



# **REPORT ON THE ONLINE AAL JP SATISFACTION SURVEY**



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The AAL JP satisfaction survey was launched by the Central Management Unit [CMU] on the last year of the programme and aimed at providing feedback from the direct benefactors of the funding and material for the final evaluation scheduled to be conducted over the summer 2013. This survey was also a mean for the AALA to learn from its own experience in the context of the on-going follow-up of the AAL JP.

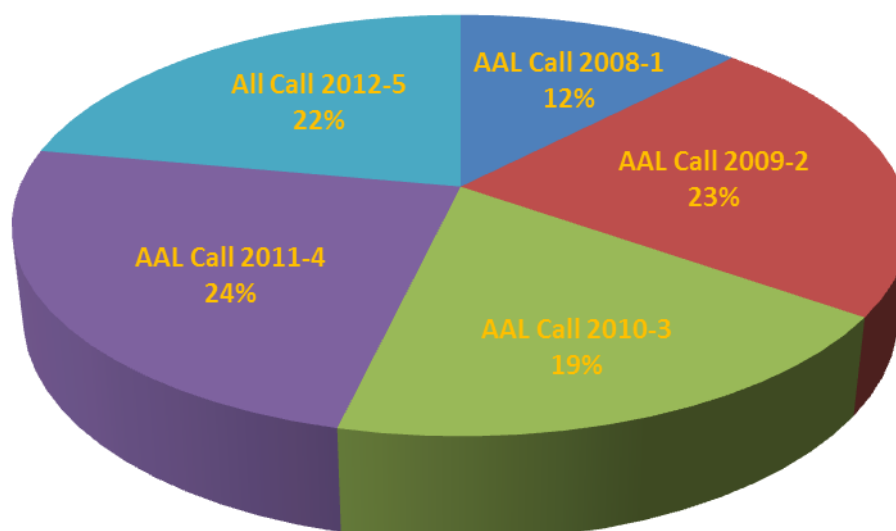
The survey was open online between 28 March 2013 and 6 May 2013, targeting the coordinators and participants of projects funded under the five calls for proposals published yearly from 2008 to 2012 [AAL JP Calls 2008-1, 2009-2, 2010-3, 2011-4 and 2012-5], i.e. over a thousand persons distributed amongst 109 projects.

The results of the survey, presented in this report, were overall very constructive and reflected that project participants generally had a very positive approach to the AAL JP and were satisfied with its functioning and organisation.

## PARTICIPATION IN THE SURVEY

Two hundred and nineteen participants took the survey, distributed per call for proposals as follows:

Survey participation per call for proposals



The lesser number of participants from AAL Call 2008-1 can be explained by the fact that most projects funded under this call for proposals are finished, rendering the responsiveness of project participants and coordinators more uncertain.

Regarding the distribution of the survey takers by nationality, more than a quarter were from Spain, and a high participation from the Netherlands is to be observed, which reflects also the level of their general participation in the AAL JP. However, it still had to be kept in mind that the

participation per country in this survey is not fully representative of the respective involvements in the AAL JP:

(1)	ES	NL	FR	CH	DE	SE	AT	IT	BE	HU	CY	PT	UK	SI	NO	FI	PL	LU	DK	RO	IL	IE
(2)	26.5	14.2	9.1	8.7	7.3	6.8	5.5	4.1	3.7	3.2	2.3	1.8	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.4	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	0	0
(3)	58	31	20	19	16	15	12	9	8	7	5	4	3	3	3	3	1.	1.	1.	0	0	0

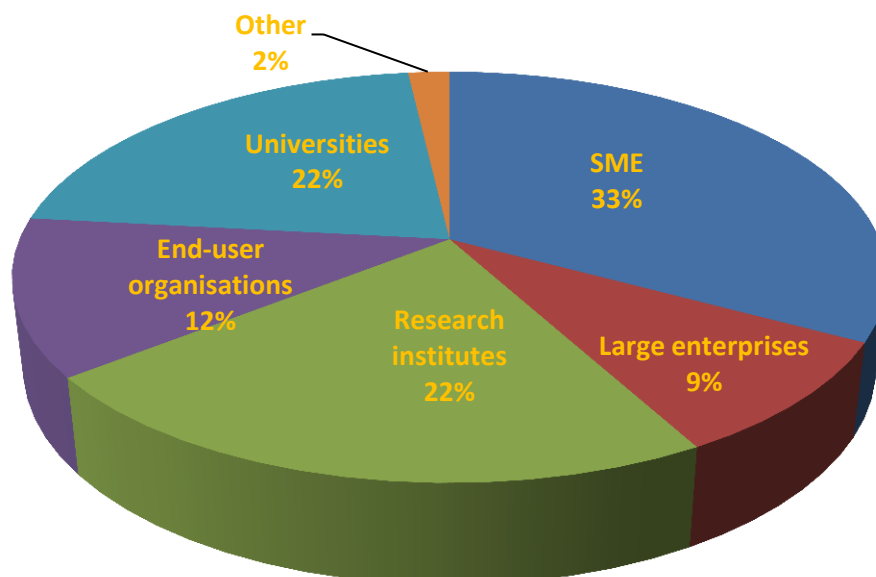
(1) *Country*

(2) *Percentage of participation in the satisfaction survey*

(3) *Number of participants in the satisfaction survey out of the total of 219 persons*

Amongst the 219 participants:

- ✓ 92 were project coordinators
- ✓ 180 were participants in projects that had already started
- ✓ 39 were participants in projects that had not yet started (mostly from AAL Call 2012-5)
- ✓ the profiles were distributed as follows:

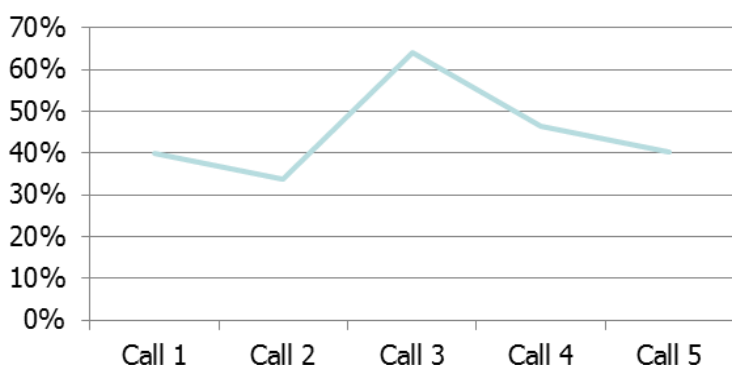


## PROPOSAL SUBMISSION STAGE

The proposal submission stage starts with the launch of a call for proposals and closes with it, lasting three months.

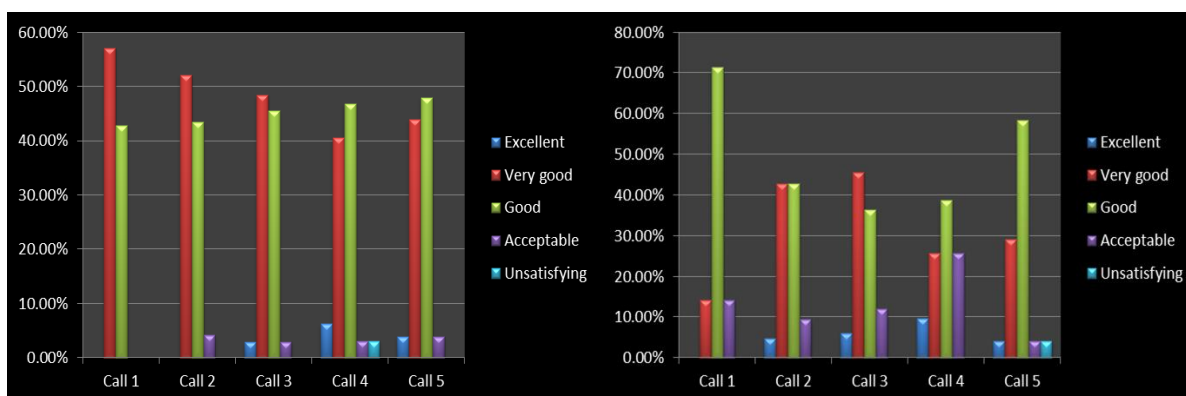
A central Info Day is organised in Brussels shortly after publication of each call for proposals, in order to provide more detailed information and support to proposers (e.g. on the call topic, the way to draft a proposal, form a consortium, etc.).

The outcome of the survey confirms, as already observed in practice, that participation in the central Info Days varies with no chronological pattern as it is very dependent on the call topic.



For instance, an increased participation can be observed for AAL Call 2010-3, for which the topic was more difficult to grasp at first glance *[ICT-based solutions for advancement of older persons' independence and participation in the "Self-serve Society"]*.

It can be pointed out from the results of the survey that participants in the central Info Days were overall satisfied with the quality of the information they received, as well as with the networking possibilities they enjoyed at the occasion of the event, and that this observation is relatively constant over the five years under scrutiny:

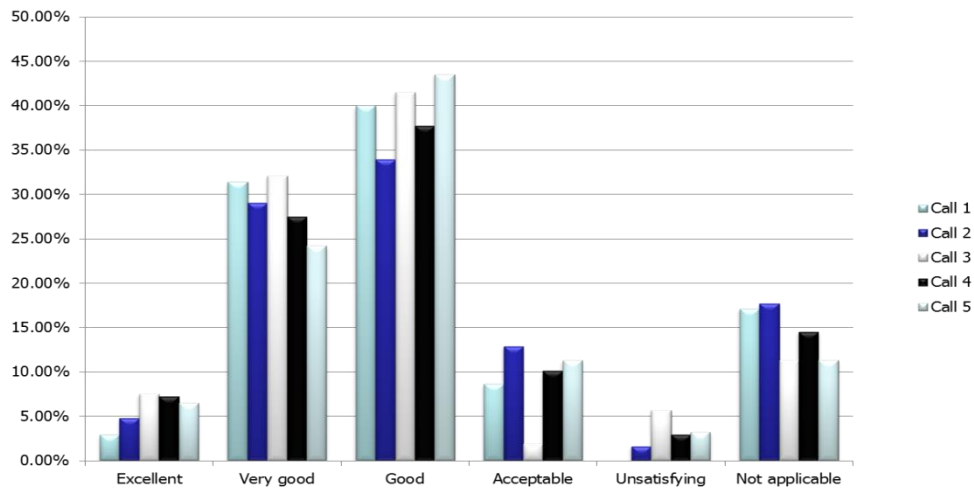


Quality of the information received

Networking possibilities

During the proposal submission phase, a proposal submission website is put at the disposal of proposers, a majority of whom sent a rather positive feedback as to its functioning and usability,

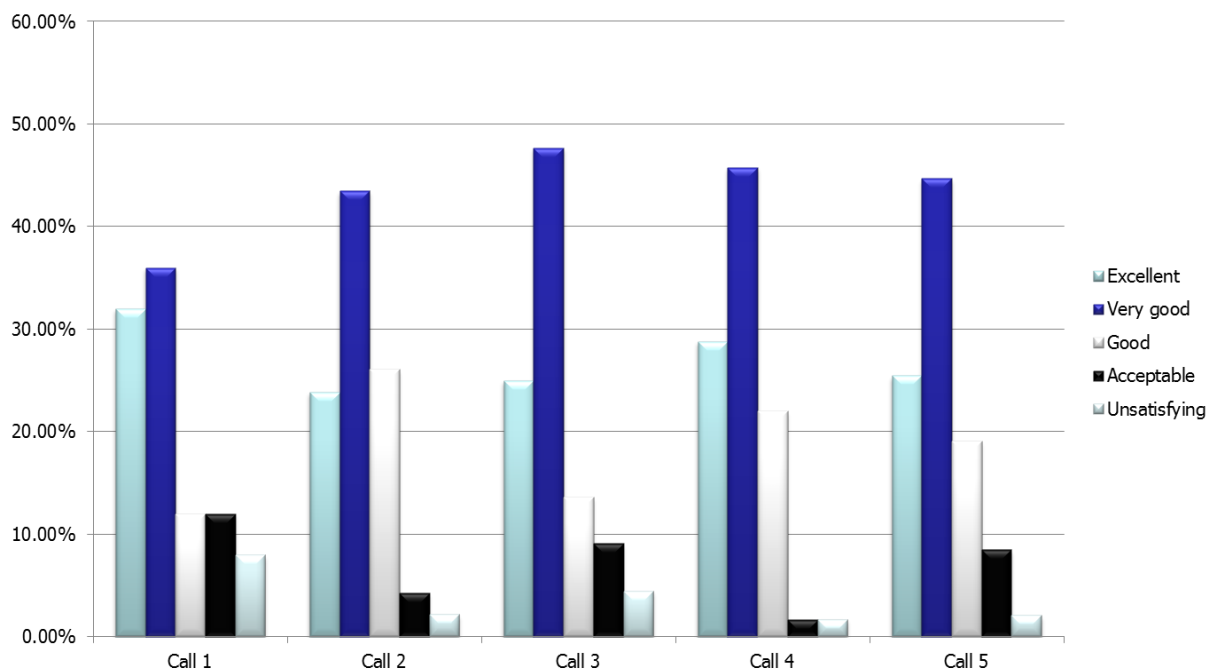
with a constant from call to call. The fact that generally, only one participant submits the whole proposal in the tool explains why 34 survey takers replied *'not applicable'*:



Proposers are strongly encouraged to contact their National Contact Person [NCP] for support and advice during the three months of call opening.

We can observe from the results of the survey that the use of NCP support at proposal submission stage increased from call to call.

Overall, out of 219 survey participants, 163 used the support of their NCP at some stage of the proposal drafting/preparation, and a considerable majority of them qualified the support received as *'excellent'*, *'good'* or *'very good'*:





Asked how to improve the national support received during the proposal submission phase, the survey takers suggested, amongst others:

- ✓ the establishment of a full pre-proposal check
- ✓ an increased alignment of national and central eligibility criteria
- ✓ a harmonisation of different national eligibility criteria
- ✓ an extensive technical support when drafting the proposal.

#### PROJECT RECONFIGURATION STAGE

Once the ranking list of proposals is issued, the CMU informs the proposers of the outcome of the evaluation.

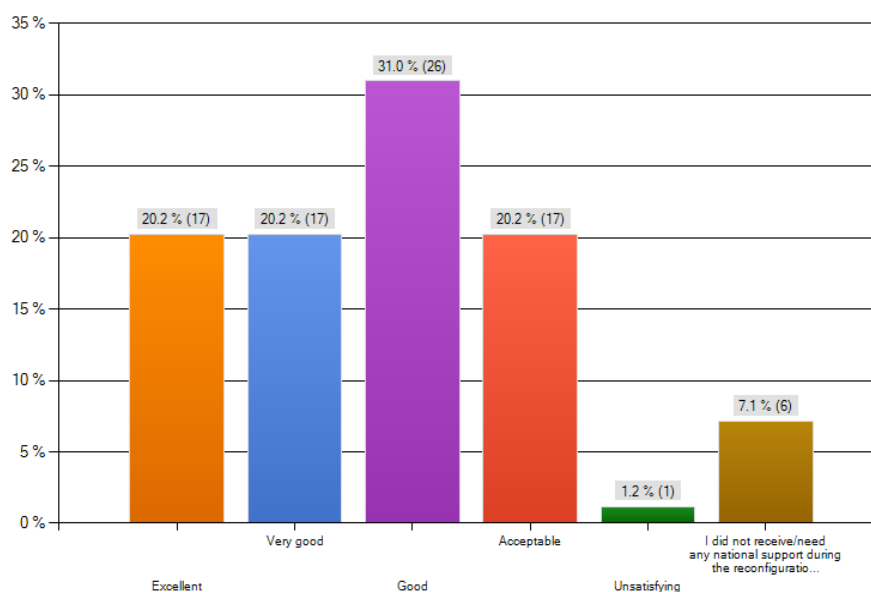
For the projects above threshold, but for which the national funding is insufficient for one or

several partners, the CMU sends out an invitation to reconfigure the proposal in order to replace the relevant participants by other participants fulfilling the criteria and coming from a country where there still is national funding available.

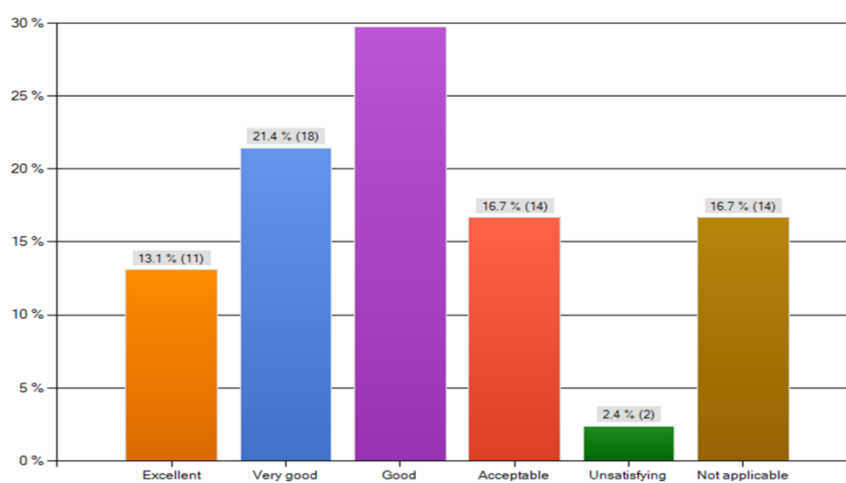
This reconfiguration phase lasts for one month maximum.

81 responses concerned projects that underwent a reconfiguration and were mostly satisfied with the support they received both at national and central level:

**How would you qualify the national support you received during the reconfiguration phase(s) of your project(s)?**

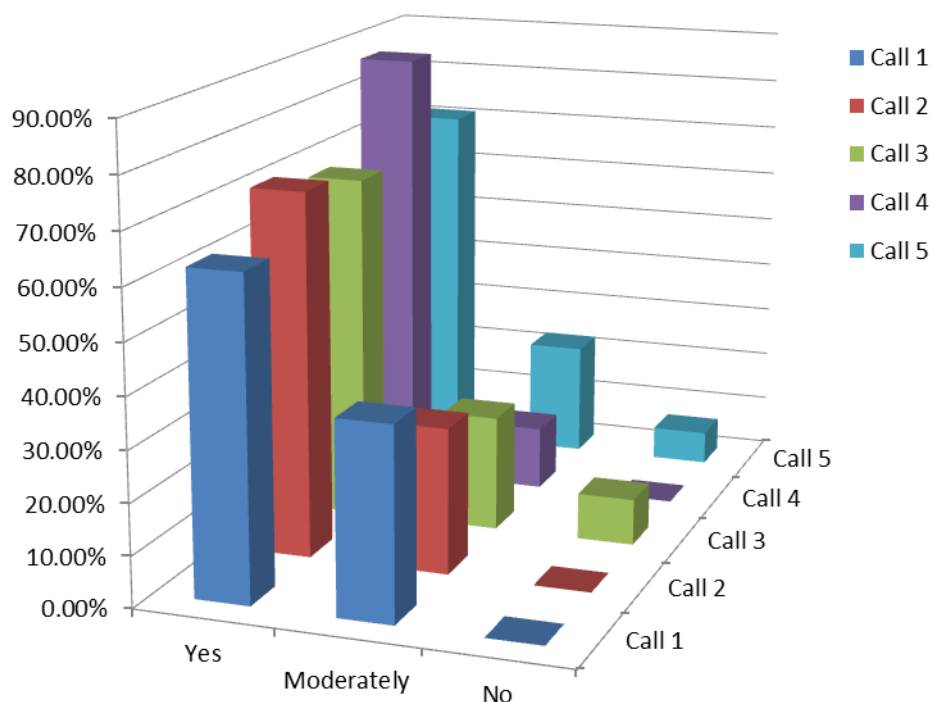


**How would you qualify the support you received from the Central Management Unit during the reconfiguration phase(s) of your project(s)?**

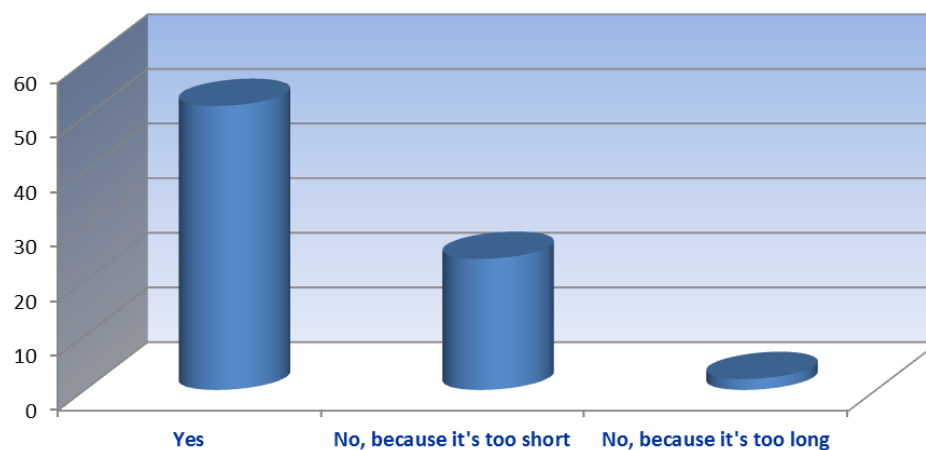


Asked whether they were satisfied with the outcome of the reconfiguration, the respondents replied by the affirmative in most cases.





Regarding the duration of the reconfiguration process, 67% of the respondents were satisfied with the one-month limit set to reconfigure, whereas 30% found it too short and 3% too long:



Among the most relevant suggestions to improve the reconfiguration process were the wish to harmonise the different national time constraints and generally an encouragement to enhance the coordination and cooperation between different National Funding Authorities [NFAs].

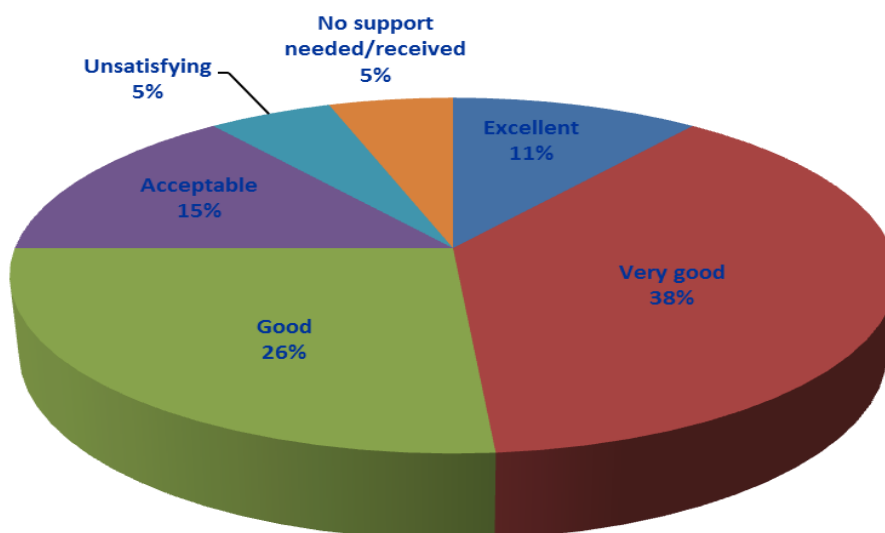
## NEGOTIATION PHASE

Once the ranking list of proposals is issued, the CMU informs the proposers of the outcome of the evaluation: all projects above threshold are invited to start negotiating at national level the grant agreements or funding acceptance letter with the partners' respective NFAs (possibly after a reconfiguration phase, see above).

The negotiation phase, in practical terms also referred to as time-to-contract, starts with the CMU's invitation to start negotiations and ends with the signature or delivery of the grant agreement or funding acceptance letter.

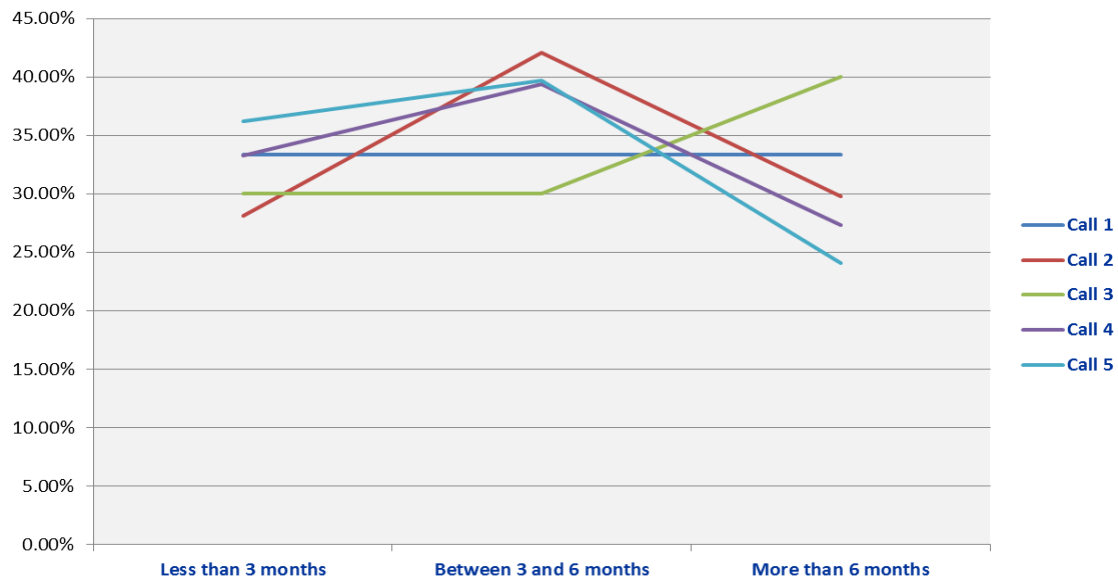
The support received during this particular period is therefore mostly national and provided by NCPs.

The results of the survey emphasises again an almost complete satisfaction with the support received by project participants at this stage:



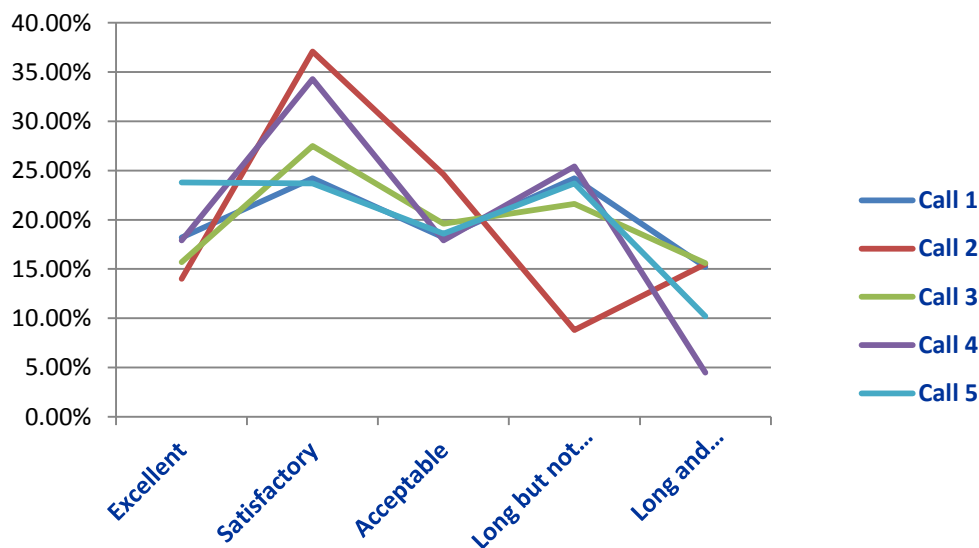
Reducing the time-to-contract is a challenge undertaken within the AAL JP since some years now and has become a priority of its follow-up for 2014-2020.

The time-to-contract for projects funded under the first five calls for proposals was reflected as follows in the survey:



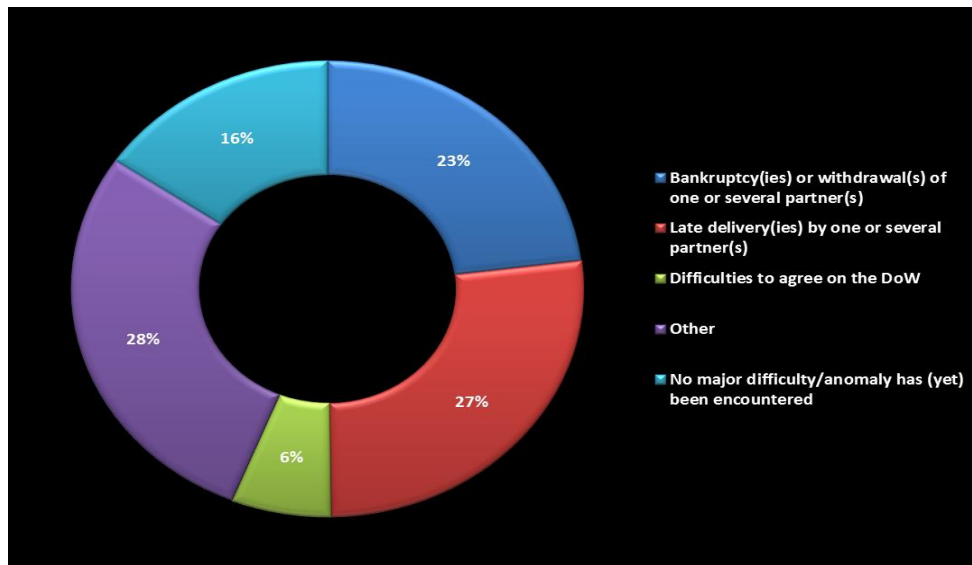
These timings have been found to be only partly satisfactory by the survey takers, as can be observed from the answers below to the question:

**“How would you qualify the time taken to sign the national contract or grant agreement or to receive the final acceptance letter for the funding request(s)?”**



## PROJECT EXECUTION

From the moment the project starts, many difficulties can arise such as bankruptcy of one or several partners or late deliveries by some partners:



The major difficulties put forward in the category “others” were notably:

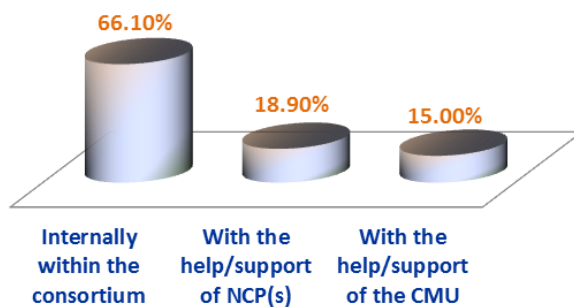
- difficulties arising before the start of the project, such as delays caused by a partner who did not (yet) sign the grant agreement or receive the funding acceptance letter (most frequent cause for delay), or caused by a late signature of the consortium agreement
- insufficiencies in the guidance and coordination of the project partners
- delays in the payment of public funding to one or several project partners
- delays due to the need to replace one or several project partners
- difficulties to agree on commercialisation aspects within the consortium
- heaviness of the administrative paperwork that considerably shortens the time dedicated to real work on the project.

At the time of the survey, approx. 15% of these major difficulties were not (yet) solved, covering the following situations:

- on-going dispute between the two coordinators
- payment of public funding or signature of grant agreement still pending
- on-going process of re-allocation of work/tasks.

For the other cases, most of the difficulties were solved internally within the consortium, as can be observed from the answers below to the question:

### **“How has this major difficulty been solved?”**

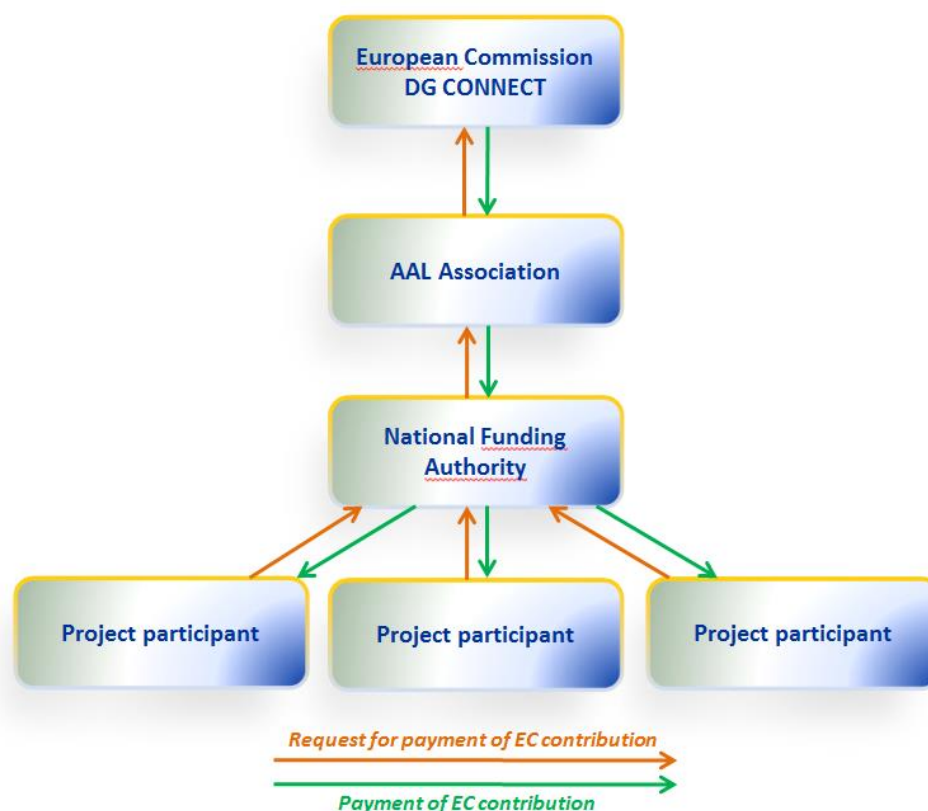


Generally, the following suggestions have been put forward by respondents to improve the support received within the AAL JP:

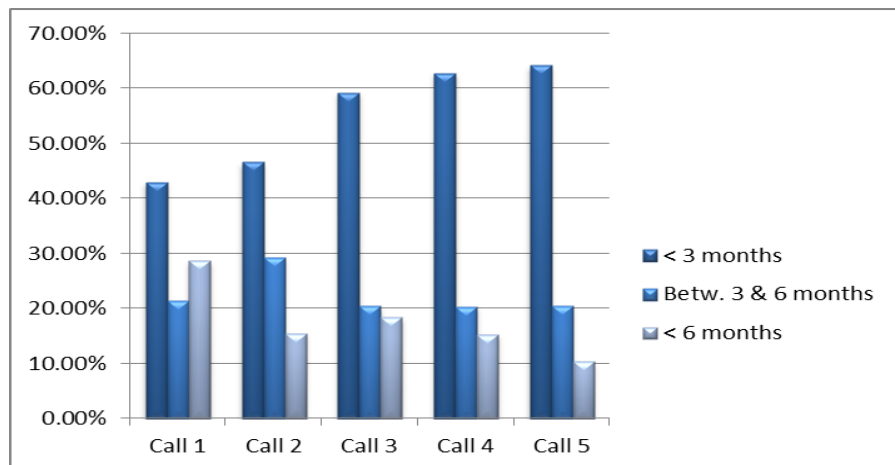
- more information and support in the preparation of the mid-term review and the content/format required for the deliverables
- more upfront information on the reporting requirements
- harmonisation between the different rules applicable at national level and between national and central regulations
- organisations of more national/European events and workshops to allow project coordinators to share their respective experience
- some means for the coordinator to put pressure on other participants to deliver timely and satisfactory results.

## PAYMENT OF PUBLIC FUNDING

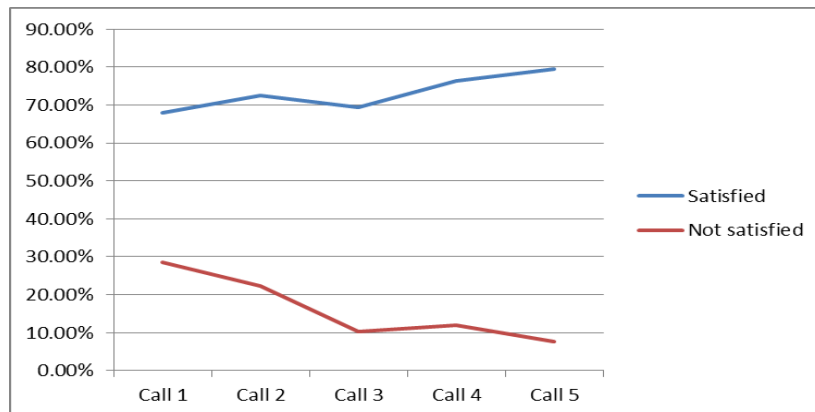
In the AAL JP, the public funding is always paid directly by the NFA to its national project participants, according to modalities and procedures regulated at national level. The EC contribution to projects is therefore paid by the European Commission to the AALA that transfers it to NFAs:



In practice, the time to payment (i.e. the time between the project participant's request for payment of the public funding and its effective payment by the NFA) rarely exceeds 6 months. It is, in most cases, inferior to 3 months, and this target has been improving over the different calls:



We can observe correlatively an increasing satisfaction pattern regarding the time to payment:



## MID-TERM REVIEWS OF PROJECTS

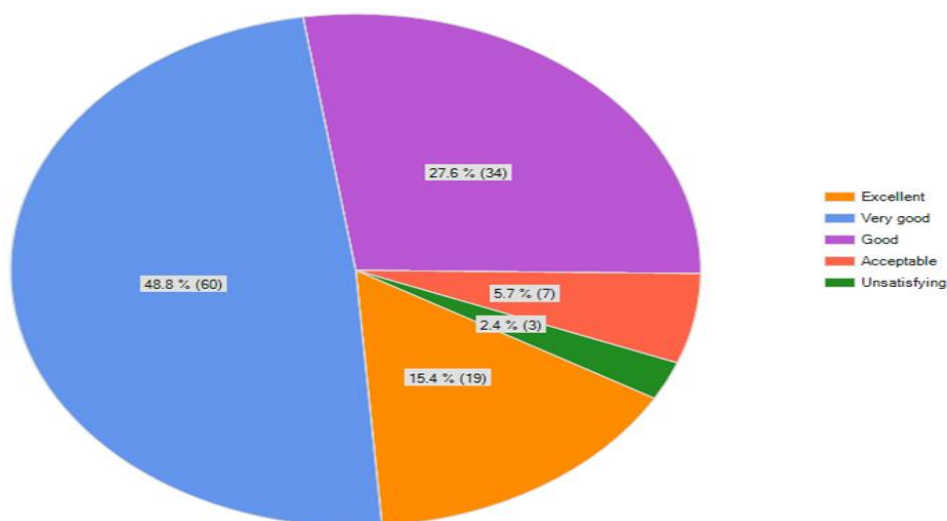
125 participants in the survey indicated having been submitted to a mid-term review of projects under the AAL JP, including 9 for whom the mid-term review was actually on-going at the time they took the survey.

The mid-term review is managed by the CMU and performed by two independent experts representing end-user perspective and technology and innovation expertise on the basis of deliverables prepared by the consortium.

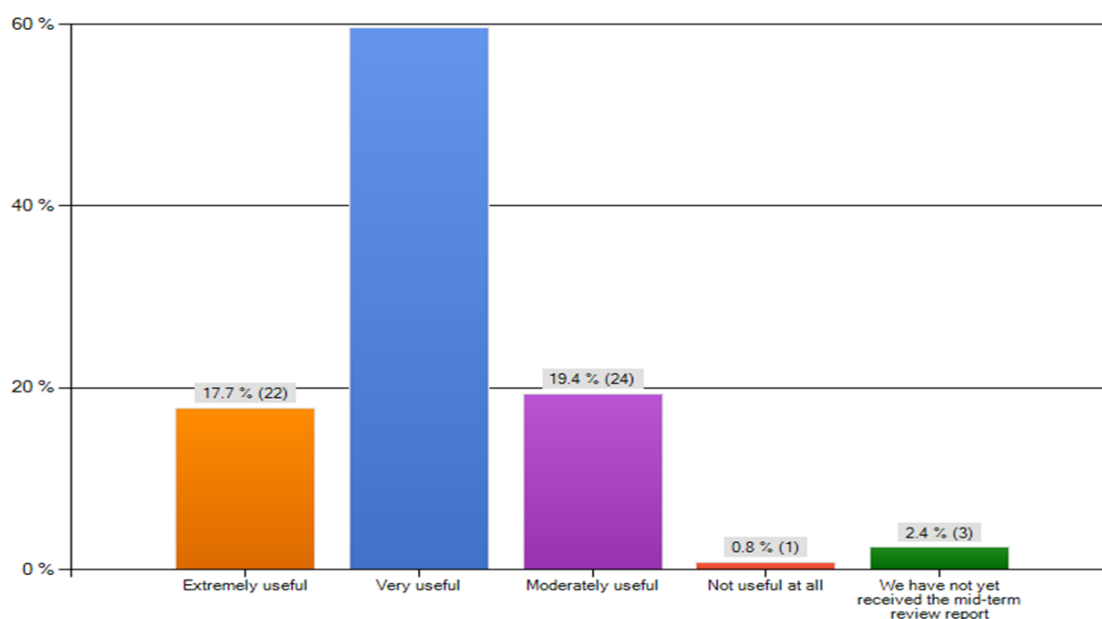
After one physical meeting involving the experts, the CMU, involved NCPs and project participants, the experts issue a report providing recommendations to guide the consortium for the second part of the project.

The consortium then has a possibility to reply or not to these recommendations.

Asked to rate the preparation and organisation of the mid-term review process by the CMU, the respondents were rather enthusiastic:



and generally considered the recommendations from the experts *“very useful”*:



The following suggestions were put forward:

- give more time preparation to the consortium
- allow the consortium to have access to the questions in advance of the mid-term review meeting so that they can provide consolidated answers from the consortium
- on top of the recommendations, include positive aspects in the report
- give the consortium more detailed instructions on how to gather and present the deliverables.



## FINAL REVIEWS OF PROJECTS

50 participants in the survey indicated having been submitted to a final review of projects under the AAL JP, including 10 for whom the final review was actually on-going at the time they took the survey.

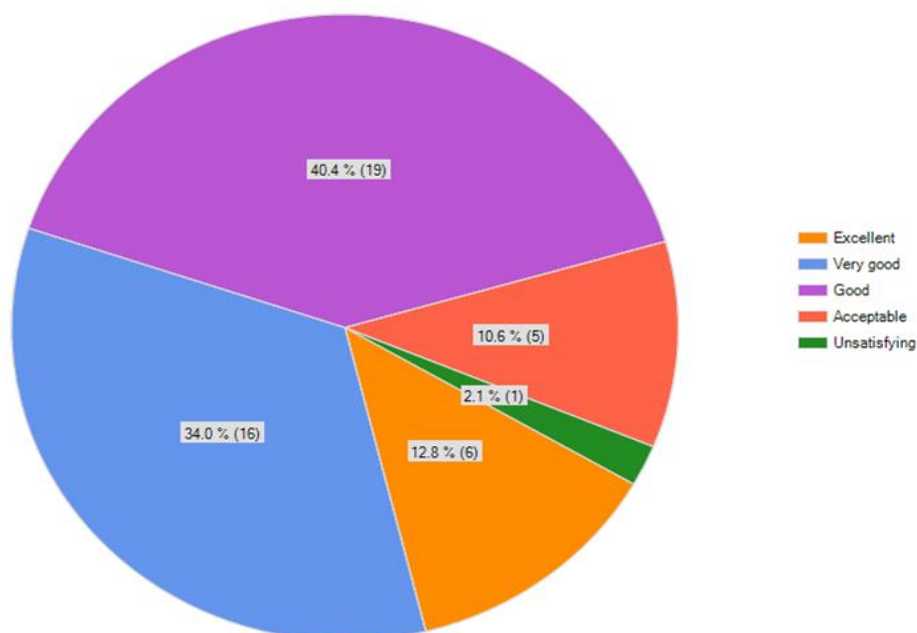
The final review is managed by the CMU and performed by two independent experts representing end-user perspective and technology and innovation expertise on the basis of deliverables prepared by the consortium.

The final review is remote, so there is no physical meeting involved: after studying the deliverables initially provided, the experts produce an additional round of questions to the consortium.

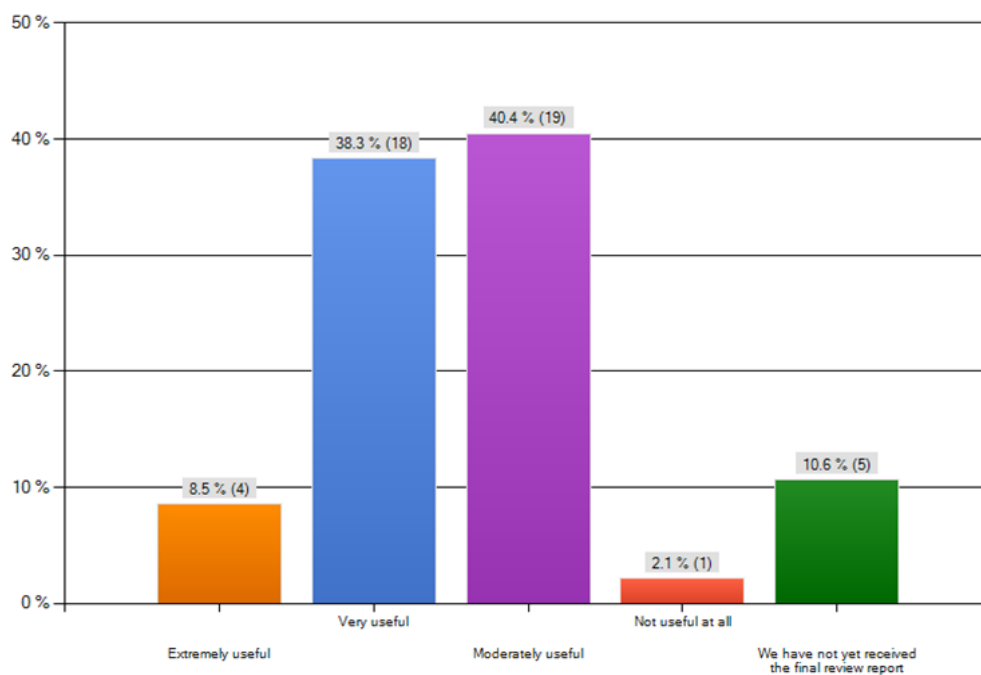
With the subsequent replies, they then issue their consolidated report providing recommendations to the consortium for later stages of the project.

The consortium has the possibility to reply or not to these recommendations.

Asked to rate the preparation and organisation of the final review process by the CMU, the respondents were globally satisfied:



but, for a majority, considered the recommendations from the experts only “moderately useful”:

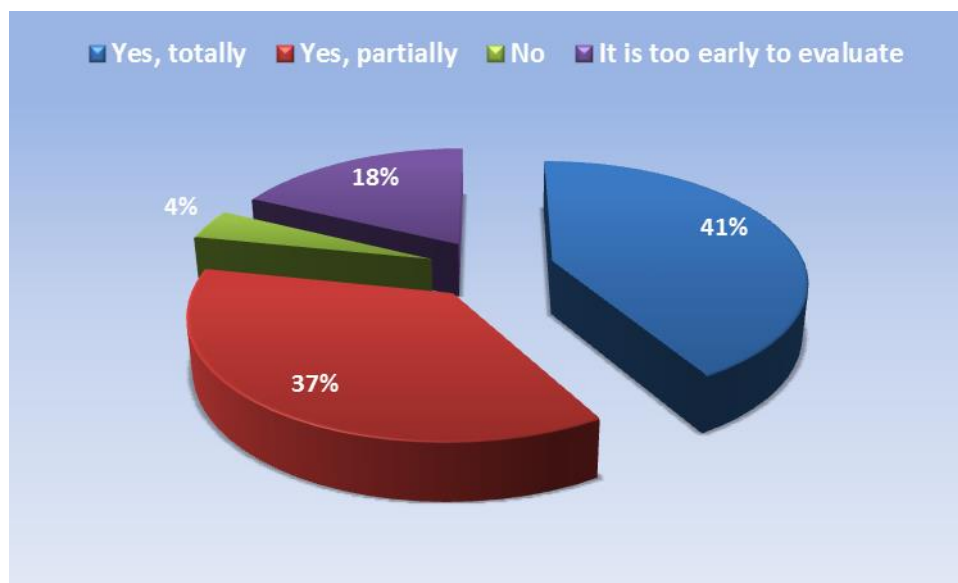


The suggestions put forward mainly encouraged the organisation of a physical meeting for the final review as for the mid-term review.

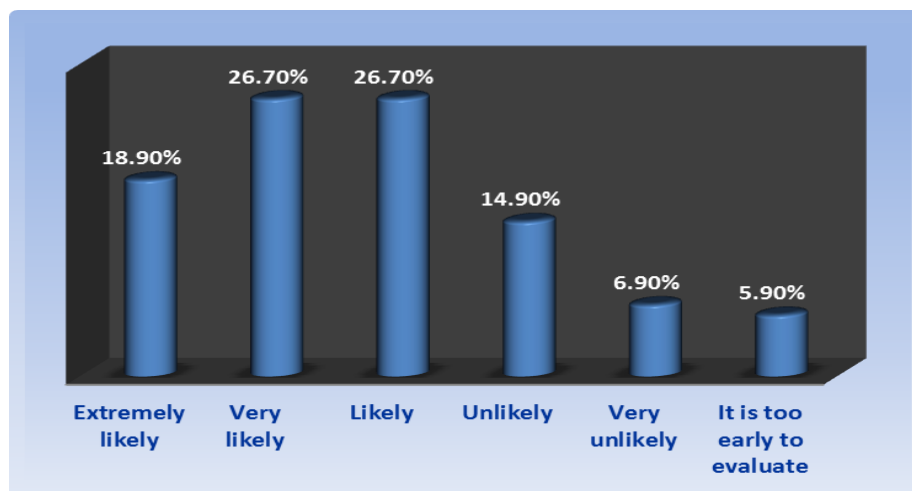
## GENERAL CONCLUSIONS/SUGGESTIONS

The overall satisfaction of project participants expressed in the survey are very positive, as can be observed from the outcome of the final set of questions:

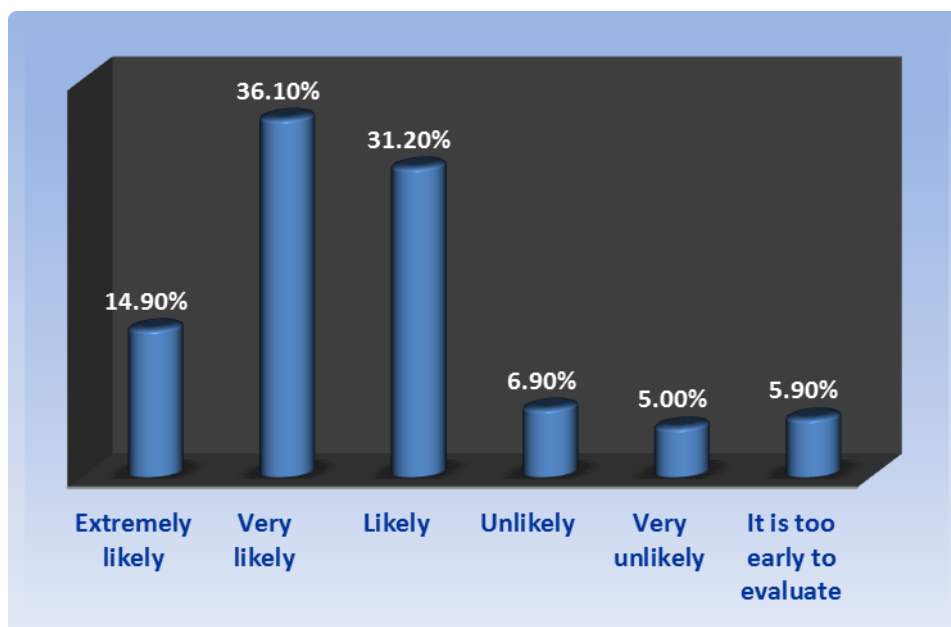
**“Do you consider that your participation in one or several AAL JP project(s) was worth your own financial/work investment in the project(s)?”**



**“How likely are you to submit a new proposal for an AAL JP call, provided the scope/topic matches your field of expertise?”**



**“How likely are you recommend the participation in AAL JP calls for proposals to your network, provided the scope/topic matches their field of expertise?”**



**“In general and from your perspective as a project participant, what further comments/suggestions would you provide to improve the AAL JP and its management?”**

- ✓ Harmonise the national funding regulations (time-to-contract, time-to-payment, end-user involvement, fundability etc.)
- ✓ Provide the coordinators with means to put pressure on project participants to deliver timely and qualitatively
- ✓ Improve and enhance effective knowledge sharing
- ✓ Decrease the level of bureaucracy and administrative workload
- ✓ Pre-check the administrative and financial capacities of NFAs (mostly to avoid issues/discrepancies regarding time-to-contract & time-to-payment)
- ✓ Increase the centralisation of programme management.

[These comments reflect the main recurrent observations and are not exhaustive.](#)