

Erasmus+ 2028-34

Higher Education Sector Recommendations

Index

1. Foreword	1
2. Democratic principles embedded in the programme governance.....	2
3. Stronger focus on inclusion	4
4. Quality student mobility for skills	7
5. Accounting for the carbon footprint	11
6. Simplification and digital transformation	13
7. International dimension and (Geo)political realities	15
8. Truly enabling an interconnected European Education Area	17
9. Funding bridges.....	20

1. Foreword

Erasmus+ stands as one of the most recognised and valued EU funding instruments, strengthening bonds among European citizens by connecting people through study abroad programmes and more. The flagship programme has expanded during the current and previous funding periods, including features that go beyond student exchange for studies. In nearly 40 years, the programme has benefited 16 million young people across Europe. The EU has set a goal of reaching 23% of higher education graduates participating in learning mobility¹, a welcome development in challenging times when cooperation and mutual understanding are more vital than ever. Erasmus+ plays a crucial role in fostering unity and shared growth of our continent and worldwide.

As preparations for the Erasmus+ 2028-2034 programme progress, this document consolidates the European University Foundation's (EUF) recommendations for an ambitious, flexible, and inclusive programme in the next programme period. These suggestions are grounded in the cooperation projects implemented by the EUF network to support the internationalisation efforts of member institutions, as well as the challenges faced by practitioners involved in implementing international activities.

This paper follows a series of recommendations (co-)published by the EUF and stakeholder organisations on the importance of allocating a budgetary envelope and a legal base that matches the ambitions of the renewed programming period 2028-34. They can be found here:

- November 2025: A [call](#) for matching the ambitions with appropriate financial commitments;
- January 2026: A [stakeholder call](#) for an increased budget for Erasmus+;
- February 2026: Stakeholder [proposal](#) for amendments to the legal base of Erasmus+.

An executive summary of our recommendations is as follows:

1. Involve European stakeholder organisations in the governance of the programme in a meaningful manner.
2. Adopt a more inclusive and transparent calculation approach for Erasmus+ grants.
3. Keep semester-long credit mobilities at the core of the programme.
4. When possible, make green travel the default for students in the programme support measures.
5. Ensure stability and continuity of the digital platforms supporting the programme implementation.
6. Accept the validity of the existing Inter-Institutional Agreements in the new programming period.
7. Strengthen the funding allocated to Cooperation Partnerships to maintain their bottom-up innovation potential.
8. Provide more long-term support for the development of the European University Alliances.
9. Implement quality monitoring guidelines for Erasmus staff trainings.

1. Council Recommendation of 13 May 2024 'Europe on the Move' — learning mobility opportunities for everyone, retrieved at https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C_202403364

2. Democratic principles embedded in the programme governance

Key recommendations for improved governance:

1. Involve European stakeholder organisations in the governance of the programme. They provide a practitioner's view to Member State representatives on the trends at European level. This decision would increase both transparency and accountability for the programme implementation.
2. Ensure the implementation proposals for the Erasmus+ Committee to vote upon are publicly made available in advance to allow for European and national stakeholders and beneficiaries to consult with their respective representatives.
3. Consider creating pathways for exchanges between the CULT Committee of the European Parliament and the Erasmus+ Committee to enable a more effective monitoring of the implementation of the programme reflecting the European decision-making processes.

Despite the vast knowledge and willingness to engage, the governance model of the Erasmus+ programme often falls short in accommodating any meaningful involvement of stakeholder organisations and beneficiaries. Accordingly, key decisions at the programme level are often detached from the everyday realities that higher education institutions and beneficiaries face.

The European Commission is entrusted with the management of the Erasmus+ programme. Every year, the Commission prepares an Annual Work Programme that outlines the proposed priorities, call specifications and funding allocations. In turn, the Erasmus+ Committee, which represents the relevant authorities from member states, validates this proposal. Considering the current procedure, a strong democratic process would require the Commission to maintain transparency in

Between June 2022 and April 2026, Erasmus Without Paper provided a practical example of how improved governance can help connect Erasmus+ programme-level decisions with practitioners' needs and domain experts' insights.

For roughly four years, EWP developed a multi-stakeholder governance structure unlike anything

its proposals, so that European and national stakeholders could consult with Committee members before they are making decisions. As contact information of the representatives of the Member States is not disclosed, it is currently not possible to engage stakeholder and beneficiary views in a structured manner, resulting in an asymmetry of governance decision-making in favour of the Commission.

Such transparency and good practice would also enable more trust among the higher education community, allowing beneficiaries to better understand the rationale behind decisions, and voice their concerns and suggestions on how the programme is implemented early enough.

However, good governance is not only about the involvement of the beneficiaries in the co-creation of the programme. The ability to anticipate and communicate changes timely is equally important in ensuring beneficiaries can adjust to new circumstances. In many cases, beneficiaries find out about the changes from rules and regulations, such as the Annual Work Programme, which often are published late, delaying the publication of the Erasmus+ Programme Guides as well. These delays hinder institutions from participating and preparing for internationalisation activities, and cause unnecessary uncertainties in the planning.

Anticipation of changes is especially important during the transition period. Whilst higher education institutions are resilient and could rely on peer networks during the previous transition periods, the late announcement of the changes and limited functioning of certain systems made the transition between programming periods more difficult and less efficient.

previously seen in Erasmus+, with fora where university representatives, students, IT experts, National Agencies, stakeholder organisations, European University Alliances and other relevant actors came together to share information, exchange views on the state of play and priorities, as well as necessary adjustments and improvements.

This practical example of how to make the governance of Erasmus+ more democratic and user-centred can be significantly expanded in the coming programme for many of its operational aspects.

3. Stronger focus on inclusion

Key recommendations for inclusion:

1. Adopt a more inclusive and transparent calculation approach for Erasmus+ student grants, such as the one developed by Erasmus For All.
2. Use the digital transition to facilitate smoother and more timely payments of student grants.
3. Ensure the programme recognises the housing crisis by supporting multi-stakeholder strategies to address the diverse challenges across all levels.

The current programming period has made inclusion a top priority for the programme, and according to the Erasmus+ Annual Report 2024², 17,7% of learners supported in Higher Education were from fewer-opportunity backgrounds, having received a social top-up in addition to their regular grant. It is still not possible to determine the degree to which the programme is inclusive, as no impact assessment has been conducted for the general student population, and it is not always clear to higher education institutions what criteria should be used to award social top-ups. It is against this background that the Erasmus GAP³ project has been working towards giving higher education institutions an approach to monitor their degree of inclusion. Despite this policy effort, obstacles to student mobility are numerous:

The **financial obstacle** related to living costs abroad: 35.63% of respondents in the ESN Survey 2023⁴ confirmed that the Erasmus+ grant is inadequate to cover living costs, is one of the main obstacles for them to participate in mobility. The current programme categorises destinations across three country groups and, in a rather arbitrary way, defines grant ranges based on whether a student moves to a higher-, similar-, or lower-cost-of-living country. This approach disregards actual living cost differences between countries of the same group and even more so the high disparities between cities within countries.



The Erasmus for All⁵ project developed a new grant calculation methodology - fairer and easier to understand for students while reducing the IRO's workload in managing grants. This refined method proposes a European baseline grant for all students, awarded to all exchange students and inflation-indexed. A further top-up will be granted for those going to a more expensive city and separate funds are available to support green travelling (e.g. an interrail pass). The full proposal can be found here.⁶

2. Erasmus+ Annual Report 2024, retrieved at <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/eb9511a3-c05a-11f0-a612-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

3. Erasmus GAP project website, retrieved at <https://www.erasmusgap.uvsq.fr>

4. ESNsurvey - 15th Edition: Making Quality Mobility a Reality for All, retrieved at <https://esn.org/ESNsurvey/2023>

5. Erasmus For All project website, retrieved at <https://www.up.pt/erasmus-for-all/>

6. Erasmus For All report "Removing the main obstacles to European student mobility", retrieved at <https://zenodo.org/records/11145764>

The **financial uncertainty**: The current grant calculation is not easy for students to understand. To increase understanding, Erasmus Student Network created a grant simulator⁷ to help students assess how much they would receive when going abroad. Furthermore, students often do not know when they will receive the first instalments of their grant ahead of their mobility. It is known that students face the highest costs at the beginning of their mobility. This creates cash-flow issues for the lowest-income students as confirmed in the ESN Survey 2023: 62.7% received their grants only after departure, exacerbating upfront cost issues and deterring participation, especially for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.



The MEGA project⁸ has piloted a digital approach to grant management and payments. Our recommendation is that the European Commission support digital transformation initiatives, especially when considering the use of smart contracts, in the next programme generation. This would reduce the workload for International Office and Accounting staff by ensuring consistent conditions for timely grant payments — while students would have greater guarantees of receiving their grant instalments on time.

Rising **housing prices** have become an obstacle for both outgoing and incoming students: outgoing students fear not being able to find accommodation when returning home, while incoming students struggle in the search of affordable and quality housing options. Increasingly, this is becoming an obstacle compounded by the fact that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds lack certainty on when they will receive their grants. Around 50% of students reported paying more than 400€ for their accommodation per month during their mobility – whilst the average monthly grant according to data in the Interim evaluation of the current Erasmus+ programme is 465 €/month. More than 10% could confirm their accommodation only after arrival, facing stress and additional costs for hotels/hostels or other short-term rentals. Last but not least, there has been a sharp increase in housing scams since 2023, creating uncertainty and financial harm for students.⁹



The HOME projects have developed a trusted housing collector to provide students with easier access to quality housing opportunities. We recommend the European Commission to further support the community in developing initiatives for quality and affordable housing opportunities. In this regard, we welcome the European Affordable Housing Plan¹⁰, which addresses this issue at a transversal level. More specifically, we recommend introducing guidelines or quality standards for landlords allowing students to sublet their apartments while they study abroad, thereby facilitating both incoming and outgoing mobility flows.

7. Erasmus+ Grant Simulator, retrieved at <https://erasmusgeneration.org/grant-simulator>

8. Million of Erasmus Grants project website, retrieved at <https://projects.uni-foundation.eu/mega/>

9. Home2 report, "From the freedom to move to the freedom to stay: insights into the student housing crisis in Europe", retrieved at <https://zenodo.org/records/15783662>

10. European Affordable Housing Plan, retrieved at https://housing.ec.europa.eu/document/download/756915b5-d1b1-4bde-ac82-03532d2d3d90_en?filename=0.pdf

Furthermore, **inclusion needs to be fostered during mobility**: students tend to stay in international bubbles and often do not integrate into local communities to the desired extent. At the same time, Europe is also facing a massive demographic shift with an ageing population (one citizen in three is expected to be over 65 by 2060). Connecting incoming exchange students with senior citizens would not only ensure the latter remain active in society but also create opportunities for mobile students to learn from the local host communities. The Erasmus+ programme has also been developing intergenerational housing opportunities to both respond to rising housing prices and increase the programme's inclusion of elderly people. The forthcoming programming period could further support such initiatives.

Erasmus +60

The Erasmus+60 project has piloted a first initiative to involve senior citizens in international learning opportunities and therefore making them benefit from a connected continent. To nurture this connection, we recommend that the future programme period support intergenerational interactions between students participating in an Erasmus+ mobility and incentivise higher education institutions to develop an international offer for senior citizens.

WESHAREWECARE

The WeShareWeCare project developed a network of national and local stakeholder organisations that support intergenerational housing and non-formal learning opportunities.

4. Quality student mobility for skills

Key recommendations for quality student mobility:

1. Keep semester-long credit mobility at the centre of the programme so students can create and understand their European identities to the fullest extent possible.
2. Support the preparation and debrief of students to ensure they understand the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they have acquired through their studies abroad.
3. Reintroduce language learning at a key pillar of student mobility by monitoring multilingualism acquired through studies abroad and consider specific and effective measures to support language learning based on past initiatives of the programme and the community.

The quality of the mobility experience is crucial, regardless of the duration of the mobility period, and should not be jeopardised by the rush to quantitative mobility targets. As the programme has been growing in numbers over the past programming period, it has become more difficult to focus on the qualitative aspects of the student mobility experience to ensure the programme delivers its intended impact. Some of the challenges we suggest addressing are:

Language learning: the Erasmus+ programme was born with the idea to expose students to different cultures and to enable them to acquire advanced language skills in a language other than their own. The programme no longer offers dedicated language learning resources, with higher education institutions reporting inexistent or very low use of the *EU Academy* language courses. The lack of language skills is also cited in the Erasmus+ interim evaluation report as an obstacle to mobility for hard-to-reach groups. Taking this into account, supporting language learning would further increase the degree of inclusion of the programme.

It is evident that language learning has been deprioritised during the current programming period and should be reinforced in the new programming period to effectively support multilingualism in Europe, a highly valued skill in an increasingly competitive labour market. This could happen in making dedicated funding available for language learning, reintroducing it as a priority in the programme and monitoring the impact of mobility periods on language learning progress made by mobile students during their mobility.



*Online linguistic preparation and intensive language courses: The combination of both online and in-person language courses has been proven most effective to ensure students reach the desired level of language skills ahead of their studies abroad as demonstrated by the language learning project pioneered by **Campus Europae**. We recommend making multilingualism a priority again in the new programming period to ensure students benefit the most from their studies abroad.*

Intercultural learning: one of the main benefits of student mobility is its transformative impact on the students who experience it. The results are linked to the development of soft skills as they navigate a cultural context entirely new to them, and to the acquisition of knowledge about the host community's culture. Although credit mobility can be beneficial for intercultural competency and prejudice reduction, it is not automatically effective. Students may carry biases and prejudices and may struggle to interact effectively with locals or to handle challenging intercultural settings.

Higher education institutions can help overcome these barriers by providing students with the essential knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to navigate and learn from intercultural encounters. To maximise the benefits of these mobility periods, we recommend reinforcing support activities organised for the benefits of students, with special attention to intercultural awareness preparation sessions and debriefing for homecoming students.



*One of the challenges identified by the **Padmica consortium partners** is the lack of scalable and easily adaptable resources to help HEIs in better preparing their outgoing students and debriefing the homecoming ones. The partners of the initiative have set a goal for themselves to develop a scalable and sustainable approach for International Relation Offices to easily deploy intercultural preparation and debriefing sessions of their outgoing and homecoming students.*

Well-being of students: since the COVID-19 pandemic, mental distress and anxiety have increasingly been reported as issues that incoming students are facing, including increased dropout rates of students who have applied and had been selected to study abroad. Student exchanges encourage students to leave their comfort zones and acquire life skills as well as become more resilient. Supporting students during this delicate phase enhances their self-confidence for their future professional and personal lives.

Ensuring students receive much needed support will become more important in a world that is ever more complex and uncertain. We therefore recommend adding student well-being as an aspect to be monitored before, during and after study periods abroad.



*The **Mobile Minds in Motion project** is developing an approach to better anticipate well-being of students studying abroad. The forthcoming self-assessment tool and the handout on preventive strategies may be resources for higher education institutions to rely on to develop support measures that takes this evolving reality into account.*

Recognition of study achievements: Students considering studying abroad identify the lack of guarantees for the recognition of their study achievements as being the second most important factor discouraging them from undertaking studies abroad after financial concerns. The Erasmus+ Annual Report 2024 shows that only 88% of students received full academic recognition of their student mobility.

We strongly recommend the adoption of full and automatic recognition of studies abroad as an urgent priority for the coming programming period, using the foundation laid out in the ECTS Users' Guide¹¹ and recent digital transformation processes undertaken under the European Student Card Initiative for full and automatic recognition of ECTS points abroad, as well as an approach to grade conversion that is fair, statistical, and digitised.



The Egracons project has developed a tool to manage the conversion of grades based on statistical distribution tables. We recommend making use of the digital environment created by Erasmus Without Paper and the latest efforts to facilitate the deployment of the digital transfer of Transcript of Records by encouraging the HEIs to connect their grade conversion tables.



The AUREA project is assessing the current state of play of recognition of credits earned abroad and empower HEIs in implementing automatic recognition procedures of credits obtained abroad.

Mobility formats: The introduction of the Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs) has generated substantial interest from the higher education community, introducing short and intense mobility opportunities for students and staff. These short and blended mobility offers are a chance to make more students benefit from international learning opportunities and intensify academic cooperation between higher education institutions.

We however call on the European Commission to maintain traditional credit mobility as the main mobility format in the future programming generation as the impact of prolonged periods of stays yield increased benefits for individuals and the carbon footprint for a mobility is lower.



The HLITL project has identified that a minimum stay duration is needed to have an impact on students' soft and intercultural skills and knowledge acquisition. That duration identified is a minimum of 6 weeks and stands in contradiction with the Blended Intensive Programme's usual duration of 1-week. It is therefore of high importance to further investigate the benefits and impact of these short-term blended programmes to justify the costs they generate in relation to regular credit mobilities, and how they can be utilised to further encourage students to participate in long-term credit mobility.

11. ECTS Users' Guide 2015, retrieved at https://education.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document-library-docs/ects-users-guide_en.pdf

Quality of courses taken abroad: mobile students usually fall outside of the regular Quality Assurance mechanisms for higher education institutions to monitor the perceived adequacy and quality of the courses followed by mobile students. To contribute to the improvement of the learning experiences of mobile students, we recommend taking advantage of the digitalisation of Learning Agreements to allow students to assess the courses they have taken during their studies abroad, providing institutions and teachers useful feedback on how their courses may be further improved.



The AsCOLA project has developed a methodology to allow mobile students to evaluate the courses taken during studies abroad and implemented this approach in the first online service digitalising the preparation and signature of Learning Agreements, the Online Learning Agreement tool.

Duration of study periods abroad: By realising that the prescribed duration of mobility periods can be too restrictive, HEIs can be offered greater flexibility to manage their mobility grants in light of their strategic internationalisation goals.

It is therefore recommended that the funds be allocated to HEIs by number of months, leaving it up to them to decide how many students should be supported and for how long (which would then allow for mobility periods exceeding 12 months in the context of Joint Programmes). This should be introduced with a minimum average threshold of duration of studies abroad to be met to ensure the focus remains on quality and high-impact mobility, for instance at least 3 months.

Funding for Joint Programmes: The network recommends to open the possibility for Joint Programme Consortia to jointly apply for mobility grants towards the European funding agency in charge of managing centralised funds. This would allow the development of strategic joint programmes and ensure that these programmes remain inclusive in supporting their students throughout the entire duration of studies.

5. Accounting for the carbon footprint

Key recommendations for decreasing the carbon footprint of student mobility:

1. Use the programme guiding documents (ECHE, Student Charter) to support the recognition of transversal competencies fostered through green travel.
2. Make green travel the default for students in the programme support measures.
3. Consider implementing a European-wide partnership to offer free train tickets to students.

In 2022, 73%¹² student travel in the context of the Erasmus+ programme, took place using planes as a means of travel to and from the host destination. Considering that there are approximately 500 000 higher education students participating in Erasmus+ every year, that is annually over 700 000 plane tickets that are bought to participate in Erasmus+ mobilities for higher education only. Low-cost airlines even provide discounts to Erasmus+ students when they travel with their company. This sets an important precedent for students that continue to use plane travel after their mobility, whereas EU-funded mobility could actually be seen as an opportunity to change individual behaviour for the benefit of the entire continent in the long run.

From an environmental standpoint, another issue that bears mentioning is the Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs). It is well understood that they are proportionally more expensive than semester or yearlong mobilities, but the same is true of their carbon footprint if green travel is not used. When a student participates in a BIP, the carbon footprint associated with the programme is not divided by months but by a few days at most. Hence, the expansion of BIPs is making the Erasmus+ programme even more carbon polluting, which is contrary to the Union's emission targets.

As a consequence, the EUF recommends a stronger inclusion of green travel provisions in the next programme and emphasises the need for providing a clear framework for assessing the cost-benefit ratio of BIPs. The recommendation of operating **regional partnerships** between institutions that are **easily accessible through low-carbon intensive travel** may also be further assessed but should not happen at the expense of strategic collaborations. When there is a strong strategic value to implement blended programmes between partners that are geographically distant, green travel should be encouraged.

12. Green Erasmus report, (2022). Research on the habits of Erasmus students. Retrievable at <https://project.greenerasmus.org/documents/GE-report.pdf>



Thanks to the Sustainable Erasmus Travel Consortium, the network has accrued substantial knowledge of the issues at hand.

We recommend reframing how programme participants view their travel experience: as a learning experience that should be promoted to students and therefore as an integral part of their mobility experience.

Referencing green competencies in the Erasmus Student Charter would further contribute to changing the narrative around the benefits of mobility and encourage students to adopt responsible behaviours.

Offering a free green travel ticket to students, negotiated by the European Commission with railways, buses, and boat/ferry (which, as of 2026, are eligible for the green travel support) companies for peripheral destinations, would effectively increase the accessibility and inclusivity of sustainable travel for a significant percentage of Erasmus+ students. Negotiating with Interrail poses a sensible solution for implementing this policy reform.

By doing this, millions of European students in the next programme period, for whom Erasmus+ would be the first time they travel alone abroad to a different country, would be incentivised to use green travel beyond their studies. This reform drastically reduces the use of plane travel for Erasmus+, significantly showing the Union's commitment to sustainability.

6. Simplification and digital transformation

Key recommendations for simplification and digital transformation:

1. Ensure stability of the digital platforms supporting the programme implementation.
2. Accept the validity of the existing Inter-Institutional Agreements in the new programming period.
3. Ensure that if new IT systems are deployed they do not carry additional costs for higher education institutions, directly or indirectly.

The announcement ([here](#)) that the European Commission aims to move away from a fully operational interoperability framework, which has enabled the exchange of more than 1.6 million digital agreements in the current programming period, is at odds with [repeated calls for stability](#) by the higher education community. Such a decision entails unnecessary costs and risks, while decreasing the agency and strategic capacity of the European higher education sector. Furthermore, the EC has decided to rely on a non-EU commercial actor to implement the new ecosystem, raising questions about data sovereignty.

In order to avoid the kind of situations witnessed in 2014 and 2021, when EC-owned platforms such as the Mobility Tool, the Online Linguistic Support and the Beneficiary Module were not fit for purpose for several years, we deem it essential that the new IT systems:

- Demonstrate they are as capable, secure and reliable as the existing system they are meant to replace. This means that if a new IT solution is not ready for large scale usage at the start of the new programming period then the timeline for its introduction should be adjusted accordingly.
- Support the automatic extension of Inter-Institutional Agreements, which is a key step to reducing digital bureaucracy and which enjoys wide support among higher education institutions
- Carry no additional deployment costs for universities, whether using in-house or third-party providers. Institutions have already invested significantly in adapting to the current digital ecosystem, whereas the EC should adopt an evolutionary approach to protect those investments.
- Support automatic reporting to the Beneficiary Module from launch.



Together with members, our network has pioneered the [*Erasmus Without Paper initiative*](#), as a community driven digital ecosystem, which over the last 14 years has grown into the world's most advanced ecosystem for supporting academic international cooperation and student mobility.

The notion of automatically extending existing Inter-Institutional Agreements has received large support from the Higher Education Community and was deemed feasible by legal experts from higher education institutions and National Agencies.

Furthermore, enabling automatic reporting has long been regarded as a priority by higher education institutions. Technical solutions to make this possible have been developed by the EWP Consortium as far back as 2019.

This is why we call on the European Commission to build on existing digital achievements and ensuring its evolution remain aligned with the needs and priorities of the Higher Education community, not just with regards to high-level design, but also on the definition of exacting details (i.e. data standards), as these have a direct and significant impact on their day-to-day work.

7. International dimension and (Geo)political realities

Key recommendations for the international dimension:

1. Embedding the global dimension across all actions of the programme.
2. Ensure flexibility for higher education institutions to manage funding and mobility flows in the International Credit Mobility.
3. Maintain Erasmus+ as a bridge between countries and cultural and political systems.

In a world that is becoming increasingly shaped by rapidly evolving geopolitical realities, we call for a programme that will reinforce opportunities for cooperation and exchange with partners across the globe. This will contribute to Europe's ability to maintain ties and mutual understanding with countries and citizens around the world while enhancing the attractiveness of its Education Area.

The global dimension needs to be embedded across all key actions of the programme, and it should be more open to the world outside of Europe and serve as a tool for soft diplomacy across funding lines, not just through limited actions like Capacity Building for Higher Education.

In addition, the current Capacity Building actions still reflect a Eurocentric approach, notably in its name. Embedding a global dimension across all key actions would enable HEIs to develop more tailored and mutually beneficial ongoing cooperation opportunities worldwide. We also recommend that for highly competitive calls, a two-stage application procedure is introduced so to decrease the intense workload for higher education institutions staff members in the face of very low success rates.

We welcome the intended simplification of enforcing harmonised funding rules for Erasmus+ programme actions, even when they are funded by other European Commission funding instruments. This should allow the European Commission to implement a simplified management of International Credit

Accordingly, we recommend that the European Commission provide HEIs with the liberty to allocate funds between regions of the world so as to compensate for the fluctuation of allocated funds between the annual call for proposals. In addition,

Mobility. Above all, HEIs have noted that global partnerships require much more long-term visibility to build mobility schemes that would yield the expected results.

retaining a mobility project duration of 36 months would allow HEIs to strategically develop partnerships with institutions from outside Europe.

Furthermore, Erasmus+ should also support HEIs in developing resilient internationalisation strategies that are fit for a changing world. As the Erasmus+ programme is growing, it is becoming an ever more critical instrument to maintain academic freedom and autonomy in Europe, serving as a conduit for global promotion of these values. Accordingly, we call for a programme that supports bottom-up cooperation, allowing HE staff members to nurture deep ties across national boundaries.

Given that the current and previous programme generations have seen national political developments push for the suspension of the programme in Hungary and Switzerland, we call on the highest decision-makers, notably in the European Council to recognise the value of having a programme that builds bridges between countries, cultivates strong cultural and political systems, and allows Europe's youth to build a common future. We recommend that European policymakers continue to support the exchange of ideas and knowledge through the Erasmus+ programme, even during challenging political periods. Rather than suspending entire countries or large cohorts of institutions from the programme, European and national funding authorities should instead ensure that EU values are respected in how Erasmus+ funding is implemented through close monitoring.

We call for the full reintegration of Switzerland and the United Kingdom in the Erasmus+ programme and maintaining cooperation with Ukrainian higher education institutions as a priority in the forthcoming programming period. Similarly, we support efforts to extend the cooperation in Erasmus+ with Western-Balkan countries that remain outside of the programme.

8. Truly enabling an interconnected European Education Area

Key recommendations for a connected European Education Area:

1. Strengthen the funding allocated to Cooperation Partnerships to maintain their bottom-up innovation potential.
2. Provide more long-term support for the development of the European University Alliances.
3. Consider implementing quality monitoring mechanisms for Erasmus+ staff mobility.

Erasmus+ Higher Education cooperation partnerships are a strong added value to higher education, ranked by the respondents in the interim evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme 2021-27 among the top three most effective actions for organisations and staff¹³. These cooperation partnerships for the European higher education sector advanced the modernisation and internationalisation of HEIs tremendously since their start in 2014. As a result, projects such as Erasmus for All, which reexamines the way grant calculations are made, the Online Learning Agreement, and the European Student Card have been created.

However, the funding for cooperation partnerships in higher education has halved within the 2021-2027 programme period with 121 million EUR in 2023 dropping to only 62 million EURO in 2026, drastically limiting European higher education cooperation. The decrease in funding comes at a time when the number of applications increased manifold, leading to an alarming rate of rejected project applications in central and decentral calls.

The transformative nature of Erasmus+ Cooperation Partnerships in Higher Education is no longer to be debated. Yet, they lack visibility in the decision-making process at the European level, where these bottom-up and grassroots projects are not well represented. We therefore recommend the European Commission to consider ensuring thematic coordination among Consortia of similar or complementary objectives to maximise their visibility in the higher education community and towards the decision-makers.

We further recommend adjusting the way the Erasmus+ Project Result platform indexes the content: resources should become indexed first to increase their visibility and exploitation potential. This would tremendously increase their exploitation potential and limit the

13. [Interim evaluation of the 2021-2027 Erasmus+ programme and final evaluation of the 2014-2020 Erasmus+ programme](#), p. 48.

With the role of higher education under attack in many parts of the world, including on the European continent, Cooperation Partnerships act as a lifeline for university cooperation. Hence, the EU should look at these Cooperation Partnerships as supporting European shared values in programme countries and beyond, and connecting the European Education Area more deeply.

Projects associated with the European University Alliances have attracted broad interests from local, national and European decision-makers given that the Erasmus+ programme encompasses more than student exchanges. This strategic development brings a lot of attention to the programme itself and the cooperation opportunities it offers. There is a shared understanding that the European University Alliances are an opportunity to further deepen the ties across the European Education Area and advance on some of the bottlenecks that hinder educational cooperation, notably on the question of Quality Assurance and Accreditation.

There are three considerations that are of particular importance moving forward: The first one is maintaining the strategic balance between excellence of these initiatives and the inclusive dimension of the programme, requiring opportunities for all HEIs in the programme countries. This balance is delicate to maintain and calls for monitoring the spill-over effect on HEIs that are currently not involved in these initiatives. Second, such ambitious initiatives should not be carried out with Erasmus+ funds alone, which would divert funds for student and staff mobility and bottom-up cooperation. Third, the initiatives must have adequate long-term funding so that they can concentrate on their complex mission of ensuring ambitious convergence between the institutions involved in given alliances to build transnational educational offerings that will enhance the European Education Area's attractiveness. A considerate implementation of lump sum funding rules would further allow the alliance partners to focus on long term

number of clicks required to consult possible interesting possibilities. In parallel, the use of AI-Assistant to summarise the most relevant resources for platform users would further enhance their visibility.

The EUF was one of the stakeholder organisations that was consulted on the European University Alliances. The network has decided against becoming directly involved in one of the alliances and remains, therefore, impartial in this process. Consequently, over 40 Alliances are represented in the membership of the EUF and our University Alliance Accelerator community has been supporting staff from member institutions exchanging practices and discussing challenges.

The EUF Network recommends ensuring appropriate institutional funding for the alliances and assessing the impact of these alliances on the development of the European Education Area, by identifying the concrete results that may also be adopted by non-involved institutions. This could happen by involving non-involved HEIs in the Community of Practice of European University Initiatives and allowing them to reporting back to the higher education community on the novel opportunities generated by the development of the alliances.

strategic development instead of centering their attention around the project management.

Transnational mobilities for teaching and administrative staff members yield a transformative power for the individuals involved and institutional benefits in developing closer cooperation with partner institutions. Although Erasmus+ has long supported staff mobility, the quality of staff training often varies. Many opportunities focus on networking or intercultural exchange rather than skill-building for professional growth. Without formal standards, staff struggle to identify training that truly develops competences, while HEIs face challenges in assessing which training programmes deserve Erasmus+ funding. Accordingly, there is a need for improved quality assurance measures in organising and selecting training offers.

The Erasmus+ Crossroads label, created by the EUF, was developed with a view at collecting staff training offers that are aimed at delivering specific learning-outcomes for their participants.

The Erasmus Compass project will further develop this label by creating a clear quality framework.

9. Funding bridges

There is a strong wish from the higher education community to ensure synergies between different EU funding lines, notably Horizon Europe, the European Competitiveness Fund, AgoraEU, and Global Europe. This is happening in a context where higher education institutions are increasingly strategically outlining their Erasmus+ mobilities and collaborations along the lines of their three missions (education, research, society). This also means that closer connections between the different funding programmes will allow institutions to utilise the funds of the Erasmus+ programme for their core mission (mobility of student and staff, bottom-up cooperation) and create bridges to other programmes when seeking to implement scoped cooperation schemes.

These overall observations call for creating stronger bridges between these different EU funding instruments, as well as ensuring that the other programmes, in particular European Competitiveness Funds, are able to cover the contribution of European higher education institutions to the Competitiveness Compass. It is imperative that European networks and alliances of higher education institutions be able to take advantage of such opportunities strategically, and consider funding the Scholarships for Talents in strategic fields through the European Competitiveness Fund rather than Erasmus+ directly. Furthermore, the Talent Scholarships shall remain flexible for higher education institutions to define strategic fields of education, relying on the holistic and interdisciplinary efforts of the higher education community to contribute to the Competitiveness Compass.

About us

The European University Foundation (EUF) is an influential network of 100 higher education institutions committed to diversity and social fairness in higher education, and to accelerating the modernisation of the European Higher Education Area. Through close cooperation and policy experimentation, it works across key areas, including high-quality student and staff mobility, inclusion, the green transition, the digital transformation of higher education, and supports the quality and resilience of internationalisation.

Its core activities are designed to strengthen the capacity and expertise of academic and administrative staff, raise awareness of EU policy objectives and initiatives, and facilitate policy dialogue among practitioners, policymakers, and stakeholders. The organisation has considerable expertise in policy innovation and a rich history of contributing to the further development of the Erasmus+ programme.

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