

For a flexible, resilient and impactful Erasmus+

Position dated 6 February 2024

The leading universities of science and technology united within [CESAER](#) welcome the opportunity to provide additional input in the context of the public consultation on the past, present, and future of the Erasmus+ programme.

Our Members have submitted individual responses to the online questionnaire which closed on 8 December 2023, and with this position, we complement these with high-level recommendations. We reiterate that we are ready to provide the support and expertise of our association and our Members to advance all these important areas related to the Erasmus+ programme. This note also complements and expands on our input note '[First experiences with EU Funding Programmes from 2021 to 2027](#)' dated 21 April 2022. We also recall our [previous Erasmus-related statements](#), as well as our [input](#) on the Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027 and [positions](#) on the European Education Area.

We have identified three main sectors for improvement. These sectors are the financial & legal framework of the subprogrammes under Erasmus+, the overall programme structure and its administration, and the programme priorities.

While there are areas to improve, we highlight that the EU funding programmes remain highly valued by our community and we, therefore, welcome the public consultation as an opportunity to work together to make these programmes even more attractive.

1) Improve financial & legal framework

Budgets

For nearly all cooperation actions (i.e., cooperation partnerships, capacity building, and similar programme schemes), low budgets makes it increasingly difficult to run projects successfully, and there is little adjustment in relation to the financial situation such as the reality of rising costs in human resources and also for travel. Additionally, we see a notable rise in expectations, with a suggested increase in mobility ranging from 20 to 25% (as mentioned in the European Commission's 2024 work programme). These expectations can only be met if complemented by a corresponding boost in the overall programme budget, both for European University Alliances and for all other established and well-functioning funding schemes.

We call upon the European Commission to:

- increase individual mobility grants and enable more flexibility in the programme implementation in light of novel education and training offers and joint programmes, such as the ones developed by Alliances;

- significantly increase individual budgets of collaborative projects to empower the consortia to drive sustainable change and attract high-level partners;
- allow for an increase in grants in the running and future projects to meet the challenges of rising costs e.g. due to inflation.

At the current stage, in some aspects, Horizon Europe holds greater appeal compared to Erasmus+, which partly stems from a substantial funding disparity. Lower funding rates for the Erasmus+ projects cause implementation challenges and constrain the involvement of excellent players. Thus, given a limited program budget, prioritising fewer highly funded Erasmus+ projects capable of innovative and groundbreaking approaches over numerous small and dispersed initiatives, in some of the actions, would be more beneficial. Additionally, as direct synergies between Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe are challenging and complex, a framework for smooth synergies for the benefit of all stakeholders should be elaborated.

To take Erasmus to the next level, we call upon the European Commission to:

- substantially raise the potential funding allocated per project to enhance both the appeal and the scope and ambition of what can be achieved within the program;
- facilitate synergies between Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe actions.

Lump sums

We welcome the exploration of the lump sums model in Erasmus+, but their introduction did not lead to less administration on all levels. Besides several legal uncertainties, lump sums also resulted in lower project budgets and therefore problems during implementation with a negative impact on the overall attractiveness of projects.

- We call on the European Commission to ensure legal certainty around the use of lump sums (for the full project cycle including approval by external auditing authorities) before any broader roll-out.

2) Consider returning higher education programme structure & administration to direct management

In the previous funding period, the education and cooperation programmes were all integrated under the new Erasmus+ roof. The idea was simple and well-received: to simplify application and implementation procedures, link to the worldwide dimension, avoid having several complicated subprogrammes, and strengthen the link between education and cooperation, including beyond education institutions. In reality, project administration has not been simplified, but has become fragmented across Europe to give local organisations and authorities more control over the selection procedure and implementation of projects. This leads to confusion among beneficiaries, who are partners in one and coordinators in another project, but dealing with different agencies in the same programme, working with different application portals and reporting tools (e.g., European Funding & Tenders Portal for centralised actions, and the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps and Beneficiary Tool for decentralised actions). Additionally, as National Agencies are drafting Grant Agreements in their national language, it becomes challenging for the partner to be able to advise on the

Partnership Agreement. While it is indeed important to reflect regional demands, we see more benefits in a centralised administration of the programmes.

- We recommend that the European Commission prioritises augmenting staffing and capacity within the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Subsequently, the Commission should pursue a return to direct management in all sub-programmes of Erasmus+.

KA171 actions would benefit from being aligned with KA131 actions, therefore streamlining administration processes and significantly enhancing overall effectiveness. Additionally, we have observed that the framework for mobilities with non-associated partner countries remains challenging. While the initiative to open KA131 to countries outside of the EU is welcome, it might pose challenges related to tuition fee disparities for non-associated countries within the program.

- We recommend that the European Commission align the KA171 ICM action more closely with the KA131 action, to streamline administration processes and significantly enhance overall effectiveness.
- We call upon the European institutions to facilitate cooperation with as many like-minded and long-standing partners as possible, notably including the United Kingdom and Switzerland.

3) Future-proof programme priorities

We welcome the overall goals and priorities of the programme, as they are generally relevant. While the process of elaborating priorities with associated countries is straightforward, the process is more complicated with non-associated countries.

A weak point of the programme is the inflexibility to react to unpredictable events and developments (e.g., Covid-19 pandemic, the war against Ukraine, inflation, and increasing pressures facing democracy). To meet future challenges, it has to be possible to submit applications with a forward-looking approach outside the (possibly outdated) priorities, as the programme would benefit from innovative initiatives and projects that reflect upon up-to-date challenges. Priorities should include the continued development of resilience of our societies, in particular among young people, against unpredictable events, such as those triggered by climate change, and debate on the impact of technological developments, such as AI, on our democracies in general and our education systems in particular.

- We call upon the European Commission to enable the bottom-up definition of priorities, enhancing flexibility and resilience, and in so strengthening forward-looking programme lines while empowering beneficiaries to articulate their strategic priorities.

In light of recent developments, including in the context of European University Alliances, it is crucial to supply, where possible, a coherent approach to the funding and administration of different forms of mobility (e.g., short, long, blended, bilateral and multilateral) while also ensuring their quality and recognition. There are many administrative hurdles in the current Erasmus+ programme which make it difficult to introduce flexible formats of mobility, particularly with blended intensive programmes and short-term PhD mobility. Increased

attention must be paid to increasing the flexibility of funding instruments to improve and re-design high-quality and meaningful blended and virtual formats.

Digitalisation remains challenging and the strategy has fallen short in streamlining and simplifying processes for institutions, and for administrative and academic staff. We underline that digitalisation should serve as a tool to streamline the coordination and boost education and training outcomes of Erasmus projects, not as an end in itself. The implementation process should therefore allow for adequate time, ensuring that the tools possess a suitable level of flexibility that aligns with the needs of the beneficiaries.

- We call upon the European Commission to advance its long-term vision of digitalisation including administrative procedures for learning & teaching and new mobility formats in full dialogue with key stakeholder organisations, to achieve the highest pedagogical and educational quality, as well as desired learning outcomes.

Additionally, 'green' top-up for travel fails to sufficiently cover the significant price disparity of many eco-friendly transport options.

- We call upon the European Commission to explore and promote diverse forms of environment-friendly mobility and to introduce more effective incentives for green travel and initiatives for 'greener' projects in general.

4) Foster resilience

In the recent past, programme managers and the beneficiaries had to deal with all sorts of challenges, including notably the Covid-19 pandemic. As lockdowns started, mobilities as such were impossible overnight and solutions were needed. While we appreciate that in the end the Commission and also regional programme authorities were quite flexible in dealing with the situation, we suggest implementing some sort of extended *force majeure* tool into the programme.

- We call upon the European Commission to implement an extended *force majeure* tool into the programme.

Our offer

Our Members highly value Erasmus and consider it a major achievement and value add of the European Union. We stand ready to provide our full support for its future development.

We offer to provide our experience and expertise, built since our creation in 1990, in continuing to support the design and implementation of successive EU funding programmes.

For more information and enquiries, please [contact](#) our Advisor for Higher Education Sophie Ratcliff.

This document can be referenced using <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10623904>

Rooted in advanced engineering education and research, [CESAER](#) is an international association of leading specialised and comprehensive universities with a strong science and technology profile that advocate, learn from each other and inspire debates. Our Members champion excellence in higher education, training, research and innovation, contribute to knowledge societies for a sustainable future and deliver significant scientific, economic, social and societal impact.

