

Removing the main obstacles to European student mobility

A proposal for better and more inclusive Erasmus grants

Report developed within the Erasmus for All project



Title

Removing the main obstacles to European student mobility – a proposal for better and more inclusive Erasmus grants

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The popularity of the Erasmus+ programme is part of its identity, just as is the long-standing financial challenges that participating students have faced. Research has shown time and again that financial barriers are the main obstacle experienced by mobile students, as well as the main reason why too many opt to not participate in mobility programmes. In fact, the success and popularity of Erasmus have historically come fairly cheap - a huge success story for not very much money at all. Some political leaders have recognised this, not least the former European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, who in the run-up to the 2021-2027 MFF pleaded for seven times greater investment in this flagship programme.

Erasmus for All aims to reckon with the design inefficiencies of the Erasmus+ programme candidly, considering both historical and practical reasons that help understand why the financial support currently afforded to mobile students falls short of their needs. Additionally, it brings forth constructive proposals on how to address them, with the explicit goal of ensuring a realistic and equitable access to the European mobility experience. We hope this report can inform critically important discussions among practitioners and stakeholders, as well as support and inspire policy makers to take decisive action and ensure that Erasmus+ is truly for all.

The content of the report is divided into the following chapters:

CHAPTER 1

The first chapter is dedicated to exploring the challenges and issues that currently affect Erasmus+ grants and that ought to be considered to advance and improve the grant system in the near future. Topics such as groups of students

remaining excluded from mobility, or the rapidly rising accommodation costs will be analysed considering recent research.

CHAPTER 2

The following chapter outlines the preliminary work undertaken by the group of experts involved in the creation of scenarios to change the Erasmus+ grant system and calculate the grant in a more inclusive way. It highlights the main issues experts looked into, as well as the shared assumptions that informed the creation of new grant calculation scenarios.

CHAPTER 3

Four proposals on how to better calculate the Erasmus+ grant are described in detail in chapter 3, one of the core parts of this report. This section describes these proposals, their structure and main strengths and weaknesses.

CHAPTER 4

The following chapter compares the four new grant calculation proposals according to a set of criteria, and identifies the most effective one in ensuring more inclusive Erasmus+ mobility, and a more equal access to its opportunities.

CHAPTER 5

Chapter 5 delves into the chosen scenario to improve Erasmus+ mobility and make it more inclusive, while also exploring current limitations and ways forward.

CHAPTER 6

The perspectives of Higher Education stakeholders on how to improve the Erasmus

grants are detailed on chapter 6. Their views on the current Erasmus+ grant system, what should be the way forward and their views on the chosen Erasmus for All grant calculation scenario are a practical test to the work and analysis carried out by the Erasmus for All working group.

CHAPTER 7

Chapter 7 explores the impact that the change to the Erasmus for All grant calculation system would have on the implementation of the European University Alliances.

CHAPTER 8

Finally, chapter 8 summarises not only the conclusions of the report, but also the impact that the change to a more inclusive grant calculation system would have on both the behaviour of the student population and the implementation of the European University Alliances.

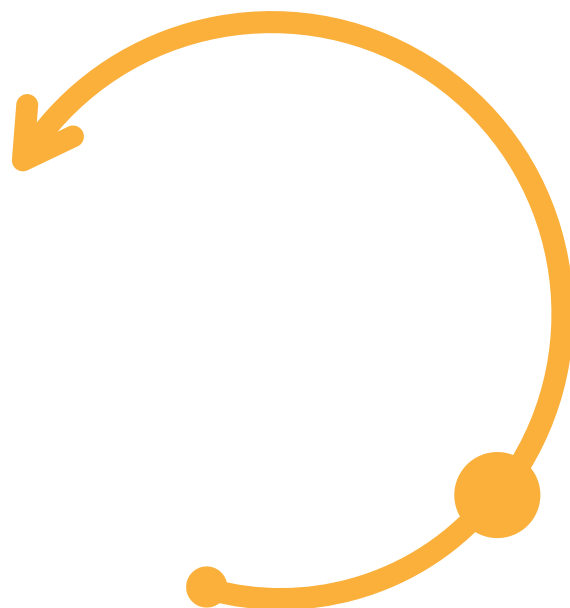
Presenting Erasmus for All

Erasmus for All is an Erasmus+ KA2 Cooperation Partnership project which aims to tackle the low levels of participation in Higher Education mobility by proposing an economically viable grant scheme. It also intends to contribute to reducing the existing asymmetries in the attribution of Erasmus+ grants throughout Europe through the promotion of a fairer, inclusive and equitable grant calculation methodology. Its main objectives are the following:

- Keep the topics of inclusion and equity in the policy agenda;
- Build a shared understanding among key stakeholders of the desired trajectory/ evolution of the current and successor Erasmus+ programme;
- And provide expert and in-depth analysis and recommendations that effectively address the inefficiencies of the current Erasmus grants.

The research undertaken in this report builds on other activities of the project, namely the mapping of other mobility student support systems and research on the topic of inclusive and accessible Higher Education mobility. Additionally, it was essential for this report to understand and collect the conclusions of the Erasmus for All Student Social Labs - a series of focus groups that aimed to collect students' views on several topics regarding the Erasmus+ mobility grants and how they could be improved. The conclusions of these activities, summarised in the report "In-depth analysis on mobility funding and beyond"¹, were thus essential in informing the work here presented.

For more information about the Erasmus for All project, please check the project website².



1. Erasmus for All report "In-depth analysis on mobility funding and beyond" retrieved at https://www.up.pt/erasmus-for-all/downloads/Mapping_and_Research_Report_FINAL.pdf?v=6

2. Erasmus for All project website <https://www.up.pt/erasmus-for-all/>



1. KEY ISSUES THAT RENDER THE EVOLUTION OF ERASMUS GRANTS A PRIORITY

The Erasmus+ programme is one of the flagship initiatives of the European Union, with 13.7³ million participants in mobility activities by 2022. The benefits arising from such an experience are undeniable, positively impacting intercultural skills, employability and ultimately the sense of European identity of young adults. Key components of a student mobility within Erasmus+ include, among others, the exemption of tuition fees, the recognition of the period abroad and, in the majority of cases, an Erasmus grant⁴ as a contribution to cover the extra costs students incur while on mobility.

The regulation to establish the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027⁵ states that “Investing in learning mobility for all, regardless of background and means (...), is key to building inclusive, cohesive and resilient societies and sustaining the competitiveness of the Union, ...”. However, even though some steps have been taken towards increasing equal access to Erasmus+ mobility opportunities, achieving this goal remains a significant challenge⁶.

Research⁷ on the topic highlights economic barriers as one of the biggest issues hindering students from participating in an Erasmus+ mobility. This economic strain

disproportionately affects students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, deterring them from even considering such opportunities. A similar trend was echoed in the discussions with the experts - not one of the experts involved in the consortium could remember a time where money was not a limiting factor for broadening participation in Erasmus+ mobilities - because such a time has never truly existed.

Given that the way the grant is calculated did not fundamentally change in the last decade, it is crucial to explore how this mechanism and its underlying logic could be adapted to meet the needs of students and their economic realities. This adaptation is essential for expanding access to the programme to a broader and more diverse student base. The programme needs to do more than just advocate for inclusivity – it must actively implement the tools to turn this aspiration into reality.

Identifying and understanding the factors that impede the effectiveness of the Erasmus+ mobility grant is the first step towards this goal. Listed below are some of the key issues that need to inform the evolution of Erasmus+ grants to truly fulfil the vision of an Erasmus for All.

3. Retrieved from the Erasmus+ annual report 2022, at <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/9020d5f5-8f3a-11ee-8aa6-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

4. The term “Erasmus grant” refers to the monthly grant Higher Education students receive when participating in a long-term exchange within Erasmus+ countries (identified at the time of writing this report as KA131)

5. Regulation (EU) 2021/817 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 establishing Erasmus+: the Union Programme for education and training, youth and sport and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 (Text with EEA relevance), retrieved at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32021R0817>

6. In the European Parliament resolution of 16 January 2024 on the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027, the European Parliament “... points out that insufficient grants to cover the costs of learning mobility and delays in payment are among the biggest deterrents to participants in mobility projects”. Retrieved at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2024-0007_EN.pdf

7. In the report from ESU “Bologna with Student Eyes 2020”, it is stated that “The clear majority of all respondents indicated that financial difficulties are the number one consideration for students who would like to undergo a learning mobility period but ultimately decide against it”. Retrieved at <https://esu-online.org/bologna-with-student-eyes-2020/>

1.1. Grants are insufficient to cover the extra costs students incur during mobility

One of the main aims of the Bologna process was to promote mobility by overcoming obstacles to the free movement of students. This comprised not only the recognition of studies and the access to services available in the home institution while abroad, but also a social dimension where students from all backgrounds could undertake international student mobility. The [2020 Rome Ministerial Communiqué](#) included the [Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA](#) as one of the Annexes. The European Commission is a full member of the Bologna Process and thus has agreed to said Principles. One of the principles approved states that “International mobility programmes in higher education should be structured and implemented in a way that fosters diversity, equity and inclusion and should particularly foster participation of students and staff from vulnerable, disadvantaged or underrepresented backgrounds”. However, equitable access to the Erasmus+ mobility programme is still not a reality.

The European Commission contends that the grant amount is only a contribution to the costs incurred abroad. Consequently, this results in significant disparities in mobility access based on factors such as students’ socio-economic backgrounds. A contribution to the costs incurred abroad leaves students with a gap to fill, as the cost increase students are facing when engaging in a study period abroad is almost never met with an equally high grant from the programme. Furthermore, it overlooks the fact that not all sources of income and financial support, such as income from work or national grants, can be portable⁸.

To participate in the programme, students must either rely on additional financial support - from their own resources (either through their savings or through income from side jobs) and/ or from others (such as family, partner, etc) - or belong to a fewer opportunities background to receive further support (which according to the Erasmus+ Annual report 2022, represents only around 12% of HE students going on mobility). Students that cannot rely on these options are often unable to partake in the programme.

Research indicates that financial obstacles are among the primary deterrents from participating in student mobility, especially for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. ESU’s *Bologna with Student Eyes 2020*⁹ report highlights that the most challenging issue continues to be students’ lack of financial resources to undertake an international student mobility. The EUROSTUDENT report “*Social and Economic Conditions of Student Life in Europe. EUROSTUDENT VII Synopsis of Indicators 2018-2021*”¹⁰ follows the same path, since a cross-country majority of 60% of students not planning to undertake an international student mobility mention the expected financial burden as a deterrent to their participation.

Indeed, the percentage of mobility costs students would need to have covered to be able to consider going abroad, which significantly exceeds the percentage covered by the current Erasmus+ grant for the majority of students. The SIEM project report (2021)¹¹ points out a percentage of “53% of non-mobile respondents (...) needing at least 75% of the mobility programme costs to be covered by funding if they were to go abroad”. When looking at non-mobile respondents from lower socio-economic backgrounds, the percentage substantially increases to 70%.

However, the same report finds that less than a third of respondents from low-income

8. Mobility scoreboard, Higher education background report 2022/2023, Eurydice report, retrieved at: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/f9202a88-efbf-11ed-a05c-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-286032402>

9. Bologna with Student Eyes 2020 report retrieved at https://esu-online.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/BWSE2020-Publication_WEB2.pdf

10. Social and Economic Conditions of Student Life in Europe. EUROSTUDENT VII Synopsis of Indicators 2018-2021 retrieved at https://www.eurostudent.eu/download_files/documents/EUROSTUDENT_VII_Synopsis_of_Indicators.pdf

11. Allinson K., Gabriels W., (2021). Maybe it will be different abroad; student and staff perspectives on diversity and inclusion in student exchanges. SIEM Research Report, siem-project.eu, retrieved at https://siem-project.eu/documents/SIEM-survey-report_2022_10.pdf

Financial support offered versus needed

Q. How was the total cost of your mobility period funded? (mobile respondents: 8.350)

Q. What level of funding would be needed if you were to go abroad? (non-mobile respondents: 4.470)

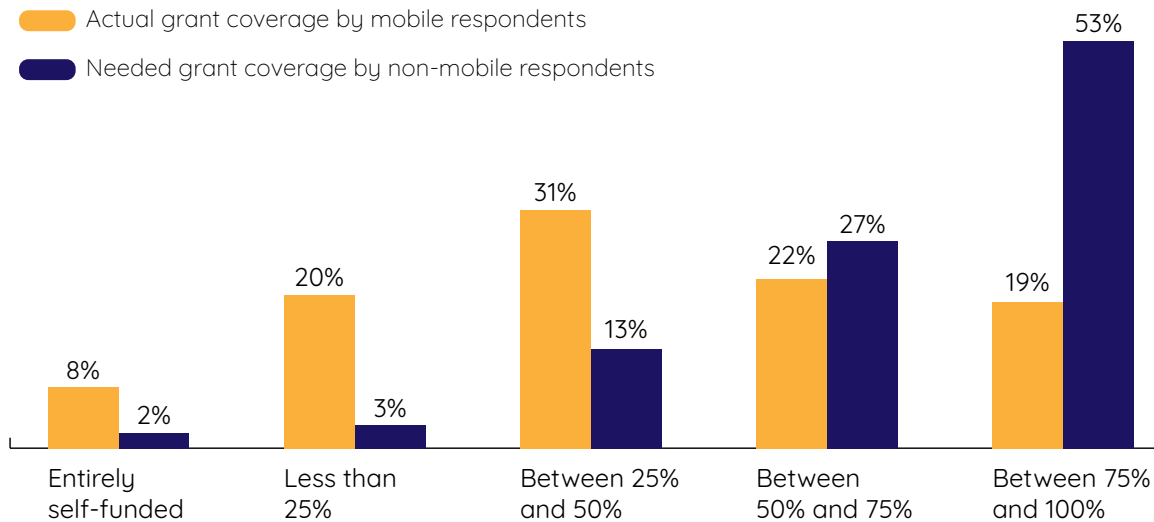


Figure 1 - Data from SIEM report with comparison between financial support offered versus needed, for mobile and non-mobile respondents. ESN Survey results from 2022 (*Erasmus Student Network (2022). Understanding the experience and needs of exchange students in challenging times. ESNsurvey - XIV edition, retrieved at <https://esn.org/esnsurvey/>*) and its previous editions ([2016](#), [2018](#)) showcased a similar trend.

backgrounds had at least 75% of their mobility programme funded, indicating that adequate financial support remains unavailable and is impeding the participation of all students in Erasmus+. For those students who do participate in mobility, their choices may be limited to cheaper destinations, rather than focusing on academic curriculum, for instance.

Over the past decade, the way the Erasmus+ grant ranges are defined has not fundamentally changed. While the European Commission has adjusted the grant ranges since 2018 to reflect the inflation and rising living costs across the programme countries, this does not mean that the adjustments automatically translate into an increase of the final grant amounts, as that decision is passed on to the National Agencies.

The average monthly grant amount has been increasing since the beginning of the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027, a much-needed improvement to ensure students planning to go on mobility receive adequate support. These gains have however been diminished by periods

of rapidly increasing inflation¹², and thus did not result in more affordable mobility. Additionally, the soaring accommodation costs substantially raised the cost of international student mobility, and most likely impacted the number of students considering going abroad, as discussed in 1.3.

Additionally, the Erasmus+ programme introduced a new travel grant in 2024, which aims to alleviate the financial burden of the travel to and from the mobility destination. While it is a step forward, it might be too early to tell whether the implementation of this measure will have a substantial impact on students' overall budget.

1.2. The current Erasmus+ grant system is not transparent enough

A transparent grant system should ensure that students easily understand when and how much they will receive for their grant and based on what criteria. Such clarity should be

12. From the end of 2020 to the end of 2023, the inflation rate in the Euro Area was 18,12%, based on Eurostat database Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices. Retrieved at <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tec00027/default/table?lang=en>

a requirement for Erasmus+ programme grants, as it would make the rules clearer, support informed decisions and establish a shared sense of fairness and logic. These aspects can influence students' decision to go on mobility, particularly when it comes to price-sensitive populations such as students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Nevertheless, at present Erasmus+ mobility grants are opaque and complex, and their correspondence to living costs abroad tenuous. It is exceedingly difficult for an International Officer to explain to a prospective mobile student the rationale behind their mobility grants, meaning considerable work is still required for reaching a satisfactory degree of transparency.

The current grant system organises EU Member States and third countries associated to the Programme in three groups according to their cost of living: higher, medium or lower living cost. In addition, the European Commission establishes three grant ranges:

- Low range grant level from **225 and 550 EUR** per month
- Medium range grant level **292 and 606 EUR** per month
- High range grant level **348 and 674 EUR** per month

The decision on which grant range is applied depends on whether a mobility happens between countries that are from the same country group (medium range grant), a country group with lower living costs (lower range grant) or a country with higher living costs (higher range grant). This approach has substantial shortcomings since it assumes that a) countries can indeed be clustered in only three groups to reflect their costs of living, b) costs of living are the same within a country, and c) it is enough to get the same grant range when moving from a low living cost country to either a middle or a high living cost country¹³. In addition, one may notice the very small difference between the

grant ranges (+/- 50 EUR) and the rather wide range of grant levels (over 300 EUR). While we note that the exact grant amounts are defined by each National Agency, it is difficult to understand the actual impact of combining three country groups with such broad grant ranges.

Critically, and in addition to this, the actual **criteria and threshold** to determine whether a **country belongs to the group with higher, medium or lower living cost are not known**, and do not withstand close scrutiny. Even though adjustments have been made in the last few years to reduce discrepancies, cases subsist where grants fail to follow a clear mathematical logic. This creates realities that are difficult for both staff and students to understand, and difficult to explain to potential participants – a situation which is clearly detrimental to the programme and its promotion.

This opaqueness does not come exclusively from the country groups and the wide ranges defined. According to the Erasmus+ programme guide 2024 v1¹⁴, the Erasmus+ National Agencies will define the grant amount “in agreement with National Authorities, and/or the HEIs on the basis of objective and transparent criteria...”. These criteria relate to the availability and level of funding of other sources of co-financing to complement the EU grant, as well as the general level of demand of students who intend to study or receive training abroad. The flexibility that Erasmus+ National Agencies have is generally welcomed. However, it can significantly accentuate inconsistency between sending countries.

Additionally, the logic on which the criteria are built does not necessarily account for the students who would want to embark on the study period abroad but cannot due to financial or other constraints. In this case, the demand for mobility only represents students who already consider participation in mobility programmes and for whom that is a realistic opportunity.

Taken together, these factors make it very difficult

13. According to the Erasmus+ programme guide 2024, students from a country with lower cost of living would receive the higher range EU grant if they went to any country on group 1 (countries with higher living costs) or group 2 (countries with medium living costs). This would mean that a student from Turkiye (group 3) would receive the same grant if they went to Estonia (group 2) or Iceland (group 1).

14. Erasmus Programme Guide 2024 version 1, retrieved at https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-11/2024-Erasmus%2BProgramme-Guide_EN.pdf

		Erasmus+ programme year				
		2014	2015-2017	2018-2020	2021-2023	2024
Country groups	Group 1 Countries with higher living costs	Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Norway, United Kingdom, Sweden, Switzerland	Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom	Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg , Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom	Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Norway, Sweden	Austria, Belgium , Denmark, Finland, France , Germany , Iceland, Ireland, Italy , Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Netherlands , Norway, Sweden
	Group 2 Countries with medium living costs	Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey	Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey	Austria , Belgium, Cyprus, France , Germany, Greece, Italy , Malta , Netherlands, Portugal, Spain	Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain	Cyprus, Czechia , Estonia, Greece, Latvia , Malta, Portugal, Slovakia , Slovenia , Spain
	Group 3 Countries with lower living costs	Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	Bulgaria, Croatia , Czech Republic , Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Republic of North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia , Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey	Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Türkiye.	Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Lithuania, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Türkiye

Table 1 - Changes in country groups for Erasmus+ learning mobility grant calculation. The **countries in bold** have changed groups compared with the previous year*

*Information about the groups of countries retrieved from the Erasmus+ programme guides from 2014 to 2024, which can be retrieved at <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-programme-guide>.

for experts and non-experts alike to understand the way grants are currently allocated.

In the case of participants with fewer opportunities, this lack of transparency is even more evident. The European Commission's decision on the framework of inclusion measures of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programmes 2021-2027¹⁵ states that *“Lack of awareness about the availability of dedicated measures for people with fewer opportunities can result in less participation of these target groups. Greater effort is needed to raise awareness and increase their levels of information and awareness about the opportunities in place and how to access them”*.

However, the fact that the criteria of what is deemed as fewer opportunities is defined at National level means that the efforts to communicate and disseminate Erasmus+ support relies mostly on the shoulders of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Despite a massive commitment of HEIs to providing students with the most relevant information possible, the sheer amount of data that needs to be conveyed might lead to an inefficient message coming across for students, which in turn results in confusion and less optimal access to opportunities. This is in line with the preliminary findings of the ESNSurvey XV¹⁶, which states that 15% of students reported not knowing whether they have received top-ups or not in their mobilities. While more information is, in principle, always better, it would be disingenuous not to consider how much complexity can be effectively conveyed through existing channels – in other words, an overly complex student support system will always be understood to a limited extent, whereas there is merit to simplify it when possible.

1.3. Erasmus funding does not match rapidly rising accommodation costs

The global student housing crisis has been reported widely across the media, and the situation in Europe is no exception. Scarcity of available short-term accommodation, rapidly increasing prices, home and host institutions struggling to support and inform their students on the topic, scams - those are just some of the obstacles mobility students are facing when planning their study period abroad. Housing is crucial for the student experience abroad, as without fulfilling such basic needs students are not able to focus on their studies to the extent required.

The importance of accessible housing is also acknowledged in the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education¹⁷, which points to the responsibility of Higher Education Institutions in “guiding mobile participants in the process of finding accommodation”. It is equally mentioned in the Erasmus Student Charter¹⁸, the document that outlines the rights and duties of Erasmus students, which says “You are entitled to receive information on obtaining insurance, finding housing, securing a visa (if required), and facilities/support available for those with special needs”.

Over the years housing prices have increased in most of the countries across Europe. EUROSTUDENT¹⁹ suggests that the reasons for that could come from an increase in the demand for housing that continues to be unmatched by the housing offers. This has increased the share of the expenses on accommodation, as students' income and the public support for them (e.g. national student grants or in-kind support) have not been able to keep up with the cost increase, contributing even more to the student housing crisis across Europe.

15. European Commission decision on the framework of inclusion measures of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programmes 2021-2027, retrieved at https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021-10/comm-2021-7493_en.pdf

16. Preliminary results of the ESNSurvey XV retrieved at <https://www.esn.org/news/launch-preliminary-results-xv-esnsurvey>

17. Erasmus Charter for Higher Education 2021-2027 Guidelines, retrieved at https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/charter-annotated-guidelines-feb2020_en.pdf

18. Erasmus student charter, retrieved at <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/45379>

19. Social and Economic Conditions of Student Life in Europe, EUROSTUDENT VII Synopsis of Indicators 2018–2021, retrieved at https://www.eurostudent.eu/download_files/documents/EUROSTUDENT_VII_Synopsis_of_Indicators.pdf

A recent report published by ESU and ESN²⁰ shines a light on the severity of the issue of student housing for exchange students. As Erasmus+ scholarships do not match the current living costs or even keep up with the inflation rates, more than half of the students reported being able to cover only half of the accommodation costs or even less. The situation varies a lot across countries, and even cities and individual institutions. It also depends on the availability of student housing provided by HEIs and other student services, and the extent to which students need to look into the private market for available options. The percentage of exchange students living in HEIs-provided housing can vary from 10% to 75% across the programme countries, as detailed in HousErasmus+ research²¹. That also affects what share of students' expenses will have to go towards covering accommodation costs as student housing tends to be less expensive than accommodation available on the private market.

Given that accommodation costs make up the biggest share of student expenses abroad and the situation significantly varies across programme countries, the current grant system fails to address the structural differences students are facing across Europe.

1.4. Groups of students remain structurally excluded from mobility

A lot has changed in the European student population over the last 35-40 years. Participation in higher education has increased significantly in several member states, leading to a greater diversity of students enrolled at universities. When this diversity is coupled with a higher representation of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, this has important consequences to existing student support systems.

A student support system – in the case at hand,

20. INTERNATIONAL STUDENT HOUSING: How are exchange students in Europe navigating the housing crisis?, retrieved at https://www.esn.org/sites/default/files/news/international_student_housing_report.pdf

21. HousErasmus+ Research Report, retrieved at https://www.houserasmus.eu/sites/default/files/HE%2B_Final_Research_Report.pdf

22. Social and Economic Conditions of Student Life in Europe, EUROSTUDENT VII Synopsis of Indicators 2018–2021, retrieved at https://www.eurostudent.eu/download_files/documents/EUROSTUDENT_VII_Synopsis_of_Indicators.pdf

Erasmus+ grants – that may have worked well for a less diverse cohort of students may see its effectiveness decreased when said cohort becomes more heterogeneous over time and more reliant on effective financial support. This creates evolutionary pressure on such systems to keep up with the times, new requirements and changing needs and expectations.

Such challenges are compounded by a particularly important development, which is the increase in the proportion of students in higher education who rely on paid employment to cover their expenses. Leaving aside for a moment whether such development constitutes an indictment of the effectiveness of student support systems across Europe (or their inability to evolve and meet changing needs), the fact remains that according to EUROSTUDENT²² more than half of the students work during their studies.

Given that work income is hardly portable, this means there is a vast cohort of the student population that is structurally excluded from this kind of opportunity. A challenge of this magnitude surely cannot be ignored and addressing it will no doubt entail more than small adjustments to the existing Erasmus grants.

1.5. Pricing of mobility contrasts with the needs of students

In the course of the work carried out in Erasmus for All, it became clear that one important obstacle to improving the Erasmus grants is not strictly financial, but rooted in the history and the collective consciousness of the higher education community.

Since its creation in 1987, the Erasmus programme foresaw the attribution of grants to Higher Education students who carried out a period of study abroad within its framework. According to the Council Decision of 15 June

1987 adopting the European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (ERASMUS)²³, this grant aimed to support “... *mobility costs, that is travel costs, foreign language preparation as necessary and higher cost of living in the host country (including, where appropriate, the extra cost of living away from the student's home country)*”. In the Erasmus+ programme guide 2024²⁴, the grant support for the mobility of students was described as a “contribution to their additional costs for travel and subsistence related to their period of study ... abroad.”

We have come a long way since 1987. In the (not so recent) past, Erasmus grants were so low that they were dismissed by some as little more than “pocket money”. Such remarks concealed an unpleasant reality: for students in some countries, it was unconceivable to embark on an Erasmus mobility unless they worked or had support from their families. Over time the average grants have eventually risen, to the credit of generations of decision makers (e.g. the European Parliament Education Committee has played a key role in this respect over many years).

Erasmus is indeed one of the most successful programmes of the EU, and its standing is deserved, having provided the experience of taking part of their studies abroad to millions of students. But how many more could have taken part in it if student support had been more effective and better aligned with the needs of mobile students? How many millions more will be able to do so in the future if solutions are found and acted upon?

Given that in the history of the programme there were never adequate arrangements to enable the participation of students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, it must be pointed out that the great success of Erasmus has been achieved by pricing the support of student mobility too low to make it truly inclusive.

Discussions about addressing the root cause of this issue are often met with remarks and

concerns about the fact that increasing grants risks a decrease of the total number of those who can benefit from a mobility experience. This is an understandable reaction, not least among those who make Erasmus such a huge success – the International Relations Officers and Mobility Coordinators. However, history shows us otherwise: it is possible to increase the average grants and the overall number of participants by ensuring the overall budget of the programme is adjusted to meet both goals. Furthermore, even within the past and current MFF, the yearly budget for mobility tends to increase year on year, which leaves some room for addressing such legacy issues.

While the advantages of reviewing the pricing of European student mobility and adjusting to the reality and needs faced by students are clear, the disadvantage of not doing so is just as easy to explain: a failure to address the single biggest participation bottleneck in the programme will curtail any ambitious plans to involve even more students in the years ahead, especially at a time of mounting economic pressures.

Additionally, the difficulty of achieving higher participation combined with the need to keep statistics rising might result in the reduction of the average duration of exchanges. While short-term mobility might make sense to a particular set of students, it should not be the standard solution for increasing the number of students going on mobility, especially when it does not align with academic calendars or students' own preferences.

It is essential that arguments in favour of decisive action must weigh heavier than inertia and political deadlock – notably with regards to the need to continue to increase the budget of the programme in future MFF, which would disorient the current chief policy priorities regarding fostering greater inclusion.

23. Council Decision 87/327/EEC of 15 June 1987 adopting the European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (ERASMUS) Retrieved at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/ET/TXT/?uri=CELEX:31987D0327>

24. Erasmus Programme Guide 2024 version 1, retrieved at https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-11/2024-Erasmus%2BProgramme-Guide_EN.pdf

1.6. A more ambitious approach is needed to widen participation in Erasmus+ mobility

The work carried out in Erasmus for All is part of a broader context. In recent years, both the Erasmus+ programme and the Higher Education sector at large have increasingly prioritised social inclusion, aiming to widen the participation in international student mobility²⁵. Notably, the current programme has expanded a measure introduced in 2014 which aims to improve the support of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, commonly referred as the ‘fewer opportunities top-up’. This initiative has been well received, as it aims to provide additional financial support tailored to the needs of many more students, enabling them to pursue international mobility opportunities.

While the introduction of this initiative marks progress towards a more inclusive Erasmus+ programme, there are still significant issues to address. According to the Erasmus+ Annual report 2022²⁶, around 12% of Higher Education mobility participants are students with fewer opportunities. Although this percentage has seen a slight increase compared to the previous programme, the rate of progress is slow and may not adequately represent the proportion of students with a fewer opportunities background currently enrolled in Higher Education. In fact, the absence of a standardised methodology at the European level to define such a population renders such an analysis almost impossible. Yet, mapping the gap between the characteristics of the mobile and non-mobile student populations is essential to have a clear picture of the challenge at hand. The inability to evaluate the effectiveness of this measure in encouraging more students from disadvantaged backgrounds to participate in Erasmus+ mobility underscores the necessity for a unified European approach to address this critical issue.

The process of defining criteria for what constitutes ‘fewer opportunities’ in the Erasmus+ programme may also pose a challenge. Currently, this definition is determined at national level, which means that different criteria are applied in each country. While this approach allows for consideration of diverse circumstances, it also leads to disparities at the European level and makes it quite difficult (if not impossible) to have a clear overview of progress, needs and challenges. This is because the differences arising among countries can sometimes result in completely different realities depending on where the student is coming from, which can be detrimental to the programme.

Finally, a consultation with Higher Education stakeholders revealed another significant aspect: the stigma associated with coming from a ‘fewer opportunities background’ may deter students from seeking support. This stigma could lead them to believe that student mobility is not accessible to them, causing them to exclude themselves from the possibility at an early stage. Additionally, this raises ethical and practical concerns about requiring students to publicly acknowledge a certain condition to be eligible for the fewer opportunities top-up.

These issues underscore the fact that efforts to create a more inclusive Erasmus+ programme are primarily addressed at the national/local level, resulting in varying levels of implementation and a lack of coordinated action at the EU level. This fragmented approach to inclusion complicates the development of consistent programme-level messages. Therefore, it prompts consideration of whether addressing **the design issues affecting the entire structure of Erasmus+ grants would be the most effective approach**. While support for students with fewer opportunities has improved, there are distinct advantages to adopting a systemic perspective on inclusion, rather than an individual-focused one. Improving the instruments transversal to the programme

25. The prioritisation of social inclusion and the focus on widening participation in international student mobility were referred in several documents:

- Regulation (EU) 2021/817 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 establishing Erasmus+: the Union Programme for education and training, youth and sport and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013, retrieved at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/817/>
- EHEA (2020). Rome Ministerial Communiqué, Rome, November 19th 2020. Retrieved at https://www.ehea.info/Upload/Rome_Ministerial_Communique.pdf

26. Erasmus+ Annual report 2022 retrieved at <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/f975eb93-8f34-11ee-8aa6-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

could - and should - also lead to more clarity and a faster removal of the financial barriers that continue to act as an obstacle to mobility. This approach would benefit those students that are not wealthy enough to afford the mobility on their own, but not poor enough to receive

the fewer opportunities support. Furthermore, such an approach would impact not only on the participation of students with fewer opportunities, but also uphold the principle of Erasmus+ as a programme with opportunities truly for all, not only for the better - or worse-off.





2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH PRECEDING THE CREATION OF GRANT CALCULATION SCENARIOS

The task of looking into the Erasmus+ grant for long-term HE student mobility and understanding how it can be improved to become more inclusive and equal is a formidable challenge.

To tackle it, the consortium brought together a multidisciplinary team of experts, with particular attention being paid to the ensuring robust competences and experience in the following fields:

- Statistics: providing quantitative research/findings related to the topic of student mobility within Erasmus+ and, particularly, the grant system; exploring how the variables identified for the new grant calculation methodology could potentially lead to an increase in the number of mobilities;
- Economics: providing insight regarding the most suitable method to calculate the grant, including considerations about regional purchasing power, and feedback on the economic feasibility of the proposed methodology;
- Sociology: ensuring that the grant calculation methodology includes the notion of social mobility at its core and shedding light on how the Erasmus+ programme and particularly the new methodology could be perceived by students;

- Policy: highlighting known issues pertaining to the manner the Erasmus+ programme has evolved and linking them with the concerns brought forward by key stakeholders, such as students, IROs, university leadership, etc.; contributing to contextualising proposed actions in terms of the broader EU policy, both within and beyond the programme as such.
- International student mobility: bringing hands-on knowledge about the implementation of student mobility and the daily challenges faced by students and staff; adding an important perspective on the implementation of any suggested changes, as well as thorough experience in possible solutions that may have been explored by some institutions.





The working group that delved into the development of an improved way to calculate the Erasmus grant consisted of representatives of the Erasmus for All partners with expertise in one or more of these areas.

Tackling such structural challenges can only be achieved through a clear methodology. For this reason, the following steps preceded the publication of this report:

The **first step** was a scoping exercise which delimited the analysis to studying, analysing and eventually improving the grant support for long-term mobility of Higher Education students (typical semester or year-long mobility) between




EU Member States, third countries associated to the Programme and third countries not associated to the Programme from Regions 13 and 14 (currently KA131). The reasoning behind the decision to focus only on this type of mobility is that this is the largest learning mobility-related activity within Erasmus+ and therefore any changes implemented might have an impact on a higher number of beneficiaries. The progress made towards improving support to this critical cohort can subsequently inform or inspire improvements to other types of mobility and cooperation.

In a second stage, the consortium gathered to explore the most recent conclusions on the topic of Erasmus+ grants and inclusion as a way to achieve the best possible results in terms of a new grant calculation methodology. This discussion had the following goals in mind:

-  Better understanding the target group of Erasmus+ grants.
-  Defining the problem and analysing existing proposals to solve it.
-  Discussing what variables should be taken into consideration to develop new methodologies.
-  Reaching a set of assumptions that would help develop the grant calculation scenarios.

To achieve these goals, the consortium looked into the main characteristics of the European Higher Education student population, since this will be the main group a new Erasmus+ grant calculation methodology would need to tackle. This exercise was based on the findings of the EUROSTUDENT report “*Social and Economic Conditions of Student Life in Europe - EUROSTUDENT VII Synopsis of Indicators 2018-2021*”. Additionally, the conclusions of the previous activities on the project were essential to explore the current situation of Erasmus+ mobility grants and the most recent updates

and rules of its system - namely the research on the topic of inclusive and accessible Higher Education mobility and the feedback of students on the current Erasmus+ grant system, gathered through the Student Social Labs. This exercise resulted in the identification of the key issues that prevent the Erasmus+ grant system from being more inclusive. The main ones are the following:

-  Most times, the Erasmus+ grant is not enough to cover the costs for students on mobility.
-  The financial burden of mobility is the most often cited reason not to undertake a study period abroad.
-  Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to go on mobility.

It was equally important to consider policy developments over recent years, and which plans had been proposed for a more equitable grant system. In this regard two proposals were found:

- The **living cost approach**, from a position paper published by the Campus Europae Students’ Council in 2004²⁷. By then, it had been identified that the largest barrier to mobility was the cost of living differences within a country and their relation to the grant system. Hence, a need arose to take such differences into consideration in the grant calculation. This proposal was geared towards maximising the efficiency of the resources available. It involved assessing the monthly living costs at home institutions without unnecessary extras, then comparing this amount to the costs of the destination city in two different scenarios:
 - 1) students with no accommodation costs at home (so while on mobility their accommodation costs increase);
 - 2) students already with accommodation costs at home (the

27. Position paper adopted by the Campus Europae Student Council of the network on the social dimension of higher education, retrieved at https://uni-foundation.eu/uploads/2004_social%20dimension_positionpaper.pdf



difference between living costs at home and on mobility already take into account the accommodation costs).

The final grant would thus be a realistic amount that covers the actual extra expenses while on mobility.

- The **standardisation approach** set forth by the Erasmus500²⁸ 2020 campaign, which looked into the reformulation of the Erasmus grant scheme with the establishment of a truly European Erasmus grant of at least 500€ per month. This was defined as a realistic minimum that would ensure bigger coverage of costs and liberty of choice for students. The emphasis on a symbolic common grant for all students resonated both with students and staff from many countries. The Erasmus 500 campaign already included references to the issue of working students and how the overall carbon footprint of European student mobility could be structurally decreased.

These proposals provided a starting point for the discussions of a new grant calculation methodology within the working group and were assessed by its members from different perspectives, including the main differences with the current Erasmus+ system and its advantages and challenges. This analysis allowed for a better understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, which in turn informed what needed to be tackled in the new methodology for the calculation of Erasmus+ grants.

28. More information about the Erasmus 500 initiative can be found in the following link: <https://erasmus500.eu/>

3. PROPOSALS TO CALCULATE THE ERASMUS+ GRANT

The working group set out alternative (and competing) grant calculation scenarios that were aimed at tackling the issues that prevent the Erasmus+ grant system from being more inclusive, while also answering the main challenges faced by students. Experts were given full freedom in terms of the number of scenarios and issues to tackle. In total 7 scenarios were eventually put forward.

Some proposals were designed to address particular aspects that could improve student support to mobility. Their very specific qualities determined their inability to function as a grant system on their own, which in turn limited their comparison with full-fledged grant system scenarios. Nevertheless, they played an important role in flagging possible aspects to tackle in subsequent proposals, such as the importance of accommodation costs in mobility students' overall budget. Annex I includes the description of these proposals in further detail, which may be of interest to those working on the topic, or looking for additional information about the train of thought that informed the work of the experts.

The scenarios described below aim to impact the Erasmus+ grant system in a transversal manner, aligning with the goal of the Erasmus for All project, i.e., improving the equity and inclusion aspects of the Erasmus+ programme by thoroughly modernising its grant calculation methodology.

Accordingly, their analysis is more detailed, mapping the preliminary strengths and weaknesses identified.

3.1. Updating the country groups and adding a top-up for capital cities

This scenario uses the current Erasmus+ grant system as its basis. It proposes to tackle the lack of clarity on how the countries are grouped and on which criteria are used to identify them as having high, medium or low costs of living. Besides that, it focuses on one of the main factors influencing the Erasmus+ mobility experience - accommodation - by using the Eurostat indicator "Price level indices - Housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels 2021"²⁹ as the criteria to group the countries. In doing so, it also recognizes that there are considerable differences between costs of living within cities of the same country and therefore proposes to tackle this through a top-up for students undertaking their mobility in a Higher Education Institution in a capital city.

Therefore, it personalises mobility in terms of its origin and destination countries and cities (capital vs. non-capital), while not accounting for the personal characteristics of the student. It also accommodates top-ups for disadvantaged students, as existing already in the current Erasmus+ grant scheme.

29. National accounts indicator (ESA 2010) : Price level indices (EU27_2020=100). Analytical categories for purchasing power parities (PPPs) calculation: Housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels; year 2021. Retrieved at https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/PRC_PPP_IND_custom_3623484/bookmark/table?lang=en&bookmarkId=1e3001b1-5091-4486-a53d-c8bb41f322d2

Groups	Countries
Group 1	Denmark, Iceland, Ireland, <i>Liechtenstein</i> , Luxembourg Third countries not associated to the Programme from Regions 14 (<i>Faroe Islands</i> , Switzerland, United Kingdom)
Group 2	Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Spain Third countries not associated to the Programme from Regions 13 (<i>Andorra</i> , <i>Monaco</i> , <i>San Marino</i> , <i>Vatican City State</i>)
Group 3	Malta, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Greece, Latvia, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia
Group 4	Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, <i>North Macedonia</i> , Romania, <i>Serbia</i> , <i>Türkiye</i>

Table 2 - New organisation of country groups according to the proposal “Updating the country groups and adding a top-up for capital cities”

Countries in Italics are not included in the Eurostat indicator “Price level indices - Housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels”. Its position could remain the same as it is in the current grant system, except for new added group 4 (those countries are placed in group 3)

Following the Eurostat indicator “Price level indices - Housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels” 2021, we can see that the group positions of many countries would change, in comparison to the groups listed in the Erasmus programme guide 2023. To make the distribution of countries even more coherent, this scenario also proposes to change the total number of groups from 3 to 4, as presented in Table 2.

To provide a more granular support for students who are going to an institution located in a capital city, a top-up is added, though this is based on the assumption that housing costs are usually higher in the capital; no specific calculation pathway for the “capital top-up” was considered at this point.

As a preliminary analysis, the following strengths and weaknesses were identified:

- The **focus on accommodation** is a clear strength, as it represents the single largest expense most mobile students face when abroad. It is also one of the main issues faced by them - therefore, by grouping countries according to their housing prices, it will render such clusters of countries more consistent.

- The **use of a publicly available index** will represent an **increased transparency** on why certain countries are grouped together, which will influence the clarity Mobility Officers convey when explaining how the final grant is calculated. Further to that, the fact that the **index chosen is published by Eurostat** grants it **credibility** in terms of its accuracy.
- This scenario also aims to **partially tackle** one of the challenges identified by the Erasmus for All research, which highlights the significant **cost of living differences between cities of the same country**. By awarding a specific top-up for students that are studying in capital cities, it looks to compensate for higher costs that those students might face.
- The similarity with the current Erasmus+ grant system would make for an easy transition if and when such changes would be implemented.

However, several of the issues identified in the current Erasmus+ grant system were not tackled by this scenario:

PROPOSAL 1

UPDATING THE COUNTRY GROUPS AND ADDING A TOP-UP FOR CAPITAL CITIES



STRENGTHS

- Focus on accommodation expenses.
- Use of a publicly available index enhances transparency and credibility.
- Addressing cost of living differences between cities by offering top-ups for students in capital cities.
- Similarity to current Erasmus+ grant system facilitates easy transition.



WEAKNESSES

- Complexity and opacity in grant calculation process.
- Insufficient distinction between cost of living in capital vs non-capital cities within countries.
- Exclusion of some countries from the Eurostat index and potential inaccuracies in representing students' realities.

- It would still be **rather complex**, and the way the **final grant amount would be calculated would still be opaque** for the majority of students, since it would still be decided by each Erasmus+ National Agency (similarly to the current Erasmus+ grant system).
- **The distinction between capital vs non capital would not be enough to make a meaningful distinction between costs of living in different places in a given country.** A first reason is that the importance of the capital varies between countries, depending on city hierarchy. Paris and London are located in countries where the capital is clearly more expensive than other cities. This is not true for all countries, where the most expensive city may not be the capital (such as the case of Spain or Italy). Secondly, even within countries the difference between non-capital cities can be significant, and such a measure would not account for that. Finally, the decision to single out capital cities might influence students in their choice of mobility destination.
- Some countries participating in the Erasmus + programme are not included in the Eurostat index "Price level indices

- Housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels", while the Eurostat index used might not be the most accurate indication of students' realities.

3.2. Grant calculated through an income level matrix

This scenario aims at readjusting the current system by calculating the final monthly grant through the variation in income levels of sending and destination city. To do this, sending and receiving HEIs would be grouped in four categories, according to their location in NUTS 1 or NUTS 2 regions³⁰ and the Eurostat index "Disposable income of private households"³¹. To calculate the final grant, a top-up sum is multiplied to cover for the difference in income levels.

The preliminary analysis of this scenario highlighted the following strengths:

- By not only **considering the economic reality of the destination**, but also the one from the origin location, this scenario is **better equipped to correct the differences** that will be experienced by students on mobility.

30. NUTS - Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics. More information about this can be found in the Glossary section.

31. More information about this Eurostat index can be found in the following link: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/product/page/tgs00026>

Sending/ Destinationa	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Level 1	1X	2X	3X	4X
Level 2	NO	1X	2X	3X
Level 3	NO	NO	1X	2X
Level 4	NO	NO	NO	1X

Table 3 - Income level matrix

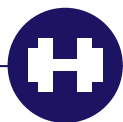
- Compared with the current Erasmus+ grant system, it **goes further in accounting for the differences within the same country**, as it looks into the income level of the regions in which the home and host institution are located.
- Using a **publicly available index** developed by Eurostat ensures **more transparency and reliability** on how the final grant is calculated.
- Furthermore, this scenario references a **top-up sum** that would be used to calculate the final grant amount, but **it does not identify how the sum would be defined and by whom**. This does not allow for a proper understanding of the accuracy or complexity of the calculation, causing undesirable uncertainty.
- Another weakness would be that **using NUTS1 or NUTS2 classification might still not be granular enough**, since those classifications refer to regions with populations between 3 and 7 million (NUTS1) or smaller regions with populations between 800 000 and 3 million (NUTS2). However, as explored above, ideally the Erasmus+ grant calculation should be calculated by comparing city-level differences (NUTS3).

With regards to weaknesses:

- The **notion of multiplying the top-up grant** by factors of 2 to 4 **does not ensure parity** (or linearity) **with the increase of the living costs** we are looking to compensate for.

PROPOSAL 2

GRANT CALCULATED THROUGH AN INCOME LEVEL MATRIX



STRENGTHS

- Comprehensive approach considering economic realities of both origin and destination locations.
- Improved accounting for differences within the same country by considering income levels of regions.
- Use of publicly available Eurostat index enhances transparency and reliability in grant calculation.



WEAKNESSES

- Lack of parity in multiplying the top-up grant to compensate for living cost increases.
- Absence of clear definition or authority responsible for determining the top-up sum.
- Potential lack of granularity in using NUTS1 or NUTS2 classifications for regional comparisons.
- Eurostat index "Disposable income of private households" may not accurately reflect students' realities.

- The Eurostat index “**Disposable income of private households**” might not be the best fit to students’ realities.

3.3. Assessing the grant amount through city-based costs

This scenario aims to mitigate the cost of living differences between host cities of the same country, allowing students to freely choose their mobility destination without having to be worried about how to face different costs. It strives for a **more efficient implementation of the budget**, by accurately awarding students the exact amount they would need, considering the cost differences, while at the same time allowing more flexibility and freedom to HEIs. Institutions would also be able to provide their students with information about all the mobility destinations, their cost of living compared to the home city and the expected monthly grant students would receive.

The starting point is that each sending Institution defines a base amount, according to a set of criteria (e.g. the cost of living of their city, the budget available, the demand for mobility within their institution, etc)

- » As an example, this base amount could be set at 400 EUR for Porto (Portugal)

A tool would then be used to understand the percentage difference between the cost of living of the home city and the host city;

- » For the sake of this exercise, and given that currently there is not an ideal tool adapted to this reality, we will use NUMBEO³², a crowd-sourced online database that includes a city cost of living comparison tool.

To consider a mobility flow between Porto, Portugal and Berlin, Germany, NUMBEO identifies the cost of living in Berlin as being 52.02% higher than in Porto.

The student would thus receive $400 * (1+0,5202) = 608,08$ EUR per month

Changing the destination city to Lodz, Poland would allow us to understand that NUMBEO identifies the cost of living in Lodz as being 29,54% lower than in Porto.

The student would thus receive $400 * (1-0,2954) = 281,84$ EUR per month

Other top-ups could be added to the grant, according to the needs and particular situation of students (e.g. fewer opportunities top-up).

The analysis of this scenario highlighted the following strengths:

- The main advantage of using such a scenario is that, if the tool measuring living cost differences is reliable, **students would have a similar experience in terms of their ability to face the costs of their destination city**, regardless of their choice.
- **Implementation for HEIs could be more transparent**, as every HEI would have to map the institutions they have an agreement with and consult the available tool to calculate the value of living cost differences, which is a process that could be easily automated. The transparency for students would be established by guaranteeing that grants would be rigorously adjusted to the living costs abroad and by providing them with access to the relevant data used for the



A base amount is defined at institutional level



Cost of living calculator to determine the percentage difference between different cities



The final grant is calculated through multiplying the base amount by the percentage difference

Figure 2 - Scenario “Assessing the grant amount through city-based costs”

32. More information about the NUMBEO platform and its collection of cost of living data can be found in the following link: <https://www.numbeo.com/cost-of-living/>

calculation. This would enable students to apply not just knowing exactly what grant they would receive but having higher assurances about the grant correlation with their needs.

- Another strength of this scenario would be an **economically efficient use of resources**, ensuring that the grant would cover the exact difference between the costs of living of the students' origin and destination cities.
- The **definition of the base amount by sending HEIs** would provide them with **further flexibility** to deal with the current reality of their student population and adjust the grant accordingly.

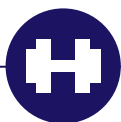
With regards to weaknesses:

- The downside of further flexibility being granted to HEIs to determine their baseline costs is that this could lead to **situations where this calculation is not credible**. This could also **negatively impact the transparency of how the grant is defined**, as HEIs located in the same city could define completely different base grants; this would mean that students going to the same destination city would have considerably different experiences in terms of cost coverage, which is obviously undesirable.

- **The lack of readily available tools that can reliably capture the cost of living differences between cities across Erasmus+ programme countries** could hinder the prompt implementation of this scenario. However, it should be noted that such tools could be easily developed – in fact, until 2020 the European Commission systematically gathered data about living costs through the participants report, and such process could be easily resumed and leveraged on.
- Given the way the grant is calculated in this scenario, the **final amount can drop considerably from the current Erasmus+ grant system, in some cases meaning students would not receive any grant** (e.g. when the origin city has considerably higher living costs than the origin one). Its feasibility and political acceptance (e.g. by students) could therefore be challenging.
- Finally, in this scenario, HEIs would have an added responsibility in defining the base amount which would increase their workload. The flexibility this scenario offers would be countervailed by the necessary analysis of the different factors influencing the definition of the base amount, a process that could take long, involve several actors within each institution, and that would probably need to be repeated yearly.

PROPOSAL 3

ASSESSING THE GRANT AMOUNT THROUGH CITY-BASED COSTS



STRENGTHS

- Ensures similar experiences for students in facing destination city costs, regardless of choice.
- Transparent implementation process for HEIs, with potential for automation.
- Economically efficient use of resources by covering exact living cost differences between origin and destination cities.
- Flexibility for HEIs to define base grant amounts.



WEAKNESSES

- Potential lack of credibility in baseline cost calculations by HEIs.
- Lack of readily available tools to capture living cost differences between cities.
- Possibility of considerable reduction in grant amounts compared to current system.
- Increased workload for HEIs in defining base grant amounts.

3.4. European baseline grant with supplement for cost of living differences and green travel support

This proposal aimed to take a broader view of the issues connected with the grant, while considering a diversity of ways in which they could be resolved (e.g. in-kind support). By combining different funding tools and processes, it aims to tackle the following key challenges:

- the lack of transparency and clarity for students regarding the calculation basis of their mobility grant, causing an uncertainty regarding how they correlate with living costs and how to studies abroad can be funded;
- the considerable differences that can arise from the way the monthly grant is currently calculated, which leaves students undertaking a mobility in the same city in completely different situations that are irrational and difficult to justify;
- the cost of living differences between cities of the same country, which are not accounted for in the current Erasmus+ grant system (as already noted on the previous scenario) and can result in completely different experiences for students going to different cities within the same country;

- Notwithstanding current efforts to transform Erasmus+ into a more environmentally sustainable programme, the difference between the current travel grants for green vs non-green travel is not substantial, while the differences in costs of travelling sustainably in Europe very much are.

To tackle this, this proposal aims to calculate the final monthly grant as a sum of different components:

A European baseline grant

A minimum amount that every student across Europe would receive. This component has different purposes:

- Providing a European grant for a European programme, reducing the perceived differences and inequalities between students from different countries. Standardising a minimum amount that all students would receive would transform the way the Erasmus+ mobility grant is perceived. Depending on the actual amount, it could send a strong signal to students regarding the coverage of their extra costs they would have on mobility;
- Simplifying the dissemination of Erasmus+ grant support and the understanding of students on how much they would receive,

A new Erasmus+ grant proposal for KA 131 student semester mobility

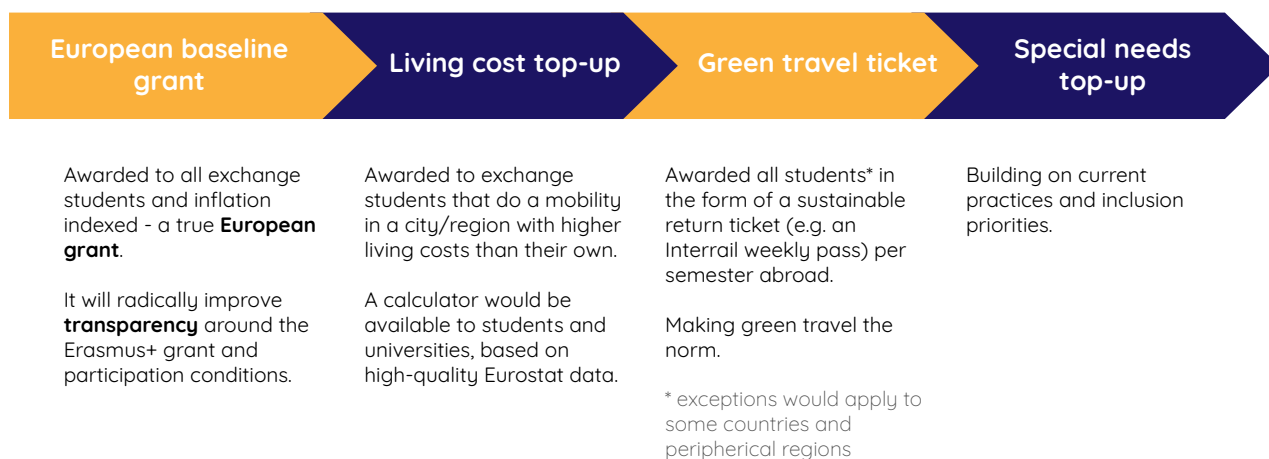


Figure 3 - Scenario "European baseline grant with supplement for cost of living differences and green travel support"

allowing them to plan their financial resources well before the mobility start;

- Enabling simplified reporting and paving the way to greater usage of unit costs.
- Influencing the perception of students on how affordable the mobility experience can be, particularly among more price-sensitive students.

The eventual decision on the exact amount of a European baseline grant would have to consider EU budget planning requirements. However, if the interplay foreseen between the baseline and the supplement for cost of living is safeguarded, students would anyway have strong assurances that their needs will be catered for using this formula.

A supplement for cost of living differences

A top-up amount that would cover differences between the cost of living of origin and destination cities/regions. This supplement would only be granted to students undertaking mobility in a city/region with a higher cost of living than their origin.

The balance between the baseline amount and the supplement for cost of living differences will allow the students to have a strong assurance that the grant they will receive will indeed be able to cover the extra costs they would face while on mobility.

Ensuring that these calculations are available through a simple grant calculator will be essential to guarantee the easy adoption of such a funding formula. Eventually this grant calculator could even be leveraged to automatise the preparation of grant agreements and automatise this step, decreasing the administrative burden involved in the management of Erasmus+ mobilities and improving the mobility experience of the students themselves, as IROs could be more focused on quality aspects of mobility and not as much on the calculation of the grants.

A green travel ticket

A sustainable travel ticket that would be awarded to students and that would make green travel the norm.

It should be noted that the new Erasmus+ programme guide 2024 introduced considerable changes in terms of travel support. For the first time, students will have a dedicated grant that will cover the costs of traveling to and from their mobility destination, according to the distance between the origin and destination cities. This grant also attributes higher amounts to students who travel through more sustainable means of transport. Whilst this is a step in the right direction, there are still considerable challenges that hinder these changes from going as far as required to make the Erasmus+ programme truly sustainable:

- The difference between the non-green and green travel support still falls short of the actual costs the latter often entails³³. The fact that green travel is still not a default option does not send a strong enough message.
- The complexity it adds to the implementation of mobility, reporting and the overall calculation of the grants impacts the processes at HEIs negatively;
- If there is not a specific budget increase dedicated to cover the additional costs required for travel support, this might create a negative effect on the distribution of mobility grants as the amounts per student will considerably increase and therefore the number of students can be impacted.
- The Erasmus+ National Agencies can opt out from providing travel support for long-term student mobility, which creates inequalities across Europe in terms of which students will benefit from this measure.

Therefore, current efforts to transform the Erasmus+ programme into a more sustainable

33. According to the Greenpeace report "Ticket prices of planes vs trains – a Europe-wide analysis", rail trips are on average twice as expensive as flights. Retrieved at <https://greenpeace.at/uploads/2023/07/report-ticket-prices-of-planes-vs-trains-in-europe.pdf>

one should go further still. There is a necessity to enhance its contributions to meet the required expectations of having a carbon neutral Europe by 2050³⁴.

This leads us to the proposal included in this scenario to grant each student with a sustainable travel ticket. Doing so would mitigate the impact of some of the structural issues (e.g. cost) that affect transnational train travel across Europe, e.g., the lack of integrated and international ticket booking systems. This in-kind sustainable travel support could take the form of an “Interrail”-like ticket created specifically for the reality of Erasmus+ students, who usually travel in very particular times of the year (beginning and end of semesters). This would allow for the Erasmus+ programme to be more sustainable while at the same time fostering students’ European citizenship by allowing them to explore Europe before and after their mobility.

This is bolstered further by the success of the DiscoverEU action³⁵ of the Erasmus+ programme, which offers the opportunity to travel throughout Europe by train to 18-year-olds who reside in any of the Erasmus+ programme countries, exactly by offering them a pass to travel predominantly by rail.

Considering that the aim of the Erasmus for All methodology is to impact the whole programme, the different levels of access to sustainable transport must be considered. Indeed, this might not be a reality accessible to all students. Nevertheless, while solutions should be in place for those that are not be able to benefit from such in-kind support, this proposal would still impact a majority of students and lead to a considerable reduction of the Erasmus+ programme carbon footprint and should therefore be tackled.

A few opportunities top-up could still be added to these components to account for specific situations of students, according to the programme’s specific priorities.

Overall, the analysis of this scenario highlighted the following strengths:

- One of the main strengths of this scenario would be the **clarity on the minimum grant amount students would receive** which, if set correctly, would provide a clear message towards students, and more price-sensitive students in particular (e.g. lower socio-economic backgrounds, working students, etc).
- This scenario would also **facilitate the explanation of the grant calculation system at European level and a sense of fairness among participants**, given that the scholarship would be the same for all students within the Erasmus+ programme countries.
- It would also help **tackle cost of living differences at city level** by completely adjusting the grant amount to the comparison between living costs at the origin and destination city. This would ensure all students would have equal opportunity to experience their mobility regardless of their choice of destination.
- Another strength would be **placing green travel as being the norm rather than an option**. This would reinforce the focus of the Erasmus+ programme on environmental sustainability, which would represent a step forward from the current system.

With regards to weaknesses:

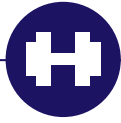
- Depending on the origin and destination of the students, **it might not be feasible for them to travel sustainably without extensive improvements in the sustainable transport scene across Europe**.
- **The European baseline component of the grant could reduce the economic efficiency of the implementation of the mobility budget**, since it will assign a fixed amount to all students, whereas in some cases the amount needed to

34. EU 2050 long-term strategy https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/climate-strategies-targets/2050-long-term-strategy_en

35. More information about the DiscoverEU action can be found here: <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/opportunities/opportunities-for-individuals/discovereu>

PROPOSAL 4

EUROPEAN BASELINE GRANT WITH SUPPLEMENT FOR COST OF LIVING DIFFERENCES AND GREEN TRAVEL SUPPORT



STRENGTHS

- Clarity on minimum grant amount provides clear message.
- Facilitates transparent grant calculation system at European level, promoting fairness.
- Addresses cost of living differences at city level, ensuring equal opportunity for mobility experiences.
- Emphasizes green travel, aligning with Erasmus+ program's focus on environmental sustainability.



WEAKNESSES

- Feasibility of sustainable travel dependent on improvements in European sustainable transport infrastructure.
- European baseline component may reduce economic efficiency by assigning fixed amounts.
- Lack of available tools to capture city-level cost of living differences could hinder implementation.

cover the extra costs they would incur on mobility would be lower. While this is an objective risk which increases the higher the baseline is, it should also be noted that a solid baseline amount would also decrease the reliance on the coverage and effectiveness of national student support systems, while at the same time sending strong messages of cost affordability to students.

- Currently **there are no available tools that can capture the cost of living differences at city level**, which could impact negatively the implementation of this scenario. However, as stated above, such tools could be easily developed by using data collection mechanisms already in place (e.g. Participants report for Erasmus+ mobility students).

4. REVIEW OF PROPOSALS TO CALCULATE THE ERASMUS+ GRANT

The project research conducted prior to this report consisted of an in-depth analysis on mobility funding in Erasmus and beyond, complemented by the Erasmus for All Student Social Labs, which gathered students' opinions and recommendations on the evolution of Erasmus+ mobility funding. The combination of these two approaches defined a set of desirable characteristics that a scholarship scheme should include to promote higher student participation. In particular, the scholarship scheme should be:

The list below encompasses properties deemed desirable that are both financial (1-3) and non-financial (4-9). Measuring some of the ideal characteristics of the Erasmus scholarship scheme proposed above goes beyond the scope of this report and therefore cannot be leveraged to benchmark the different scenarios presented in the previous chapter (e.g. being certain, timely and perceived as fair). Moreover, the design of the scenarios looked into impacting the whole grant calculation system and transforming it

✓ 1. Financially sufficient for students

The scholarship should aim towards covering all the mobility-related expenses and being experience-enhancing.

✓ 2. Geography-based

The scholarship rationale should account for origin and destination countries and cities of the student.

✓ 3. Granular

Students' features and needs of different nature should be considered and accounted for in the scholarship scheme.

✓ 4. Certain

Students should know as soon as they apply or immediately after they apply the amount of scholarship that they will receive.

✓ 5. Timely (disbursement)

Students should not be requested to put their own money in advance.

✓ 6. Transparent

Students should be able to understand easily when, how much and why they will receive their scholarship.

✓ 7. Simple

Students* and HEIs should be guaranteed to have a minimum/reduced amount of bureaucracy needed to participate - such as reporting expenses and asking for invoices.

✓ 8. Perceived as fair

All students, regardless of the more expensive or cheaper city destination, should agree that the scholarship scheme is indeed fair for all participants.

✓ 9. Generalised

The scholarship should be applicable between different countries and realities within the Programme countries (also known as an "European approach").

*The assessment of the simplicity criteria from students' perspective will be within the scope of subsequent work to be carried out by the Erasmus for All consortium

into a more inclusive and equitable one, which also limits the comparison of the scenarios according to criterion 3. Nevertheless, the consortium acknowledges and recommends that specific situations and needs of students should still be tackled on a more granular level (e.g. special needs students).

An additional 10th criterion was also discussed in the expert group, revolving around the notion that HEIs should be granted enough financial resources to be able to keep up with a higher student participation. However, there is a perverse logic in considering such a criterion, in that it would in fact put a premium on the lowest overall cost of the grant scheme, which is at odds with the intellectual goals of the report. Please see chapter 1.6 for a discussion on the pricing of the programme and how it has historically shaped and affected Erasmus+.

Five of the nine criteria above have thus been selected for comparing the proposed scenarios, of which two are financial in nature (number 1 and number 2) and three are non-financial (number 6, 7 and 9).

The comparison between the different scenarios is detailed in the next page.

When looking at the comparison, the scenario “European baseline grant with supplement for cost of living differences and green travel support” emerges as the one that could best cater to the needs of students and staff, while simultaneously having a city-level approach and thus ensuring that the final grant amount takes into account differences between the origin and destination countries and cities.

The design of this proposal seems to send a strong signal to students about the willingness and capacity of the programme to cover their extra costs on mobility; it was felt this would provide a robust basis to assure interested students that inability to meet costs would not stand in the way of their participation. Ensuring that all students perceive the mobility experience as something they would be able to realistically entertain and eventually participate

in is a central goal of Erasmus for All. Such strong signalling is particularly important for segments of the student population which are more price-sensitive, e.g. due to their socio-economic background.

Other reasons why this proposal is considered as a potential game-changer include the following: a) it provides a simple and objective formula to calculate the core grant b) the in-kind support for travel frees more grant financial resources to tackle other expenses³⁶ faced by students.

Taking this into account, the Erasmus for All consortium decided to put forward the scenario “European baseline grant with supplement for cost of living differences and green travel support” as its methodological contribution for the betterment of Erasmus+, aiming to positively impact how accessible Erasmus+ mobility is to students from all backgrounds, and ultimately improve the inclusion and diversity aspects of the programme.

36. It is acknowledged that this is a virtue that might not be possible to extend to students to/from outermost regions; the total numbers of students that fall on this category is relatively low though, to the extent where it may be adequate to make alternative arrangements for them while still tapping into the efficiencies of scale (in terms of cost, carbon-neutrality, convenience) the solution offers.

	Financially sufficient for students	Geography-based (account for origin and destination countries and cities)	Transparent (students understand when, how much and why they receive the grant)	Simple (minimal bureaucracy for HEIs to participate in the programme)	Generalised (an “European approach” to the calculation of the scholarship, making application among Programme countries consistent, though not equal)
1. Updating the country groups and adding a top-up for capital cities	Not addressed. Similar to the current Erasmus+ grant system, as no significant changes are proposed in terms of grant amount.	Partially addressed by updating the country groups and by providing a top-up for capitals. Differences among cities of the same country are not considered.	Only partially addressed. Most key challenges of the current Erasmus+ grant system will persist; however, there is more clarity on how country groups are defined, which is a (small) step in the right direction.	Similar to the current Erasmus+ grant system.	Not addressed as, similarly to the current system, the grant could be completely different in each programme country.
2. Grant calculated through an income level matrix	Partially addressed, in that it is dependent on the top-up sum definition. The consideration of income levels in the origin and destination region should in principle be able to cater to the needs of students.	Partially addressed by basing the calculation on NUTS 2 regions. Differences between cities are not considered.	Partially addressed, as the methodology would be publicly available. However, the definition of the top-up could hinder transparency.	For HEIs the grant calculation is simplified when compared with the current one. The implementation can be streamlined through digital grant management tools.	Fully addressed, by setting up a system that would be European wide.
3. Assessing the grant amount through city-based costs	Partially addressed, in that it is dependent on the base value definition. The comparison of cost of living between home and host city should in principle be able to cater to the needs of students.	Fully addressed through the cost of living comparison of home and host city.	Partially addressed. It depends on how the base amount is defined by HEIs and on having a reliable cost of living calculator available.	For HEIs the grant calculation would be simplified, but there is still an added layer of bureaucracy when defining the base amount. Usage of digital grant management tools is made somewhat more difficult. A cost of living calculator is a functional requirement to avoid burdening IROs.	Partially addressed, as it would have a European wide system but in which the Institutional level would have considerable weight.
4. European baseline grant with supplement for cost of living differences and green travel support	Fully addressed. The combination of the baseline grant and living cost top-up should cater to the needs of students.	Fully addressed through the cost of living supplement, awarded when the cost of living of the destination city is higher than the origin city.	Fully addressed; however, it is dependent on having a reliable cost of living calculator available.	For HEIs the proposed “European approach” would lead to considerable simplification. The implementation can be streamlined through the usage of digital grant management tools; a grant calculator is a functional requirement to avoid burdening IROs and enable automation.	Fully addressed, by setting up a system that would be Europe-wide.

Table 4 - Comparison of new grant calculation scenarios according to predefined criteria



5. IMPROVING STUDENT SUPPORT FOR MOBILITY: THE ERASMUS FOR ALL GRANT PROPOSAL

A grant system that is simpler and more accurate

The Erasmus for All research recognised a range of challenges that cannot be ignored when looking at the betterment of the Erasmus+ grant system, as well as several mechanisms that can effectively have an impact both on tackling them and improving the overall student support for mobility. The proposed Erasmus for All grant calculation methodology looks to solidify these improvements through its approach:

- By improving the transparency and communication of the grant, reducing discrepancies throughout Europe and aiming to allow students from lower socio-economic backgrounds to consider that the experience of mobility is available and open to them;
- By correcting the city-level cost of living differences for students already considering going on mobility, to ensure their needs throughout their mobility abroad can be better covered by the Erasmus+ grant;
- By removing obstacles for students to travel more sustainably to and from mobility, providing in-kind support that could fundamentally alter behaviour patterns for the vast majority of exchange students in Europe;

- By radically reducing systemic complexity by bringing forth a “European approach” to the calculation logic, making support more transparent and intelligible and reducing reliance on a maze of top-ups unless when strictly needed (e.g. top-ups for students with special needs).

Considering a change from the current Erasmus+ grant system to this new methodology demands the abandonment of old habits and preconceptions regarding the grant calculation. This inevitably also raises implementation questions, such as:

5.1. Will the budget for Higher Education mobility be enough?

Just increasing the average amount that is attributed to each Erasmus+ mobility student could create a paradox whereby more students consider going on mobility, but fewer spots become available. This is why it is critical that such changes are accompanied by an overall increase of the programme budget – in fact they configure a key rationale for that to happen at the first available opportunity. Having a more performant student support system will make the Erasmus+ programme more attractive, inclusive and equal and provide an opportunity to leave behind the current under-pricing paradigm, which disproportionately affects student populations from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

5.2. How to know the amount to be awarded to each student?

The implementation of this new grant calculation scenario foresees the tailoring of the grant amount according to each student's origin and destination city, but this must not come at the expense of an increase of the workload that International Officers face daily. In fact, the present proposal can even lead to a reduction of such administrative burden and friction.

One of the virtues of this scenario is that it makes it easy to automate the calculation of the grant and reduce administrative complexity. Embedding the grant calculation in the mobility management systems would also pave the way for electronic grant agreements (see chapter 3.4 for a discussion on the matter).

Such grant calculators should be available to staff and students. Streamlining such processes would allow for more exact calculation and reporting, providing a seamless experience to students and making sure International Officers are not unduly burdened with such matters.

5.3. How to calculate the grant?

When exploring how to convert the Erasmus for All grant calculation methodology into actual grant amounts, the working group focused on computing the formula. The equation of this grant calculation is thus the following:

- 1) $\text{GRANT AB} = \text{Base}$ if $B < A$
- 2) $\text{GRANT AB} = \text{Base} + (B - A)$ if $B > A$

where

- » "GRANT AB" is the value of the monthly grant given to a student coming from A to B
- » A is the cost of living of the origin city
- » B is the cost of living of the destination city

When the living cost of the origin city is higher than the living cost of the destination (formula 1), the student will only receive the European

baseline amount. If, however, the cost of living of the destination city is higher than the one from the origin city (formula 2), the supplement for cost of living will be added to the baseline amount to determine the final grant.

The definition of the baseline amount by the EU institutions will likely send a strong message about the affordability of the mobility experience - especially to a more price-sensitive population, such as students from a fewer opportunities background. However, in principle the amount per se will not have a considerable influence on the coverage of cost of living differences. The proposal foresees that there must always be a supplement for cost of living differences, which will guarantee adequate coverage in case the destination city has higher costs of living than the origin one. The combination of both tools will provide a powerful indication to students that their grant will adequately cover the high living costs they might face, and that it will be regularly updated to consider possible changes. This methodology should thus allow students to have confidence that the Erasmus grant will realistically enable them to participate in the mobility scheme.

5.4. Data limitations and way forward

To assess cost of living differences between origin and destination locations, the team identified the need for reliable sources of information as a key functional requirement early in its discussions. Several consultations and meetings with experts in the field have taken place, notably with colleagues from Eurostat. In these meetings the purpose of our work was thoroughly explained to obtain the most suitable indicators possible. In the first meeting, the team focused not only on assessing the correction of living-cost differences, but also on addressing whether those variables could be used in regional or city-level approaches. The Eurostat experts pointed at the possibility of using the Price Level Index (PLI), which is an indicator that reflects the overall price level of a country compared to the average in the European Union (the base of the index) and is already corrected

for differences in exchange rates. The PLI is derived from Purchasing Power Parities³⁷ (PPPs), developed by the EUROSTAT. The PPPs display the price level differences across countries by comparing how many currency units a basket of goods and services would cost in each country. PPPs are calculated with the main purpose of providing accurate Gross Domestic Product (GDP) comparisons between countries. Then, PPP can be divided by the nominal exchange rate to produce an adequate comparison for price levels – the PLI.

However, in the same meeting it was confirmed that there are no readily available indicators at regional level to provide a PPP-based comparison. The **absence of reliable indicators at a regional/city level** for the cost of living comparison is compounded with the **lack of alignment of existing EUROSTAT indexes to the reality of mobility students**.

Indeed, the type of expenses and the weight they have in the overall budget of mobility students is not aligned with the overall student population. Recent studies³⁸ highlight the differences in the relative weight that various expenses have on the overall budget of international students versus the general student population. Therefore, the calculation of cost of living differences should take these nuances into account to certify that the grant will be as efficient as possible, while at the same time ensuring the needs of students are accounted for.

The actual collection of the data pertaining to mobile students' cost of living goes beyond the scope of the Erasmus for All current work, but having this data is essential for students from all backgrounds to have a clear idea of what costs they should expect in their mobility destination and how they compare with their reality in the country of their sending institution. Making such data fully available to students and staff should thus be a priority. Additionally, it is crucial that the exercise of pricing mobility done by the European Commission (when defining the ranges) and by Erasmus+ National Agencies (when defining the actual grant amounts)

considers the information on students' cost of living in a transparent and straightforward way.

To overcome the obstacles identified and, at the same time, provide stakeholders with reliable and trustworthy data on costs of living of mobility students, it is important to consider carefully which data sources should be used for calculating the Erasmus grants. Ideally Eurostat could indeed be used as a primary data source, since the data they make available can be considered a "gold standard". Further discussions on this matter are underway to understand how the existing datasets can be leveraged to best capture the reality of students in cities throughout Europe with very different living costs. European urban statistics should be extended to covering living cost related data for cities involved in the Erasmus programme.

Additionally, the possibility of undertaking student-focused research in Erasmus+ programme countries would be a very important tool for assessing costs of living, as well as other relevant topics. The "[Student Survey in Germany](#)" is a comprehensive study undertaken by the German Centre for Higher Education and Science Research (DZHW, Verbundleitung) and by the AG Hochschulforschung at the University of Konstanz, which delves into the situation of Higher Education students across Germany and collects relevant data on their social and economic conditions, studies and study conditions, among other topics. In the context of the Erasmus for All expert group, this dataset allowed for PPP calculations to be anchored on a reliable quantitative dataset. Such comprehensive research can yield extremely interesting results and help understand the differences between the costs of living in each city, which could represent a strong contribution to the advancement of the mobility-related discussion. While it is understandable that similar studies in other countries would require a substantial investment, advocating for the collection of this information would prove to be a step further in the analysis and research on students' situations.

37. More information about Purchasing Power Parities can be found in the following link: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/purchasing-power-parities>

38. Study on the economic and sociocultural impact of international students in Portugal ("O impacto económico e sociocultural dos estudantes internacionais em Portugal"), developed by Ricardo Biscaia in November 2022 for the Universities Portugal consortium. Retrieved at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qw8Z5igVQyrIVVMWmOImNuvRPMXZp4UT/view>

In the meantime, there are other sources readily available which could also yield vital insights in calculating the costs of living of students:

5.4.1. Participant report form for Erasmus+ KA131 Student mobility for studies in Higher Education

The participant report form is a document that all HE mobility participants complete to provide feedback on their mobility experience. It addresses a variety of topics, such as the motivation of students to undertake a mobility period or the recognition of their studies. The information collected through this feedback is expected to contribute to the continued improvement of the programme. As noted earlier, in the previous Erasmus+ programme 2014-2020, this form³⁹ collected information on, for example:

- the amount of the Erasmus+ grant;
- other sources of funding and their amount;
- the average cost (accommodation and subsistence) per month;
- the extent to which the Erasmus+ grant covered the overall expenses related to the mobility period.

The information collected on the cost of living and its correlation with the grant is inestimable, as it potentially allows the compilation of a pan-European database of living costs. The fact that this data would be available for all Erasmus+ programme countries is of particular significance, since this is not the case for most Eurostat datasets. The analysis of this dataset, which should be made available to the research community (in line with the open science principles that the Commission rightly champions), could considerably impact the definition of the grant amounts and ensure that they are adjusted to students' realities.

However, in the new Erasmus+ programme 2021-

2027, the number of questions focusing on costs was considerably reduced⁴⁰, to the point where, from the list above, the only question kept focused on the extent to which the Erasmus+ grant contributed to the additional expenses related to the mobility period.

Erasmus for All thus recommends the reinsertion of more specific questions on students' cost of living when abroad and their publication in accordance with open data principles, which are espoused by the EU programmes and policies.

5.4.2. Publication and dissemination of city-level costs of living by HEIs

The ECTS user guide recommends that HEIs publish the costs of living in their cities as one of the resources complementing their course catalogue. This means that a majority of HEIs participating in the Erasmus+ programme might have already collected basic information on cost of living, which could represent an important contribution to the assessment of how much a mobility abroad would cost.

Nevertheless, currently the data made available varies across HEIs and is not easily accessible. The lack of a standardised structure hinders its comparability and can therefore limit its relevance for students considering several mobility destinations.

By designing a specific methodology to collect this information - including details of what data should be collected mandatorily, how often it would need to be updated and what type of elements should be considered, such data could become relevant input for cost of living assessment. A weighted approach that would consider both the input from students' information at the end of their mobility abroad and the city-level costs of living published by HEIs could in this case be a short-term solution to approach the current lack of fine-grained data.

39. Template of the 2019 Call Participant Report Form for KA1 Learning Mobility of Individuals - Student mobility for studies in higher education, retrieved at https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/wikis/pages/viewpage.action?pagelD=357272008&preview=/357272008/357271992/EP-KA1-HE-Studies-2019_05_04_2019_EN_draft.pdf

40. Template of the Call 2021 participant survey form for KA1 Learning Mobility of Individuals - Student mobility for studies in higher education, retrieved at https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/NAITDOC/Manage+participant+reports+in+projects?preview=/86966848/86966822/EP-KA1-HE-Studies-2021_21_03_2022_EN_draft.pdf#Manageparticipantreportsinprojects-WhatareParticipantReports



6. THE VIEWS OF HIGHER EDUCATION STAKEHOLDERS

The Erasmus+ mobility ecosystem is composed of a variety of stakeholders that play a very important role in contributing to the implementation and improvement of the programme. The task of proposing a new, more inclusive grant calculation system is massive, with a far-reaching impact, and therefore the contribution and views of these stakeholders is crucial.

Throughout the work of the Erasmus for All project, representatives of **student organisations** (ESU), **universities** (University of Porto, Sapienza University of Rome, Trinity College Dublin, University of Pécs, Université de Versailles Saint-Quentin-En-Yvelines), **networks of universities** (European University Foundation) and **Councils of Rectors** (France Universités) have actively been involved in the development of the grant calculation scenarios, ensuring that different perspectives were taken into account.

The next step in this methodology was to collect feedback from experts external to the consortium to help assess the robustness of the proposed conclusions. Such feedback adds considerable value to this work and provides a first “stress and reality check” of the ideas contained therein. External experts come from different backgrounds, ranging from political circles to practitioners, and work directly or indirectly on the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme:

1. Angeliki Psychogiou, Policy and Project Coordinator at the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA), Belgium

2. Ester Brožová, Head of the Erasmus+ Office of Charles University, Czechia
3. Juan Rayón Gonzalez, President of the Erasmus Student Network International, Belgium
4. Nicoleta Popa, Coordinator - University Education projects department of the National Agency for Community Programmes in the Field of Education and Vocational Training (ANPCDEFP), Romania
5. Pedro Nuno Teixeira, Secretary of State for Higher Education, Portugal
6. Valeria Costantino, Pro-Rector for Erasmus projects at the University of Naples Federico II, Italy
7. Romeo Franz, Member of the European Parliament (Greens), Germany

The list above reflects the role and positions of the expert panel at the time of the interviews, which were conducted from June to September 2023. As the interviews were conducted before the changes in the Erasmus+ programme guide 2024 were made public, all the views and opinions of stakeholders should be taken into account under this perspective.

The most common topics discussed were:

- The current Erasmus+ grant system: strengths, weaknesses and aspects requiring improvement;
- The Erasmus for All alternative grant calculation;
 - » Biggest advantages and disadvantages with respect to the current scenario;
 - » Possible obstacles to its implementation.

6.1. On the current Erasmus+ grant system

When discussing the system currently in place to calculate the Erasmus+ grant, interviewees were asked to highlight some strengths beyond the most obvious ones (e.g. purpose, societal impact, etc). The first round of feedback focused on:

- The fact that the **grant is equal for all students coming from the same university**. This means that any student from a particular university has, in principle, equal footing to access and benefit from the Erasmus+ grant, therefore ensuring a fair distribution of financial support across the student body.
- The current Erasmus+ grant system allows for **complementarity with other types of funding**. This not only expands the overall financial capacity available to support students across Europe, but also makes it possible to address specific needs of different regions, institutions or student demographics.
- The **inclusion top-ups** that are currently available were deemed as a step in the right direction. By providing additional financial support, this top-up helps mitigate obstacles that might otherwise hinder students' participation in Erasmus+ student mobility. Moreover, the definition of criteria at national level enables a more tailored assistance for a wide range of student situations.

Interviewees were also asked to identify the main weaknesses of this system. The majority of the shortcomings highlighted were in line with the conclusions of the Erasmus for All research that resulted in the design of the new Erasmus for All scenario:

- The **grant amount is too low and slow to keep up with inflation and rising costs of living**;
- The **opaqueness of how the grant rates are defined** by the European Commission

and how adjusted they are to the realities students will face while on mobility;

- » Students do not understand when or why they will receive a certain grant amount;
- When it comes to inclusion measures, the **identification of students who should receive the fewer opportunities top-up is difficult**. Moreover, the way the system is designed forces students to identify themselves as being from a fewer opportunities background. As not everyone may be willing to be singled out or to provide sensitive information, the number of students eligible for a top-up grant may be underestimated.

Finally, the **complementarity of the current Erasmus+ grant system** and its additional contributions at local, institutional or national level was raised as a weakness, as these additional contributions are entirely optional and need to be structured in a way that avoids **creating more discrepancies than the ones they wish to mitigate**. The **lack of a public registry at European level that allows for an understanding of how grants are complemented** by other funds might hinder the comparison of grants and the structuring mentioned above.

6.2. On what needs to change in the Erasmus+ grant system

It was **unanimous** among all stakeholders interviewed that the **grants should be better adjusted to the needs of students** than they currently are. This translated into slightly different perspectives depending on the interviewees' background.

The **adjustment of the grants according to the reality faced by students** was mentioned by several interviewees. The need to account for the destination city, especially in the case of bigger cities, was highlighted by several (before the Erasmus for All proposal was mentioned). One interviewee mentioned that the **minimum Erasmus+ grant amount should be higher**, and

that it would be important that the European Commission establishes mechanisms to foresee direct increases of the grants if needed, as currently they can act on the grant ranges while the actual grant amount is defined at National level.

Transparency on how the grant rates are calculated is a necessary improvement according to several stakeholders. This would also impact the clarity in which the grants could be explained to students. Additionally, **it should be mandatory for HEIs to pay the grants before the mobility starts**, as any delay in the timing of the grant payment will have a negative effect on the students' ability to face the extra costs of mobility, which is even more problematic for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Travel costs were mentioned as something that could be better considered in terms of the support provided. In the current system, the monthly grant is supposed to already include travel costs. However, since the definition of the grant amount is rather opaque, it is unclear how much is reserved for travel costs and how that amount is calculated, if at all. This impacts the perception of students, who think that travel is not included at all. A possible solution to this could be to **separate the travel support** to improve communication to students, anticipating one of the key features of the Erasmus for All proposal⁴¹.

An interesting point raised by several stakeholders was the **definition of strong governance mechanisms** where key stakeholders such as students and universities can jointly improve the way mobility rules – and especially grant amounts - are defined. In this way, different actors in the European Higher Education ecosystem could have a say and discuss the issues that should be prioritised.

Finally, the impact of grant differences on the European University Alliances was also highlighted. Offering the same conditions to students within a given alliance is currently next to impossible. Here, in the case of other mobile students, grant differences cannot be clearly

explained, which can create an unpleasant feeling for some students and negatively impact on the perception of European Universities and on the efforts to set up inter-university campi.

The example of alliances seems to confirm that a European approach to funding mobility is lacking. Enabling Alliances to manage grants to their students in a way that mitigates the cacophony of national rules is positive, but does not suppress the fact that all students would stand to benefit from a European approach to this key matter.

6.3. On the Erasmus for All grant calculation scenario

The concept of the Erasmus for all grant calculation scenario was presented to interviewees, and they were asked to state their views, highlight advantages and disadvantages, as well as any possible obstacles to its implementation.

The general feedback gathered was broadly positive, with several respondents noting that it does provide a useful roadmap to address the **need for change they would like to see in the Erasmus+ grant system**, namely in terms of **accounting for city-level differences in cost of living**. It was felt that the proposed changes would also encourage more students from disadvantaged backgrounds to consider going on mobility, since they would understand how their grants align with the extra costs they faced in their destination city. The positive feedback to this question was a key aspect that the expert group wished to validate, since it aligns so strongly with the goals of Erasmus for All.

The fact that the new grants would be **easy to understand would also help bring clarity to students on how much and why they would receive** a certain amount. Improved transparency would also make financial planning easier for students.

Moreover, the **in-kind travel support was deemed a good idea** that could improve the sustainability of the programme. Having

41. The separation of the travel grant from the monthly grant was introduced in the Erasmus+ programme guide 2024 which was published in November 2023, after the interviews took place (June-September 2023). For more information on such changes please see chapter 3.4.

a separate mechanism to cover travel costs would also increase the coverage of the costs of mobility, as students would not need to cover their transport costs with the monthly grant⁴².

This grant methodology would also have a **positive impact on the implementation of the European University Alliances**, guaranteeing that students within the same alliance would have equal access to the mobility experience and ensuring much more consistent conditions to access and participate in mobility activities. This would be of high value in the implementation of this initiative.

When questioned specifically about **whether this methodology would encourage more students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds to go on mobility**, most agreed with the statement. It was also noted that statistical data is already leveraged by some national student support system for the purpose of calculating **scholarship and top-ups with greater granularity than it would be possible otherwise (using city-specific data from the National statistics institute)**. This positive feedback was also in line with the overall goal of Erasmus for All to open the mobility opportunity to all students.

Most interviewees mentioned that the **creation of a cost of living calculator** to automate the assessment of cost of living differences would be a **functional prerequisite for the implementation of the Erasmus for All scenario**; this seems a reasonable expectation and is aligned with the implementation scenario suggested in chapter 4 to avoid a negative impact on the work of International Officers, and/or mistakes in the calculation of the final grant. The automated grant calculation would facilitate the communication of such information to students through portals, the Erasmus+ App and other websites, significantly improving clarity on how much they would receive and why.

A potential risk that was noted was whether this grant proposal could add **complexity or uncertainty to how project funding within Erasmus+ National Agencies** is handled. There

was considerable interest in how budgeting and planning could themselves benefit from this change of paradigm, and, as a suggestion, impact simulations could be carried out as part of the roll-out of such a scheme to help HEIs manage such a transition.

Currently, grant inadequacies act as a natural deterrent for students to pick destinations more freely. Since all cities would be in an equal position through this new Erasmus for All methodology, in the sense the grant would correct any cost of living differences, several interviewees mentioned that removing this bottleneck could lead to **more students** choosing **expensive cities/university destinations**. Ultimately, such pressure and demand should not be regulated through artificially low grants but rather via the **number and vacancies available through the existing institutional agreements of the HEIs**, which should allow the distribution of students across the cities available according to their academic compatibility and not cost. Such a change of paradigm could also lead to a more deliberate management of the HEIs' agreements preventing situations where agreements are automatically renewed without further considerations on their value or use.

Lastly, one stakeholder mentioned that the **exhaustion of International Offices** caused by dealing with the issues related to the Beneficiary module and other digitalisation processes can surely affect their willingness to change the grant system and cause resistance to yet another change that they would have to implement. Therefore, any considerable change and tools - such as the ones suggested by the Erasmus for All consortium - would need to be fully prepared and functional before they are implemented. This is consistent with the recent European Parliament report on the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027⁴³, which states that "... digital tools (of the Erasmus+ programme) should be optimised by 2025 at the latest to create a user-friendly, accessible, reliable, speedy and efficient environment that respects data protection."

42. The separation of the travel grant from the monthly grant was introduced in the Erasmus+ programme guide 2024 which was published in November 2023, after the interviews took place (June-September 2023). For more information on such changes please see chapter 3.4.

43. European parliament report A9-0413/2023 on the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027, retrieved at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2023-0413_EN.html#_section2



7. IMPACT OF THE ERASMUS FOR ALL PROPOSAL ON EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY ALLIANCES

With the new Erasmus+ programme funding period came several new activities, including the European University Initiative⁴⁴, which aims to create 60 university alliances across Europe by mid 2024, involving at least 500 HEIs to foster long-term, structural cooperation, including the mobility of students. Mobility targets for the alliances are ambitiously set at 50% for each alliance but no dedicated funding has been put in place to achieve such goal. This makes the applicability of the Erasmus for All grant proposals to the operations of the European University Alliances a particularly interesting case study, which can be used to evaluate the merits or demerits of the proposals outlined in this paper.

What counts towards the achievement of these targets is also unclear, as mobility might include several forms of intercultural exchange, not just typical semester or year-long mobilities. However, the 2021 “Council conclusions on the European Universities initiative - Bridging higher education, research, innovation and society: Paving the way for a new dimension in European higher education”⁴⁵ already called for balanced, seamless mobility, with the physical format being the priority. Other mobility forms can only have complementary roles.

Even though large-scale comparable data is not yet publicly available, substantially increased mobility flows are expected between the Alliance partners. However, given the current volume and characteristics of the grants available, the expected results are bound to fall short of

the ambitious goals, while discrepancies and inequalities between students going to the same destinations will only become more evident. Even though European University Alliances are focusing on structural cooperation within their consortia, they have to abide by a variety of national funding rationales set by the National Agencies, which vary significantly across programme countries. When aiming to build fair and truly European conditions for students within the Alliances, one is faced with the grim reality whereby some of the students will be in a much more disadvantaged position than others. European Universities thus provide perhaps the ultimate example of why a European approach to calculating grants in a way that is fair, logical and consistent would be an important step forward.

The Erasmus for All grant calculation system addresses the abovementioned challenges by offering an EU-wide solution while still considering existing cost of living differences between origin and destination cities and equitably levelling them.

Given the specific setting of European University Alliances and the pressing targets for mobility, the implementation of the Erasmus for All grant calculation methodology would have a considerable positive impact on its practices. The methodology, designed as a combination between a European-wide baseline grant and a supplement to cover cost of living differences, would significantly improve the perception of the mobility opportunities among the students

44. European Universities initiative, retrieved at <https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/european-universities-initiative>

45. Council conclusions on the European Universities initiative - Bridging higher education, research, innovation and society: Paving the way for a new dimension in European higher education, retrieved at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/49659/st08658-en21.pdf>



and remove the inequalities that are currently embedded in the system (e.g., students going to the same destination and receive different grants that lack in transparent and coherent logic). This would allow the Alliances to realistically involve more students in mobility activities, leaving the number of available grants the main bottleneck to achieve the 50% target.



8. CONCLUSION

Improving how Erasmus+ fares with regards to inclusion and diversity has influenced the way the programme is designed for several years. However, when it comes to student mobility, there are still several factors that hinder its accomplishment, and insufficient financial support stands tall among the most pressing concerns. Throughout this report, we delved into a range of options to improve the way Erasmus+ grants are calculated, considering aspects such as accessibility, consistency, transparency and how the grant will be perceived by students across Europe.

The work developed by the Erasmus for All consortium effectively sets forth a new and much improved methodology to calculate the Erasmus+ grant and to tackle the issues currently affecting the access to mobility. By ensuring a **European baseline amount to all students across Europe**, it aims to improve the way mobility opportunities are communicated and to send a strong message, even to students that might not consider this a suitable opportunity to be for them. By ensuring a **city-level cost of living supplement**, it promotes efficient usage of public funds, and ensures that all students will be on equal footing regarding the coverage of costs that oftentimes vary greatly within a given country of destination. By offering **in-kind sustainable travel support**, it allows

for a change of paradigm regarding the travel to and from the mobility destination, aligning Erasmus+ with the EU climate targets and the values and concerns of young adults.

From an administration standpoint, the Erasmus for All calculation methodology can also pave the way for a reduction of the administrative workload involved in managing mobility grants, as a **cost of living calculator** can be leveraged to **fully automate the disbursement of financial support and its reporting**. Even though the required tooling is not fully available at present, this report also provides an in-depth analysis of how this can be put in place. This means that the current status quo could change promptly should there be willingness from decision-makers to tackle this issue.

This report doubles as a call for joint action to the whole of the European academic community to remove existing financial barriers and make student mobility truly for all. This will prove essential to meet the ambitious goals of the European Education Area and of the European Universities Initiative. Even more importantly, achieving a future where all students have the possibility and capacity to go on mobility will also represent an overwhelming success of the Erasmus+ programme and contribute to a better, more united Europe.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ACRONYMS

Acronym	Name	Definition
BP	Bologna process	The Bologna process focused on establishing the European Higher Education Area, and striving for more student and staff mobility, to make higher education more accessible and inclusive. More information about it can be found here: https://www.ehea.info/page-how-does-the-bologna-process-work
COICOP	Classification of Individual consumption by purpose	This is a classification developed by the United Nations Statistics Division to classify consumption expenditures according to their purpose. More information can be found here: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Classification_of_individual_consumption_by_purpose_(COICOP)
	Destination city	In the context of this report, destination city refers to the city that hosts the Higher Education Institution chosen by the student as the mobility destination.
-	Erasmus+ National Agency	According to the Erasmus+ programme guide 2024, it refers to “An authority in charge, at national level, of monitoring and supervising the management of the Programme in a Member State or in a third country associated to the Programme. One or more National Authorities may exist in each country.”. For the sake of this report, Erasmus+ National Agencies refer to the ones managing Higher Education related activities.
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System	Information about the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, and their purpose can be found here: https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/inclusive-and-connected-higher-education/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system
EHEA	European Higher Education Area	The European Higher Education Area was created within the framework of the Bologna process and announced in 2010. It currently includes 49 countries and the European Commission as members. More information can be found here: https://www.ehea.info/page-members

Acronym	Name	Definition
EU	European Union	
	EU Member States and third countries associated to the Programme	In the Erasmus+ programme guide 2024, this expression describes countries that can participate fully in all actions of the programme. More information can be found here: https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-a/eligible-countries
	Grant	A grant is a sum of money that is given to an individual or to an organisation for a specific purpose. In the context of this report, the term refers to an Erasmus+ student mobility grant.
HE	Higher Education	
HEI	Higher Education Institution	
IRO	International Relations Office	
KA131	Key Action 131	Key Action 131 concerns projects that support student and staff mobility between higher education institutions within EU countries and third countries associated to the Erasmus+ programme. In this report, the term is only used to describe student mobility for studies.
-	Mobility grant system/grant calculation methodology	The processes and criteria through which a final grant is defined. In this report, these expressions refer to the Erasmus+ student mobility grant for studies in EU countries and third countries associated to the Erasmus+ programme.
MFF	Multiannual financial framework	The Multiannual financial framework is the regulation that sets the annual budget of the European Union. The one currently in place covers the years 2021 to 2027. More information can be found here: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/29/multiannual-financial-framework
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics	The Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics is a common classification established by the European Union that subdivides the economic territory of Member States into three levels: NUTS 1, NUTS 2 and NUTS 3. More information can be found here: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/99/common-classification-of-territorial-units-for-statistics-nuts-
-	Origin city	In the context of this report, origin city refers to the city in which the Higher Education Institution where the student is enrolled in for a full degree is located.
PLI	Price Level Index	According to Eurostat, the Price Level index "... expresses the price level of a given country relative to another (or relative to a group of countries like the European Union) by dividing the Purchasing power parities (PPPs) by the current nominal exchange rate." More information can be found here: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Price_level_index_(PLI)

Acronym	Name	Definition
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity	Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) is an indicator used to compare price level differences between countries, using a specific basket of goods. In the context of this report, the PPP index used is from Eurostat: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/purchasing-power-parities
SIEM	Social Inclusion & Engagement in Mobility	An Erasmus+ KA2 Project that conducted research on the accessibility of the programme and on the measures needed to improve access and participation in mobility. The project was coordinated by ESN, more information can be found here: https://siem-project.eu/
	Socio-economic background	The social and economic status of an individual.
	Working group	Throughout this report, the mention of a working group refers to the group of experts working on the development of new grant calculation methodologies, and which is presented at the beginning of this report. The Erasmus for All consortium, on the other hand, includes all the project members.

ANNEX I

GRANT CALCULATION SCENARIOS ADDRESSING SPECIFIC ISSUES OF STUDENT SUPPORT TO MOBILITY

a) Coverage of students' extra accommodation costs

This proposal aims to tackle one of the most pressing challenges for students going on mobility: accommodation costs. It can be a complement to other scenarios, as it does not impact the whole grant system.

The staggering rise of accommodation costs across Europe has negatively impacted mobile students. Student accommodation is generally scarce, and depending on the destination city, a student might have to go through a lengthy and costly process to find suitable accommodation within their already strained budget. In some cases, rents can be considerably higher than the actual monthly grant students receive, making it very unlikely that students without access to additional resources continue their mobility.

To support students and partly cover accommodation costs, this scenario proposes a top-up to be awarded to students in case their rent is above a certain threshold (e.g. 500 euros, an amount that is already higher than the average monthly grant).

To receive this, students would present their rental contract, and the host institution would also need to confirm that the average rent in that area is indeed high. Additional criteria would need to be in place to ensure the accommodation was chosen out of necessity and not because of additional comfort the student would prefer.

b) Allowing more flexibility locally on the attribution of the Erasmus grant

Across the Erasmus+ programme countries, there is a plurality of realities when it comes to student mobility support. In certain cities/regions, students can receive additional grants from local governments or other entities, translating into different sources of funding potentially available without any due correction of the Erasmus+ grant.

For instance, at Université de Versailles Saint-Quentin-En-Yvelines, half of the Erasmus outgoing students combine an Erasmus+ grant with one or two other mobility funds, depending on their background: the regional grant ("Bourse de mobilité Ile de France IDF") and the grant of the French Ministry of Higher Education ("Aide à la mobilité internationale Etudiante AMIE"). Both grants are managed by the International mobility office of the university.

Therefore, this grant scenario calls for more autonomy for Higher Education Institutions to assess their students' needs and to distribute funds in order to maximise the number of outgoing students and also to promote fairness within the HEI ecosystem.

The roles of each institution would be as follows:

The European level defines the rules and

principles of the grant: universal, for all, minimum and maximum amount for each zone, top-up for travel and students with less opportunities. On the other hand, the National Agency defines the criteria to identify students with less opportunities, plus other criteria to be listed that should be attributed at the national level.

The local administration or the sending institution would be allowed to define some other criteria, taking into consideration the other existing grants, the difference of the cost of living between the home and the host institution, with the objective to reduce discrepancy or to take more into consideration the student situation and the cost of living.

A variation of this proposal is already foreseen in the current Erasmus+ grant system, where Erasmus+ National Agencies can define a range for the grant, and HEIs can decide the final grant amount by considering other sources of funding that students have available in that region.

c) Separate funding track for students from disadvantaged backgrounds

Given the overall goal of increasing participation in mobility and making the Erasmus+ programme more inclusive, a possible approach to achieve this would be to create a separate funding track for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. This would allow for:

- A grant increase targeting disadvantaged students;
- Better and more targeted marketing initiatives to attract students from disadvantaged backgrounds
- A less competitive format, in which these students would have a higher chance to be awarded a scholarship.

To define the funding track and the target group, and similarly to what is currently done, each Erasmus+ National Agency would define the criteria to identify students from disadvantaged

backgrounds. A separate number of placements would be thus exclusively allocated to this funding track, which would provide higher grants than the general system, replacing the usual top-ups that are available for these students.



Removing the main obstacles to European student mobility

A proposal for better and more inclusive Erasmus grants

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