

Analysis of the needs, requirements, and expectations of target groups



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Questionnaire Report

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Authors

- Radka Hanzlová
 - Institute of Sociology, Czech Academy of Sciences
 - E-mail: radka.hanzlova@soc.cas.cz
- Diana Kalášková
 - University of Pardubice
 - E-mail: diana.kalaskova@upce.cz

Contributors from Wide AcrossEU Team:

- Monika Vejchodová
 - University of Pardubice
 - E-mail: monika.vejchodova@upce.cz
- Beti Kostadinovska Dimitrovska
 - Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje
 - E-mail: beti.kostadinovska@ukim.edu.mk
- Yuliya Bogoyavlenska
 - Zhytomir Polytechnic State University
 - E-mail: yubogoyavlenska@gmail.com
- Marlene Kohllechner-Autto
 - University of Lapland
 - E-mail: marlene.kohllechner-autto@ulapland.fi
- Pierre-Andre Forest
 - University of Lapland
 - E-mail: pierre-andre.forest@ulapland.fi
- Agneta Hånell Plamboeck
 - Umeå University
 - E-mail: agneta.plamboeck@umu.se



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Basic Information

Project number:	101158561
Project name:	WIDEn performance in research and innovation capacity and competence Across EU
Project acronym:	WIDE AcrossEU
Project starting date:	1 May 2024
Project duration:	40 months
Project Coordinator:	University of Pardubice (abbr. UPCE)
Project Partners:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje (abbr. UKIM)• Zhytomyr Polytechnic State University (abbr. ZPSU)• University of Lapland (abbr. ULAPLAND)• Umeå University (abbr. UMU)

Project Summary

Our project represents the opportunity to strengthen institutions from Widening countries and upscale them to a higher level through capacity, skills and competence building and networking actions. The consortium consisting of partner institutions from Czechia, North Macedonia, Ukraine, Finland and Sweden have diverse experience with participation in Horizon Europe (HE), Synergic EU R&I funding, Smart Specialisation Clusters and other international R&I funding schemes. The key objective of the project “WIDE AcrossEU” is to move the participants from Widening countries (the core group: 3 higher education institutions from the Czech Republic, North Macedonia and Ukraine) who are formerly current single beneficiaries of regional funding programmes (ERDF, IPA, Interreg and similar investments for R&I infrastructure), to a higher level and prepare them for wider and more successful participation in direct EU funding programmes.

The specific objectives, which are: 1. To map the needs and requirements of target groups in Widening partners, 2. To strengthen the competitiveness of target groups in Widening countries by acquiring new transferable skills for R&I staff, 3. Access to networks and partnerships to secure more successful proposal and create a base for lead partner roles for Widening partners, 4. To better use R&I infrastructure funded under ERDF or similar investments, 5. To create strategies for R&I and Human Resources, 6. To improve access to excellent European R&I networks and communities.

These will be achieved through the following work packages: WP1: Need of analysis for capacity and competence building, WP2: Acquisition of new transferable skills, WP3: Exploitation of R&I funding opportunities & networks, WP4: R&I valorisation, policy support and synergies, WP5: Dissemination, communication and exploitation, WP6: Management and coordination.



About the Project

As we all know—and many of us have experienced—creating and submitting a project proposal can be a daunting task. There are many challenges, from navigating complex requirements to lacking proper guidance and support. These difficulties can discourage even the most motivated researchers from pursuing their ideas. This is precisely what inspired the WIDE AcrossEU project and what it aims to change. WIDE AcrossEU intends to strengthen the competitiveness of higher education institutions (HEIs) in Widening countries by not only identifying the most pressing issues that hinder project success, but also by providing tailored training and support.

WIDE AcrossEU consortium consists of three institutions from Widening countries: Czechia–UPCE, North Macedonia–UKIM, Ukraine–ZPSU, and two from non-widening countries Finland–ULAPLAND and Sweden–UMU. The partners from non-Widening countries have diverse experience with participation in HE, Synergic EU R&I funding, Smart Specialisation Clusters and other international funding schemes. This experience ensures that the project offers concrete strategies to improve proposal quality and success rates, fostering a new level of confidence and competence among participating institutions. The partnership has a clear focus: while Widening partners aim to transition from participants to coordinators in EU-funded projects, the non-widening partners were chosen for their proven track records in EU R&I finance, research infrastructure utilisation, HR management, and Smart Specialisation. The consortium is dedicated to leveraging this call to facilitate broader access to EU funding programmes, including Horizon Europe, Life, Digital Europe, and Interreg.

WIDE AcrossEU aims to strengthen the competitiveness of higher education institutions (HEIs) in Widening countries by identifying the most pressing issues that hinder project success and providing tailored training and support. This will also lead to opportunities to create multiple pathways to synergy, strengthening institutions from Widening countries and upscaling them to higher levels through capacity, skills and competence-building and networking actions. A vital step in achieving this was understanding the specific challenges the Widening institutions faced. To this end, the project conducted a needs assessment through two comprehensive surveys:

- Questionnaire I: Project Acquisition and Management Training Needs Analysis
- Questionnaire II: Analysis of Systems and Structures in Current Project Support

These surveys, distributed across the Widening partners, UPCE, UKIM, and ZPSU, aimed to identify the areas where academic and administrative staff required the most support. The findings provided a coherent picture of the areas that need the most support through targeted interventions, training programmes, and strategic advice. By identifying the most problematic issues that deter academics from submitting HE proposals, we can develop our strategy for strengthening the competitiveness of universities in the Widening countries.

Through the surveys, we identified in what areas the university members need the most support, what kind and form of training they would welcome, and what they think is lacking at their respective universities. These questionnaires form the basis for training plans to boost the capacity and competencies of the three core Widening partner institutions at the university and individual levels. This analysis serves as a foundation for the participants from non-Widening countries, ULAPLAND and UMU, to create a plan for their co-provision of training, strategic advice, and ways in which they can further share their experiences in synergic funding, as well as roles in smart specialisation priorities setting and implementation. The results from these surveys will guide the development of the training programme comprising 10–15 thematic events and courses.

These targeted efforts will improve the immediate competitiveness of the participating HEIs and establish a sustainable framework for future success in direct EU funding programmes. By addressing the gaps identified in WP1, WIDE AcrossEU lays the groundwork for subsequent work packages (WP2, WP3, and WP4) and contributes to the project's overarching goal: empowering institutions in Widening countries to thrive internationally.



Methodology

Following the project's objective to strengthen the competitiveness of Widening partner institutions, the methodology involved conducting two tailored questionnaires to assess current challenges and training needs. To identify the most pressing challenges faced by university staff in the creation, preparation, and submission of project proposals, two comprehensive surveys were conducted at the Widening partner universities: UPCE (Czechia), UKIM (North Macedonia), and ZPSU (Ukraine). These surveys were a collaborative effort developed through multiple online and in-person discussions among all project partners. The questionnaires were hosted and managed on a website maintained by UPCE and were pre-announced during meetings at each university to encourage participation. The questionnaires were open from 1.10.2024 to 3.11.2024. All replies include the identification of the respondents' home institution and their position.

To ensure privacy and compliance with ethical standards, respondents were guaranteed complete anonymity, with no replies traceable back to individuals. The management of the data collected adhered strictly to EU GDPR guidelines (as detailed in the project's Data Management Plan). Thus, the information collected was handled securely and in compliance with European, national, and internal legislative regulations.

Questionnaire I: Project acquisition and project management training needs analysis

This questionnaire was aimed at the broadest target group, including:

- PhD students
- Academic staff
- Researchers (from early-stage researchers to high-ranked professors)
- Project Support staff and other relevant administrative staff (engaged with pre-award and post-award management and actions related to EU and international funding applications).

This questionnaire intended to map the respondents' previous and current experience with projects, to indicate their interest in coordinating projects or being a partner in a project, and to identify the types of training that would be most beneficial for them. By doing so, it sought to pinpoint capacity-building opportunities and preferred formats for training programmes.

Questionnaire II: Analysis of the systems and structures in current project support

The target group for this survey included the following:

- PhD students
- Academic staff
- Researchers

The Project Support staff and Administrative Staff were excluded from participating in this survey since it focused on evaluating the services and support provided by the universities. Respondents were asked to specify areas where additional assistance was required, providing insights into the institutional structures and processes that need improvement.

Questionnaire Distribution and Participation

Each institution was responsible for distributing the questionnaires to its target audience. The goal was to collect at least 50 responses for Questionnaire I and 300 responses for Questionnaire II, a benchmark that was exceeded across all institutions.

At UPCE, the questionnaires were distributed via the university's email system. A personal invitation to participate was sent on 4.10.2024, followed by a reminder on 22.10.2024 to encourage additional



responses. This approach proved effective, with UPCE collecting a total of 170 responses: 116 for Questionnaire I and 54 for Questionnaire II.

At UKIM, the questionnaires were sent to personal e-mails of the target groups through the University Computer Centre internal system, followed by shared information as a reminder during the Rector's Board meeting on 22.10.2024 to be shared at the units' level. This methodology enabled collecting a total of 210 responses, 104 for Questionnaire I and 106 for Questionnaire II.

At ZPSU, links to the questionnaires were distributed via the university's internal system, also within closed channels, to ensure direct and efficient targeting of the targeted audience. Participation was initiated with an invitation, followed by the project team's continuous monitoring over the subsequent period to address any possible local technical issues. This approach made it possible to have the results on 11.10.2024, gathering 260 responses: 136 for Questionnaire I and 124 for Questionnaire II.

Institution	Responses to QI	Responses to QII	Total QI + QII
UPCE	115	54	169
UKIM	104	106	210
ZPSU	136	124	260
Total Responses	355	284	639

Objectives of the analysis

The primary objective of this analysis is to establish a foundation for a tailored and comprehensive training and knowledge transfer programme that meets the needs and expectations identified through the questionnaires. By targeting experienced and high-potential researchers as well as junior researchers and administrative staff, the analysis seeks to strengthen their capacity to successfully participate in Horizon Europe (HE) calls for 2025 and 2026–2027 as partners and potential project coordinators.

The analysis plays a pivotal role in (1) identifying the needs for skills, capacity, and training at consortium, institutional, and individual levels; and (2) designing a targeted training programme that meets these needs while incorporating activities that enhance access to funding opportunities, strengthen networking capabilities, and facilitate strategic proposal planning for Widening partners.

This analysis is essential to the overall success of the WIDE AcrossEU project, as it maps out and identifies:

1. Skills, capacity, and competence needs among the Widening partners to ensure that the planned training regime (WP2) addresses the actual challenges at consortium, institutional, and individual levels.

Mapping the knowledge, skills and experience in areas such as:

- a. Proposal writing.
 - b. Project coordination and communication.
 - c. R&I and project management.
 - d. Financial and HR management.
 - e. Navigating grant programmes supporting international R&I cooperation.
2. The current systems and structures for project support within the participating institutions, including the organisation of project support offices and the collaboration between rectorates and faculties:



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- a. Examining the organisation of project support offices.
- b. Evaluating collaboration between faculty-level administrations and project support offices.
- c. Identifying best practices and areas for improvement.

These insights will ensure that the training and capacity-building initiatives are aligned with the actual needs of the consortium. We expect it will lead to improved outreach to international networks and increase the competitiveness of Widening partner institutions by addressing specific skills gaps and promoting knowledge transfer. This will hopefully result in the successful submission of multiple project proposals as coordinators and as participants in upcoming HE calls.



Results of Questionnaire I:

Project acquisition and project management training needs analysis

Brief summary

- A total of 355 respondents completed the questionnaire, of which 115 (32%) were from UPCE, 104 (29%) from UKIM, and 139 (39%) from ZPSU. For more on the structure of the research sample, see Tables 1 and 2.
- Almost half of the respondents (49%) have previous experience with international cooperation project/s. In comparison with universities, significantly more respondents from UKIM (64%) have this experience compared to UPCE (44%) and ZPSU (43%).
- If the respondents have previous experience with international cooperation projects, it is mainly from Erasmus+ (61%), followed by Horizon Europe (22%). Regarding the role in the project, the most frequent was “partner in the project/s” (37%).
- In terms of evaluating their proficiency in some areas, respondents can confidently do on their own: understanding project calls (15%), international cooperation/partnership development (14%) and project management skills (14%). On the other hand, almost one-third of respondents struggle with funding & tender portals usage skills (30%) and cannot do project administration (32%) without full support.
- Almost one-third of respondents (31%) know of a funding instrument they would like to apply for, with Horizon Europe being the most common (79%).
- One-third of respondents (33%) know of a funding instrument they would like more training in, particularly in Horizon Europe (81%).
- In terms of participation in an international Research and Innovation cooperation project in the years 2025-2028, more than three quarters (76%) would like to participate as a partner in a project and 17% as the project coordinator. Just under a fifth (18%) of respondents are not interested in such participation.
- Regarding the format for attaining information and skills in R&I projects, respondents preferred online training the most (60%), followed by in-person training (46%) and mentoring and blended learning (both 43%).
- Nearly three-quarters of respondents (71%) would be willing to participate in on-site training abroad to gain information and skills to professionalise their ability to prepare R&I projects. Of these applicants, almost all (86%) would be willing to travel and spend some time abroad on a shadowing/mentoring programme, with the ideal length being 3-5 working days (53%) or 6-10 working days (41%).
- Respondents do not have one preferred format of training sessions: half (50%) prefer blended learning, 45% online and 43% in person.
- In terms of the kind of training session, short sessions on specific topics (1-2 hours) (59%) and half-day sessions (3-5 hours) (45%) are most preferred.
- Respondents clearly mentioned mornings as the best time for training sessions (57%), while weekends were the least popular (15%).
- Only one-fifth of respondents (20%) have previously attended training programmes or workshops aimed at promoting their knowledge/skills in R&I projects.



Questionnaire Results

Table 1: Structure of research sample

	Frequency	Percentage
N (total)	355	100
University		
University of Pardubice (UPCE)	115	32
Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje (UKIM)	104	29
Zhytomyr Polytechnic State University (ZPSU)	136	39
Current position at university (more options possible)		
PhD student	63	18
Academic staff member/Researcher	238	67
Non-academic staff working in Project Support	41	12
All other non-academic staff	26	7
Gender		
Man	126	35
Woman	215	61
Do not want to specify	14	4

Table 2: Number of working years (N = 302)

	in current position (%)	at the university (%)	in research (%)
not relevant	3	2	17
0–2 years	21	12	6
3–5 years	21	14	12
6–7 years	7	7	5
8–10 years	7	5	9
11–12 years	4	6	6
12 and more years	37	54	45



A. Knowledge and Skills Assessment

Figure 1: Do you have previous experience with international cooperation project/s (%) (N = 355)

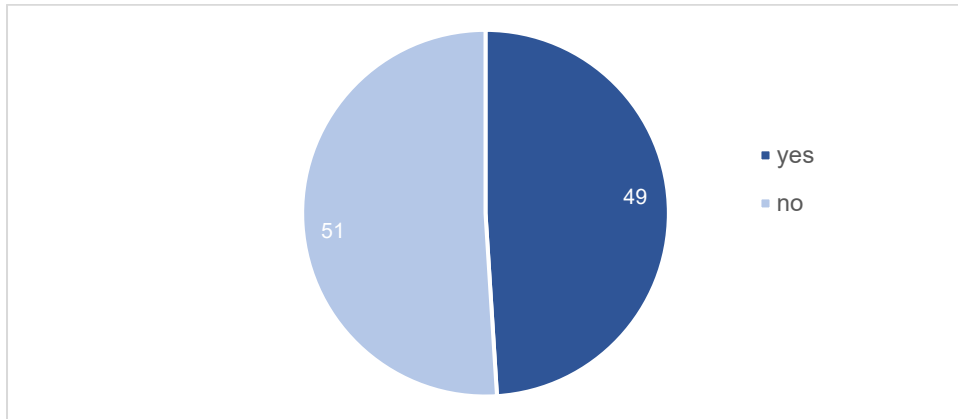
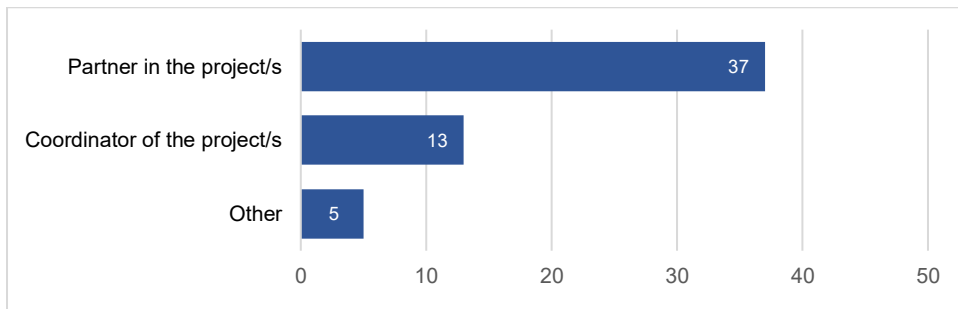


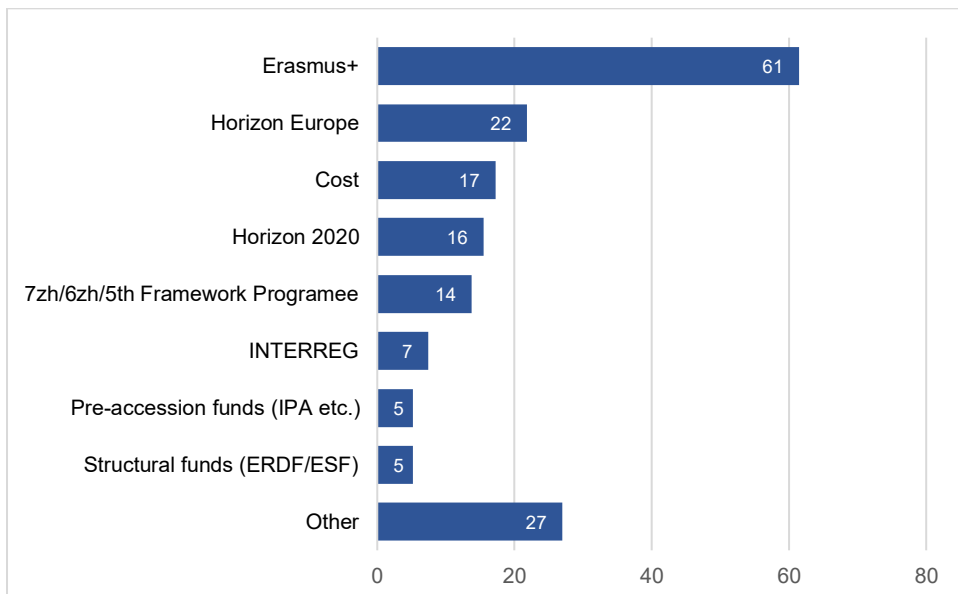
Figure 2: What was the role of the University in the projects? (%) (N = 174)



Note. Only respondents who have previous experience with international cooperation project/s.

Of the other responses ($n = 19$), "accountant" and "participant" were repeated twice.

Figure 3: The programme/s of the projects (%) (N = 174)



Note. Only respondents who have previous experience with international cooperation project/s.



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Of the other responses ($n = 47$), the following were repeated multiple times: 8x Tempus, 4x Visegrad Fund, 3x GAČR, DBU (Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt) and EEA Grants, 2x CIP and COSME.

Table 3: The approximate period of the project/s implementation (Projects in total: N = 332)

	Frequency
Started before 2015 (ongoing and completed)	76
Started between 2016-2020 (ongoing and completed)	69
Started between 2021-2023	
Currently ongoing	55
Already completed	78
Started in 2024	
Currently ongoing	30
Already completed	11
Planned to start in 2015	13

Note. Only respondents who have previous experience with international cooperation project/s.

Figure 4: Previous experience with international cooperation project/s by university (%) (N = 355)

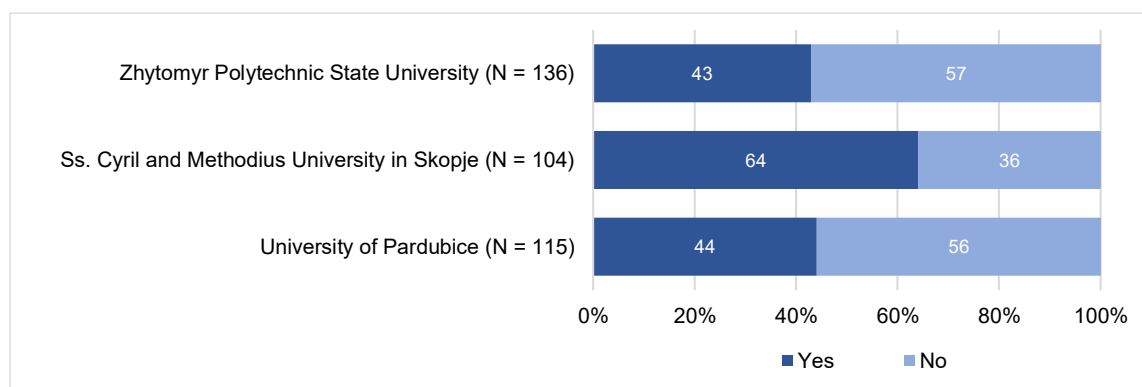
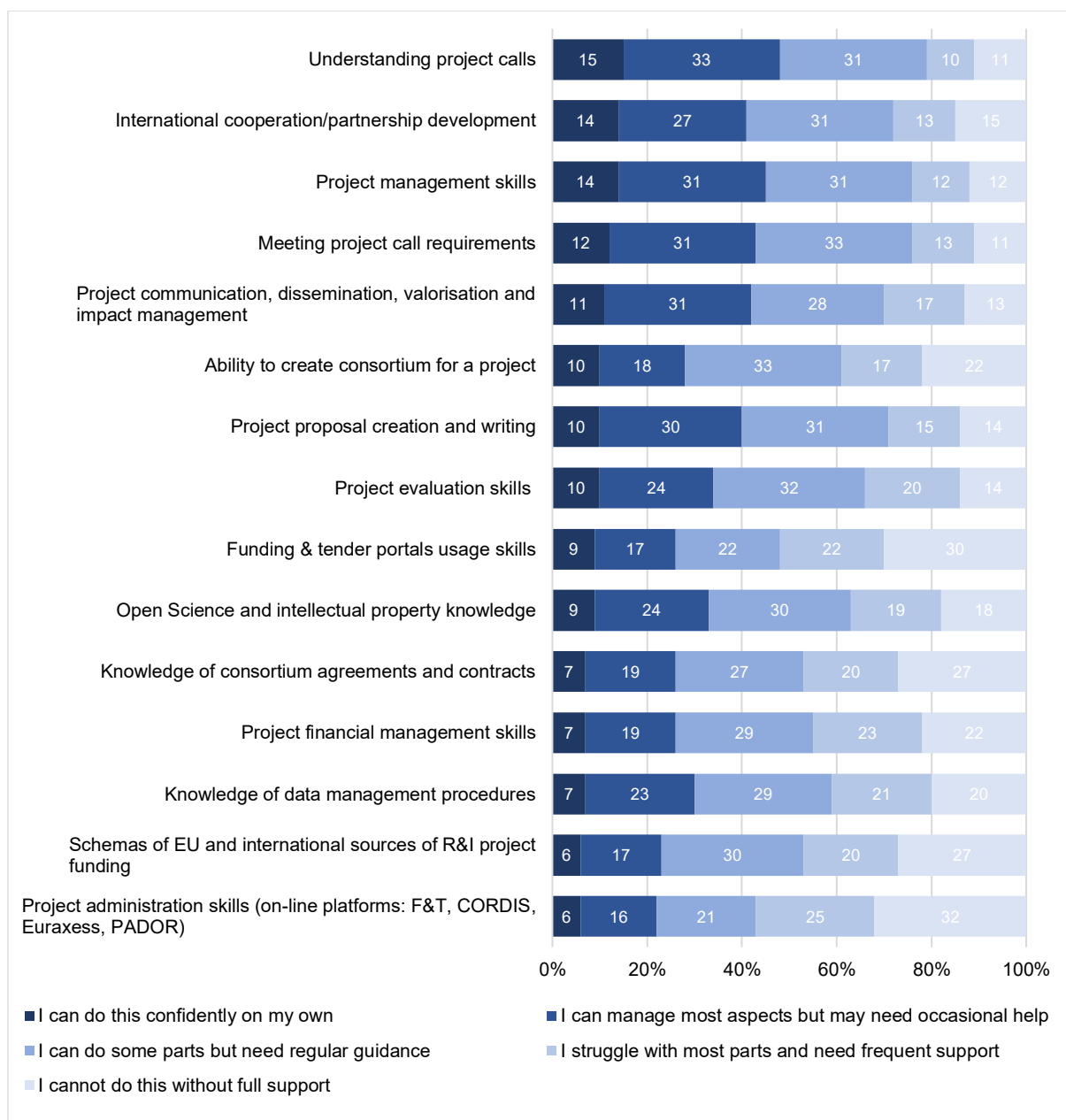




Figure 5: Evaluation of own proficiency in some areas (%) (N = 355)



Through an open question, respondents were invited to share their own needs as answers to the question: “Regarding project preparation or implementation/management, what area would you appreciate more training in?” The following Table 4 shows the responses that were repeated multiple times. There were 260 responses in total.



Table 4: Areas for training that respondents would most appreciate (n = 260)

	Frequency
Financial management	38
Preparing and writing a (strong/successful) proposal	36
Project management	19
Creation of a project (proposal) including examples	18
Online platforms (FTO Portal)	12
Project administration	10
Finding the (right) calls; Project implementation and dissemination; Everything – all aspects	8
Understanding the calls – choosing the right one; Data management procedures	7
contracts (Grant Agreement, Consortium Agreement); Project planning	6
Communication within the project; Project evaluation; Fitting evaluation criteria; Open Science	5
Project; International cooperation; Creating a consortium	4
Data Management Plan; Project Reporting; Basic training; Schemas of EU and international sources of R&I project funding; Financial planning; Tracking and reporting finances; Intellectual property; No training – full support required	3
Project coordination; Risk management; Gender diversity; Impact management	2

Figure 6: Do you know of (a) funding instrument/s you would like to apply for? (%) (N = 355)

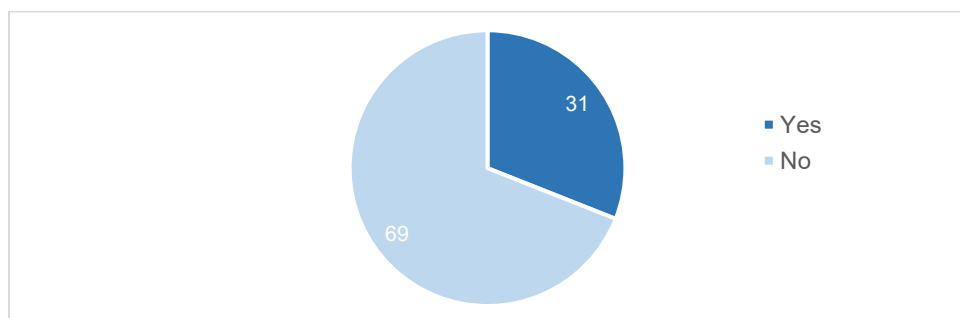
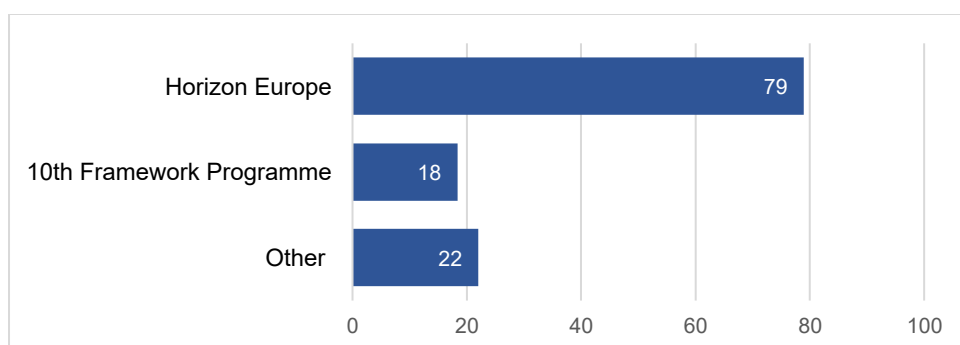


Figure 7: Specification the funding instrument/s (%) (N = 109)



Of the other responses (n = 32), the following were repeated multiple times: 7x ERASMUS+, 6x COST, 3x Czech Science Foundation, Creative Europe and IPA, 2x INTERREG.



Figure 8: Do you know of (a) funding instrument/s you would like more training in? (%) (N = 355)

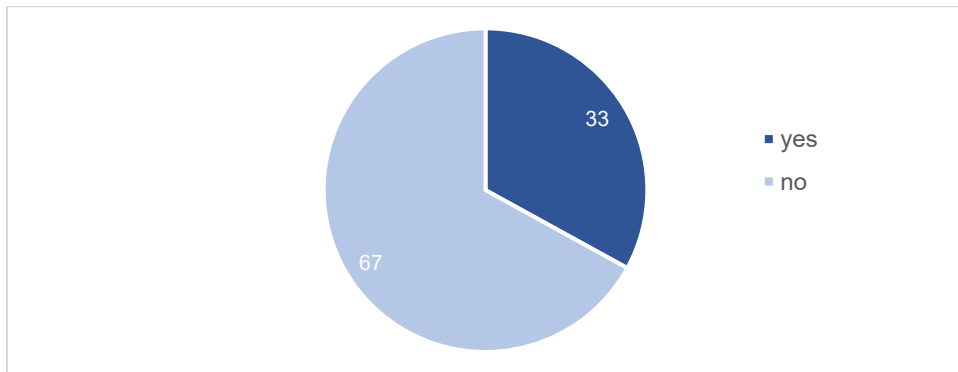
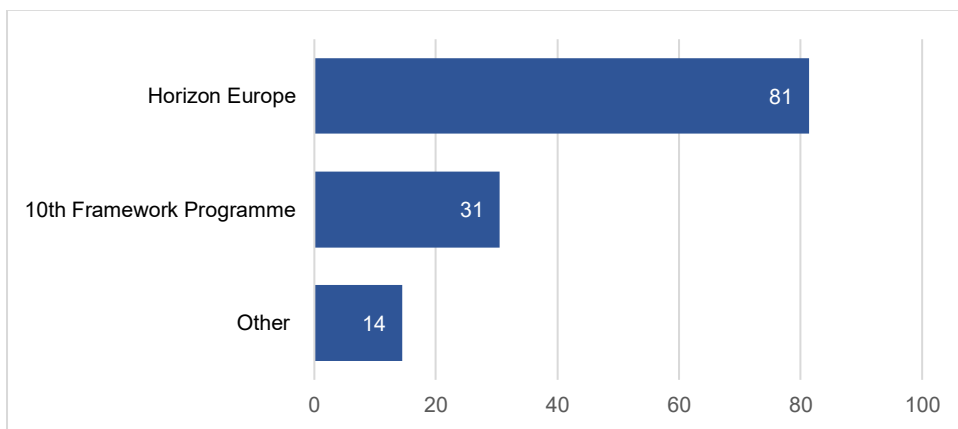
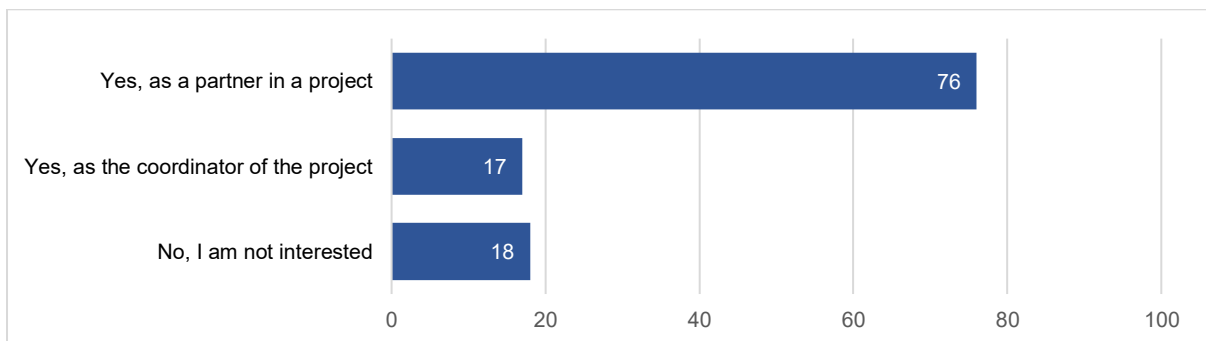


Figure 9: Specification the funding instrument/s (%) (N = 117)



Of the other responses ($n = 17$), the following were repeated multiple times: 5x ERASMUS+ and COST.

Figure 10: Would you like to take part in an international Research and Innovation cooperation project in the years 2025-2028? (%) (N = 355)



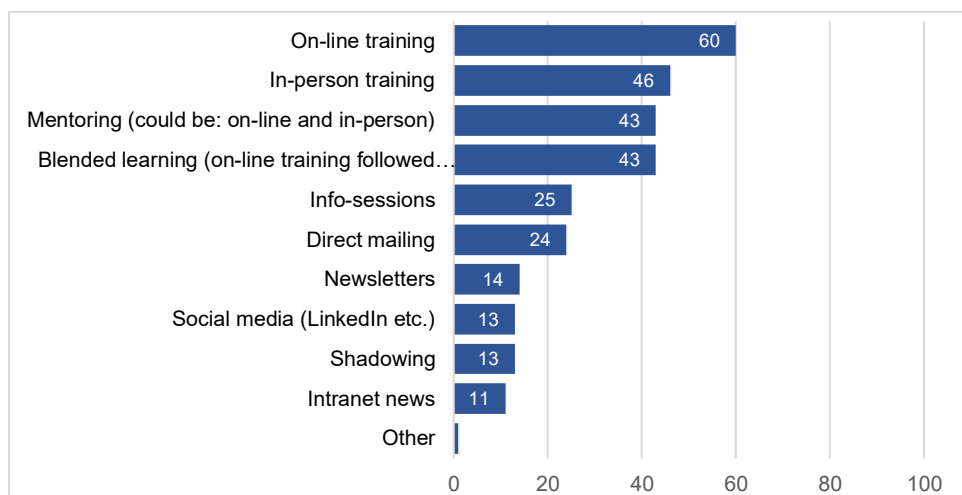
Note. Multiple-choice question.

Respondents who answered "No, I'm not interested" ($N = 63$) were asked "Why?" by an open-ended question. There were 23 responses, and the following were repeated: 4x retiring soon/already, 2x too much administrative work, not a researcher, war and instability, not a suitable candidate, does not know about relevant calls.



B. Preferred Learning Methods

Figure 11: What format do you prefer for attaining information and skills in the area of R&I projects? (%) (N = 355)



Note. Multiple-choice question.

Figure 12: Would you be willing to participate in an on-site training abroad to gain information and skills to professionalise your ability to prepare R&I project? (%) (N = 355)

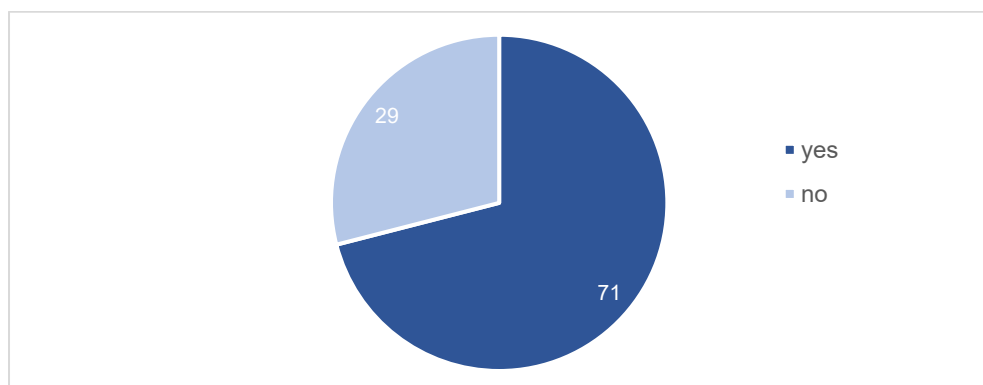
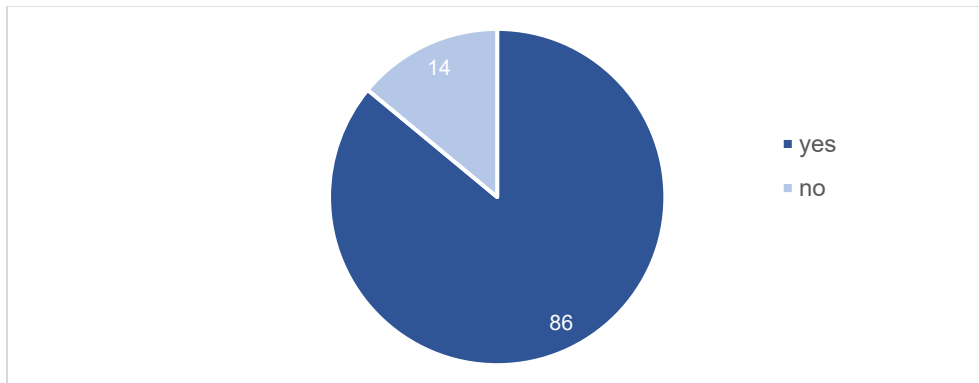


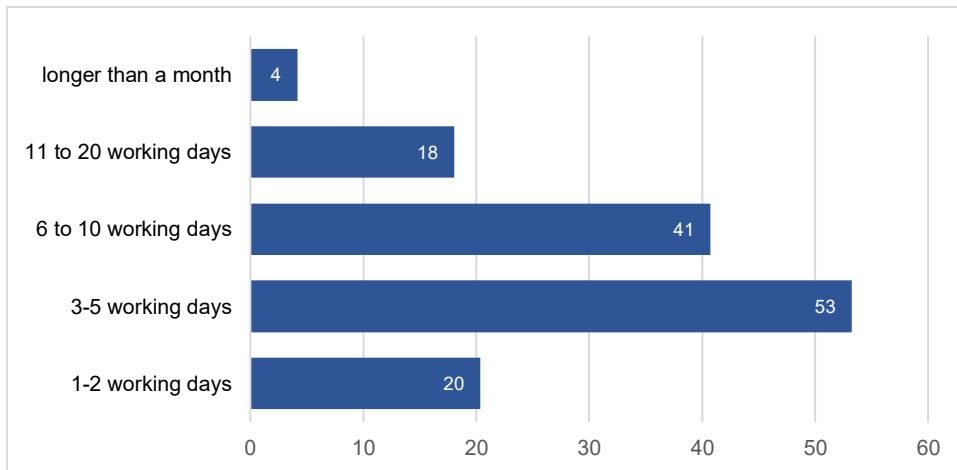


Figure 13: With respect to your position, can you travel and spend some time abroad on a shadowing/mentoring programme? (%) (N = 252)



Note. Only respondents willing to participate in on-site training abroad gain information and skills to professionalise their ability to prepare R&I projects.

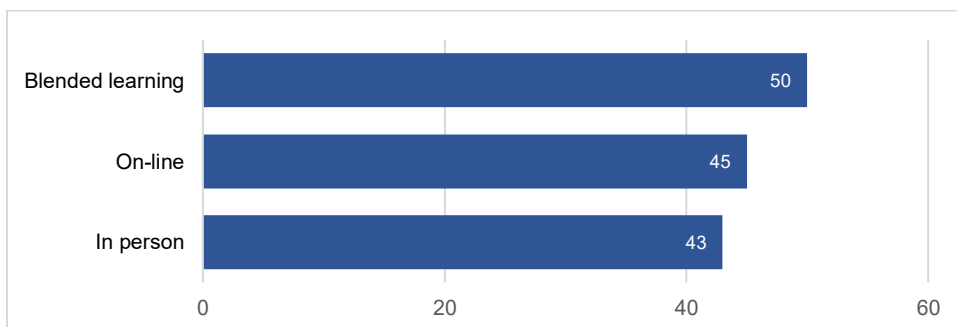
Figure 14: How long would you be willing to spend abroad? (%) (N = 216)



Note. Multiple-choice question. Only respondents willing to participate in an on-site training abroad gain information and skills to professionalise their ability to prepare an R&I project and will be willing to spend some time abroad on a shadowing/mentoring programme.

C. Training Format and Duration

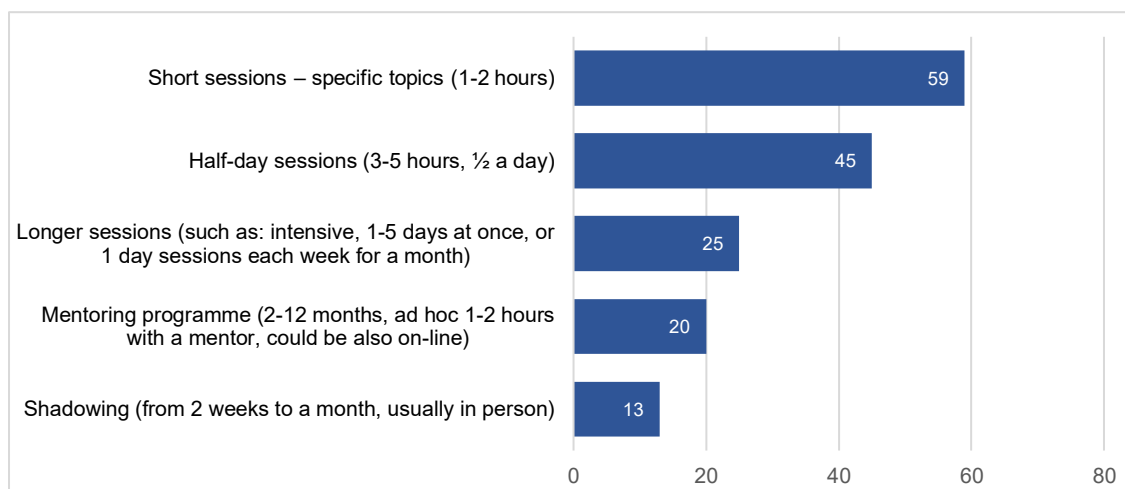
Figure 15: What is your preferred format of a training session? (%) (N = 355)



Note. Multiple-choice question.

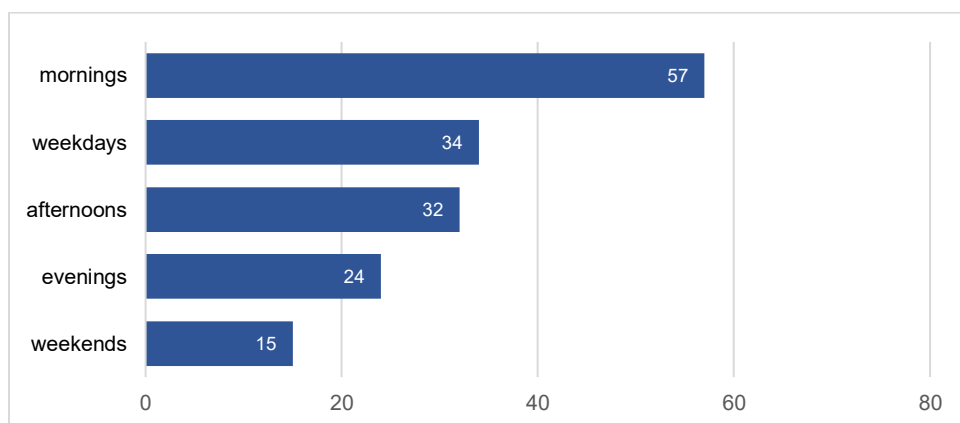


Figure 16: What kind of training session do you prefer? (%) (N = 355)



Note. Multiple-choice question.

Figure 17: Do you have any specific time preferences for training sessions? (%) (N = 355)



Note. Multiple-choice question.

D. Feedback on Past Training

Figure 18: Have you attended any training programmes or workshops aimed at promoting your knowledge/skills in R&I projects (for example Horizon Europe etc.)? (%) (N = 355)

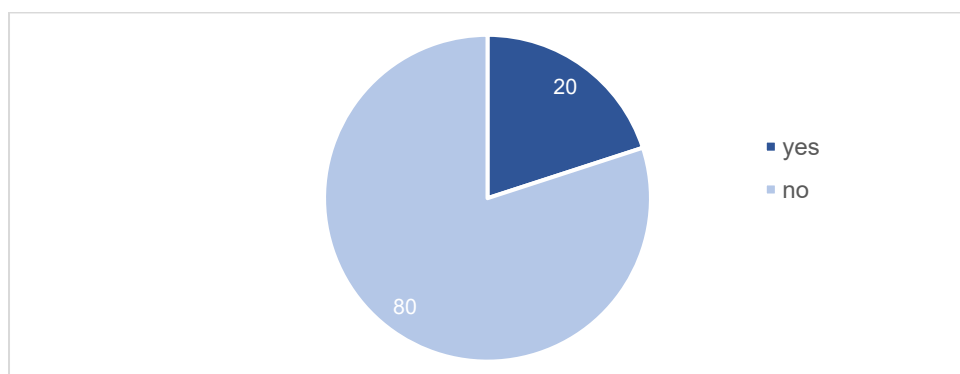
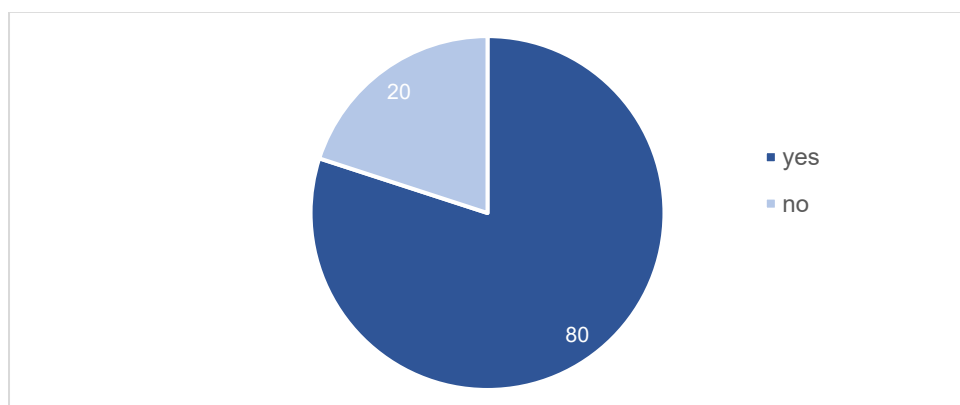




Figure 19: If NO attended, would you be willing and interested in taking part in such training? (%) (N = 285)



If YES, what did you like or dislike about your previous training experience? There were a total of 53 responses to this open-ended question, which are summarised in the Table 5 below.

Table 5: If YES, what did you like or dislike about your previous training experience? (N = 70)

	Frequency
Liked (n = 25)	6
Complex/general information; Practical/concrete information	4
Everything	3
Focus on concrete topics; Concrete examples	2
Focus on particular calls; Online format; Open discussion; Talking about real-life experience	1
Disliked (n = 24)	
Too general (not detailed/practical enough) info	10
No examples	5
Too complicated	3
Too short training; No further support after training	2
No concrete advice on how to succeed; Too long without engaging the audience;	1
Too little information	
Suggestions (n = 4)	
Would like more detailed training	3
Would like feedback on applications	1



Results of Questionnaire II: Analysis of the systems and structures in current project support

Brief summary

- A total of 284 respondents completed the questionnaire, of which 54 (19%) were from UPCE, 106 (37%) from UKIM, and 124 (44%) from ZPSU. For more on the structure of the research sample, see Tables 6 and 7.
- In terms of the type of support/services respondents can use within their university, information sharing about upcoming funding calls is the most common (66%), while assistance with funding management information systems (43%) and enhancing the strategic alignment of projects (42%) being the least common. In this aspect, we can see differences between universities. All support/services are significantly more frequent at ZPSU but least frequent at UKIM.
- Under a third (32%) of respondents have professional experience with project preparation support within their university. This experience is significantly lower at UKIM (26%) compared to ZPSU and UPCE (identical 35%).
- Examining the types of project preparation support revealed that sharing information about upcoming funding calls and help with the university's process aspects of the application are the highest rated. Contrast to help with searching for a project partner and enhancing the strategic alignment of projects, which were rated the worst.
- One-quarter of respondents (25%) have professional experience with project implementation support within their university. This experience is the same at all three universities.
- When evaluating the various types of project implementation support, technical/administrative support for project changes is rated the best, but risk management support/advice (risk mitigation) is rated the worst.
- Mapping the interest in training and getting support in training in different areas, it was shown that there are not many differences between the areas listed. The most significant interest was in training for technical aspects of the project application (51%) and project budget planning (50%). Most respondents also expressed interest in getting support in these areas (40%): funding project applications and conditions for funding, technical/administrative support for project changes, and organisational commitments (e.g. Letters of Intent/Support). Approximately one fifth of respondents were not interested in any of these services, with the ethical/PR/gender aspects of the application being the least interesting (24% not interested).



Questionnaire Results

Table 6: Structure of research sample

	Frequency	Percentage
N (total)	284	100
University		
University of Pardubice (UPCE)	54	19
Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje	106	37
Zhytomyr Polytechnic State University	124	44
Current position at university (more options possible)		
PhD student	50	18
Academic staff member/Researcher	187	66
Non-academic staff working in Project Support	8	3
All other non-academic staff	49	17
Gender		
Man	99	35
Woman	215	60
Other	3	1
Do not want to specify	11	4

Table 7: Number of working years (N = 243)

	in current position (%)	at the university (%)	in research (%)
not relevant	3	2	19
0–2 years	20	13	8
3–5 years	20	14	12
6–7 years	7	7	5
8–10 years	6	4	10
11–12 years	4	5	4
12 and more years	40	55	42



A. Current project support services within university

Figure 20: Can you use the following types of support/services within your university? (%) (N = 284)

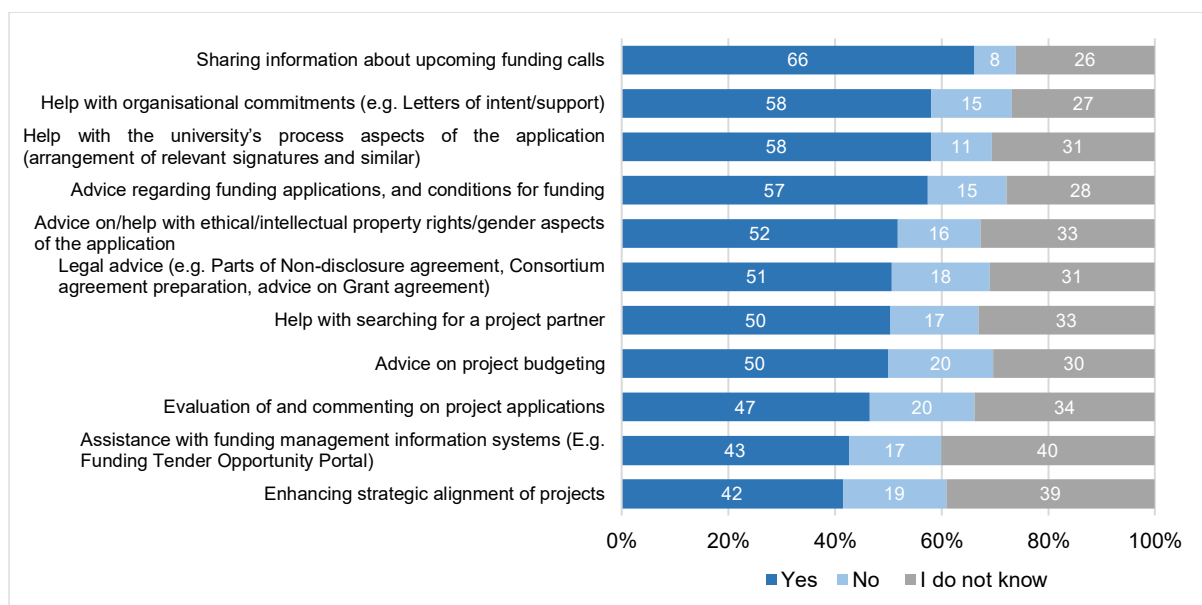


Table 8: Usage the types of support/services within your university by university (%) (N = 284)

	UPCE (N = 54)	UKIM (N = 106)	ZPSU (N = 124)
Enhancing strategic alignment of projects	24,1	26,4	62,1
Assistance with funding management information systems (E.g. Funding Tender Opportunity Portal)	38,9	30,2	54,8
Evaluation of and commenting on project applications	35,2	29,2	66,1
Advice on project budgeting	57,4	29,2	64,5
Help with searching for a project partner	40,7	35,8	66,9
Legal advice (e.g. Parts of Non-disclosure agreement, Consortium agreement preparation, advice on Grant agreement)	48,1	34,9	65,3
Advice on/help with ethical/intellectual property rights/gender aspects of the application	42,6	33,0	71,8
Advice regarding funding applications, and conditions for funding	59,3	38,7	72,6
Help with the university's process aspects of the application (arrangement of relevant signatures and similar)	57,4	43,4	71,0
Help with organisational commitments (e.g. Letters of intent/support)	40,7	48,1	74,2
Sharing information about upcoming funding calls	70,4	53,8	75,0



Figure 21: Do you have professional experience with project preparation support within your university? (%) (N = 284)

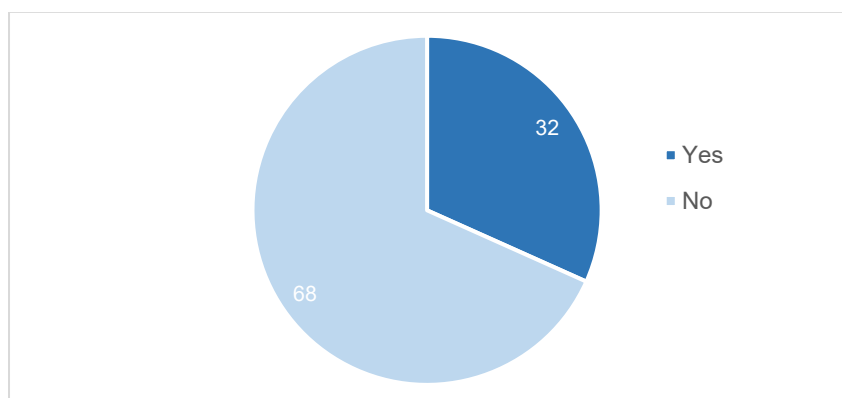


Figure 22: Professional experience with project preparation support within university by university (%) (N = 284)

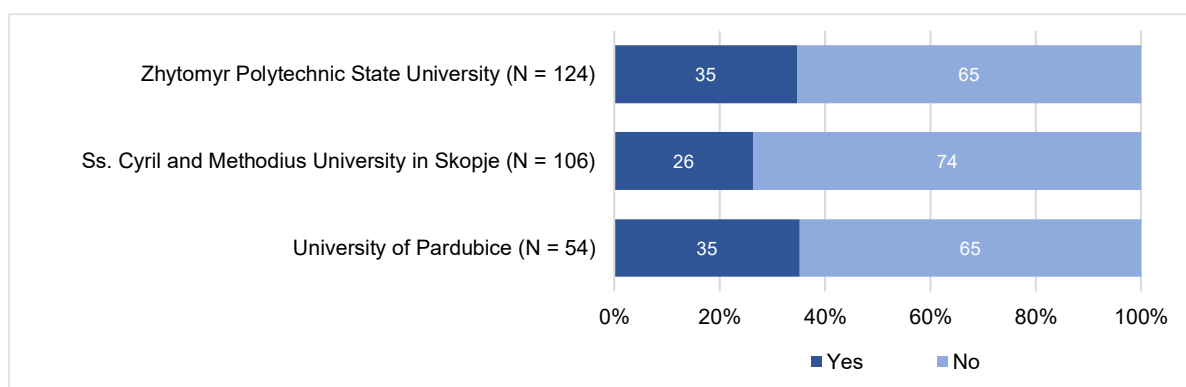
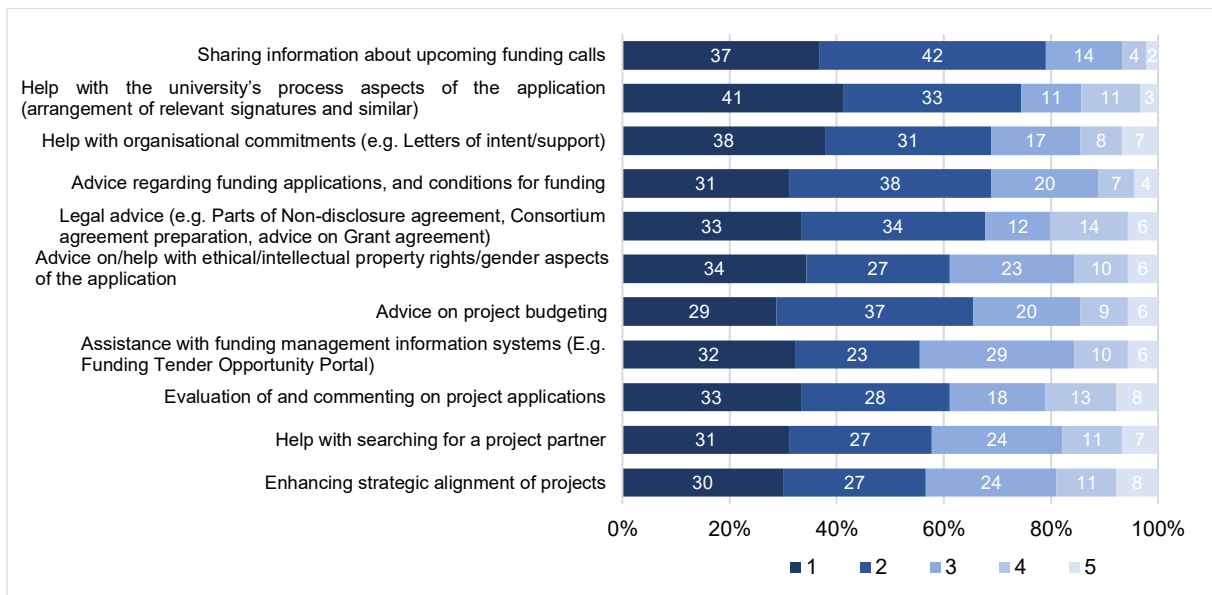




Figure 23: How do you evaluate the project preparation support within your university? (%) (N = 90)



Note. Items are ranked in ascending order of mean. Only answered by respondents who have professional experience with project preparation support within their university.

Figure 24: Do you have professional experience with project implementation support within your university? (%) (N = 284)

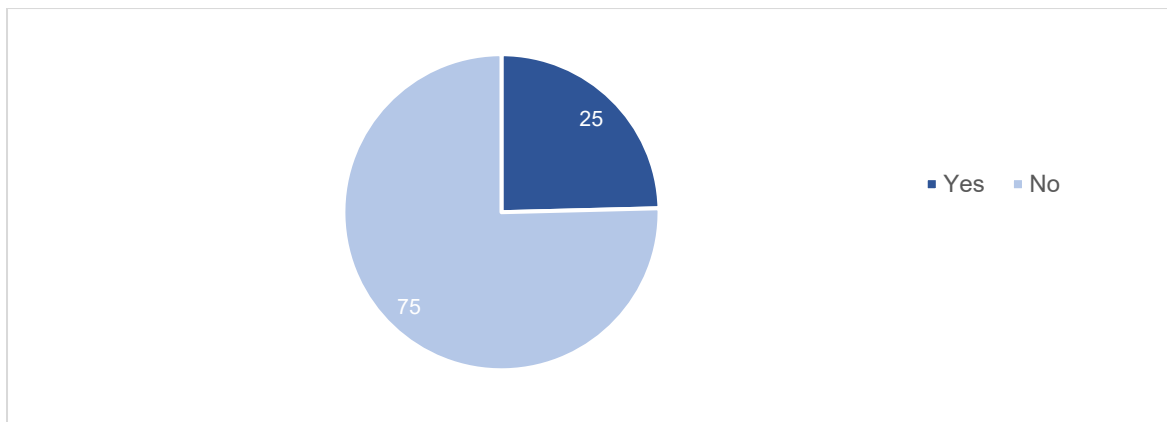




Figure 25: Professional experience with project implementation support within university (%) (N = 284)

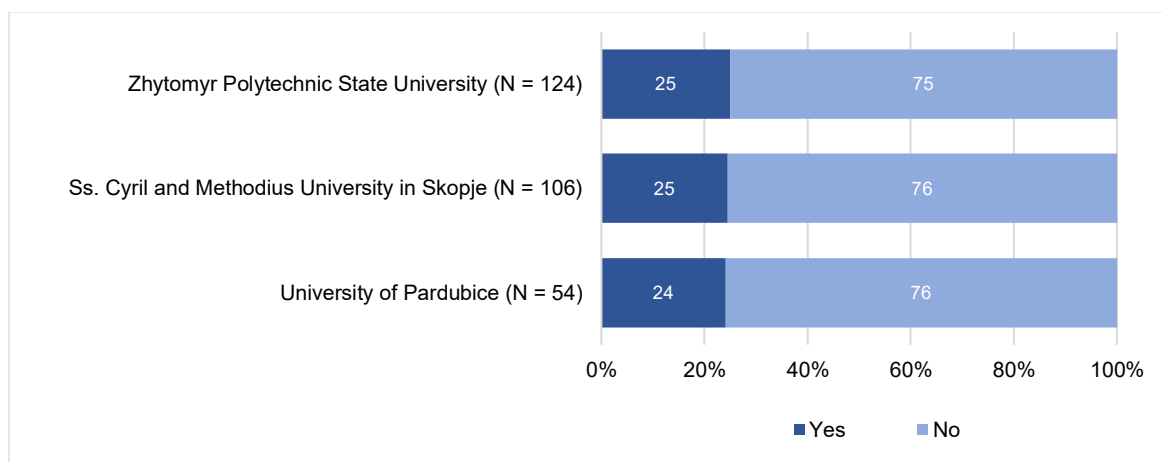
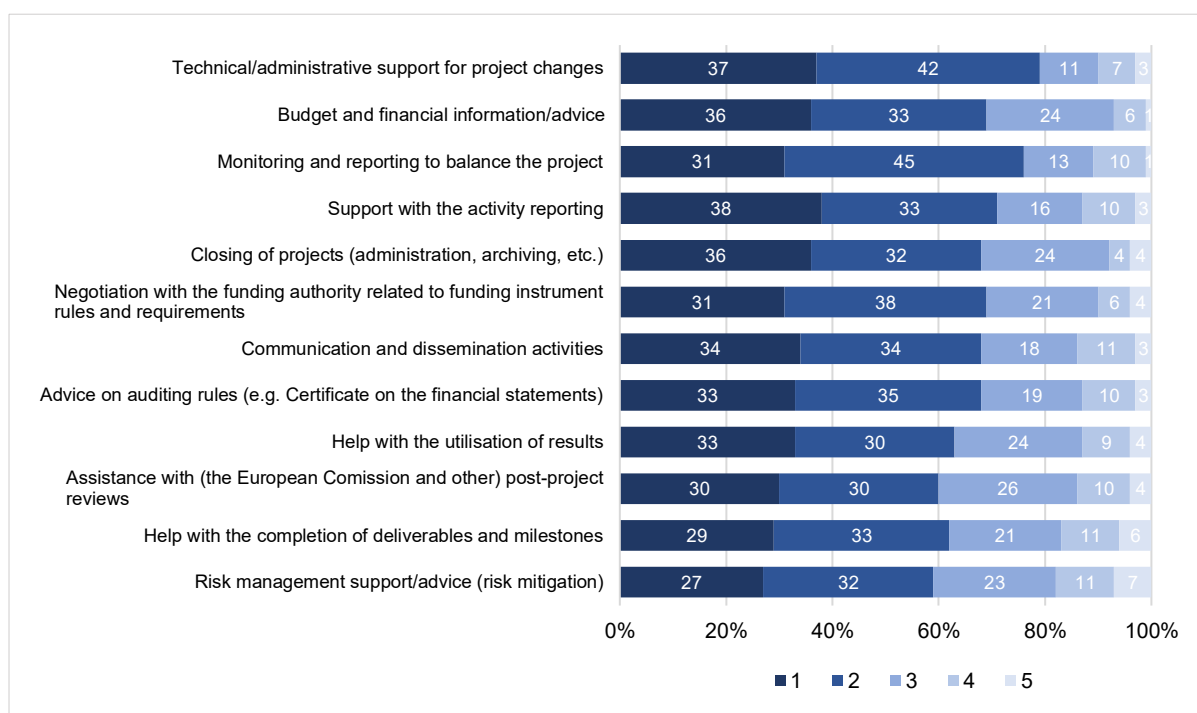


Figure 26: How do you evaluate the project implementation support within your university? (%) (N = 70)

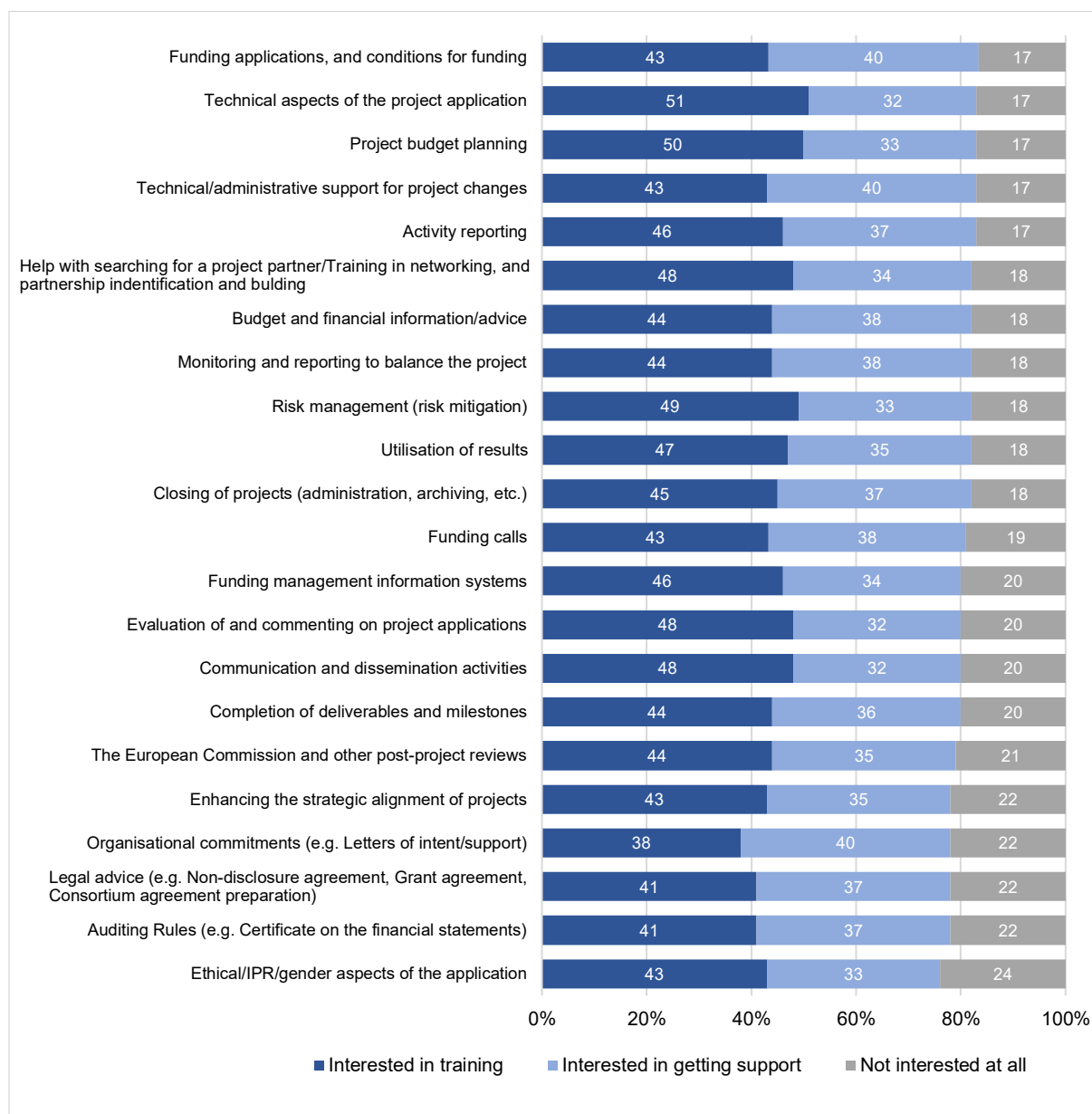


Note. Items ranked in ascending order of mean. Only answered by respondents who have professional experience with project preparation support within their university.



B. Future project support services within university

Figure 27: Interest in using services/support or taking part in training in the future (%) (N = 284)



Note. Items are arranged in ascending order of "Not at all interested".

Respondents had the option of giving another answer. In the case of other training, there were 31 responses, the following of which were repeated twice: on-line platforms: F&T, CORDIS, Euraxess, PADOR; project management; project administration and financial management. In the case of other project support services, there were a total of 32 responses, of which help with (successful) project application was repeated 3 times and project preparation 2 times.



Executive Summary

The WIDE AcrossEU project aims to enhance the competitiveness of higher education institutions in Widening countries by identifying and addressing the barriers to successful participation in EU-funded projects. Two questionnaires were conducted where the members from institutions in Widening countries shared their experiences with project submission. The results of the questionnaires made it possible to assess the needs and existing gaps in project acquisition, management, and institutional support.

This analysis will further serve as the basis for the training plans to boost the competences of the institutions from Widening countries: UPCE, UKIM and ZPSU. The surveys helped to identify the skill gaps, which the Training Programme will bridge for the three Widening partners.

Questionnaire I

- Nearly half of the 355 respondents (49%) reported prior involvement in international projects, with Erasmus+ (61%) and Horizon Europe (22%) as the most common. However, this experience is primarily in supportive roles (37% as project partners).
- Significant skill gaps were identified in funding, tender portal usage (30%), and project administration (32%).
- Respondents preferred online training (60%) but were strongly willing (71%) to participate in on-site training or mentoring abroad.
- Short, topic-specific sessions (1–2 hours) were the most favoured training format.
- The majority of respondents (70%) expressed readiness to participate in international on-site training, with most of them (86%) interested in mentoring/shadowing programs lasting 3–10 working days.

Questionnaire II

- While sharing information about funding calls is common (66%), critical services such as funding management system assistance (43%) and strategic alignment of projects (42%) are less prevalent (especially at UKIM).
- Support for partner search and risk management were rated the lowest among institutional services.
- High demand was expressed for training on project applications' technical aspects (51%) and budget planning (50%).
- Support was also sought for funding applications and administrative tasks related to project changes (40% each).

Training Programme

Based on these findings, WIDE AcrossEU will implement a Training Programme to address skill gaps and enhance institutional support systems. The programme will include a series of tailored events focused on pre- and post-award services (10–15 thematic training events).

Depending on the level of understanding and knowledge, there will be two types of training available: beginner and advanced.

- Pre-award services:



1. Navigating EU and national funding instruments, understanding and meeting call requirements.
 2. Consortium building (selection of associated partners).
 3. Proposal preparation, project writing – working on a selection of current calls (Excellence, Impact, Quality and Efficiency, Work packages, Deliverables and Milestones).
 4. Technical support (e.g., Funding and Tenders Portal, PADOR).
 5. Budget preparation.
 6. Science communication, intellectual property, open science, and data management.
- Post-award services:
 1. Grant and financial management, HR management.
 2. Project coordination and reporting using online tools.
 3. Results utilisation and exploitation (e.g., Horizon Results Booster).
 4. Technical and Finance Report (interim/final).

The training will be delivered through a combination of online and in-person formats, depending on cost-efficiency, effectiveness, and safety considerations. Experts from non-widening partner institutions, ULAPLAND and UMU, with additional input from regional authorities, national contact points, and grant providers. The training will strengthen Widening institutions' ability to act as project coordinators, develop core competencies in proposal writing and project management, and foster collaboration through joint training.

This programme will enhance the capacity of the Widening institutions to participate in EU funding programmes. By addressing identified gaps in skills, knowledge, and institutional support, Wide AcrossEU will empower the institutions in Widening countries to transition from project participants to coordinators, significantly boosting their competitiveness and increasing project submissions.