

Blended Intensive Programmes and blended mobility within Erasmus+ KA131 higher education mobility action

Frequently asked questions on Blended Intensive Programmes

April 2023

A. Blended intensive programmes and Organizational Support

Who receives the BIP organisational support?

The coordinating higher education institution that applies for the BIP OS receives the funding.

It is up to the institutions that are organising the BIP to decide how the amount is shared between them.

All institutions that send participants to BIPs should fund them as per the regular funding rules as outgoing mobilities for either staff or students.

What can the BIP organisational support be used for?

- **The BIP-OS is not to be used to fund incoming Erasmus+ mobilities to the BIP (for instance a zero-grant mobility).**
- **The BIP OS is not to be used as a top-up to the individual support.**

Organisational support for BIPs is intended to cover costs related to the preparation, design, development, implementation and follow-up of the programme and delivery of virtual/remote activities as well as the overall management and coordination.

Costs may include: production of documents or educational material, rental of rooms, rental of equipment, field trips, excursions, communication activities, translation and interpretation, preparatory visits, lecturers' fees and administrative tasks.

The BIP can provide certain services for free or subsidise a part of the expenses for the participants, **but they have to avoid double funding from Erasmus+ funds.**

For example, the BIP can provide some meals, or subsidise accommodation for participants. If the BIP also has local participants that are not eligible to be funded by Erasmus+ and the BIP wishes to pay for full accommodation in the city of the host HEI or in a place outside the city for those participants, for well justified reasons, then this is allowed as there is no double funding by Erasmus+.

There are no explicit restrictions on what the BIP OS can be used for, **but beneficiaries must be careful that there is no double funding.**

Can the BIP partnership pay for accommodation for all participants during a field trip?

Yes.

Can the BIP get additional funding from somewhere else, like from a private company or for the HEIs in the partnership?

Yes, this is possible and can be beneficial.

B. Blended intensive programmes and Partnerships

What are the different roles in the BIP partnership?

Every partner in the BIP partnership has to be involved in developing and implementing the programme and every partner has to have a role in either receiving or sending participants, except if they are just coordinating.

- The coordinating HEI coordinates the organisation, receives and manages the organisational support for the blended intensive programme. The coordinating HEI is by default the receiving HEI (host) for the student and staff mobility, unless otherwise decided by the partnership.
- In addition to the (main) receiving HEI, there may also be a co-hosting organisation. This organisation can be an enterprise, another HEI, association or public body (**in the same country**) hosting participants for practical training as part of the programme.
- The receiving HEI, awarded with an ECHE, receives the BIP participants either at its premises or at a different venue/hosting organisation in the same country in which it is located. There is only one primary receiving higher education institution in a single BIP (there can be a secondary host HEI that can also be recorded in the BM project).
- The physical mobility of a single BIP has to take place in one country (in one receiving higher education institution) for one uninterrupted period. **The BIP physical component cannot be split into a few days in one country and then a few days in another country.**

Short field trips and excursions that cross borders are still allowed as long as the main part of the delivery of the physical component takes place in the host country.

- **A sending HEI can be any HEI from the blended intensive programme partnership or outside it.** It can be expected that the majority of participants come from sending HEIs which are part of the partnership.
- Invited staff funded by KA131 can come from any organisation in Erasmus+ Countries. **The coordinating institution can be a sending institution too if the venue of the activity is in another country.**
- In exceptional cases the role of sending institution can include an HEI that is “sending” a teacher to teach, in person or virtually, without sending any learners.

Who counts towards the minimum of 15 participants for the BIP to be eligible for funding?

- HEI are encouraged to plan BIPs with more than 15 learner participants to be sure that the programmes remain eligible for BIP-OS funding even if some participants drop out!
- The BIPs were designed to allow the BIP partners to send learner participants to a blended course within the partnership and therefore it is expected that at least 15 learner participants come from HEIs within the partnership. **However, this is not a hard requirement so some of that minimum number of learner participants can come from other ECHE-holding HEIs outside of the partnership if the situation calls for it.**
- **Zero-grant participants can count towards the minimum of 15 as they are considered Erasmus+ funded participants.** The beneficiary organisations receive OS funding for the Erasmus+ mobilities even if the students are zero-grant students.
- Learners who are already on mobility at the HEI that is hosting the BIP, for studies or a traineeship or teaching, can participate in the programme as local participants **and do therefore not count towards the minimum requirement of 15 Erasmus+ funded participants.**
- Participants from third countries not associated to the Programme **do not count towards the minimum requirement of 15 participants in the BIP but can participate.**

Is a BIP eligible if there is only one HEI sending learner participants?

BIPs should preferably include learners from at least three HEIs from three EU Member States or third countries associated to the Programme so it is strongly recommended that there are Erasmus+ mobile learner participants from more than one HEI taking part so that the BIP participants have a more international experience.

If a BIP partnership organises a joint virtual component and then organises the physical component in three different countries, based on specialisation, can that count as three different BIPs? Meaning that three different BIPs are utilising the same virtual component.

Yes, as long as for the physical components in the three different countries (the three different BIPs) there are at least 15 mobile learner participants in each country.

The overall learning outcomes have to be different in each country to be considered as different BIPs.

Can the teaching staff of the BIP come from third countries not associated to the Programme?

- Teaching and training staff involved in the delivery of the BIP can come from third countries not associated to the Programme if they are funded by the KA171 mobility action.
- **Note that the minimum duration of physical mobility for staff in KA171 is 5 days instead of 1 day of KA131.**

Who signs learning agreements, inter-institutional agreements and issues transcripts for the BIP?

The receiving institution, whether it is coordinating institution or not, must always be the one to sign IIAs, learning agreements and mobility agreements and issue transcripts of records or certificates of attendance.

C. Budget Transfers

Can HEIs transfer unused BIP-OS funds to other budget categories?

HEIs are allowed to transfer 100% of the allocated BIP OS funds to other budget categories. Unused BIP OS funds can occur either because the BIP did not take place or there were fewer mobile learners than anticipated.

However, is not possible to transfer unused BIP OS to the Mobility OS category. It is not possible to increase the organisational support for mobility without an amendment.

It is to be noted that not organising BIPs while funding was awarded in the mobility project will be negatively reflected in the calculations of the past performance in future KA131 grant allocations by the National Agencies.

There is no negative impact if the HEI returns unused BIP OS during the interim report stage or if there are justified reasons why the BIP could not take place. HEIs need to explain why the BIP was not realised in their final reports and it is up to the NA to see whether the reasons are justified.

Can HEIs transfer unused BIP-OS to another BIP?

- Unused BIP-OS can be transferred to another BIP via a grant agreement amendment **following a formal request to the NA.**
- There is a second option where a grant agreement amendment is not needed and where the beneficiary would do a budget transfer within the total contracted BIP OS and report the transfers **in the final report of the KA131 project.**
- It is better for HEIs to contact the National Agency to make sure that the transfer is eligible before the submission of the Final Report

These are the steps the BEN and NA have to take if they choose the second option:

- 1) BEN encodes/has their partners (sending HEIs) encode the mobilities / actual number of participants in their BIPs.
- 2) BEN sees that there is a possibility to move reported BIP OS between their contracted BIPs: for example, BIP A goes from having 18 learner participants (BIP OS = 7200 EUR) to having 15 participants. BIP B goes from having 15 participants (BIP OS = 6000) to having 17 participants.
- 3) BEN decides that they want to do a budget transfer and not a grant agreement amendment.
- 4) For BIP A, the BIP that will now have fewer learner participants (18 to 15), the reported BIP OS is automatically calculated in the BM project budget section and in the final report budget section. BIP A now has 6000 EUR reported BIP OS, not the original contracted 7200 EUR.
- 5) For BIP B, the BIP that will now have more reported learner participants (15 to 17), the reported BIP OS **does not automatically increase in the budget section beyond the contracted BIP OS.** This is because the upper cap for reported BIP OS is always the contracted BIP OS of this BIP and this cap cannot be increased without a grant agreement amendment. Therefore, even when the learner participant number goes from 15 to 17

the reported BIP OS stays at 6000 EUR in the budget section of the project in BM and in the final report submitted by the BEN.

- 6) At the final report stage the BEN describes in the budget transfer section of the KA131 final report that they did a budget transfer from BIP A to BIP B, decreasing the reported BIP OS for BIP A, and increasing the reported BIP OS for BIP B by the same amount. The final report budget version reported by the BEN, however, will show that BIP A has 6000 EUR BIP OS, and that BIP B has 6000 EUR BIP OS.
- 7) During the NA validation stage of the final report, the NA has to check the relevant textbox of the final report to see if all described budget transfers are eligible and feasible in terms of availability of funds to transfer. The NA then has to adapt the project's final report budget (in this case the actual reported BIP OS of BIP B) according to the budget transfers. This is the final report budget validated by the NA.
- 8) Both the final report budget reported by the BEN and the budget validated by the NA are sent to PMM.
- 9) Please note that if BIP A goes from having 18 learner participants (BIP OS = 7200 EUR) to having 17 participants, the 10% margin of tolerance applies in the calculation of the BIP OS, resulting in the reported BIP OS staying at 7200 EUR. Theoretically, reported BIP OS from BIP A can still be transferred to other BIPs to balance their final funding by describing the transfers in the final report.

Can an incoming student be sent to another country by their receiving institution to take part in a BIP or another short-term mobility?

A student is not eligible to be sent on another mobility to take part in a BIP by his receiving HEI.

If the students want to participate in a BIP that is organised in another country then their home institution has to nominate/send them to that BIP separately.

To be eligible for Erasmus+ mobilities, students have to be registered in a HEI and enrolled in studies leading to a recognised degree or another recognised tertiary level qualification.

Therefore students who are already on a long-term mobility abroad are not eligible participants in mobility activities outside the host country organised by their receiving institution.

Can the same BIP be organised several times during one project if the BIP is not financed?

- An HEI can apply for funding (grant item/budget category “blended intensive programme organisational support”, BIP-OS in short) for only one edition of the same BIP (with the same title, learning outcomes and partnership composition) per call year. Coordinators can reapply under the following call for the same BIP in order to receive funding (BIP-OS) for it.

- A blended short-term mobility can be undertaken to any receiving organisation, independent from the existence of a BIP.
- If HEIs want to organise the same BIP (with the same title, learning outcomes and partnership) more times within the same KA131 project under the same call year (including a rotation of the coordinator), they will not be eligible to receive additional Erasmus+ funding (BIP-OS) for a further edition. Therefore, further editions of the BIP will not be recorded in the programme support tools (Beneficiary Module BM, PMM).
- If the BIP partnership wants to organise “BIP-style short courses” within the same call year they can still send participants to the receiving HEI hosting the short course through Erasmus+ blended short-term mobility and record it in the BM as a stand-alone mobility.

“Zero-grant” BIPs (i.e., without a BIP-OS but a BIP that would be recorded in the programme support tools) are not envisaged for the moment. (see Handbook pp. 12-13).

What happens if a BIPs does not have 15 learner participants? Can the partnership keep the BIP-OS?

The minimum number of learner participants should always be 15, in line with the rules of the Programme Guide. If some of the 15 participants have to attend virtually due to force majeure (e.g. Covid), the coordinating HEI can still receive the BIP-OS.

It is up to the NA to establish whether the situation is truly a case of force majeure.

Beneficiaries are encouraged to organise BIPs with more than 15 participants to avoid the risk of not receiving the BIP-OS if participants drop out.

If the BIP does not get enough applicants and eventually enough learner participants, then the BIP is not eligible for funding.

Furthermore, it is not possible for one BIP to take place at two occasions in the same project to reach the minimum of 15 participants (10 participants present physically one week and 5 during another week). The minimum 15 participants should be physically present together at one event.

However, the 10% flexibility rule for mobility OS also applies for BIP OS.

This means that beneficiaries may keep the BIP OS if the number of reported number of learner participants is 10% or less of the contracted number of participants

This also means that a BIP with 15 contracted participants can have less than 15 participants reported and still be eligible for funding, as long as they are within the 10% limit.

How does the 10% tolerance margin rule work for BIPs?

The same 10% tolerance margin that applies for mobility OS in the 2021 and 2022 grant agreement applies to BIPs from call 2021 and 2022.

The requirement is still that contracted BIPs have at least 15 learner participants. BIPs with fewer than 15 contracted participants are not eligible. The margin of tolerance is a safety net in case of unplanned drop-outs but beneficiaries should strive to have at least 15 learner participants. Beneficiaries must justify in the final report why they did not reach 15.

If the reported number of participants is less than 15 the BIP can be accepted as eligible for funding, as long as the number of reported participants is within the 10% margin.

For example, a BIP with 15 contracted participants can keep the BIP OS for 15 even if there are only 14 reported participants. If a BIP with 18 contracted participants has only 17 reported participants, the beneficiary can keep the BIP OS for 18 participants.

BIPs with 13 reported participants cannot be eligible for funding, as that would be more than 10% of 15 contracted participants.

For BIPs with 15, 16, 17, 18 and 19 contracted participants the margin of tolerance means that BIPs with one less reported learner participant can keep the originally contracted BIP OS. **In case of a BIP with 20 contracted learner participants, it is possible to go down to 18 participants and keep the BIP OS for 20, since 10% of 20 is 2.**

How does it work in the Beneficiary Module and final report if a BIP does not reach the minimum number of participants to be eligible and keep the BIP OS?

If the BIP took place but did not reach the minimum number of learner participants, beneficiaries that have sent participants to the BIP keep the encoding in BM as it is, linked to the specific BIP. In this case, the BIP coordinator encodes all the information for the BIP in BM and explains in the KA131 final report why the BIP did not reach the minimum number.

If the BIP eventually does not take place because of lack of participants the institutions who were planning to send participants remove their mobility records in BM. The BIP coordinator also explains in the final report why they did not manage to achieve this contracted BIP. The BIP coordinator can, as part of an interim report and reallocation, return the BIP OS funding for that BIP to the National Agency.

How can beneficiaries get BIP OS for more participants in a single BIP or for more BIPs than planned within a project?

If a beneficiary would like to organise BIPs with more participants than originally planned, they can do a budget transfer from one BIP to another in the same project, or they can request more funding from the NA at the interim stage/reallocation. The beneficiary can also do a grant agreement amendment when moving BIP OS from one BIP to another.

If a beneficiary would like to organise more BIPs than originally planned (and therefore get more BIP OS) this can only be done at the interim stage/reallocation. The beneficiary is not allowed to transfer budget to organisational support for BIPs.

What documentation is needed to prove how the BIP OS was used?

The only supporting documents needed are spelled out in the BEN GA: *“In the case of blended intensive programmes, **proof of attendance specifying the participants’ name (learners) and their start and end date of the activity.**”*

If the beneficiary does not use all the BIP OS funding they do not need to report that but can do a budget transfer and use it for other mobility activities.

For any checks (e.g. desk checks and on the spot checks) the supporting documents mentioned in the grant agreement are the ones that need to be checked for the coordinating institution to receive the BIP OS. NAs in the sending countries are responsible for checks on their own beneficiaries, not the NA in the receiving country. The beneficiary that receives the BIP OS needs to report on the BIP in their final report for their project and the NA needs to review that report.

What should the virtual component of the BIP include?

There are no explicit requirements for what the virtual component of a BIP should include. The only requirement is that the whole BIP, virtual and physical components together, awards 3 ECTS credits to learner participants who are on student mobility for studies. This also includes BIPs for doctoral candidates on mobility as students.

The BIPs were designed to be flexible and offering an opportunity to explore innovative ways of teaching and learning and beneficiaries are encouraged to do so. For more ideas see the Blended mobility implementation guide: <https://op.europa.eu/s/yBxT>

Do HEIs have to create new inter-institutional agreements (IIAs) for BIPs

All student mobilities for studies and staff mobilities for teaching to BIPs need to be underpinned by an IIA. This does not mean that the HEIs need to create a new IIA between the sending and receiving institution if there is already an IIA in place for other types of mobilities or other education levels or fields.

HEIs can decide amongst themselves if they do a new agreement specifically for the BIP participation, but this is not a requirement.

HEIs can also decide to do a multilateral IIA. This would be done outside EWP as this feature is not yet available in EWP.

If a non-HEI organisation is participating in some way in the BIP they do not need to have an IIA with the other institutions and do not need to be a part of a multilateral IIA, as they are not an ECHE holding HEI and are not sending learner participants. They can be added in a paper version of the IIA, but this is not necessary.

If a HEI that is not in the BIP partnership wants to send a student or a teacher for teaching on an Erasmus+ mobility to a BIP then they need to make an IIA with the receiving institution.

Do HEIs have to have a IIA for the BIP participation if the only learners are staff on staff mobility for training?

No. When a BIP has only staff mobility for training (STT) learners then an IIA is not needed. This is the same rule as for any other STT mobilities.

How do funded travel days work with BIPs?

The same rule for funded travel days applies to mobilities to BIPs as to any other short-term mobilities.

Only students who are on short-term mobility can receive standard travel days, one travel day before the activity and one travel day following the activity.

If students on short-term mobility opt for green travel they could therefore receive up to 6 days of additional individual support, if duly justified.

The travel days are added to the total funded duration so if the physical mobility activity is 14 days and the student gets 2 green travel days the total funded duration is 16 days.

Therefore, the student gets 14 days at the rate of 70 EUR and 2 days at the rate of 50 EUR (call 2021 and 2022 rates).

Can students and staff members attend the same BIP as learners?

Yes, students and staff members on staff mobility for training can attend the same BIP as learners.

In the Beneficiary Module the beneficiary sets the type of learner in the BIP as the type that makes up the majority of the participants.

How should HEIs report on local participants in the BIP in BM, both learners and teachers?

The local learner or teacher participants are not encoded specifically in the KA131 project's BIP data fields in BM but the number and type of local participants can be indicated in BM in the BIP field called "objectives and description".

Should staff on staff mobility for teaching to a BIP be linked to the BIP in BM?

Yes, staff mobilities for teaching should be linked to the BIP to provide a full picture of the participants of the BIP. It allows the BIP coordinator to see the feedback from the participant report from the mobile staff.

Should KA171 participants be linked to a BIP in BM even though they do not count towards the 15 learner participant minimum?

Yes, KA171 mobilities should be linked to the BIP to provide a full picture of the participants of the BIP. It allows the BIP coordinator to see the feedback from the participant report from the KA171 participant.

D. Blended mobility and Virtual Component

Can the sending institution be responsible for the virtual component in a blended mobility?

It is the receiving institution that is responsible for the virtual component, in the same way it is responsible for delivering the physical classes.

The virtual activities should also be in consistency with, or a reinforcement/continuation of the physical activities and therefore the same institution should be in charge of both.

In the cases of blended staff mobility for teaching does the "at least 8 teaching hours per week" limit have to be taken into account for whole mobility period (physical and virtual part) or just for the physical part of the mobility?

The same rules apply for fully physical mobilities and blended mobilities and the number of teaching hours should be 8 hours per week.

If the mobility lasts longer than one week, the minimum number of teaching hours for an incomplete week should be proportional to the duration of that week.

If the teaching activity is combined with a training activity during a single period abroad, the minimum number of hours of teaching per week (or any shorter period of stay) is reduced to 4 hours. The training could be virtual as well.

Does the minimum of 3 ECTS credits which must be awarded in short-term blended mobilities for studies also apply in case of doctoral short-term mobilities that have no virtual component?

A blended mobility for studies must award a minimum of 3 ECTS credits, this also applies to blended short-term mobilities of doctoral students.

If a doctoral student is participating in a BIP they must participate in both the physical and virtual components as any other learner.

The BIP as a whole has to award 3 ECTS credits to the students. The same rule goes for BIPs that are specifically designed for doctoral students.

However, the blended component in short-term student mobility at doctoral level is optional.

If the doctoral student mobility only has a physical component, the rule of the minimum 3 ECTS credits does not apply.

Where the recognition of the awarded ECTS credits is not possible, for instance in the case of some doctoral programmes, the 3 ECTS credit feature should be considered as a guideline for workload of the blended short-term student mobility at doctoral level.

Can a blended mobility last more than 12 months?

The physical mobility component can last a maximum of 12 months.

HEIs are free to allow mobilities with a total duration of more than 12 months, as long as the physical mobility duration does not exceed 12 months.

The virtual component end dates, however, must be within the project implementation period.

Please note that the balance payment of the student grant is issued at the end of the blended mobility.