

Erasmus+ 2021-27 Interim Evaluation and 2014-20 Final Evaluation

Position paper
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Introduction

Erasmus+ plays a crucial role for European HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) and their international stakeholders. Individuals, institutions, and organisations can participate in exchanges and collaborative efforts and represent the main source of financial support for international mobility and educational cooperation. Beyond its concrete and enduring impacts on education at all levels, Erasmus+ also contributes to fostering cohesion within Europe, both within and beyond the European Union, while enhancing transnational partnerships.

With this feedback, EURASHE analyses the programme objectives' relevance to today's current needs, the contribution of the programme to the green deal and to promote the inclusion of people with fewer opportunities, and its clearance and straightforwardness, and "to sustainable growth, quality jobs and social cohesion, to driving innovation, and to strengthen European identity and active citizenship". We highlight the following points for consideration:

- Advocate for additional funding to support inclusive, equal, accessible, and fair HE;
- Support short-term mobilities across degree programs;
- Anticipate solutions for students facing challenges in crises or at-risk contexts;
- Recognise funding as a major obstacle, leading to consideration of virtual exchanges and blended mobility;
- Enhance synergies between the European Education Area and the European Research Area;
- Involve HEIs more in inter-regional cooperation and related investments;
- Consider practical adjustments and more inclusivity in the European Universities Initiative;
- Foster synergies with other programs to ensure project sustainability;
- Further simplification and consultations of the Erasmus+ program;
- Increase the awareness raising and dissemination of project results;
- Encourage cross-reference to different funding programs for continuation and scaling up of successful project outcomes.

Programme structure & horizontal priorities

Erasmus+ holds immense value, exerting a substantial influence on HEs and their constituents. It stands as a vital instrument for enhancing educational quality and making meaningful contributions to society, both within Europe and on a global scale. Erasmus+ must remain one of the highest priorities for the European Union in the next Multiannual Financial Framework.

Both the 2014-2020 and the 2021-2027 Erasmus+ programmes pursued a similar general structure under three key actions¹. For its implementation, the 2021-2027 Erasmus+ programme includes four

¹ **Key Action 1 for individuals:** Transnational and international mobility actions aimed at learners, young people, and practitioners;

Key Action 2 for organisations: Transnational and international cooperation projects aiming to support mutual learning, exchange of good practice, innovation, and capacity building of organisations;

Key Action 3 for policy development and cooperation: Support to policy cooperation at the European Union level aiming to develop new policies to trigger modernisation and reforms in the fields of education and training, youth, and sport.

horizontal priorities: Inclusion and diversity; Digital transformation; Environment and fight against climate change; and Participation in democratic life, common values, and civic engagement. EURASHE recognises the relevance of these priorities for HEIs in Europe and beyond. Better connected and collaborative, HEIs benefit from mutual learning, capacity building, exchanges of good practices, and awareness raising. There is, nevertheless, room for improvement across the priority areas as well as introducing clear impact assessment mechanisms which would enhance the programme priorities. For more inclusive, equal, accessible, and fair HE, additional funding is needed to face the high costs of mobility-related actions, mostly for students. Many students from applied HEIs can be described as non-traditional, which often means that accessibility and inclusion measures and incentives² are of particular importance to pursuing their studies.

Collaboration and exchanges in a virtual format can contribute to reducing the climate impact of travel, however, they cannot fully replace physical mobility, and be considered in the same terms³ or as a means to reach mobility targets. The investment in digital skills of learners and teachers in the programme will be also enhanced by this boost of virtual and blended exchanges across the three key actions. The costs referred to sustainable travel, for example, are shown to be insufficient which limits the usage of green forms of transport.

Alongside interim and final consultations of the Erasmus+ programme, the Commission should consider continuously monitoring the progress to assess the accuracy of the horizontal priorities.

Learners & staff mobility

EURASHE welcomes the return of short-term mobilities across more degree programmes. We note that individuals report obstacles to mobility because of a low grant level (aggravated by accommodation costs and general inflation) and the need to increase the participation of learners from vulnerable groups.

Even though the Programme reacted promptly to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, stakeholders including the European University Association, as well as many policymakers, have noted⁴ that Europe lacks a programme to support students and academics in crises or at-risk scenarios. For example, students who need more than two semesters to finalise their degree do not yet have a solution.

EURASHE members share a positive view of the Erasmus+ mobility actions. However, funding can be a major obstacle and therefore they often need to consider virtual exchanges and blended mobility.

Transnational & international cooperation

Cooperation between HEIs and organisations fosters capacity building across borders. Overall, the organisations involved in these activities welcome them but reinforce the need to encourage synergies and cooperation between projects. EURASHE's view is aligned with the EUA⁵ on the need to enhance

² Financial support, awareness raise of staff skills development, fit in curricula design, among others.

³ As equally funded activities.

⁴ [Building on the success of Erasmus+](#)

⁵ [Building on the success of Erasmus+](#)

more timely communication of results, and addressing this by the Commission organising meetings and events for project participants focusing on content-related updates from projects.

As a mean of sectoral cohesion support, the programme, and thus the European Union aims to foster synergy between the European Education Area (EEA) and the European Research Area (ERA)⁶. To achieve this, increased policy and funding synergies are needed, while aligning with the European Higher Education Area that extends beyond the EU. The European Strategy for Universities, with a focus on the European Universities Initiative, is a step forward. However, it is crucial to further enhance the integration of education, research, and innovation both horizontally and through additional actions. This objective should be pursued in the current Erasmus+, the upcoming tenth framework programme for research and innovation (FP10), as well as the Cohesion Policy. This is vital for the entire higher education sector, contributing to skills development, lifelong learning, and fostering cross-sector cooperation in green and digital innovation. EURASHE sees scope in particular to involve HEIs more in inter-regional cooperation and related investments by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

Programme novelties: European Universities & Centres of Vocational Excellence

EURASHE welcomes the European Universities Initiative (EUI) as a trailblazer for transnational cooperation among HEIs within Europe and to promote European higher education globally. The initiative should, nevertheless, become more practical and less focused on meeting all the ambitious objectives. We support the EUA's views on the need to have a holistic reflection⁷ on the future of the EUI⁸, considering the concerns and obstacles related to the high investment required and external policy pressures. The grant provided under the EUI and the large number of resources mobilised seems to be an obstacle for some of the alliances. EURASHE highlights the need for the Initiative to be inclusive and value further the diversity of collaboration actions within Erasmus+ and beyond, as the initiative, *per se*, does not fully encompass the HE sector. Furthermore, EURASHE underlines the need to strengthen the links between education, research and external engagement. It is, nevertheless, positive that the funding period has been extended from three to four years in the 2021/2022 call.

EURASHE recognizes the relevant role of Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) in bringing together VET providers including HEIs, as well as local and regional level partners and other stakeholders to systematically co-create "skills ecosystems". Like the European University Initiative, CoVEs must promote synergies with other programmes to ensure their sustainability.

⁶ Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030) at [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32021G0226\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32021G0226(01))

⁷ Considering all dimensions of cooperation, including learning and teaching, research, innovation, and societal engagement, along with the sustainability of such aspects.

⁸ [Building on the success of Erasmus+](#)

Policy development and cooperation actions no longer accept NGOs as initiators, as one of the novelties in the Erasmus+ programme, but after permission from the respective government. This discloses the belief that only governments should be involved in policymaking.

Administration & funding

Despite updates to the Erasmus+ programme over the years, further simplification of the programme would help beneficiaries concentrate on implementation and increase the diversity of participants. For mobility actions, EURASHE supports further developments towards the goal of becoming paperless and administratively burdenless, including initiatives such as Erasmus Without Paper⁹.

Similarly in the area of the Programme's actions supporting projects and cohesion of the sector e.g. Key Action 2, the reporting and management can consist of a huge administrative burden for beneficiaries, hampered by a lack of clarity, short deadlines, unexpected inquiries for documents and other evidence, and delay in getting access to information. Further consultations would enable better adaptation of the Programme to the needs of beneficiaries while improving projects' monitoring and implementation.

EURASHE mostly supports the efforts to increase funding¹⁰ and simplify the Erasmus+ programme. One of the significant changes is the lump-sum funding model, which is a new way of providing financial support. While this is promising, it is only used in a minority of projects and none have completed a full cycle yet. People involved in these projects have mentioned that there are uncertainties when it comes to managing finances and reporting for lump-sum projects. The information sessions organized by the EACEA did not provide clear details about financial and administrative requirements. Even though the formal administrative requirements for budget reporting have been reduced, it is unclear whether the documentation and accountability needs will be different in the case of an audit compared to previous programmes¹¹. Therefore, it is important to carefully assess the experiences with this new approach and consider expanding it to other parts of the Programme.

Overall, beneficiaries of the Programme welcome the new lump sum approach in project management because it makes things simpler and ensures better cost coverage. However, there is a problem with the lack of clear guidance and support, as well as confusing rules. Many are unsure about how this new approach will work. Most notably, those who seem the least informed are the project coordinators who, "just in case," insist on the same documents for reporting as they do for actual cost

⁹ [Erasmus Without Paper | Erasmus+ \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹⁰ It has an overall budget of more than EUR 26 billion for the period 2021-2027¹⁰, which is nearly double compared to its predecessor programme (2014-2020).

¹¹ It is essential to clearly distinguish between the old and new guidelines, especially if there are updated ones for lump sum projects, in the context of final audit reports and the expectations placed on auditors. Occasionally, project partners find themselves in situations where auditors may have overlooked certain details or failed to adhere closely to the specified requirements. Consequently, after a few months, the audit process may need to be repeated, causing challenges for both the project partners and the auditors themselves. They are compelled to revisit a report that was already completed several months before, while the current requirements significantly differ from those they had previously followed in other projects. It is advisable, if feasible, to organize information sessions for auditors who are interested in staying informed and actively engaging with Erasmus + projects.

projects. People often find that the instructions from EACEA are not clear and sometimes even contradict each other. Finally, beneficiaries including EURASHE European NGOs like EURASHE would prefer calls to be opened on a rolling basis across the year, and in this respect, the Programme could learn from the 'cut-off date system' employed by actions under the European Innovation Council (EIC) and Interregional Innovation Investments (I3)

The COVID-19 pandemic as well as geopolitical events have posed obstacles for the green and digital transitions, and particularly shown both the strengths and limitations of Erasmus+. It therefore requires further simplification and flexibility in terms of budget-launching emergency actions and increasing the resilience of the Programme.

Impact & exploitation of results

Raising awareness to the wider community and target groups and effective dissemination of results as well as engaging stakeholders for active participation in the project's activities (e.g.: multiplier events, webinars, etc) is essential for increasing the impact and exploiting project results. It also contributes to fostering networking and partnerships with a wide range of HEIs, organisations, governments, and industry partners. Stronger alignment and synergies between Erasmus+ and other EU programmes and initiatives, such as Horizon Europe promote cross-sectoral collaboration and innovation, mainly for project sustainability.

Erasmus+ projects often lead to relevant results for being exploited in different contexts and scaled up at other levels. Therefore, more specific and dedicated calls for the dissemination and exploitation of project results would be beneficial and consist of an incentive to reuse, adapt and multiply project results.

The Erasmus+ Project Results Platform is a valuable tool in this regard as it showcases project outcomes, shares best practices, and reaches a wider audience, including potential stakeholders, collaborators, and beneficiaries. It provides a central hub for disseminating the project and its impact, enhancing its visibility and potential for exploitation and continuation, therefore it would benefit from further dissemination. A platform enabling cross-reference to different funding programmes, to find opportunities for continuation and scaling up of successful project outcomes would also contribute to the sustainability of Erasmus+ projects while raising awareness and engaging stakeholders.

Conclusions

EURASHE and its membership recognise the major importance of the Erasmus+ Programme to the higher education sector and call for enhancing consultation of citizens and stakeholders (the "end users") regarding the progress evaluation of the Erasmus+ to provide insights and recommendations for simplifying the programme implementation and promoting inclusion measures and outreach to the whole of society.

EURASHE recognises progress when comparing the Erasmus+ Programme of 2014 to 2020 with the one from 2021 to 2027, particularly in the areas of increased budget and new actions taken on board

in the education and training areas. The funding increase in 2020 has produced positive results but there is nevertheless space for improvement. EURASHE highlights the need to simplify the management and administrative matters of the programme among other aspects. We highlight that, in the mobility field, there is a need to boost its inclusivity dimension, and the attention to the digital opportunities to be included in the programme. In the field of cooperation, the lump sum approach, while decreasing the administrative burden and better coverage of the real costs, EURASHE underlines the need for better guidance and support, and simplification.

About EURASHE

EURASHE is the European Association of Professional Higher Education Institutions. Depending on the country, its members have different names, but what they all have in common are applied and professionally orientated study programmes to equip students with work-ready skills. They also engage in place-based and user-oriented research with significant regional development impact. Overall, they provide innovative solutions for the challenges Europe faces.

The mission of EURASHE is to strengthen the impact of innovative, high-quality Professional Higher Education (PHE), and applied research, facilitating institutional multi-stakeholder cooperation and dialogue, and promoting PHE and its interests in the European Higher Education Area and beyond.

For more information, please visit: www.eurashe.eu