

# ERASMUS+ COALITION

FOR STRONG EU PROGRAMMES FOR EDUCATION, YOUTH AND SPORTS

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## **Is the new Erasmus+ fit for purpose? European civil society's proposition for an Erasmus+ for all**

### **The Erasmus+ Coalition**

The Erasmus+ Coalition gathers 88 EU-level organisations, representing over 6200 member organisations across Europe and millions of programme beneficiaries from the education, training, youth and sports sectors. These members account for national networks, institutions, collective groups, and similar large-scale Erasmus+ beneficiaries which have their own regional and local members.

The Coalition reviewed the proposals put forward by the European Commission on the [next Multiannual Financial Framework](#), or long-term EU budget. These proposals establish the future funding programmes which will define the work ahead for the education, training, youth and sports sector. **The civil society in these sectors presents a response to the proposal**, focusing mainly on the Erasmus+ programme, but considering the synergies that the programme has with AgoraEU, the European Competitiveness Fund, Horizon Europe and the National and Regional Partnership Plans, amongst others.

### **What works in the new programme?**

The Erasmus+ Coalition welcomes the **stand-alone Erasmus+ programme** which has been safeguarded, considering it is the EU's [most recognisable flagship initiative and considering its tremendous impact with a small budget allocation](#). Reflecting on the budget, **it is encouraging to see it increased to 40.8 billion EUR**. This does not represent a 50% increase from the previous budget as it must be considered that this number was achieved by merging the Erasmus+ programme with the European Solidarity Corps programme (1.009 billion EUR), while

based on inflation calculations, the 40.8 billion EUR budget simply will maintain Erasmus+ at its 2027 level, which means that this is not a budget increase. **Therefore, the initiative is commendable, but more is needed.**

The continued commitment to inclusion has been doubled down with a dedicated chapter in the new proposal that continues to strengthen this priority across the Erasmus+ programme. The civil society is fully welcoming this approach, though it draws attention to further aspects that need to be clarified, given that the definitions on learners with fewer opportunities need to become more granular and considering that many aspects of inclusion are mostly addressed at technical level, after the regulation's adoption.

### **How can we ensure Erasmus+ aids learners to reach their full potential?**

Is this current proposal fit for purpose, to achieve the EU's ambitions based on the Political Guidelines of President von der Leyen, the Union of Skills initiative and the outcomes of the European Year of Youth? Unfortunately, this is not the case.

### **Achieving an actual budgetary increase**

The budget increase, though welcomed, does not account for the need to expand the Erasmus+ programme to more beneficiaries considering the increasing demand for the programme and the ambitious target set by Executive Vice-President Roxana Mînzatu to ensure that each European benefitted by at least one Erasmus+ experience in their life. Moreover, the proposal's budget cannot ensure that Erasmus+ can also support the EU ambitious goals with which it has been linked, among which we mention supporting European competitiveness, innovation, defence and security, resilience and cohesion, partnerships, flexibility and responsiveness, building a sustainable and greener future for Europe. As argued before, the [European Parliament has been calling for a tripling of the budget](#), while the [Mario Draghi report](#) for a five-time increase to simply match the developed ambitions for the programmes in recent years. If it is to empower all learners, reach as many young people as possible and achieve the original objectives of the Erasmus+ programme, **a five-time budgetary increase is required.**

The European Commission's next MFF proposal makes funding available for all sectors of education, training, youth and sport without allocating specific percentages for each, as was previously done. In fact, in the current MFF period the Erasmus+ programme provides three different chapters, one for education and training, one for youth and one for sports, with dedicated funding for each. Moreover, percentages of the budget are allocated to each specific sector, accounting for what is called funding earmarking. **The new proposal needs to return to**

**this model or ensure an equal visibility for the different components.** Beneficiaries cannot plan the work ahead without knowing the available budget, creating an instability which will directly impact the implementation of the programme. Moreover, without earmarked funding we run the risk of focusing on sectors that have been successfully absorbing funding, while neglecting areas in which the most disadvantaged learners and young people find themselves.

### **Support for policy development, partnerships and civil society cooperation**

**The new Erasmus+ proposal does not sufficiently address the need to and how it will continue to support civil society, policy development and fostering cooperation between stakeholders in lifelong learning.**

The current structure of the Erasmus+ program distinguishes among learning mobility, cooperation among organisations and policy development. The new proposal offers instead two pillars: learning opportunities for all, and capacity building support. This falls short in addressing how the programme will continue to support civil society and policy development. Many beneficiaries engaging in Erasmus+ rely on civil society networks to advocate for their needs, build their capacity, facilitate cooperation, raise programme awareness, and maintain a stable support ecosystem. With no reference to continued organisational support for civil society, the proposal risks fragmenting the wider Erasmus+ community, undermining the programme's long-term effectiveness. Civil society networks are those that have compiled the challenges experienced by beneficiaries in the application, implementation and reporting stages of engaging with Erasmus+ and presented them to the European Commission for effective course correction. These networks have also been raising awareness of the programme and expanding its outreach, which is frequently identified as a challenge by the European Commission. These networks create a structure of support for the programme and, **with no reference to organisational support for civil society to continue doing so, the Erasmus+ community is in danger of being fragmented which will have long-lasting repercussions on achieving the programme objectives.**

Moreover, the proposal significantly weakens the programme's policy development pillar, which has been critical for driving systemic change, supporting internationalisation, and ensuring equitable access to high-quality lifelong learning opportunities. At a time when Member States and the EU are focusing on Europe's long-term resilience, the lack of adequate policy support is a strategic gap that will hinder the programme's ability to deliver on its objective and pilot reforms linked to validation and recognition of prior learning, to basic skills development, to addressing teacher shortages, to develop a digital education strategy, to boosting youth societal participation, to name just a few examples of systemic actions that were trialed with the current policy development opportunities.

## **Clearer and measurable objectives are needed**

Some of the proposal's objectives remain unclear and too narrow, while others overlap with each other, or list numerous, disparate topics to focus on for the beneficiaries. While this might be considered as giving further flexibility across objectives it might also contribute to greater confusion. **The proposed objectives put a major and unbalanced focus on labor market needs in comparison to the current programme period.** With new funds such as the European Competitiveness Fund, Erasmus+ does not need to focus on sectoral interests, but rather to provide space for the holistic development of each learner and young person. **Lifelong learning can have spillover effects for competitiveness, preparedness and the labour market, but it can do so only when treated as a goal in itself. If lifelong learning is instrumentalised to serve particular labour market interests, Europeans will experience a narrowed down learning pathway which under-prepares them for the world ahead.**

Similarly, the programme can have a strong impact on youth employability, but it cannot be reduced to a labour market instrument. Its objectives have always been rooted in values of inclusion, cooperation, and lifelong learning, actively contributing to strengthening the EU project and fostering a European community. To this end, **certain actions that ensure this need to be safeguarded with clearer references. Hijacking the educational and democratic goals to meet labour market oriented skills demands would see programme beneficiaries through the narrow prism of future employees,** rather than focusing on the positive role they play as active citizens. This undermines the spirit of inclusive learning and community empowerment and may ultimately prevent the intended target groups of the programme (education and training, youth and sports stakeholders) from accessing Erasmus+. To broaden the scope beyond the labour market perspective, the objectives require more balanced references with specific articles to strengthen:

- **The cooperation between the different sectors** in education, training, youth and sport for the promotion of a holistic lifelong learning vision
- **The recognition and validation of non-formal, informal and prior learning and transversal competences** as Erasmus+ must also make meaningful contribution to support learners to use the competences developed through its actions

More specifically on the objectives, we cannot lose the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) by having it mainstreamed across all objectives. **The merged ESC initiatives deserve a separate chapter where they are thoroughly explained, and further actions are clearly established.** Support for solidarity deserves to receive full attention.

Linked to this, strengthened objectives require consistent monitoring. As foreseen under the [Budget expenditure tracking and performance framework](#), there are insufficient references to the [Council Recommendation Europe on the Move](#) learning mobility targets, frustrating commitment to achieving the Erasmus+ objectives. The framework must be adapted to contain the sector-specific targets. We, however, welcome the additional objective on active citizenship and European identity being introduced as a separate specific objective.

### **Synergies with other EU programmes**

The current proposals foresees a series of synergies with AgoraEU on the promotion of civic education and media literacy, with National and Regional Partnership Plans for reaching learners with fewer opportunities as well as for validation and recognition of competences, but also with the European Competitiveness Fund and Horizon Europe with regard to partnership development and competences for particular sectors. However, the **current synergy creation is insufficiently explained and creates further confusion among beneficiaries**. Moreover, the National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRRPs) risk a cutback on the European Social Fund+ (ESF+) which has frequently contributed to the same indicators as Erasmus+. The current dismantling of ESF+ as a funding line and transformation of the programme into a 14% commitment for social investment under the NRRPs threatens to reduce investment into skills development and support for young people that are NEETs. More information on the needs for ESF+ can be found [here](#).

### **The governance of the next Erasmus+**

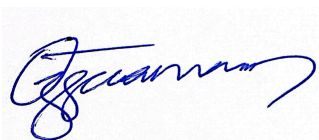
The significant change to the structure of the next MFF means that the negotiation process will occur in different arenas of policy making, where education and training beneficiaries might be bypassed. Therefore, to ensure that their voice is clearly heard on Erasmus+, it is crucial to **bring back in the proposal references to the Erasmus+ Programme Committee, and ensure a renewed participation of networks representing beneficiaries in the programme to the meetings**. The Erasmus+ Coalition needs to be structurally involved in any decision-making that will define how the programme will be operationalised in synergy with the other funding programmes of the EU.

### **Civil society's asks for the next Erasmus+**

- Further increase the Erasmus+ budget to achieve a five time increase compared to the budget for 2021-2027
- Re-establish the chapters for education and training, for youth, and for sport
- Bring back funding earmarking for each sector in education and training, for youth and for sports

- Specify clearly the support to civil society networks and organisations to ensure that structural aid can be given to some of the most essential stakeholders that promote the programme
- Adapt the Budget expenditure tracking and performance framework to include the Europe on the Move learning mobility targets
- Strengthen the European Social Fund+ (ESF+) to ensure its continuous synergy with the Erasmus+ programme. This requires strong guarantees that the 14% of the National and Regional Partnership Plans dedicated to social investment will be directly linked to ESF+ and not other programmes merged under the Plans
- Provide a better balance between labour market needs and learner needs
  - Include a separate section to define and strengthen the solidarity volunteering opportunities
  - Mainstream references to the development of lifelong learning and cross-sectoral collaboration
  - Expand references and terminology definitions on the early childhood education and care sector, the youth sector, the VET sector and the adult education sector
- Include a clear reference to the Erasmus+ Programme Committee and make sure that civil society representation on the Committee is established.

Signed:



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