

ALMA Network Position Paper

Supporting ALMA, an active-inclusion initiative empowering vulnerable young NEETs

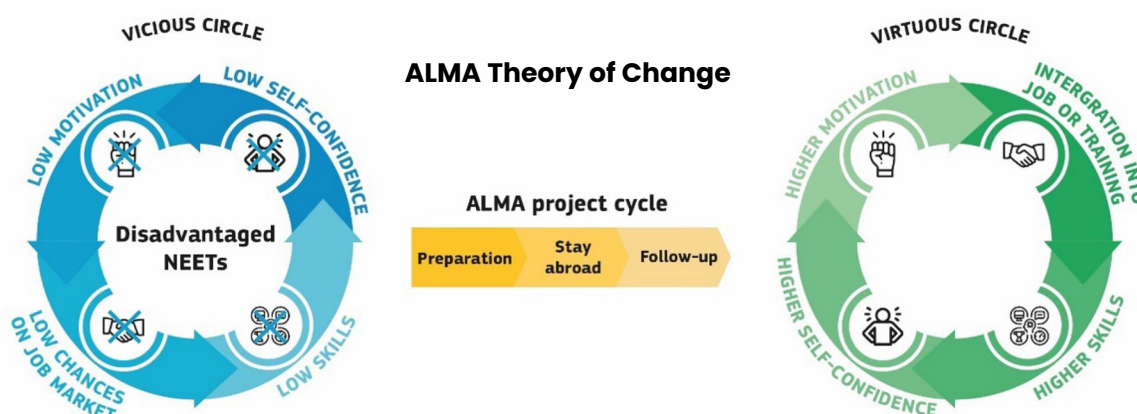
In the context of Europe’s demographic and competitiveness challenges, supporting young people who are not in employment, education, or training (NEETs) to re-enter employment, education, or training has both individual and long-term economic benefits. By overcoming their current challenges, NEETs can become active contributors to economic, social, and cultural life.

To address this challenge, the ‘**Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve**’ (ALMA) initiative, launched in 2022 by the European Commission, targets the most disadvantaged NEETs aged 18–29, who are vulnerable with regard to their chances of accessing work or training for individual or structural reasons (e.g. disability, long-term unemployment, insufficient school performance, a migration background). Building on a long-standing successful experience scaled up from Germany to other Member States, the initiative aims to support participants’ integration into the labour market and society of their Member State of origin by boosting their motivation, soft skills, personal growth, and self-confidence through a transformational work-related learning experience abroad.

This position paper expresses the support of the ALMA Network, advocating for the continuation and further development of the ALMA initiative beyond the current 2021–2027 programming period. The ALMA Network brings together ESF+ Managing Authorities and Implementing Bodies at national and regional level from Member States¹ implementing or planning ALMA measures within their ESF+ programmes. Acting as a community of practice, the Network provides strategic coordination, practical guidance, and a trusted space for cooperation, supporting its members in designing, launching, and managing ALMA calls with quality, efficiency, and impact, while fostering the continuous improvement and long-term sustainability of ALMA.

What creates ALMA’s specific value

ALMA’s added value lies in offering a **work-related learning experience abroad** in an EU Member State other than the one of residence, embedded in a project cycle with comprehensive pedagogical support across all phases to achieve meaningful personal and professional development. This cycle includes an **intensive preparation phase**, followed by a supervised work-related learning experience abroad and a **follow-up phase** using the newly acquired competences to integrate into employment. The ALMA theory of change below shows how supported mobility helps to break cycles of exclusion to move towards social inclusion and labour-market integration.



¹71 members from 13 Member States (BG, CZ, DE, ES, GR, HR, IT, MT, PL, PT, SE, SI, SK).

ALMA **addresses a critical gap in EU mobility programmes**. While Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps promote transnational mobility for students, apprentices, and volunteers, **ALMA specifically targets young people who have fewer opportunities or who are at risk of social or economic marginalisation**, using mobility **as a tool for social inclusion rather than an objective**. ALMA is innovative and unique precisely because it addresses the unmet needs of this target group by using transnational mobility in a new way.

From IdA to ALMA: building on successful experience since 2008

ALMA builds on over a decade of European experience in transnational work-related learning mobility. Its origins lie in **Germany's 'Integration durch Austausch' (IdA) programme, launched in 2008** under the ESF 2007–2013. Inspired by IdA's proven success, this socially innovative approach was progressively **scaled out** through the Transnational Learning Network (TLN) Mobility, formed by **eight Member States and regions**². Together, they developed a common framework to support the launch of national and regional TLN mobility calls for disadvantaged young people. In 2022, the European Commission institutionalised this structure by launching the ALMA EU-level initiative, a flagship action of the European Year of Youth, recognising the positive impact of structured mobility on employability and social inclusion for disadvantaged young people.

ALMA's gradual expansion across Europe (2021–2027)

During the 2021–2027 programming period, ALMA is implemented under both **shared management** within national or regional ESF+ programmes, and **indirect management** through the one-off EU-level ALMA call implemented by the European Competence Centre for Social Innovation in 2023–2026. The objective of this call was to help Member States to integrate ALMA into their ESF+ programmes, by piloting or scaling up ALMA-type operations.

- **ALMA EU-level call:** 28 transnational projects in 15 Member States³ were funded with EUR 11 million from the ESF+ between 2023 and December 2025, targeting 800 young NEETs.
- **National and regional ESF+ programmes:** Eight Member States⁴ are currently implementing ALMA under shared management with a total budget of EUR 174.7 million targeting 7 966 NEETs.
- **Additional regions and Member States**, including Greece, Croatia, Italy (Emilia-Romagna), Portugal, Poland (Opolskie), Slovakia, and Spain (Valencia) plan to launch ALMA projects, **that could bring total funding close to EUR 202 million and reach around 8 600 young people by the end of the period**.

ALMA's proven impact

ALMA delivers multi-layered impact by supporting NEETs to overcome barriers, build self-confidence, and develop professional, intercultural, and soft skills that enhance employability. It supports their reintegration into education or employment while fostering European added value through transnational experiences. At the same time, ALMA strengthens cooperation and long-term partnerships among organisations across Member States.

A recent impact evaluation of projects implemented under the ALMA EU-level call provided additional robust evidence of ALMA's effectiveness and efficiency. For instance, **62 per cent of participants** who completed all phases of the ALMA experience were later reintegrated into employment, education, or training. When considering all project participants, including those who dropped out, **47, 4 per cent** successfully reintegrated. **Also, 80 per cent or more of the participants** assessed that ALMA was a truly life-changing experience for them, a catalyst for personal development, increased confidence, and a stronger sense of European identity. More specifically:

- **Personal growth:** 94 per cent of participants felt ALMA enhanced their personal development and self-esteem.
- **Social skills:** 87 per cent agreed that the ALMA experience strengthened their social skills and flexibility to adapt to new environments, and, for many participants, stepping outside their comfort zone was the main mechanism driving social and personal change.
- **Future career perspective:** more than 81 per cent declared that the ALMA experience prepared them for the labour market, and they felt more confident about their future career.
- **European identity:** more than 76 per cent felt more European after participation, and they were now better able to understand how our Union impacts citizens' lives. This shows that European identity was no longer an abstract concept for the participants but a practical network of solidarity, shared values, and opportunities.

² Germany, Czechia, Poland, Slovenia, Sweden, Catalonia (Spain), Galicia (Spain), Trento (Italy).

³ Austria, Bulgaria, Czechia, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden.

⁴ Bulgaria, Germany, Czechia, Italy (Calabria), Malta, Slovenia, Spain (Andalusia, Catalonia, Galicia, and Murcia), and Poland (Lubelskie, Podkarpackie, Śląskie, and Świętokrzyskie).

The cost –benefit analysis of the ALMA EU-level call shows that the benefits of the initiative exceed its costs. The economic benefit–cost ratio is equal to 1.33, meaning that **benefits outweigh costs by 33 per cent**. Additional benefits related to participants’ personal growth are also evident, although not assessed in monetary terms⁵.

These findings confirmed the previous results of the TLN Mobility programmes. By scaling up a German social innovation into an ESF+-supported EU-wide initiative embedding transnational learning and collaborative practice, ALMA has demonstrated its capacity to deliver impactful results for vulnerable NEETs, tailored to their needs and effectively supporting their integration into employment, education, or training. In doing so, ALMA provides a concrete response to Europe’s demographic challenges while strengthening European identity through lived transnational experience.

Conclusions and recommendations

Based on the strong evidence presented, **the ALMA Network strongly supports the further development and continuation of the ALMA initiative beyond the current programming period**. ALMA has proven to be a highly effective, cost-efficient, and transformative instrument for supporting disadvantaged young people, while delivering clear European added value.

To consolidate and scale up this impact, **future implementation should be embedded coherently within the broader EU framework**, while **preserving ALMA’s specific social inclusion focus** and tailored support for young people with fewer opportunities.

Maintaining the ALMA Network and EU-level coordination structures is essential to preserve institutional knowledge, support MAs and IBs, and ensure continuity of transnational cooperation. Strengthening these elements will allow ALMA to build on its demonstrated success and maximise its long-term social, economic, and institutional benefits for the European Union and its Member States.

On behalf of the ALMA Network Member States
ALMA Network

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⁵ The impact evaluation of the projects implemented under the ALMA EU-level call

