is growth on these attitudinal measures on both groups, but there is a significant difference between the groups on the measure intercultural competence, with those who had not spent time abroad showing a larger impact.

Impact measures

Differences in impact on 21st century skills, global skills, and activation were also measured. The method of measurement of these was set out in Chapter 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Z</th>
<th>sig</th>
<th>effect size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21st Century Skills</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>2305</td>
<td>Mann-Whitney U</td>
<td>-3.53</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Skills</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>2310</td>
<td>Mann-Whitney U</td>
<td>-0.437</td>
<td>0.662</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activation</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>2514</td>
<td>Mann-Whitney U</td>
<td>-1.292</td>
<td>0.196</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (11.5) Impact and time abroad impact

As can be seen in the table above, the only significant difference between the groups is on the 21st century skills measure. The similarity in scores for global skills is reasonable, as this measure is composed of items that can be considered to assess the substance of most of the exchanges followed by the participants (global issues and the relationships between societies). A difference in this learning should not necessarily be expected based on time spent abroad previous to the exchange. The fact that there is no observable difference on “activation” is somewhat surprising, as this scale includes an item measuring increased interest to partake in a physical exchange (i.e. an experience abroad). This can be taken to mean that the effect of Virtual Exchange on activation of the participants is independent of whether they have spent time abroad before.
With regards to RH10, it can thus be concluded that the impact of the programmes is indeed higher for those participants who have not yet spent an extended period of time abroad. Specifically, they show higher growth on intercultural competences, and rate the impact of the programme on their 21st century skills as higher.

**Qualitative data**

**Intercultural exchange**

The majority of youth in Europe and Southern Mediterranean countries do not spend extended periods of study or living abroad. The Erasmus+ mobility target for higher education in Europe was to reach 20% of students by the year 2020. In the youth sector, there is even less mobility. In 2015, Erasmus+ opened its borders to Southern Mediterranean countries, with about 8,000 grants per year (for students and staff from Southern to North and vice-versa)\(^\text{131}\). Erasmus+ participants in Europe encounter several barriers to mobility as mentioned above, from financial to personal relationships and responsibilities, accessibility issues for people with disabilities, and a lack of time or desire to study or live abroad. In the case of the Southern Mediterranean, there are also the additional issues of limited grants and difficulties in obtaining visas to study in Europe.

In terms of opportunities for contact and interaction in daily life, Europeans have considerably more contact with people from Southern Mediterranean countries than vice versa. According to the Anna Lindh Foundation’s Intercultural Trends 2018 report, on average, 53% of respondents in the European countries reported having talked to or met someone from a country belonging to the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean (SEM) region in the past 12 months, whereas in the SEM countries, 35% of respondents had talked to, or met with someone from a European country in the same time frame\(^\text{132}\). Furthermore, in SEM countries the contact was more likely to take place on the Internet, while in European countries they were more likely to be casual encounters on the street.

Many interviewees and survey respondents highlighted how VE offered them an opportunity to have international and intercultural encounters. This was the case both for students in Erasmus+ programme countries and those in the Southern Mediterranean region.

"It was really good, I don’t have the time to go abroad, so I could easily meet people from other countries and discuss the topics I was really interested in so, I would like to do it again" **Female, 23, Germany**

"I’m usually in group projects with people from my own country and so no new cultures are learned. In this project I worked with people from two different cultures" **Male, 21, Ireland**

"VE promotes the idea that you can create a connection even if you are in your comfort zone - you can stay in your house but can still create a connection with the world because thanks to the tech you can do something even if you don’t think it is so useful for you, for example people who are shy or not so courageous it is a great opportunity for them" **Female, 22, Italy**

"The 10-year crisis isolated Syria and Syrians from the outer world, even online. The discrimination Syrians are experiencing is massive, and thus, we as youth, lost our chance to connect or get our voices heard. It is harder than ever to get a VISA abroad to pursue higher education. That’s why I loved Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange activities. I got to learn by watching top academics’ videos which boosted my dream of studying abroad. I met foreigners who are willing to listen and discuss different topics without any prior prejudice. I also got the chance to express myself proving that stereotyping Syrians for the situation the country is going through is wrong.” **Male, 25, Syria**

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\(^\text{131}\) In 2017 UNIMED launched a petition to increase the number of grants [https://erasmuspetition.uni-med.net/](https://erasmuspetition.uni-med.net/)

A great diversity of participants involved in Virtual Exchange

As mentioned above, most Erasmus mobility is intra-European. Many of the interviewees and focus group participants mentioned getting to know or even making friends with people from countries they knew nobody from through EVE. This was the case both for students who did have experience of international mobility and those who did not. For example an Italian student, who at the time of the interview was on Erasmus mobility in Poland noted that through her VE, she met people from cultures she didn’t know:

“...I met people from very different cultures. For example I never met before people from Tunisia. They are friends on Facebook so the relationship was good” Female, 28, Poland

A Turkish student also reflected on this

“I have done Erasmus before, and was really excited. I had never met anyone from Africa before, I have met people from America, not Africa or Tunisia – I did not know before that we had so many common things with Tunisia and other countries. Actually I changed my opinion about the Middle East and North Africa because when you don’t know people – they didn’t know Turkey like I didn’t know Tunisia – do you ride a camel? Are you allowed a skirt? ... when I met [...] I realised I had the same stereotypes, which I hate, about Tunisia as well, but when I met [...] I realised that not all of them are true – like they have different generations as well - I thought they were like less civilized or less developed or less tolerant of different religions but I discovered that I was wrong.” Turkey, 24, female

The diversity of participants was mentioned as one of the best things about EVE and as contributing to their learning by a large number of interviewees and survey respondents — both those with and without experience of mobility. This was particularly the case for OFD and iOOCs, both of which engaged participants in groups of eight to 12 people, which the organisers sought to make as diverse as possible in terms of participant locations, backgrounds and gender. Whilst there were some inter-regional TEP exchanges and debates, involving participants from both European and Southern Mediterranean countries, the majority of activities were intra-regional: European in the case of TEPs and Southern Mediterranean.

“I think yes, it gave me the opportunity to meet people from countries I would never meet, to speak with people and share my opinion, we talked a lot about our cultures, it was interesting to listen to the opinions of people from everywhere in the world.” Female, 21, Belgium

“At the start I had my doubts about the exchange and its effectiveness at breaking down cultural barriers and engaging with difference. More so because the program was offered in an academic environment, with the prospect of educational credits at the end. Hence, at the beginning, my aim was purely functional to the attainment of the credits. My assumptions crumbled after one or two sessions. In general, my experience with Virtual Exchange was fantastic. I met people from all over the world and, although we could not be physically close to each other, we developed some kind of friendship.” Male, 23, Italy

As mentioned above, the Erasmus+ Impact Study found higher gains in intercultural openness when travelling to non-neighbouring countries. This highlights one of the key opportunities that Virtual Exchange offers, bringing together people from geographically and culturally distant locations at a fraction of the financial and environmental cost of physical mobility.

Different kinds of interaction than study abroad or other online courses

However, it was not only the diversity of the participants but also the nature of the interactions which were mentioned by several participants as distinguishing their VE experience from mobility, and indeed other experiences. Virtual Exchange was described as a new endeavour for almost all of the interviewees, many of whom underscored its difference from other experiences they had on social media, at university, in their daily lives. The novelty factor for many was the type of interactions that they had — extended interactions mediated through technology on topics they do not necessarily discuss in their everyday lives.
"We discussed about gender issues and inequalities. And the situation in our countries. In the real life I don’t talk about gender issues with my friends." Male, 24, Italy

"I never have had to work on a whole project and carry out a presentation with others with our sole interactions being over a screen and technology. In addition I have never worked on something with nearly every person being from a different country and university." Female, 21, Ireland

"I don’t know why - this course helped me think about these things I live every day, we suffer from these issues but we don’t really care about them - in my opinion the most important thing relevant to this project is that it doesn’t aim to tell people how to think they just give people the freedom to tell their ideas and share with their peers and to create a bridge between peers. I want to discover things by myself by listening to others ... I found things through others and by myself" 

"Although during the Erasmus I can have conversations with the locals and learn about their culture, [EVE] is a set setting for societal, political and also controversial topics which you probably would not talk about as freely with a total stranger" Female, 22, Germany

Increased interest in travel/study abroad

The majority of post-exchange survey respondents (79.7%) expressed an increased interest in travelling or studying abroad after their experience of VE. Some of them mentioned planning to travel and meet their peers that they got to know through the exchange. Some of the interviewees mentioned that they had actually applied for student mobility programmes.

"This exchange was incredibly educational. I would like to actively take part in similar projects in order to deepen my knowledge in many different areas and at the same time visit other countries." Female, 22, Poland

Blended mobility

Several TEP exchanges developed during the project could be described as examples of “blended mobility”. While the mobility component was funded by Erasmus+, strategic partnerships, or institutional funding, some or all of the VE component was supported through EVE, with the organisation and integration of facilitated dialogue sessions prior to and often after the mobility. Interviews with coordinators and/or participants suggest that the Virtual Exchange was a powerful support and preparation for the mobility, increasing the impact of the experience and allowing for participants to benefit more from their short-term experience abroad (see Annex 12 for examples of blended TEPs)

In one of these blended exchanges, participants from six countries (Spain, Italy, France, Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria) were invited to take part in a VE prior to a short term mobility in Algeria, however, the VE was not a mandatory component. Coordinators observed that those who had not taken part in the VE tended to stay in national groups whereas those with VE experience immediately socialised with one another, as they had already developed a relationship. In another blended exchange where the mobility component was only offered to a selected number of VE participants, coordinators and facilitators reported that a few of the VE participants, on discovering that they had not been selected for the mobility, lost their motivation. This has also been reported in other research studies.

Several youth workers who followed TEP training courses discussed the potential they saw of Virtual Exchange in preparing young people for mobility. This is felt to be particularly important for youth exchanges where participants may be more interested in the idea of mobility than the project and values and activities that the specific exchange embeds.

"It would be great to begin the exchange with a Virtual Exchange in preparation for actual mobility. I enjoy introductory workshops and icebreakers so the international capacity can be helped during an initial Virtual Exchange process. It enables you to break out of your comfort zone, especially
Some youth workers piloted a VE to bridge two physical training courses. Pre-mobility sessions were used for group building and ice breaking, to lessen the element of culture shock. Between mobilities, VE was used for content-development and learning-reinforcement, and as a follow-up and evaluation at the end of the project. Their evaluation of this integration was very positive and has been written up in a case study.¹³⁴

Several of the participants in the eTandem exchange,¹³⁵ organised in Spring 2020 took part in an online focus group shortly after the outbreak of the pandemic. One participant, who was a student but also worked as a nurse, had arranged to meet her eTandem partner, who had come to Italy from Cameroon in February. This was however impossible as they had arranged to meet on what became the first day of lockdown. They continued to chat on Whatsapp and communicate as they were both facing challenging times, and she was able to provide her partner with information and advice. Another participant in the same project had a Russian partner, as she was studying Russian language for her degree. Her partner had arrived in Italy and had already been to her house to meet her family. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown, they had to cancel all their upcoming plans for meeting and visiting different Italian cities together. However, they continued their interactions on Whatsapp and had video chats, which was strongly valued by her partner who, at the time of the focus group, hadn’t been able to meet any other Italian students, only other international students in the residence and felt the need to understand what was going on around her.

**Erasmus+ staff mobility and EVE**

The 2019 Erasmus+ Impact Study reported that professional and institutional advancement were important motivations for participants in staff mobility: over 90% of respondents reported the opportunity to establish new collaborations, to improve their competences in their field, to reinforce collaboration with a partner institution abroad or to internationalise their professional networks as reasons to take part in the programme (p.119). The study found that Erasmus(+) teaching staff use innovative teaching methods more often than nonmobile teaching staff. 59% make use of ICTs in their teaching, compared to 44% of non-mobile staff. 53% of Erasmus+ staff make use of material from open educational resources in their teaching, compared to 34% of nonmobile teaching staff. Participants from Partner Countries were reported to learn most from mobility when it comes to innovative teaching methods. The most frequent barriers to staff mobility were found to be family reasons and personal relationships (67%), followed by working responsibilities (64%). Difficulties finding an appropriate institution abroad were a further factor identified.

The professional development offered through TEP training in EVE (see Chapter 9) addressed many of the interest areas expressed by Erasmus+ staff taking part in a mobility (Erasmus+ Higher Education Impact Study p.121). In particular it offered collaboration and networking, the opportunity to experience different learning and teaching methods, including the use of ICT and learning in multidisciplinary groups as well as student-centred learning. It also addressed soft skills and intercultural and social competencies.

EVE made Erasmus+ more inclusive as it offered a quality international and intercultural learning experience to HEI staff who may have been hindered from accessing mobility for personal reasons and working responsibilities, and in 2020 were prevented from doing so due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A staff week focusing on Virtual Exchange and planned to take place in Padova in June 2020,¹³⁶ with maximum 40 participants, had to switch to online mode. This required some adjustments, and the new format — with a mixture of webinars and workshop events — proved extremely successful.

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¹³⁴ Van de Kraak & Lai, 2020  
¹³⁵ Griggio & Pittarello, 2020  
¹³⁶ https://www.unipd.it/en/international-staff-week
The webinars were attended by hundreds of participants all over the world. The interactive workshop component which used a Virtual Exchange approach, was evaluated very positively by all participants who managed to network and make contacts. Clearly, it was not the same as spending a week together, but it provided the basis for a potentially more successful staff week in the future. Likewise, the TEP training courses created opportunities and networks for staff wishing to use Erasmus+ mobility by supporting the creation of an international community of practice, as mentioned by respondents. Some staff also indicated that through their EVE training, they had made contacts with people from other universities, which they intended to leverage to organise staff mobility.

**Discussion of findings**

This study showed that the majority of EVE participants had not experienced an extended period of time abroad, and that RH10 was partly confirmed. In other words, the impact of EVE was greater on these participants in perceived improvement in intercultural competence and 21st century skills. However, there was no significant difference between the two groups in the measures of global skills and activation. This is perhaps not so surprising when looking at the results of the Erasmus+ 2019 impact study on participants’ social and political engagement, which was quite limited compared to its impact in terms of adaptability and cultural openness. One of the characteristics which distinguishes EVE from Erasmus+ mobility could thus be defined as its impact on young people’s global skills and activation. This can be attributed to the great diversity of the participants in the groups and the types of interactions they had, since in most exchanges they addressed global, sometimes divisive issues, in two-hour long dialogue sessions with the support of trained facilitators. Finally, EVE was found to enhance the experience of physical mobility by providing opportunities for participants to get to know peers in their host countries before departure, so as well as developing skills they also made useful contacts. It is however worth highlighting that how the two are integrated is also of importance.
12 Main findings and recommendations

The Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange initiative aimed to offer young people intercultural learning opportunities and support the development of employability skills through the development and implementation of different models of Virtual Exchange and the growth of a facilitator community.

This innovative pilot project engaged 33,541 persons over the course of its implementation: 28,426 (85%) youth took part in the different VE models, and 5,115 (15%) individuals trained in Online Dialogue Facilitation, Debate Leadership or to develop Transnational EVE Projects. Thus, the project largely exceeded its target of 25,000 participants by December 2020, set by the European Commission. The initiative was particularly appealing to women (61% of participants), reflecting in part the demographics of the higher education population. In terms of geographic distribution, the equal balance between participants in European and South Mediterranean countries —despite economic disparities and unequal access to the Internet — is a testament to VE’s regional (and global) relevance, and highlights its value in offering balanced exchange opportunities and mutual learning in two regions between which physical mobility is rather limited.

Summary of main findings

This research study has provided important findings on the impact of the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange initiative. A positive impact on participants’ self esteem and curiosity and above all perceived effectiveness in intercultural communication was found across all activities. Participants’ feelings towards people from different ethnic and religious groups improved significantly in OFD and IIOC exchanges that were intentionally designed to address these dividing lines. Some changes were found to last at least up to 18 months after the end of the programme, and confidence in communication skills was found to have significantly increased further over time.

Participants perceived improvement in their 21st century skills, above all active listening, critical thinking and the ability to work in culturally diverse teams. Knowledge of global issues grew as well as understanding of the relationships between different societies. Participants were activated through their experience, that is they shared information about what they learnt with others and many also challenged media misrepresentations. They also became interested in further intercultural encounters both through VE and study or volunteering abroad, and a good number actually engaged with multiple activities available within the rich “ecology of virtual exchange” that EVE offered, with a number of them also becoming trained dialogue facilitators.

Experiences were evaluated very positively overall by exchange participants. The factor that most contributed to their positive evaluations were the encounters with peers across Europe and South Mediterranean and engaging with a diversity of perspectives and experiences. Meaningful relationships across borders were created, many of which lasted well beyond the end of the exchanges as participants kept in touch with one another through various forms of social media.

There were only minor differences in terms of impact on some of the measures according to the gender of participants, but significant differences per region. Generally participants in Southern Mediterranean countries reported a higher improvement in their skills. The higher impact may be in part due to cultural bias in the responses, as similar trends have been found in other studies. It may also be due to the fact that fewer opportunities to develop these competences are available in the formal education system in South Mediterranean countries, and also fewer opportunities for international contacts as has been reported.

As expected, there were some differences across the four models of exchange piloted, in terms of level of impact and specific skills which improved. This can be attributed to differences in the specific objectives and in the way each programme was designed to meet these objectives as well as the demographics of the groups involved. Each of the models has its own strengths in terms of design, flexibility, scalability and impact. The impact of the project extended beyond the exchange participants, as 5,115 individuals took part in the training courses offered through EVE. Again, satisfaction with all training courses was high. Factors contributing to the positive experience were the quality of the trainers and materials, and the learning experience through interactions with fellow trainees who
came from a wide range of backgrounds. Some of the educators and youth workers who completed a training course went on to develop and coordinate a number of “grassroots” exchanges (TEPs) for their classes or youth organisations, and debate leaders recruited and trained teams who they led in debates and debate competitions. Other educators and youth workers were involved as coordinators of “ready-made” VE activities within their organisations. Strong communities of educators, youth workers and debate leaders developed in the three years of the project, and will continue to be active in Virtual Exchange and in bringing life to their communities.

Over the three years of the project, a community of 801 facilitators — EVE-trained, or with previous online facilitation experience — supported a total of 7,498 sessions. The facilitator community was key to the success of the EVE initiative, as facilitators led dialogue sessions in each of the four activities. They were key to assuring the quality of exchanges and creating safe spaces for participants to engage deeply with divisive issues that characterise our societies today. Furthermore, they modelled active listening, and critical thinking.

**Challenges, lessons learnt and recommendations**

This section summarises the lessons learnt throughout the pilot, identifies challenges faced by the different stakeholders, and puts forward a number of recommendations for future VE initiatives.

1. **Understanding and engaging with (E)VE**

While student mobility is a clear and immediately understandable concept, this is not the case for Virtual Exchange. Throughout the project, various communication materials were developed with the different stakeholders in mind, to improve their understanding of EVE, and VE in general.

Although EVE’s complexity created some issues at first, having a wide range of exchange and training activities under one “roof” proved to be a winning factor once the messaging was clear and partners understood the different VE models.

**Challenges:**

- Misunderstandings around VE as a concept and educational tool and confusion with other approaches (e.g. virtual mobility, online learning, blended mobility, etc.) among educators, youth workers, IR officers;
- Communicating clearly the complexity of the initiative (multiple VE formats addressed to multiple audiences);
- The use of the “Hub” — the central entry point for EVE target audiences, hosted as a sub-site on the European Youth Portal — and challenges inherent in its design, structure and presentation, which, as became evident through stakeholders’ feedback (emails inquiries etc.), impaired its intuitiveness.

**Recommendations**

- Adopt a clear definition of Virtual Exchange to be used across all EC-supported initiatives, promote strong messaging around its core values and principles, and provide clear guidelines to implementers on the methodology;
- Socialise the concept of VE through experiential training opportunities for staff at National Agencies/ National Erasmus Officers, HEI staff and youth workers, tailoring the information provided to the different stakeholders;
2. Positioning of (E)VE within Erasmus+

At first, stakeholders had difficulties understanding EVE’s position in relation to other EC activities. Youth organisations were disconcerted by the absence of funding opportunities within this project. And university IROs saw it as a youth-oriented initiative — since it was hosted on the Youth Portal —, and did not immediately see its relevance to their activities. Furthermore, some participants from the Southern Mediterranean region raised their hopes about their chances of participation in Erasmus+ mobility as a result of partaking in EVE, which may have led to disappointment. The information webinars, and the creation of handbooks providing IROs and youth organisations with clear guidance on how to integrate EVE into their programming helped dispel misconceptions around the project.

Challenge: Relative isolation of the pilot initiative within the overall Erasmus+ programme;

Recommendations

• Integrate references to VE in relevant strategies to highlight its contribution to broader EU education and youth policy objectives, as in the Digital Education Action Plan.

• Include clear recommendations and guidance in the next Erasmus+ work programme on how to embed VE within proposals (including KA1 and KA2) and to offer VE as a standard option to enrich physical exchange programmes;

• Integrate VE in quality frameworks such as the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education, or the ESC Quality Label, and develop synergies with relevant initiatives, such as the European Universities Initiative.

3. Supporting and sustaining engagement in VE activities

Ensuring participation and retention is key to the quality of the online exchanges, and this can be difficult in VEs. Efforts put into building strong partnerships — including at institutional level — were instrumental for increased participation and retention, as was the support provided to help HEI staff find strategies for integration. For non-higher education institutions, commitment and retention remained challenging in the absence of funding prospects. Financial incentives, piloted in the final year for the debate cycles, proved effective for engagement of youth organisations.

Challenges:

• Initial lack understanding of the role and responsibilities of VE coordinators;

• Uncertainty around the initiative’s continuation from one year to another;

• Lack of time to invest in the development of “grassroots” exchanges;

• Limited on-the-ground outreach capacity on youth organisations’ side and lack of incentives and support for project implementation.

Recommendations

• Establish a multi-year VE programme which institutions can invest in, to foster institutional buy-in and create long-term partnerships;

• Introduce a funding mechanism to support both VE providers running large-scale programmes, and coordinating institutions and organisations;

• Offer both “ready made” VE models which allow large numbers of participants to have a VE experience with little institutional time investment, and training so as to gradually build the capacity of institutional staff to develop VEs for specific needs;

• Promote VE as an integral part of students’ university experience, with recommendations for official recognition by HEIs;
4. Developing new models

EVE brought together existing models of Virtual Exchange, but also sought to develop new ones such as the debate exchanges and iOOCs which built on existing MOOCs or course materials. Pilot iterations were useful in learning lessons, such as the incompatibility of self-paced courses with Virtual Exchange, and the importance of synchronous sessions for engagement of participants. While developing and piloting new models takes time, it is an important part of growing the field of virtual exchange. Pilot projects should be part of a constant feedback cycle, and be supported through collaboration, reflection, research and development.

Challenges:

• Variability of student experience in new models of VE (including TEPs)

• Negotiations with MOOC providers and potential partner organisations to develop new models were time-intensive, with a low success rate.

Recommendations

• Include both “tried and tested” models of VE and opportunities for developing and piloting new formats in future initiatives;

• Bring together a diversity of partners with expertise and understanding of the VE field, and a potential for innovation and experimentation;

• Ensure monitoring and evaluation of new models and a constant feedback cycle to support the quality of VE models.

5. Accessibility and inclusion

Challenges to accessibility and inclusion were related to language competence, connectivity and supporting and sustaining the involvement of ‘hard to reach’ youth. “Grassroots” exchanges (TEPs) and debates – run in smaller groups – were particularly well suited to variety in languages. The presence of multilingual facilitators was also appreciated.

HEIs and youth organisations were instrumental in addressing connectivity issues by giving participants access to the necessary technology, the Internet, and/or a quiet space to connect from. For many, this was however no longer an option after the COVID-19 outbreak.

Significant resources were mobilised to attract and cater for “hard-to-reach youth – such as providing tailored support to refugee and migrant participants, and minimising the complexity of some models, among others, resulting in a slight improvement.

Challenges:

• Lack of basic communicative competences in the exchange languages;

• Poor connectivity and limited technical infrastructure esp. for youth in the SouthMed region;

• Lack of funding to support an integration model for organisations serving “hard-to-reach” youth.

Recommendations:

• Support a range of VE models and work with multilingual facilitators and educators from different regions to guarantee that exchanges are offered in different languages;

• Provide funding for the purchase of devices, mobile data, the setup of tech labs, and support to vulnerable groups.
6. Supporting and retaining facilitators

Supporting facilitation across all project activities required the recruitment and retention of a strong team of trained facilitators. Managing the facilitator community was time and resource intensive. Indeed, while many were driven by their commitment to social change, their motivation and engagement had to be nurtured by offering opportunities for professional development, skill building, and refresher courses. Developing a growth path (facilitator, senior facilitator, facilitation fellow, coach) and offering increased payment options also worked towards facilitator retention.

Recommendations

• Ensure any future VE initiatives are supported by trained facilitators and a robust quality control system, and allocate corresponding funding in Erasmus+ Proposal Applications that include VE;

• Set and enforce high facilitation standards through high-quality and transparent recruitment of facilitators, adequate training, as well as strong quality control and support mechanisms (e.g. co-facilitation, peer reviews, feedback loops), using existing expertise from the VE field;

• Grow and nurture the VE facilitator community by ensuring investment in community-building and professional development, enabling further professionalisation, and developing an incremental pay structure.

7. COVID-19

In the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak and the challenges that accompanied it (interruption of HEI activities, connectivity issues due to increased Internet use, travel limitations etc.), the demand for Virtual Exchange grew exponentially. This surge in interest continued through the year and considerable efforts were made to accommodate higher numbers of participants and support interested institutions, which put a strain on available resources. While the pandemic impaired some participants’ and trainees’ ability to complete the activities (due to poor connectivity and/or other personal circumstances), levels of engagement were overall higher than usual. The strong social proximity with their peers and groups, and the opportunities to interact and engage with others on a personal level were crucial in keeping participants engaged. The trauma, isolation, and uncertainty experienced by participants and facilitators alike were taken into account through the development of new discussion guides for facilitated sessions, and through additional support and the creation of dedicated discussion spaces for facilitators.

Recommendations

• Continue to invest in VE initiatives as they provide safe opportunities for social proximity and engagement at a time when many people are feeling isolated, vulnerable and experiencing trauma;

• Ensure that facilitators and trainers have been prepared to address COVID-19-related discussions and have adequate support materials, as well as a space for them to share their experiences and challenges;

• Ensure VEs offer both synchronous and asynchronous spaces for engagement so as to ensure inclusion for those with challenges to connectivity and provide spaces for engagement beyond dialogue sessions.
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14 Annexess

Annex 1: Quantitative Measures

Pre and Post Exchange Surveys

The questions below should all be on a 5 point Likert scale

(1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

1. I have high self esteem

2. I frequently find myself looking for new opportunities to grow as a person (e.g., information, people, resources).

3. Everywhere I go, I am out looking for new things or experiences.

4. I find it is easy to talk with people from different cultures.

5. I am able to express my ideas clearly when interacting with people from different cultures.

6. I believe that strong relationships between youth in Europe and Southern Mediterranean countries are possible.

7. Indicate how “Cold” or “Warm” you feel towards people with a different ethnic background from your own (from 0-10)

   Very Cold/ Very Warm/ Unfavorable Favorable

8. Indicate how “Cold” or “Warm” you feel towards people with a different religious background from your own (from 0 to 10)

9. I feel confident communicating in English/French/Arabic (language of exchange)

(1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

Pre only

10. Have you spent an extended period of time (3+ months) abroad, or participated in a physical exchange programme?

Post-exchange only

11. How would you describe what you have learnt about people from other cultures in this Virtual Exchange?

   1 = very negative 2= negative 3 = Neither negative nor positive 4. = positive 5. = very positive

   b.1 = very similar to my previously held beliefs 2= similar to my previously held beliefs 3= somewhat similar to my previously held beliefs 4= different to my previously held beliefs 5 = very different to my previously held beliefs.

   Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

   (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

12. I built positive/meaningful relationships by participating in this Virtual Exchange.

13. I have challenged media misrepresentation of other groups since participating in this Virtual Exchange.
14. I shared information about what I was learning with my friends and/or other people in my community about my experience in this Virtual Exchange.

15. I am interested in having further opportunities to engage in Virtual Exchange.

16. Participating in this Virtual Exchange increased my interest in taking part in an educational programme abroad.

17. Participating in this Virtual Exchange improved:
   
   7. skills to communicate or work in a culturally diverse setting
   8. ability to listen actively
   9. critical thinking skills
   10. digital competences
   11. team-work and collaborative problem-solving skills
   12. English and/or foreign language skills.
   13. Other...

18. Participating in this Virtual Exchange improved:
   1. my knowledge and/or interest in global events
   2. my knowledge about the relationship between and across different societies.

19. How would you rate your satisfaction with this Virtual Exchange.

20. How likely is it that you would recommend this Virtual Exchange to a friend or colleague?
   0. Not at all likely .... 10. Very Likely

Open questions:

21. What was the best thing about this Virtual Exchange?

22. How could this Virtual Exchange be improved?

23. What is the most important thing(s) that you learned through your participation in this Virtual Exchange?

24. Please list the topics that you enjoyed discussing with your group the most. Please explain.
Annex 2: Qualitative measures

Questions that were asked over the 3 years in focus groups or interviews with participants.

How have you engaged with Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange?

How would you evaluate this experience?

Why did you get involved with Virtual Exchange? What attracted you to it?

How do you feel your participation in Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange impacted you? Did you learn any new skill that you are using in your everyday life?

What topics did you discuss during your sessions? Who decided these topics?

How do you feel about using video conferencing for communication?

In what ways (if any) are these exchanges different from other communications you have online or offline?

In what ways (if any) are these exchanges different from other university experiences?

What did you learn through the project in terms of skills?

What knowledge do you feel you acquired through the project? Are you satisfied with this knowledge or have you tried to look for further information about these issues?

What challenges did you face in the project?

What would you change or improve in the project?

How do you see VE as relating to physical mobility?

Would you like to travel, work or spend time in the countries you had an exchange with? How would you feel about having an international career?

Was language an issue? Did you use languages other than English (or the language of the exchange?)

Are you still in touch with people from your VE?

In what ways (if any) has this project changed your views on yourself or your own ‘culture’ (however you would define that)?

What did you know about European/S.Mediterranean countries OR partner country before taking part in this exchange? Do you have many friends from that region?

Before starting this project - how did you see the relationship between young people in Europe and Southern Mediterranean countries?

Where did you get this view from? Why do you think you saw it like this?

How has that view changed (if at all)?

What do you better understand about the S.Mediterranean region/Europe through participation in the project?

How do you think others saw you/your region/country? Why? Do you think that has that changed? Why?

During the discussions, how were your perspectives or stereotypes challenged?

Can you share an eye-opening moment? Or, do you have a favorite memory from the Virtual Exchange?

Can you share a difficult moment or a moment of tension in your exchange?

How would you define the role of the facilitators? How important do you see their role in this program?

Are you interested in having further opportunities to engage in dialogue through Virtual Exchange?

Would you recommend others to take part in Virtual Exchange? Why/Why not?

Would you consider taking part in another VE or training to become a facilitator?
Facilitator focus groups

Round 1
A little bit of information about your backgrounds and why you started to facilitate. How many years?
Experiences of physical mobility? Before or after becoming facilitators?
How are your Virtual Exchanges progressing? How do you see the learning of participants, are they progressing?
How do you see the value of VE for students?
What makes a ‘good’ facilitator in your view?
What keeps you engaged as a facilitator? Why do you continue to facilitate?
How do you feel about the badges and recognition system introduced for Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange?
Do you transfer the skills acquired facilitating to other contexts? Can you give some examples
How do you see an Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange facilitator community
How do you feel language proficiency affects participation? What do you understand by ‘linguistic flexibility’? What strategies do you use to support understanding when related to language proficiency?
How do you see offering Virtual Exchange in French and Arabic?

Round 2
How have you been involved in Erasmus+ this year? What have you been facilitating?
How has your experience been this second half of the year?
Do you have any comments on the report on focus groups with facilitators? Is there anything you feel that was missing from that report or that was misrepresented?
What do you feel has changed for you since then - if anything? Have you thought any more of any of the issues discussed?
What do you see as the differences (in terms of impact) between the programmes you facilitated? For example between the 4 and 8 week Connect Programme?
How do facilitators view EVE and the idea of an Erasmus+ Facilitator Community? How would you like to see it evolve?
How do you perceive issues related to language (competence and participation, translation, EVE in French and Arabic)

VE coordinators
What students have you engaged in Virtual Exchange programmes?
How is this programme offered to your students?
How is information about this programme shared with your students?
What is your primary motivation for engaging with Virtual Exchange
What research areas are you interested in?
What conditions enable a student to successfully complete a VE?
What challenges do they face?
What do you do to support completion of their students?
What would make your lives easier when implementing VE at your uni?
For TEP coordinators
For what courses did you develop your TEP?
What were the aims of the exchange?
What activities did participants engage in?
How were they assessed?
How would you evaluate the exchange? What lessons did you learn?

**Interview questions for national agencies and NEOs**

How did you find out about EVE? Have you heard presentations/participated in webinars about it? Have you read the handbook?

Was it difficult to understand the concept of Virtual Exchange? And the activities being offered?

Do you think there is any difference between Virtual Exchange and Virtual Mobility? If yes, how would you describe the difference(s)?

Are you actively involved in outreach? How?

Who are you receiving expressions of interest from? What kind of questions are they asking?

How do you think the communication about Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange should take place?

How could it be improved?

What instruments do you think national agencies should be provided with to be able to train expert evaluators who will then evaluate E+ projects with a Virtual Exchange strand proposal?

What instruments do you think evaluators should be provided with to be able to evaluate the quality of projects including a Virtual Exchange strand proposals?

Is Virtual Exchange widespread in your country? Since when?

Do you think the opportunities available are adequate considering the national context?
**Annex 3: Focus group and Interview participants**

Numbers and countries of participants in focus groups and interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Countries where participants were located</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>OFD</strong></td>
<td>82 participants, with 57 in 7 focus groups and 25 participants in interviews (30 male, 52 female)</td>
<td>Egypt, Germany, Italy, Jordan, Morocco, Serbia, Tunisia, Turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TEPs</strong></td>
<td>35 participants with 25 in 2 focus groups and 10 interviews (28 female, 7 male)</td>
<td>France, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Tunisia and Turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Advocacy Training</strong></td>
<td>27 participants in interviews (15 male, 12 female)</td>
<td>Algeria, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>iOOCs</strong></td>
<td>39 participants with 18 in 3 focus groups and 21 interviewees (28 female, 11 male)</td>
<td>Algeria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Morocco, Netherlands, Poland, Syria, UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Facilitators</strong></td>
<td>Interviews and focus groups with 25 facilitators</td>
<td>Netherlands, Tunisia, Germany, Spain, Italy, Bulgaria, UK, Turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coordinators</strong></td>
<td>35 HEI coordinators and 25 youth workers</td>
<td>Algeria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Morocco, Netherlands, Palestine, Poland, Spain, Tunisia, UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>National agencies</strong></td>
<td>11 representatives from Erasmus National Agencies (NAs) and NEOs</td>
<td>Finland (2), Italy, Poland, Serbia (3) Morocco, Tunisia (3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Focus groups
Annex 4: Factor Analysis

The factor analysis was performed on questions 3 to 15 of the post-exchange survey, all of which are measured on a five point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. Only 2019 responses were considered as some changes were implemented to the survey compared to 2018. If there was missing data present in a case, the whole case was excluded from the analysis. Oblique rotation was adopted as there was believed to be correlation in the factors. Minimum Residual (OLS) factor extraction was used as it does not assume multivariate normal distribution. A simple structure of three factors was found, with a root mean square of residual of 0.02, a root mean square error of approximation of 0.048, and a Tucker-Lewis Index of 0.968. The model explains 51% of the variance present. The results are presented in the table below.

Factor 1, 21st Century skills, consists of five items and explained 22% of the variance, with the factor loadings ranging from 0.612 to 0.781. A reliability check found a Chronbach’s Alpha of 0.846. These items seem to be a natural fit. All of them measure skills that are highly related to the demands of modern employers, as outlined in the literature review.

The second factor, Activation, comprises five items as well, and explains 19% of the variance with factor loadings ranging from 0.342 to 0.859. A reliability check found a Chronbach’s Alpha of 0.794. These items are all related to the activation of respondents and regard the self - such as becoming interested in having new opportunities, being activated to embark on a journey of further exploration whether through expressing interest in seeking opportunities for further engagement with diversity through Virtual Exchange or travel or study abroad experiences. There is also activation of others, that is sharing what they learnt or experienced with others in their communities. Finally there is taking action in terms of challenging media misrepresentation.

The third factor, Global Skills, comprises three items, and explains 10% of the variance with factor loading ranging from 0.309 to 0.535. It combines knowledge and interest in global events, knowledge of the relationship between different societies, and the ability to function in diverse settings. A reliability check found a Chronbach’s Alpha of 0.754.

These three factors allow interesting possibilities for comparison across groups. In the analysis comparisons have been made across regions (Europe and Southern Mediterranean countries), gender, and the 4 models of Virtual Exchange.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>21st Century Skills</th>
<th>Activation</th>
<th>Global Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I built positive/meaningful relationships by participating in this Virtual Exchange</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.669</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have challenged media misrepresentation of other groups since participating in this Virtual Exchange</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.342</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I shared information about what I was learning through Virtual Exchange with my friends and/or other people in my community</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.510</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am interested in having further opportunities to engage in Virtual Exchange.</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.859</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in this Virtual Exchange increased my interest in taking part in an educational programme abroad.</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.685</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in this Virtual Exchange improved: skills to communicate or work in a culturally diverse setting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in this Virtual Exchange improved: ability to listen actively</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.632</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in this Virtual Exchange improved: critical thinking skills</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.639</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in this Virtual Exchange improved: digital competences</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.781</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in this Virtual Exchange improved: team-work and collaborative problem-solving skills.</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.718</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participating in this Virtual Exchange improved: team-work and collaborative problem-solving skills. 0.718

Participating in this Virtual Exchange improved: English and/or foreign language skills. 0.612

Participating in this Virtual Exchange improved: my knowledge and/or interest in global events 0.514

Participating in this Virtual Exchange improved: my knowledge about the relationship between and across different societies. 0.535

Table 3. Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis

Loadings <0.3 suppressed
Annex 5: Analysis by gender

Attitudes towards others by gender

Regarding differences between gender, as we can see in the table below, women were warmer to people with different backgrounds than men, but the growth appears to be the same. Statistics show that there is no significant difference between the growth men and women experience in their warmth towards people with different ethnic and religious backgrounds.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Warmth towards people with a different:</th>
<th>Mean Pre-Exchange</th>
<th>Mean Post-Exchange</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic background</td>
<td>7.85</td>
<td>8.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Background</td>
<td>7.64</td>
<td>7.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 Gender and attitudes towards others

6.3 Analysis of 21st century skills by gender

Global Skills and Gender
Is the bar chart above shows, there does not appear to be a large difference between the activation scale across the genders. Statistical tests confirm that the difference is indeed not significant, so we can conclude that perceived improvement in activation was similar for both genders.
Annex 6: iOOCs developed and implemented

Countering Hate Speech

Countering Hate Speech iOOC was based on a (offline) training program developed by European Alternatives, an NGO that works to promote democracy, equality and culture beyond the nation state. European Alternatives wanted to redesign their offline training into an online course to increase the potential number of participants benefiting from the training materials.

Gender In/Equality in Media

The Advancing Gender Equality in Media Industries (AGEMI) project produced online content about gender related themes focused on media industries available for educational purposes which could be flexibly used as a resource for an iOOC. A first iteration was piloted with asynchronous interactions only, but whilst offering flexibility for participants retention was poor. The synchronous dialogue sessions were added for the 2019 and 2020 iterations which were also enhanced with newly produced content from AGEMI and further refinement of the interactive assignments.

Sustainable Food Systems

The MOOC Sustainable Food Systems was developed by the University of Siena in collaboration with other universities on both sides of the Mediterranean part of the Sustainable Development Solutions Networks. The organisers of this MOOC were interested to find ways to increase the interactivity between the learners from their different institutions. The MOOC was offered as a self-paced course for the participants of the participating institutions but this posed a challenge for the integration of VE sessions. In 2019 and 2020 the self-paced offering was adjusted to a paced offering with facilitated dialogue sessions and with broader promotion activated with and also beyond the initial institutions in 2020.

European Culture and Politics

The University of Groningen offered the MOOC European Culture and Politics on Futurelearn and showed interest to enhance the MOOC with VE methodologies to increase the interaction between the learners of the MOOC. Unfortunately, a good integration of the MOOC and the VE activities was deemed impossible due to strict limitations on the side of Futurelearn caused by GDPR regulations as well as impossibility to promote the VE opportunity on the Futurelearn platform. As such, the VE activities and the MOOC remained completely separate which hindered its successful implementation. The iOOC European Culture and Politics was subsequently dropped from the EVE project.

Newly-designed iOOCs

European Refuge/es | Cultivating diversity together (10 weeks, English)

This iOOC was designed based on a previously run Virtual Exchange program developed by the Sharing Perspectives Foundation. As such, the consortium was able to offer this iOOC already in March 2018 with a good number of participants. It was designed to bring together youth with and without refugee backgrounds to discuss what it means to be a citizen in our contemporary societies.

Newcomers & Nationalism | Exploring the challenges of belonging in Europe (10 weeks, English)

This iOOC aimed at exploring the challenges of belonging in Europe from both the perspectives of newcomers and those seeking to define national identity in our increasingly diverse societies.

Cultural Encounters | Perspectives on Populism (10 weeks, English)

This iOOC encourages participants to explore the new wave of anti-establishment politics gaining power around the world, which are reshaping our relationship to neighbouring countries and cultures.
Cultural Encounters | The Big Climate Movement (9 weeks, English)

This iOOC focused on key debates around climate change. This course asked: what is the impact of climate change on the planet, political action and the movement of people? The curriculum was developed with new content produced by Migration Matters and freely available online content. To better fit the different academic calendars the course changed from 10 to 9 weeks duration.

Technology & Society | Connections across frontiers (5 weeks, Arabic)

This iOOC was developed for delivery entirely in Arabic. The content curriculum was curated by SPF for which solely existing and freely available online resources were used, most of which had to be translated into Arabic. It was designed to engage youth from the Southern Mediterranean and Europe to explore the role played by technology in their everyday lives and societies.

Youth, Peace and Security (English and Arabic)

This iOOC used specialised conflict resolution content developed by the United Network of Young Peacebuilders and Search for Common Ground for its curriculum. The iOOC aimed to reach young people outside of HEI's. The course was successfully promoted by Search, UNOY and SPF which led to a high number of registered participants (844). The iOOC was the first which was made available in both English and Arabic; the content of the curriculum was available in both languages and participants could choose to take the dialogue sessions in English or Arabic. The development and successful implementation of this iOOC shows that the models developed are ready to be tailored to new audiences (non-HEI, affiliated with UNOY network), in multiple languages, on a new topic.

Sharing Perspectives on 2018 (English)

This short, accessible and low-time commitment VE model was developed to serve as a taster session for Virtual Exchange and for Alumni to stay engaged if they wanted to. Participants were invited to reflect on key issues that shaped 2018 through a series of drop-in facilitated sessions which were supported by online video content. Whilst accessible and well received, the decision was made not to repeat the iOOC in 2019 as the Social Circles activity was designed as an accessible way to engage with Virtual Exchange.
Annex 7 Case Studies

Case Study 1: Shadi

Shadi is an Iranian student, youth worker and peace builder who has recently completed a Master's degree in Mediterranean studies at Venice University, Italy. As part of her MA she spent 3 months in Tunisia. She was interviewed in 2018, 2019 and 2020.

Shadi first heard about EVE at the UNIMED conference in Venice in 2018 when she had just started her MA. She engaged with the speakers and subsequently signed up for the Countering Hate Speech iOOC. When living in Iran she had engaged in many online courses as she saw them as an opportunity for learning that was not always available to her in Iran. She found that the Virtual Exchange experience offered her insights that she was not getting from the MA course she was studying in Venice, in particular individuals' perspectives on issues. Her participation in the VE was not recognised as part of her studies, she participated as an individual. When interviewed, 6 months after the exchange she still felt that her Virtual Exchange experience had a strong impact on her.

Later she was interviewed in Tunisia, where she was doing research as part of her Master's course, she said that although she’d had no Tunisians in her facilitated dialogue group in EVE, she felt that she got a sense of North Africa through the Moroccan students in her group, which had really prepared her for her sojourn in Tunisia. In the courses she had followed at university she gained more theoretical, academic insights. She defined herself as an activist, she was part of United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY) working with advocacy for 5 hours a week, and was seeking to raise funds for the development of a UN peace-building course with a Virtual Exchange component. She was also advocating for EVE, telling all people she thought may be interested about the opportunities that were available. She expressed strong regret that EVE was not available in Iran, where she says there is a very strong need and demand for this kind of activity, to offer transnational learning opportunities to young people who are very isolated.

In 2019-2020 the Peace-building course Shadi had been advocating for was developed by EVE consortium members in collaboration with UNOY. This was largely a result of the initial contacts and links she had made between the organizations. She was not directly involved in the development of the course, but she followed the Youth, Peace and Security iOOC as a participant and was happy to see that her advocacy had led somewhere. In 2020 she enrolled for the dialogue facilitator training and was on her way to becoming a facilitator. In the 3 years of EVE she was invited to several EVE advocacy events to speak.

She sees the strong value of EVE as creating opportunities for young people to acquire better understandings of other regions and dismantle some of the stereotypes they may have:

“From the Southern Mediterranean side, there is a tendency to idealise Europe. Whilst I agree there is more transparency and less corruption, it is far from the utopian image many seem to have in their minds about it. This only becomes apparent when you engage in Virtual Exchange with people from the ‘other side’ when you can talk about what it’s really like. For example, whenever the topic of immigration to Europe is brought up, I tell my story of searching for a student accommodation in Venice that took me 3-4 weeks with many incidents of being ghosted by landlords as soon as they learned about my nationality. This is a real eye-opener for my fellow participants who assume everything is equal and inclusive in Europe. From the other side, certain European participants have a tendency to perceive the Southern Mediterranean region as backward, dangerous, with less culture and civilisation. I have seen some participants totally transform their views once they engage with their Middle Eastern and north African peers and see that they are well-educated, speak not only English and French perfectly, but also many variations of Arabic and lots of other local languages such as Tamazight. When they realise it isn’t all ‘camels and couscous’, it is transformative as stereotypes and assumptions are challenged on all sides.”

Case study 2: Ikram

Ikram is studying for a Master's in English Literature and she is also vice president of a local NGO which focuses on environmental issues, they clean cemeteries and work on health issues. She has travelled abroad to Spain several times for periods between 1 and 2 months, and spent 5 weeks in the US on an international exchange programme.
She joined EVE as a facilitator (after having taken part in the Connect Program in 2017), completing the facilitation training. She did two semesters of co-facilitation and then senior facilitation as well as coaching and a facilitator fellowship. She also trained to become a Debate Team Leader, and also facilitated some of the post-debate sessions in the Advocacy Training activity.

Her work with the NGO is very different from online facilitated dialogue which she says would not work with that group of people, as the NGO works with people who do not have qualifications or the English language required to take part but she takes what she learns from her facilitation experience to the work she does with the NGO.

“I think that facilitation is something that I take to my life because it just helps me become a better communicator with my NGO. We have a team and it's very important to facilitate conversations that we have with the team. Sometimes conflict arises, and then I just put my facilitator hat on and I just try to just resolve it [...] Also regarding leadership and how you’re not a boss, but you’re having other people take ownership. And it’s something that we’ve tried to do even with our projects.”

She is excited about the many different exchange activities available through EVE and how the field has grown. “If you just look at all the programs that exists it’s like you have a box, various Virtual Exchanges. And you as a participant, you can look at all of them and see which one fits you best. What I’m concerned about is that when, when teachers, professors or university coordinators choose which programmes they want to involve their students in and sometimes I think it should be student-based [...]”

She believes that the growing field where programmes also become designed specifically to address certain issues and audiences will increase the impact. Regarding her experience of the different activities - debate and dialogue - she sees the different skills and ways of thinking they address, but values what each brings and how they complement one another.

“There's a saying that my mom used to tell me, dress for the occasion. And it's like debate has its occasion and dialogue has its occasions as well. It doesn't mean that one of them is less important than the other. Both are important [...] So for debate, you get to test the idea ... when you're preparing for a debate, you don't just prepare your side, you prepare your side and the side of the opposition so that you're ready for everything. And in this process you learn a lot because sometimes you have this argument and you think that it's the greatest argument on Earth and you are very convinced by that side. And then you hear a counter argument and then again you change your mind [...] sometimes you form of a sort of dilemma [...] And this is where dialogue comes in. Because dialogue tells you that there shouldn’t really be only one side to side with. It’s about engaging with difference So you have two sides that look like they’re the opposite, but you could still make sense of both of them.”

Case Study 3: Aloisia

Aloisia is a language teacher at a university of applied sciences in Germany. She had had experience of VE before EVE, as a language teacher engaged in class to class partnerships. She heard about the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange project and training opportunities through a chance encounter with a colleague, and despite being an already experienced practitioner, she decided to follow the TEP training through which she “learnt more about the scope of activities in Virtual Exchange”. With her partner, she implemented several TEPs and integrated facilitated dialogue sessions within these, which she saw as bringing added value to their exchange.

“The facilitated sessions help the students get the idea of Virtual Exchange- they are used to me and Katja and our way of thinking but they really admired the sessions with the facilitator. It changes the style of seeing the telecollaboration from another point of view - so they work with the partner, they then discuss intercultural understanding but with the facilitator who is trained in it. I think they are very important that’s why I decided with Katja to ask for another official TEP because it helps yeah to improve the intercultural communication.”

Aloisia presented her exchange to the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange Community of implementers in a webinar session and also took part in other meetings where others presented their exchanges and experiences. She has also presented her experience at international conferences, and wrote a
case study which has recently been published. She is always interested in acquiring more knowledge and so started taking part in the training for online facilitated dialogue so she too could learn the facilitation skills that she has been observing.

She was the only one in her institution who was involved in Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange and had never tried to involve others. Her institution obtained substantial funding for internationalisation through a national funding programme promoted by DAAD, but because of Covid there was no incoming or outgoing mobility. Her institution approached her and asked her if she could suggest how the institution become more involved in Virtual Exchange, as it was seeking to develop a VE strategy. She says “The potential is huge - if you see what’s going on at the moment”. A lot of her colleagues already have international partners, and the institution has partnerships so she sees a lot of scope. She has supported the international office in finding opportunities for developing training at an institutional level, in which she also presented her exchange project. The institution is also now funding mentoring for educators interested in developing VE programmes. Furthermore the international office is developing a long term VE strategy which includes a “portfolio of Virtual Exchanges”, which will combine “ready made” exchanges for students as well as TEPs in specific subjects.

**Case study 4 - Stephan**

Stephan is a youth worker from the Netherlands and first became engaged with Virtual Exchange whilst completing an MA in Intercultural Management at the University of Bourgogne in France. He has had several international experiences, as a Bachelor’s student in the Netherlands he did a semester in Finland. He has also worked as an international volunteer serving various roles - facilitating learning for ESN, he has followed many international trainings on and for youth work - and has always been curious to learn more.

He completed the online facilitation course in Autumn 2019, which he heard about through the SALTO website where there was a call for new facilitators. It drew his attention because it was in line with his strong belief in the importance of facilitation for youth work, and his belief in social constructivist approaches to learning. He submitted a video application and was accepted directly for the Advanced Training.

Following the facilitation training he completed his practicum in spring 2020 co-facilitating for the 8-week Connect Global programme. Subsequently he participated in several Virtual Exchange activities including the iOOC Countering Hate Speech and the TEP C-STEP which brings together youth inside and outside of formal education. He also did an internship with an organisation providing training in Virtual Exchange because he wanted to get as much experience as possible in this field and work in the youth sector.

These were not his only online experiences, he has also done some other online courses on youth leadership, mentoring in volunteering activities, facilitation in volunteering activity, project management in Erasmus+. He was impressed with the quality of the courses, and how courses have been gamified to make them more engaging. However he feels that building relationships is more difficult if you only interact asynchronously, particularly for youth. You lack a sense of connection with other people, you don’t get direct notifications, people are not all online at same time and it’s hard. Virtual Exchange on the other hand allowed for the social contact that he experienced also in face to face youth work, though of course there are differences.

In his experience as a participant in Countering Hate Speech he experienced strong community building within his group, and this continued after the end of the exchange when they decided to make a Facebook group, where they would share all campaigns that they came up with - for advocating against hate speech. Quite a few pages and campaigns were set up. This is a form of activation, in his view. Other forms of activation are built into exchanges through activities which focus on advocacy.

He feels that there is a need for more active outreach and finding partner organisations to get marginalised youth involved. Making information and opportunities available in various ways. One of the main problems though is connectivity, how well, strong and widely available it is.
He is from the Netherlands and is lucky to be born and raised there - it has the highest internet penetration rate. Access to information about youth exchanges (physical and virtual) is difficult. He only heard about Erasmus+ 8 years ago and regrets not having found out about it sooner. If only he had seen or known about it earlier he could have done so much more! Now he is making use of every possibility that he has and sees the value of “giving forward” - he wants to provide such opportunities for more people, to bring them in to see and experience the opportunities. However he found his online internship, working as part of a remote team, quite challenging. The lack of face to face interaction did not help him in finding a good rhythm with his work. He learnt to deal with it, and create the mindset for it. It is important to keep in touch, share what you are working on with members of the team.

Case Study 5 - Tareq

Tareq is a young Syrian who took part in many of the Virtual Exchanges available through EVE. He recently finished his bachelor’s degree in Dentistry at Tishreen University in Latakia, Syria: “It’s a coastal city that has witnessed war for some time but now is relatively peaceful and stable”, he explains. There are however severe connectivity issues, and opportunities available to young people are limited.

“The 10-year crisis isolated Syria and Syrians from the outer world, even online. The discrimination Syrians are experiencing is massive, and thus, we as youth, lost our chance to connect or get our voices heard. It is harder than ever to get a visa to go abroad to pursue higher education. That’s why I loved Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange activities. I got to learn by watching top academics’ videos which boosted my dream of studying abroad. I met foreigners who are willing to listen and discuss different topics without any prior prejudice. I also got the chance to express myself proving that stereotyping Syrians for the situation the country is going through is wrong.”

Tareq joined the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange project before graduation. “Although my field of study seems irrelevant, I developed an interest in multiple other fields, to the point I may consider a career change in the future. Immigration, peace, and other social-related topics are one of those interests”. At the time, he had already taken part in dozens of online courses, as these are often made available freely to people in Syria, and managed to complete several of them despite connectivity-related difficulties. However, while he sees benefit in all of these learning opportunities, he values the human connections offered by Virtual Exchanges This is why he continued to engage in all the opportunities that became available to him over the course of the EVE initiative:

“Online course platforms, such as Coursera, EdX, are focused on the scientific material with limited to no interaction with tutors or fellow peers. The studying journey, for me, is somewhat boring since I have to watch many videos and do all the homework myself, with limited communicating or support. Therefore, as the course goes by, my enthusiasm decreases until I drop out. Another important difference between online courses and Virtual Exchange is that assignments of the courses test our ability to memorise information and understanding, but they rarely ask about our thoughts or reflections on the course contents.

Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange offers a completely different experience. Virtual Exchange aims to dive participants deeply into certain topics and then let them discuss it together, with the help of facilitators. The assignments are about reflecting on the topic or discovering people’s thoughts or opinions. However, the need to be present at a particular time each week proved to be difficult for me and for many other Syrians I know. Load shedding has been a part of Syrians’ life for a long time now. Not to mention, internet issues like slowness or limiting bandwidth”.

Tareq started his Virtual Exchange journey with Social Circles - Gender Equality, then went on to join the iOOC on “Gender In/Equality in Media and Journalism” and the flagship course “Cultural Encounters: Perspectives on Populism”. Following these experiences, and together with several other exchange alumni, he became an iOOC ambassador. In this new role, he worked on recruiting and supporting other participants for the Cultural Encounters and other iOOCs, joined regular meetings with fellow ambassadors and mentors, and has taken part in many online dissemination events. Regarding his motivation for this he said “My whole experience with EVE programmes was great, and I felt the need to share it with other people, especially in my community. There is no doubt that promoting dialogue through these courses would be of extreme importance, for the people and the country I live in.
However, language still proposes a major obstacle, not to mention, the usual difficulties related to the situation in the country, such as the poor internet connection and severe load shedding which would drastically affect the quality of the dialogue. Additionally, some people may not be open to discuss and share their thoughts about sensitive topics.

With more time on his hands since graduating, Tareq took part in the “Youth, Peace and Security”, Countering Hate Speech, and several other Social Circles. Most recently, he followed the “Introduction to Online Dialogue Facilitation” training as he feels he is now ready to become a Virtual Exchange facilitator.

**Case study 6 - Matteo**

Graduate in European Studies at the University of Padova, Matteo participated in an OFD as extra-curricular voluntary activity in spring 2018, Countering Hate Speech in spring 2019, Connect Express in spring 2020. Matteo was interviewed in 2018 and 2019 and also engaged through email exchanges.

Matteo has not taken part in Erasmus mobility projects because he did not want to risk delaying his graduation by spending an extended period of time abroad which may have meant taking fewer exams. However he is a strong advocate for making student mobility more inclusive as he recognizes the challenges that students with disabilities face regarding mobility. He himself is in a wheelchair and knows that Erasmus would not have been so easy to arrange.

He has taken part in several EVE activities. His first Virtual Exchange experience was in the 8-week OFD Connect programme in 2018 which for him was as an optional extra-curricular activity. He was interested in having a certificate for his cv, and also he was writing his thesis on refugees. He initially had trouble using the platform with the ‘talk’ button, so spent most of the time listening. However he found the experience very stimulating.

He subsequently took part in the iOOC Countering Hate Speech in 2019, after graduation. Again, the technology was not straightforward for him to use, and some specific tools are particularly difficult to use, however he found the support team to be accommodating in resolving the issues he was facing. He found the dialogue sessions in Hate Speech challenging at first, also as regards some of the attitudes towards hate speech and bullying that he encountered, and in fact considered dropping out of the programme. However with the support and encouragement of the facilitators and the local coordinator he continued with the exchange and became increasingly active, and said he would continue to engage with some of the participants. The most important things he said he learnt were about the conflicts in Syria and Palestine, about the issue of Hate Speech in the EU and some measures being taken by different states to address the problem. He said that his listening skills had been activated, and he applies what he has learnt through Virtual Exchange to inter--religious dialogue contexts. He was keen to continue with Virtual Exchange activities and would particularly like to see a Virtual Exchange on the environment, linking to the activism of Greta Thunberg.

In Spring 2020 he took part in the Connect Express programme again and he was enjoying the contacts he made through it. However he then stopped engaging as he started doing national voluntary service and could not cope with doing both activities.

In October 2020 he wrote to say he was thankful for his VE experiences “because I have found true friends and I am still in touch with some of them (and I can stay tuned on Palestine situation thanks to my sincere friend [...])"
Annex 8 Evaluations of training courses

TEP Basic Training (English)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How would you rate the following aspects of the training?</th>
<th>Very low</th>
<th>low</th>
<th>Neither low nor high</th>
<th>high</th>
<th>Very high</th>
<th>Total high</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of the trainers</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your learning experience during the synchronous live sessions</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your learning experience through written interactions</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course content</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall experience of the training</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 TEP basic training evaluation
To what extent do you agree with the following statements? Participating in this training helped me develop:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Total agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>communication skills</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>active listening skills</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>digital competences</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leadership skills</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>language skills</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intercultural awareness</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The training improved my understanding of Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I shared information about what I was learning in this training with colleagues, friends and/or family.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I discovered that some of my assumptions about people from other cultures were not true through participating in this training.</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The training improved my confidence to communicate or work in a culturally diverse setting.</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have acquired the necessary tools and knowledge to explain what Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange is to my colleagues.</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am interested in having further opportunities to engage with Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange activities.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 Further TEP basic training evaluation
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How would you rate the following aspects of the training?</th>
<th>Very low</th>
<th>low</th>
<th>Neither low nor high</th>
<th>high</th>
<th>Very high</th>
<th>Total high</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of the trainers</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your learning experience during the synchronous live sessions</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your learning experience through written interactions</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course content</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall experience of the training</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 TEP youth training evaluation
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Total agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active listening skills</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital competences</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership skills</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language skills</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercultural awareness</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The training improved my understanding of Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I shared information about what I was learning in this training with</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>colleagues, friends and/or family.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I discovered that some of my assumptions about people from other</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cultures were not true through participating in this training.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The training improved my confidence to communicate or work in a</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>culturally diverse setting.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have acquired the necessary tools and knowledge to explain what</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange is to my colleagues.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am interested in having further opportunities to engage with</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange activities.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7 Further TEP youth training evaluation
## TEP Advanced (English)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How would you rate the following aspects of the training?</th>
<th>Very low</th>
<th>low</th>
<th>Neither low nor high</th>
<th>high</th>
<th>Very high</th>
<th>Total high</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of the trainers</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your learning experience during the synchronous live sessions</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your learning experience through written interactions</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course content</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall experience of the training</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table B TEP advanced training evaluation
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Total agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent do you agree with the following statements? Participating in this training helped me develop:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communication skills</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>active listening skills</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>digital competences</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leadership skills</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>language skills</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intercultural awareness</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The training improved my understanding of Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I shared information about what I was learning in this training with colleagues, friends and/or family.</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I discovered that some of my assumptions about people from other cultures were not true through participating in this training.</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The training improved my confidence to communicate or work in a culturally diverse setting.</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have acquired the necessary tools and knowledge to explain what Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange is to my colleagues.</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am interested in having further opportunities to engage with Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange activities.</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9 Further TEP advanced training evaluation
Pourriez-vous évaluer les aspects suivants de la formation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very low</th>
<th>low</th>
<th>Neither low nor high</th>
<th>high</th>
<th>Very high</th>
<th>Total high</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualité des formateurs</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Votre expérience d’apprentissage pendant les sessions synchrones (plateforme de vidéoconférence Zoom)</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Votre expérience d’apprentissage à travers les interactions écrites</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le contenu du cours</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Votre expérience globale de la formation</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10 TEP French basic training evaluation
Dans quelle mesure êtes-vous d'accord avec les énoncés suivants: Participer à cette formation m’a aidé (e) à développer des:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compétences en communication</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Total agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aptitudes à l'écoute active</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compétences numériques</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compétences de leadership</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compétences langagières</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscience interculturelle</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**La formation a amélioré ma compréhension de l’Echange Virtuel Erasmus+**

| 0%               | 0%             | 0%       | 36%       | 64%   | 100%          |

**J’ai partagé l’information sur ce que j’apprenais dans cette formation avec des collègues, des amis et/ou de la famille.**

| 0%               | 0%             | 6%       | 52%       | 42%   | 94%           |

**En participant à cette formation, j’ai découvert que certaines de mes idées préconçues sur des personnes de culture différente étaient fausses.**

| 12%             | 18%            | 55%      | 9%        | 6%    | 15%           |

**La formation m’a aidé (e) à devenir plus à l’aise dans ma communication ou mon travail dans un environnement multiculturel.**

| 0%               | 3%             | 55%      | 36%       | 6%    | 42%           |

**J’ai acquis les outils pour expliquer à mes collègues ce qu’est un programme d’échange virtuel Erasmus+**

| 0%               | 0%             | 9%       | 61%       | 30%   | 91%           |

**Les connaissances et/ou les compétences que j’ai acquises pourraient être appliquées dans d’autres contextes.**

| 0%               | 0%             | 6%       | 48%       | 45%   | 94%           |

Table 11 Further TEP French basic training evaluation
Debates (Advocacy Training)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How would you rate the following aspects of the training?</th>
<th>Very low</th>
<th>low</th>
<th>Neither low nor high</th>
<th>high</th>
<th>Very high</th>
<th>Total high</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of the trainers</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your learning experience during the synchronous live sessions</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your learning experience through written interactions</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course content</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall experience of the training</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12 AT training evaluation
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Total agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active listening skills</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital competences</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership skills</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language skills</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercultural awareness</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The training improved my understanding of Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I shared information about what I was learning in this training with colleagues, friends and/or family.</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I discovered that some of my assumptions about people from other cultures were not true through participating in this training.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The training improved my confidence to communicate or work in a culturally diverse setting.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have acquired the necessary tools and knowledge to explain what Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange is to my colleagues.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am interested in having further opportunities to engage with Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange activities.</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13 Further AT training evaluation
### ALL trainings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent do you agree with the following statements? Participating in this training helped me develop:</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Total agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>communication skills</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>active listening skills</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>digital competences</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leadership skills</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>language skills</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intercultural awareness</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The training improved my understanding of Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I shared information about what I was learning in this training with colleagues, friends and/or family.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I discovered that some of my assumptions about people from other cultures were not true through participating in this training.</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The training improved my confidence to communicate or work in a culturally diverse setting.</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have acquired the necessary tools and knowledge to design and implement an Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange.</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have acquired the necessary tools and knowledge to explain what Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange is to my colleagues.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am interested in having further opportunities to engage with Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange activities.</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15 further all training evaluation
## Annex 9: Completion rates for TEP trainings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course name</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>No. of courses held</th>
<th>Trainees</th>
<th>Badges awarded (per year per course type)</th>
<th>Completion rates (per year per course type)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TEP Basic Training HEI (English)</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>4 weeks</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>4 weeks</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>4 weeks</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEP Basic Training HEI (French)</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>4 weeks</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>4 weeks</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEP Basic Training for youth workers (English)</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>6 weeks</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>6 weeks</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>6 weeks</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEP Basic Training for youth workers (Arabic)</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>4 weeks</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Training HEI (English)</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>4 weeks</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>6 weeks</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>6 weeks</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Training HEI (French)</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>6 weeks</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 16 TEP training completion rates
Annex 10: EVE Facilitators Code of Conduct

As EVE facilitators and Virtual Exchange practitioners, this code of conduct represents our commitment to the professional standards and ethics that guide our involvement in the implementation of Virtual Exchange programs. In recognition of the importance of our commitment to respectful exchange, and in accepting a personal obligation to our profession, its members and the communities we serve, we do hereby commit ourselves to the highest ethical and professional conduct and agree to:

Role of the Facilitator

- Uphold facilitator roles and responsibilities to the best of my ability, namely:
  - Enhance the quality of communication
  - Ensure equal participation amongst students
  - Mitigate and manage challenging or disruptive dynamics
  - Facilitate mutual learning between participants
  - Promote critical thinking and critical awareness in and between participants
  - Reflect the content and process of the discussion as participants perceive it.
  - Empower participants to activate their experiences maintain their new networks

- Maintain facilitator neutrality. Neutrality is essential in the exercise of the function of facilitator. We withhold our own personal opinions or knowledge about contentious political or cultural issues, refrain sharing personal information and experiences, and do not favor any particular opinions during the exchanges.

- Display multipartiality as a practical extension of a facilitators neutrality. We offer all participants equal opportunities for voice and participation, and we facilitate the introduction of alternative views when they are not voiced or not present among the participants.

- Treat fairly all participants and to not engage in any acts or suggestions of discrimination based on race, religion, gender, ability, age, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

- Use processes, methods and tools skillfully and responsibly and in alignment with the needs of the group.

- Refrain from using our position of perceived power and trust to secure privilege, gain, or undue benefit.

- Maintain confidentiality of agreed upon material and bonds of trust with our groups and individual participants. Except in situations of imminent danger or threats, we respect the privacy and intimacy of dialogues and don’t divulge the content therein or identifying information about the participants.

Quality of the Process

- Respect the goals and autonomy of the groups we facilitate. We seek the group’s ownership in the process and their commitment to participate. We do not impose anything that risks the welfare and dignity of the participants or the freedom of choice of the group.

- Create safe albeit challenging spaces. We make great efforts to create environments of respect and safety where all participants feel that they can contribute freely, and we encourage critical thinking about topics, perspectives, and sources of information.

- Safeguard the process wherein participants are the main recipients and the main drivers of knowledge. Where participants are the experts in their own experiences, we promote collective-learning through the sharing of personal experiences. In the ever present question of fact versus opinion, we encourage the primacy of experience, but when relevant also encourage the critical examination of sources of information as a part of one’s personal experiences.
• Rely on the ethics and philosophy of dialogue programs, in which we foster a safe atmosphere, cooperation, respectful exchange, genuine inquiry, open questions, and voiced differences.

• Recognize and guide the management of conflict. We see the positive potential of conflict and facilitate our groups through its constructive engagement when it arises.

• Adhere to basic ground rules of dialogue: Authenticity and respect; no verbal violence or abuse; and assumed confidentiality unless mutually agreed otherwise in addition to other specific elicited ground rules from our groups.

**Reflective Practice and the Advancement of Virtual Exchange**

• Engage in reflective practice. We self-evaluate our performance and continuously strive to improve our facilitation skills and knowledge.

• Maintain and improve technical competence and to undertake professional tasks for others only if qualified by training or experience

• Seek, accept, and offer honest criticism of work or contributions, acknowledge and correct errors, and credit properly the contributions of others.

• Assist colleagues in their professional development

• Value collaboration with each other and be ready to exchange knowledge, experiences, and resources. Providing each other with feedback and guidance on best practices and how to enhance the quality of our work is a part of the mission of every VE practitioner.

**Program Implementation**

• Honor programmatic commitments. We recognize that our students, co-facilitators, and program implementers depend on our role as a facilitators, and we take that role seriously.

• Retain the right to withdraw from the mission should our safety be at risk or should we feel unable to fulfill our role and respect for the professional standards aforementioned.
**Annex 11: Facilitators level of engagement**

This badge recognises the ability to lead and facilitate constructive online cross-cultural dialogue. The owner of this badge has:

- Successfully completed the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange Advanced Dialogue Facilitation Training programme and received a ready-to-facilitate assessment result from trainer.

- Successfully completed the facilitation practicum by providing 8+ hours of facilitation, within one year of completion of the advanced training.

- Ensured programme goals were achieved by developing individualized session plans that address each groups respective needs and dynamics.

- Demonstrated good command of facilitation skills, and ability to lead a dialogue group successfully.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facilitator Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Facilitator</strong></td>
<td>This badge awarded to trained facilitators who are able to act as an online solo-facilitator and demonstrate advanced use of facilitation skills in achieving overall Virtual Exchange goals. The owner of this badge has:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Facilitated 16+ hours as a solo or mentor facilitator</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Ensured programme goals were achieved by developing individualised session plans that address each groups respective needs and dynamics</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Demonstrated nuanced understanding and use of facilitation skills inclusive of relationship building, active listening to maximise each group's learning</td>
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<td>• Demonstrated continuous ability to learn and grow as a facilitator based on feedback</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Senior Facilitator</strong></td>
<td>This badge recognises the successful completion of Facilitation Fellowship with a Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange programme. The owner of this badge has:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Successfully solo-facilitated 60 hours+ as a facilitation fellow.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ensured programme goals were achieved by developing individualized session plan that address each groups respective needs and dynamics.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Demonstrated exceptional facilitation skills inclusive of relationship building, active listening and ability to foster open communication.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Actively contributed to Virtual Exchange systems for ensuring high quality programming through intensive facilitation, observation, and contributions to strategy.</td>
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<td>Demonstrated a strong capacity for proactive problem solving in the face of challenges.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Facilitation Fellow</strong></td>
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This badge recognises the successful completion of coaching requirements with an Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange programme, the owner of this badge has:

- Completed and participated in a two-hour coach induction
- Coached facilitators through at least one round of Virtual Exchange activity with Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange
- Mentored and supported the development of facilitators’ skills by observing a minimum of 1 group per week during the programme and submitted quality feedback to facilitators.
## Annex 12: Blended TEPs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEP Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>eTandem</strong>&lt;br&gt;University of Padova with incoming and outgoing Erasmus students</td>
<td>This is a pre-mobility exchange set up by Language Centre and International Relations to prepare students for mobility to the University of Padova, and to prepare students from the university of Padova for outgoing mobility and to improve the language and intercultural competence of students at the University of Padova.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Immersive Telepresence in Theatre Project</strong>&lt;br&gt;University of Coventry (UK) and Tampere University (Finland)</td>
<td>In the Immersive Telepresence in Theatre project, two identical spaces, linked by H.323 videoconferencing technology give the participants the impression of a shared space. The project uses existing pedagogical practices but re-applies them to a digital setting with the teaching and rehearsal of theatre. This intensive 3-week online exchange project was supposed to culminate with UK students visiting Tampere, but this was cancelled due to Covid.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Romania and Hungary 100 years later</strong>&lt;br&gt;</td>
<td>The way two important historical events are remembered 100 after they took place and the implications of remembrance for the two societies. The students worked online throughout the semester in groups of three (2 students from Romania and one from Hungary) on their own project regarding the way Trianon and the Great Unification are remembered in art, politics and advertising in Romania and Hungary. The group also took part in a facilitated session and in 2018 visited each others’ universities. During the visits students made joint presentations of their Virtual Exchange research projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pathways to Leadership</strong>&lt;br&gt;Breakthrough (Netherlands) and Associazione Interculturale Nur (Italy)**</td>
<td>This blended Virtual Exchange built on a project two partner youth organisations had already developed for youth workers to develop leadership skills in youth work. It combined a Virtual Exchange component with 2 residential training courses which were funded by Erasmus+. 24 participants from 12 different countries were involved in the project which started in September 2018. An online session was set up for participants to get to know one another and gain understanding of the project before the first residential training course in Sardinia. After the first meeting participants had regular Virtual Exchange sessions supported by Erasmus+ facilitators in order to strengthen their relationships with peers and to share their experiences of implementing the leadership skills they were developing in their community work. The second residential training took place in February 2019 and the project ended with a final Virtual Exchange session after this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DIREMED</strong></td>
<td>DIRE-MED (<a href="https://www.diremedproject.eu/">https://www.diremedproject.eu/</a>) is an EU-funded project that promotes dialogue between Mediterranean countries. This TEP was seen as a preparation for the mobility the young project participants took part in in Tangiers at the end of April 2019. Two sessions were used for ‘getting to know’ each other and issues of identity, culture, tradition and stereotyping were explored and discussed before meeting, and one de-briefing session was held after the mobility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NICE (Network for Intercultural Competence to facilitate Entrepreneurship)</strong>&lt;br&gt;8 European universities&lt;br&gt;Funded as strategic partnership</td>
<td>The NICE network developed a programme to enhance students’ employability by helping them to develop intercultural competencies and entrepreneurial skills, developing their ability to apply these skills to global and societal challenges by working together in virtual transnational teams. Students followed online modules, and in small teams developed a solution to a global challenge. The teams were supported by trained facilitators. There was a one-week summer school for a selection of students in 2019, this had to be cancelled in 2020 but an online summer school was held.</td>
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GET INVOLVED
For more information, please consult: www.europa.eu/youth/erasmusvirtual

Funded by the Erasmus+ Programme

Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange Consortium: