



FOR STRONG EU PROGRAMMES FOR EDUCATION, YOUTH AND SPORTS

## Common demands for the upcoming iteration of the Erasmus+ Programme

To ensure the Erasmus+ Programme meets Europe's strategic goals for skills, cohesion, innovation, and democratic resilience, a fivefold increase in the budget is both necessary and urgent.

In the 2018 Standard Eurobarometer 90, Europeans ranked the **Erasmus+ Programme as the 4th greatest achievement of the EU**, just behind free movement, peace and the euro. The high appreciation is reflected in the growing participation in the programme. In 2024, the EU reached **16.5 million Europeans benefitting from the programme**, a doubling participation since 2014<sup>1</sup>. However, this is still miles away from the citizens' demands during the Conference on the Future of Europe, where they demanded universal access to the Erasmus+ programme<sup>2</sup>.

The programme has gradually expanded beyond learning mobility, starting with previous iterations, though **learning mobility still accounts for 70% of its budget**. Nevertheless, the **30% focused on cooperation and policy** has yielded initiatives tackling urgent challenges for our sector, such as the Erasmus Teacher Academies, European University Alliances, the EU Youth Strategy or Centres for Vocational Excellence to name a few. Erasmus+ is more than a mobility scheme, it is a catalyst for European cooperation. Its capacity to support education policy reforms must be fully leveraged to address long-standing and deep-rooted challenges across Member States. In this regard it is also crucial to acknowledge the importance of EU-wide civil society networks supporting coordination across all beneficiaries of the programme in this context.

Europe is reconsidering its own political, social, environmental and economic vision for a future in which it boosts its stature. The democratic resilience of the EU, its preparedness for any upcoming crisis and its competitiveness are key elements to be addressed for the long-term future of the EU project. All of them crucially hinge on **Europeans with the right competences and with access to lifelong learning**. While their commitment to the EU project has been effectively strengthened year by year by means of Erasmus+ projects and initiatives. **The programme is one of the most effective tools for promoting cohesion and solidarity, nurturing a shared European identity, while bringing people together to advance equality, inclusion and the twin transition.**

The current MFF has showcased the relevance of education, training, youth, and sports policies in the European Union. The European Year of Youth 2022 and European Year of Skills 2023; the Youth Policy Dialogues, the Youth Advisory Board to President Von der Leyen and the EU Youth Dialogue;

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission (2024). Marking 37 years of Erasmus+: Key numbers and achievements. Available [here](#).

<sup>2</sup> European Commission (2022). Conference on the Future of Europe - Report on the Final Outcome. Available [here](#).

as well as the Union of Skills have raised the standing of education, training, youth and sports sectors towards the top of the political agenda, recognising their crucial role in promoting the competitiveness of the European model. Investment in Erasmus+ is a contribution to Europe's competitiveness, setting a strong sign towards the urgency of actions needed as well as towards the funding necessary to support these sectors.

The Erasmus+ Programme has to remain the **centrepiece of education, training, youth and sports in the next EU budget** for addressing coordinated policy reforms that will boost the competences of all Europeans. This will make them ready to chart their own future through active participation in society and strengthening of EU democratic values, fulfilling participation on the labour market, including in key sectors, and through broad transversal competences that will prevent disruptive transitions and ultimately also save public money in the long-term. The Competitiveness Compass goals of enhancing Europe's capacity to respond to economic, technological transitions, and retain and enhance a democratic and resilient society require investment in and enhancement of education and training at all levels.

**The Erasmus+ Coalition, gathers 81 EU-level organisations which represent over 6200 member organisations across Europe and beyond.** These member organisations account for national networks, institutions, collective groups, and similar large-scale Erasmus+ beneficiaries which, in turn, have their own regional and local members. The Erasmus+ Coalition calls for a more substantial Erasmus+ budget which strengthens the EU values and democratic fabric across all EU Member States. At the same time, it solidifies the EU's competitiveness.

## **Erasmus+ beneficiaries call for a fivefold increase in the Budget: based on five core arguments:**

- 1. Scaling up to address the ambition-reality gap: a five times increase of the Erasmus+ budget** is essential to meet its ambitions.

Based on the **European Parliament Report on the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027**, maintaining the **Erasmus+ programme at its current scope**, considering the global economic environment **would require a tripling of the EU budget**. Nevertheless, to truly ensure an accessible programme able to respond to Europe's ambitions in meeting the increasing demands for upskilling, reskilling, and competence development, the EU should follow the **Mario Draghi report**, which called for a **five-time increase in the budget**. As outlined in the report, this budget increase is crucial to ensure that the programme reaches out to all young people in Europe beyond the current 15%, and ultimately guarantee access to quality competence development and active citizenship across the entire continent.

Furthermore, increasing the investment in Erasmus+ is paramount for Europe's competitiveness and for ensuring adequate funding to address a quintessential challenge related to the fundamental right of learning. **As socio-economic background remains as one of the main predictors for learning performance, the programme needs the resources to better promote equity and inclusion.** The competitive European model is that of inclusion, supporting each European to achieve their

potential. For this, the programme needs to boost its inclusion of Europeans with fewer opportunities (including but not limited to learners with disabilities, learners with a migrant background, learners with various socio-economic backgrounds), acknowledging the targeted support that they need and providing a budget which realistically can address the needs and leaves no one behind.

2. **Erasmus+ as builds democratic and societal resilience** - the current objectives of Erasmus+ must be safeguarded to continue supporting the EU's vision for a social, democratic, prepared and innovative Europe

The Erasmus+ Programme plays an essential role in promoting active citizenship across Europe. Studies<sup>3</sup> showcase that participants of Erasmus+ projects develop **active citizenship competences**, a **sense of intercultural understanding and solidarity** as well as of further **closeness to Europe**. Moreover, participants also report a higher degree of willingness to partake in democratic processes and elections. This points out at the transformative power of Erasmus+ in developing **systemic societal resilience**, at a time when our democracies are under pressure. This is particularly important for 'left behind regions' which have seen a marked increase in disengagement with the principles of active citizenship and democratic society. Ensuring the benefits of Erasmus+ reach all European regions and sections of society is essential to **safeguard the Union's social and territorial cohesion**.

This value of the programme gains particular significance at a time when multiple European countries are preparing themselves for an increase in defence funding. The benefit of investing in Erasmus+ lies not only on the development of competences of individuals or the support to civil society organisations, but also and crucially, on the **promotion of resilient countries formed by active, healthy, informed and connected citizens**. In the long run, investing in Erasmus+ creates the systemic prerequisites for peaceful inclusive and resilient societies.

The role of the Erasmus+ Programme in this regard should be acknowledged in the legal text of its upcoming iteration, particularly in its objectives. Moreover, to maximise the programme's impact, the EU should take the necessary steps to **include as Erasmus+ Programme Countries those European countries that abide by the principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law**.

3. **Erasmus+ as a driver of innovation and competitiveness**

The Union of Skills makes it apparent that innovation and competitiveness hinge on Europeans having a broad, holistic set of competences which makes them equipped to thrive now and in the future. However, 30% of 15-year-olds in the EU lack minimum proficiency in mathematics, while 25% struggle in reading and science. Almost 50% of the EU population lacks basic digital skills. The Erasmus+ programme can set out a vision, motivate, mobilise, show the way, and enable coordination and opportunities to learn from each other for all Member States and the various stakeholders. In this way, they can advance closing these competence gaps and ensure that Europeans have the potential to be innovative and competitive.

The multitude of **Erasmus+ projects innovatively tackle basic skills development**, while studies

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<sup>3</sup> RAY Network (2024). Effects and Outcomes of the Erasmus+ Youth in Action Programme 2021-2023. Available [here](#).

pointed towards **Erasmus+ improving grades for students in STEM education**<sup>4</sup>, addressing the Union of Skills targets on STEM skills development. While Erasmus+ addresses these gaps it also promotes a holistic approach to education and training, recognising the interrelation among competences, the need to be equipped with a wide-ranging set of competences and the fact that other disciplines and transversal competences are equally crucial. Erasmus+ projects widely promoted the EntreComp and GreenComp competence frameworks, **supporting Europeans' entrepreneurial spirit, while linking it to social causes** which led to innovation for the most urgent problems that Europe faces.

Erasmus+ projects used the LifeComp competence framework while establishing **innovation in learning through non-formal and informal learning processes and the recognition and validation of competences and qualifications**. A competitive and innovative Europe leverages people's competences regardless of where they have been obtained, while promoting a culture of lifelong learning through flexible learning pathways to ensure wide and effective competence development.

Beyond innovating learning processes, Erasmus+ forges new **collaborations across all stakeholders** in education and training to deliver innovation and competitiveness, as called for by the Competitiveness Compass and Union of Skills. The programme's multi-pronged approach through the European University Alliances, the Centres of Vocational Excellence, the European School Alliances, the Skills Academies, the Pact for Skills, and the Blueprint for sectoral cooperation on skills to mention just a few are complemented by targeted cooperation partnerships and policy experimentation initiatives of the programme. Bringing together all the various communities requires significant resources, but will certainly yield the returns needed for a truly competitive Europe.

The Erasmus+ drives innovation and competitiveness specifically because it is an investment in Europe's people. **This is bound to bring significant social, innovation and economic returns for the EU, so to this end, the Erasmus+ programme requires a five-time increase to deliver on the new targets linked to innovation and competitiveness in the EU.**

#### **4. A strong Erasmus+ multiplies impact through synergies with other programmes and policy instruments**

Considering the most recent **EU Communication on 'The Road to the next Multiannual Financial Framework'**, it is clear that there is a **need for more flexibility across the macro-headings of the MFF** to address the current challenges. The Erasmus+ Programme needs to work in synergy with the European Social Fund+, the European Regional Development Fund, the European Solidarity Corps, the Development Education and Awareness Raising Programme, Cohesion funds relevant for education, training, youth and sport among many others. Similar administrative rules, and flexibility in funding transfers could enhance their potential and save costs for the EU. Nevertheless, this should not come at the cost of losing the focus on a holistic approach to lifelong learning and a promotion of solidarity. **Striking the right balance will be essential**, to also avoid falling into the trap of creating a single set of rules for all programmes that becomes overly complex, and misses the added value of specificities related to each sector.

The impact of a five-time increase of the Erasmus+ budget can be multiplied further by ensuring

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<sup>4</sup> Silvia Granato, Enkelejda Havari, Gianluca Mazzarella and Sylke Schnepf (2024). Study abroad programmes and student outcomes: Evidence from Erasmus. Joint Research Centre. Available [here](#).

**better linkages and flexibility with other EU programmes and national-level funding.** Leveraging synergies and providing smoother and similar administrative procedures is bound to ensure a more effective usage of a five-time stronger Erasmus+ programme.

Within this context, it must be underlined that each of the priorities, objectives and approaches of the Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps Programmes must be safeguarded. **The Erasmus+ Coalition commends the political willingness to keep Erasmus+ as a flagship, stand-alone funding programme, with a clearly earmarked budget for lifelong learning, youth, solidarity and sports.**

## **5. An Erasmus+ that supports multiplier organisations**

The objectives of the EU can be reached only with **a strong ecosystem of organisations and institutions that support learners and young people at European, national and local levels.** This requires spaces that improve the access to the opportunities offered by the Erasmus+ Programme and organisations that enable them to discover and engage with it. Civil society organisations in their diversity play a key role in that regard, as spaces that represent the multiple target groups and beneficiaries of the Erasmus+ Programme and that possess a unique expertise necessary for its adequate implementation. As such, it is crucial that the support offered Erasmus+ Programme is addressed to support the organisations facilitating the implementation of the programme as much as to the individuals as ultimate beneficiaries.

The identified challenge of fragmentation in education and training based on the Union of Skills Communication shows the importance of maintaining **a balance between, on the one hand the centralised and decentralised parts of the programme, and on the other hand between structural and project-based funding.** Moreover, the EU Youth Strategy outlines the crucial role that youth organisations play in realising youth policy in Europe, and the Union of Skills calls for the involvement of all education and training stakeholders to provide comprehensive, cross-sectoral insights and guidance on policy actions. To ensure a better coordination of youth, sport, education and training reforms and address sector-specific challenges across all EU Member States, programme beneficiaries need to be empowered with organisational and structural funding to address them. The delivery of long-term reform in youth, sport, education and training is dependent on all stakeholders, including civil society, having the resources to **continue cross-sectoral and cross-country collaboration.**

## **Conclusion**

To meet Europe's ambition for a competitive, cohesive, and democratic future, Erasmus+ must remain a flagship initiative—with a budget to match. A fivefold increase will unlock its full potential, ensuring no learner is left behind, and every citizen is empowered to contribute to Europe's success.