

Note

Danish Position Paper on the Next Erasmus+ Programme Period

Since its inception more than 35 years ago, Erasmus+ has established itself as the main vehicle for mobility and cooperation in education, youth and sport in Europe. The programme has been of immense value in fostering European integration, identity and values among younger generations. In a world where European cohesion is ever more important, we must look ahead to the next Erasmus+ programme period to ensure the continued success and effectiveness of the programme. The proposals of this paper can be met through reprioritisation and increased cost-efficiency and does not pre-empt the future MFF.

The main focus of the programme should continue to be on education and learning mobility as well as international cooperation within the fields of education, youth and sport while considering challenges such as climate change and the need for skilled labour in the EU to underpin the green transition.

The pillars of the programme have proven to be key drivers of personal, academic, and professional growth for participants, fostering increased knowledge, intercultural understanding, and lifelong connections. We support the bottom-up approach of the programme, which allows for flexibility at both national and institutional level. It is essential to preserve the freedom for self-determination, as this ensures that participating countries and institutions can tailor their actions according to their specific needs and circumstances.

Building on the existing initiatives, we should strive further along the set paths while ensuring European initiatives are balanced with full respect for the basic principle of national competence in education and training.

This positions paper highlights the main principles and issues to be address in order to achieve a successful Erasmus+ in the future.

Key messages:

1. Consolidate and build on the strengths of the current Erasmus+ and bolster the budget share for priorities such as VET

We recognise that the Erasmus+ programme is well-functioning and has a positive impact on education, learning and sports mobility as well as international cooperation. The brand of the programme carries a strong reputation and association with quality and valuable experiences. It is of utmost importance that we maintain and strengthen this position in the next Erasmus+ programme. Thus, we should focus on the core tasks and strengths of the programme rather than expanding into new fields or novelties.

In school education, we should continue the development of Teacher Academies as a contribution to the challenge of recruiting and retaining teachers across Europe. In vocational education and training (VET), we need to consider the need for skilled labour across Europe and support increased capacity for VET providers to strengthen mobility by bolstering the share of the budget dedicated to VET in order to boost the attractiveness of VET. In higher education (HE) new, flexible mobility formats for students and staff should be introduced, and European Universities should continue to evolve. In the youth sector, new grant and mobility options catering for diverse actors should be explored to enhance accessibility. And both adult learning and mobility in sports should remain integral parts of Erasmus+ engaging a broader scope of participants.

The openness of the programme to countries outside of the EU is a significant strength. In this light, the international dimension of the programme could be increased and expanded throughout the various programme elements. Furthermore, we believe that encouraging new programme countries to participate can enhance collaboration and understanding.

While the base structure of the programme with the current three key actions should be maintained, we need to assess the impact and relevance of all components of Erasmus+ in order to have the most efficient use of resources. To this end, we believe consideration should be given to the current broad field of centralised actions, including the DiscoverEU programme, as well as to whether funding for selected institutions should be upheld automatically.

2. Continue on the path towards a green and inclusive Erasmus+

In the context of a world where sustainability and climate challenges need to be addressed, we emphasise the importance of green and sustainable mobility. The climate crisis necessitates a transition towards more environmentally friendly practices, and students themselves are increasingly demanding sustainable options.

To make green mobility a viable and attractive choice, it is crucial to consider funding opportunities for green mobility initiatives. Resources can be dedicated to support sustainable travel; the programme can contribute to reducing its carbon footprint and promoting responsible practices.

We believe the work on creating a more inclusive programme should be further pursued. This could be done by creating the necessary funding schemes, allowing for more flexible mobility in terms of both length and form and by rethinking application and reporting procedures making them more accessible to the increasingly diversified user group.

3. Ensure an accessible and flexible Erasmus+ with an increased emphasis on user friendliness

Simplification and flexibility are key to improving the programme. Streamlining administrative processes, merging programmes, where applicable, and ensuring functioning IT systems are crucial for a smooth operation. Concrete steps in this direction would be to merge the European Solidarity Corps with Erasmus+ as well as integrating the youth area on equal terms with the different education subsets in Education and Training in order to increase efficiency and reduce administration costs. This would also allow for better allocation of funds nationally to areas with strong needs such as VET or HE.

More flexibility could be given at national level in order to prioritise, adapt and adjust programme implementation to specific national, regional and local circumstances to achieve the best use of the funding available. Therefore, decentralised allocation of funds should remain the primary principle.

User friendliness at all levels should be in focus when developing IT tools or introducing new administrative procedures. Decreasing the administrative burden throughout the programme should be sought and new tools should only be introduced if proven functional. The strong reputation of the Erasmus+ brand must remain intact.

The abovementioned key messages are elaborated in the following annex.

Annex

1. Consolidate, focus and build on the strengths of the current Erasmus+ and bolster the budget share for priorities such as VET

The programme's success lies in its ability to facilitate education mobility and international cooperation, fostering personal, academic, and professional development. To maintain the programme's positive reputation, it is crucial that quality continues to be a key guiding principle.

A programme open to the world

One of the significant strengths of the Erasmus+ programme is its openness to countries outside the European Union. We encourage **opening up the programme to new programme countries** – particularly with a special focus on Ukraine. Embracing new programme countries and fostering cooperation with them enriches the diversity of perspectives, fosters cross-cultural dialogue, and enhances the overall impact of the programme. It also contributes to the European Union's broader goal of promoting stability, prosperity, and collaboration beyond its borders.

Prioritisation

While the **Erasmus+ programme has expanded to encompass a wide range of activities and initiatives**, it is essential to ensure that the core objectives of education and training mobility and cooperation remain at the forefront. By **assessing the impact and relevance of each component**, we can make informed decisions about where resources should be allocated most effectively.

We suggest giving special attention to **considering the number of centralised actions** within the programme. Currently, the programme funds numerous smaller actions that may not always align with the primary objectives. By prioritising these actions based on their educational value, we can streamline the programme and eliminate redundancy, ultimately simplifying administrative processes and enhancing efficiency.

As part of the prioritisation process, we recommend **considering the rationale behind the DiscoverEU programme** in its current form. While the programme provides young people with travel opportunities, it is crucial to assess its educational value and its alignment with the broader objectives of the Erasmus+ programme. If a strong educational value cannot be found it may be appropriate to **re-consider whether the DiscoverEU programme should be continued**.

Similarly, we believe that the continual **funding for selected institutions should not be upheld automatically**. While recognising the importance of historical ties, funding allocations should be subject to periodic evaluation and consideration of current needs and priorities. This ensures that resources are allocated where they

can have the most significant impact and benefit a broader range of educational institutions and students.

School Education

Participation in mobility and international cooperation has the potential to strengthen the individual subjects, such as languages, social studies, history etc. as well as the interdisciplinary approach to subjects in teaching as a professional.

The Erasmus+ programme contributes to strengthening the pupils' and students' understanding of the human interaction with nature and the environment, as well as civil participation and citizenship, digital competences and the inclusion agenda. Therefore, we recommend that **international mobility will be a possibility in the field of School Education** by using the experience achieved within the field of vocational education and training in the current programme period.

We recognise a need for an increased focus on sustainability and a green dimension in the projects implemented in the framework of Erasmus+, and the field of school education can contribute to raise awareness by having clear prioritisation for subjects in both mobility and cooperation projects.

The possibility of peer-to-peer learning within the **early childhood education and care sector (ECEC) needs to be further developed** as this sector is underrepresented in the Erasmus+ programme. More awareness of the inclusion of this sector is encouraged, e.g. by changing the name from the field of "School Education" to "School Education and Early Childhood".

Erasmus+ **Teacher Academies** create partnerships and promote cross-sectoral cooperation between teacher education institutions and training providers within the fields of higher education, school education and vocational education and training at a national and European level. To further develop the personal competences of teachers at the beginning of their career we support that alliances being established can be further developed and opened up to newcomers while upholding a balance in numbers and needs. The partnerships could also include participants from the field of adult and upper secondary education.

Vocational Education and Training (VET)

There lies a great potential within the Vocational Education and Training (VET) in terms of fostering increased mobility and international cooperation. In light of the growing focus on the **need for skills and competences for the green and digital transitions**, we recognise the crucial role of VET in preparing individuals for the evolving job market. To ensure the relevance and effectiveness of VET mobility within the Erasmus+ programme, it is essential to **adopt a multiple and flexible approach that caters to the diverse needs of VET learners** and apprentices. We should also like to see a bolstering of the share of the budget dedicated to VET.

Supporting capacity-building within the VET sector is of paramount importance to promote and facilitate the mobility of VET learners and apprentices. We encourage the establishment of **permanent funding mechanisms** in this regard covering programme countries, such as were introduced under the European policy experimentation action outlined in the draft Annual Work Programme 2024. These funding mechanisms could include seed funding for the preparation of applications for KA2 projects. Such an ongoing support would enable VET institutions and organisations to enhance their capacity to provide quality mobility experiences and ensure that learners and apprentices can fully benefit from these opportunities.

Promoting mobility in the field of vocational education is not only important within Europe but also in connection with maintaining strong links with the rest of the world. VET students should be encouraged to pursue mobility experiences outside of the EU and as such the **international dimension** of the programme should be strengthened by increasing the percentage of mobility grants for students to countries outside the Erasmus+ programme.

We view the Centres of Vocational Excellence introduced in the current programme period as welcome additions in fostering cross-sectoral cooperation and partnerships in the field of VET. The further development of this initiative could be promoted by establishing **communities of practice** between the new centres drawing inspiration from the work carried out within the European Universities initiative.

Higher Education

The Erasmus+ programme is and should remain the main vehicle when it comes to cooperation and exchange within higher education in Europe, providing a crucial foundation for international cooperation within the higher education sector.

To further enhance mobility opportunities for students and staff within higher education, flexibility in mobility lengths and types should be increased and adapted to a reality with diverse living situations for both students and staff. We propose the **introduction of funding for short physical mobility periods**, in addition to blended mobility programmes. In addition to this, it could also be explored how the programme could better support internationalisation at home experiences. Similarly, more flexibility should also be created when it comes to **short-term staff mobility allowing for shorter periods** than is the case today. Staff mobility could also be furthered by allocating support for receiving institutions with a focus on increasing the quality of such stays. This expansion of funding options would cater to a wider range of students and staff and may be especially attractive to those with fewer opportunities or family obligations. In the same spirit of increasing flexibility, we suggest streamlining the mobility action by **combining key action 131 and 171** allowing for more flexible use by the institutions. Finally increased flexibility could also be considered in terms of mobility formats used in Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters.

We emphasise the importance of maintaining a bottom-up approach and **respecting the diverse national education systems** across Europe. The Erasmus+ programme should not impose forced harmonisation, but instead recognise the strength and value of the continent's educational diversity. Rather than viewing different national circumstances as barriers, we should embrace them as sources of innovation and creativity.

It is crucial to ensure that the Erasmus+ programme does not create new parallel structures or framework for higher education structures. Instead, the focus should be on **fully utilising the structures and tools established through the Bologna process**. The Bologna process has laid the foundation for common structures in higher education across Europe and has promoted student mobility. By building upon this existing framework, we can enhance cooperation, facilitate credit recognition, and streamline administrative processes within Erasmus+.

While it is important to promote cooperation within the European Union, it is equally **vital to maintain an openness to the outside world**. Encouraging students to pursue mobility experiences outside the EU can provide valuable insights and broaden their perspectives. Therefore, we advocate for further strengthening the international dimension of the Erasmus+ programme. This can be achieved by allowing for the allocation of a **higher percentage of mobility grants for students to countries not associated to the Erasmus+ programme**, enabling them to engage with diverse cultures and education systems worldwide. Especially for smaller institutions the 20% margin is quite limiting on their activities.

The **European Universities initiative** holds significant potential in promoting collaboration and excellence in higher education. It is essential to explore viable solutions for future funding, ensuring that the initiative can continue to thrive. One possible approach could involve establishing a focused **one-stop-shop mechanism** that simplifies administrative processes for the alliances by allowing alliances to access various funding sources, such as the next Framework Programme of research and innovation, through the same application procedure but with full respect for the various programmes' funding rules. Along the same line to avoid funding being consumed by bureaucracy, simpler application and evaluation procedures should be pursued. While promoting national funding for the European Universities, it should not be a requirement to allocate national funding to projects, as funding systems vary across Europe. This **flexibility allows each country to contribute according to their funding system** and supports a competitive and dynamic environment. Additionally, new alliances should still have opportunities to enter the programme while upholding a balance when it comes to the total number of alliances, ensuring that the **initiative remains accessible for new actors**. We do not however see it as a goal in itself to expand existing alliances or increase the total number. Furthermore, it is important that the initiative keeps a bottom-up approach allowing for variation in terms of alliance goals and focus areas.

At the same time, it is also important to continue allowing for the building of new institutional partnerships and in this light focus should also be given to **strengthen seed funding for new emerging partnerships** ensuring the needed stepping stones for early stage cooperation.

Adult education

The Adult sector must **continue to provide lifelong learning** and to contribute to the foreign language skills, employability, active citizenship, democratic skills and the European identity of citizens in a changing labour market. Awareness should be on the vast spectre of different institutions operating in this field in order to create a programme with enough flexibility to sufficiently cater for these differences.

With this in mind, we suggest a possibility for **one-day mobility activities** as well as a **new mobility format addressed directly at small newcomer organisations** with very limited organisational capacity. The new format we suggest would set aside a percentage of the budget for mobility projects, so small newcomer organisations would be able to make a very short application for funding of limited mobility projects between the formal application rounds. The projects could be similar to preparatory visits, and the final reports would also be very easily accessible. This possibility would ensure an easier access to the programme, especially for organisations in the non-formal and informal parts of the sector.

Furthermore, we recommend that **international cooperation should be a possibility in the field of Adult Education** by using the experience achieved within the field of vocational education and training in the current programme period.

Youth

Youth mobility provides opportunities for personal and professional development, fosters a sense of active citizenship and promotes European values among young people. Encouraging young individuals to engage in social, cultural, and civic activities that transcend national boundaries can contribute to the development of a cohesive European identity and to strengthening the social cohesion within the European Union. To further enhance the quality of youth mobility the **introduction of blended mobility options** could be considered in order to allow for digital on-boarding prior to physical mobility.

Accreditation within the field of youth is appreciated, and therefore we support an accreditation model including all non-formal and informal learning opportunities within the field, i.e. both mobility of young people, youth workers and youth participation activities. The field of youth mobility is dominated by smaller actors often driven by people working on a voluntary basis and with a high degree of rotation. This means that institutional knowledge and experiences with Erasmus+ application procedures are often limited. In order to aid actors in overcoming these challenges **consortia applications** on behalf of a larger group of actors could be introduced similarly to what exist within adult education. However, the organisations applying

as a coordinator of a consortium have to be public bodies or authorities responsible for the field of youth, e.g. municipalities, or umbrella organisations representing a number of organisations active within the field of youth work.

Recognising the importance of empowering and supporting young people, we advocate for the **integration of micro-grants** (small grants up to 3.000 €), which were made available to national activities during the European Year of Youth 2022, into the new Erasmus+ programme. These micro-grants provided young people with opportunities for personal and professional growth through simplified application procedures. The grants were applied for by groups of youth organisations. We suggest that the possibility of cascade funding / micro grants can be included in the application for accreditation, i.e. the public bodies/authorities responsible for the field of youth or umbrella organisations can be accredited to provide micro-grants directly to informal groups of young people. By **making these grants a permanent feature of the programme**, we can continue to nurture youth engagement and enable the young people to pursue their aspirations.

Finally, we suggest **not upholding Youth as a separate header** but instead integrating this area on equal terms with the different education subsets in Education & Training. This would also allow for a more efficient use of resources and the possibility to reallocate funds to areas with more demand such as VET or higher education.

Sport

The Erasmus+ Programme plays an important role in facilitating international cooperation between sport organisations and sport should **continue to be a focus in Erasmus+**. Priority should be given to cross-border activities and projects that deliver real added value at the European level. The current opportunities for the mobility of sport staff, including trainers, is a strength in order to make best use of the funding available. The possibility of creating further support opportunities targeting trainers and staff partaking in **job-shadowing opportunities** aimed at knowledge-sharing and capacity-building should be considered. More flexibility regarding the length of the exchange period, as well as additional support the hosting organisation, should be considered to ensure the quality and sustainability of the exchange.

2. Continue on the path towards a green and inclusive Erasmus+

Sustainability is a pressing concern, and we highlight the need to promote green mobility. **Strengthening funding for sustainable travel options** will make them more viable and align with user demands and climate objectives. Such an approach should be taken across the programme as a whole. In additions to this, further specific initiatives can be taken in the specific subsections of the programme as suggested under the individual subsections under key message 1.

Inclusion remains a priority for us in the next Erasmus+ programme period. While increased funding for participants (students, pupils and young people) has been instrumental in enhancing inclusivity, institutions also face administrative challenges in promoting mobility among new target groups. Therefore, we suggest a general approach across the programme of increasing **flexibility in terms of formats and lengths of** mobility actions for all types of participants. We encourage **inclusion funding directed at institutions** and organisations as a supplement - especially when it comes to Higher Education Institutions and organisations involved in voluntary projects where organisational support today is limited compared to other fields of education and youth, i.e. organisational support for higher education and voluntary projects is not directly linked to the full number of participants with fewer opportunities. Financial support could enable institutions and organisations to overcome administrative barriers, develop targeted support mechanisms, and ensure that a wider range of students, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, can access and benefit from the programme.

3. Ensuring an accessible and flexible Erasmus+ with an increased emphasis on user friendliness

We stress the importance of simplification, efficiency, and flexibility in the Erasmus+ programme to ensure its accessibility and effectiveness. The programme should strive to create conditions that allow for the **best possible use of funds with the least amount of bureaucracy**, making it as accessible as possible for end-users and promoting broader participation.

Simplification, Efficiency, and Flexibility

Over the years, the **complexity of the Erasmus+ programme has increased**, despite efforts towards simplification. The grant beneficiary agreement and the programme guide have grown significantly in size, resulting in a higher administrative burden for users and National Agencies (NAs) and entry-barriers for organisations with limited experience, organisational capacity and international network. To address this issue, we suggest focusing on having **fewer, more overarching ambitions** for the programme as well as allowing for greater freedom in local adaptation and weighing of priorities to different national contexts and unforeseen circumstances or crisis.

There is a need to **simplify and automate administrative procedures while reducing the demands for documentation**, in order to alleviate the administrative burden and make the programme more user-friendly – for instance through applying fewer evaluation and application criteria. Additionally, evaluation criteria should be known by institutions from the get-go in order for them to be properly prepared. Various types of new grants and amounts of top ups have over the years been added to the programme in order to address different priorities like inclusion and sustainability and order to cater for the many different needs of the programme. We suggest that the funding mechanisms for the programme will be simplified and

mainstreamed for the new programme in order to reduce the complexity and increase the flexibility of the programme.

We strongly support the possibility for institutions and organisations to apply for **accreditations within all fields of education and training as well as youth** to simplify the access for mobility activities. To ensure high quality and impact of mobility programmes implemented by accredited institutions and organisations we recommend that the possibility for being accredited is limited to public bodies, local authorities responsible for the fields in question and umbrella organisations representing several organisations or associations active within the fields.

An important barrier in terms of simplicity is the communication of procedures directed at the users. With an increasingly more diverse user group it is of utmost importance that application procedures and reporting directed at participants are held in **simple and understandable language** as well as only gathering the most needed information from beneficiaries.

Finally, we believe that **merging the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps (ESC)** programmes into one programme is a logical step towards simplification and efficiency. Having a unified programme eliminates the need for separate administrative structures, reducing bureaucratic overhead and enabling more efficient use of funds. Leveraging the strong Erasmus+ brand, which carries a positive association, consolidates resources and promotes a cohesive approach to mobility and cooperation. When merging Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps (ESC) into one programme we recommend that the concept of “solidarity” as well as support mechanisms in voluntary projects are maintained.

Functionality

Ensuring the functionality of the Erasmus+ programme is crucial for maintaining its attractiveness and efficiency. Unfortunately, the programme has experienced **recurring IT issues** that have hampered its accessibility and caused a significant waste of administrative resources. The frustrations resulting from malfunctioning end-user platforms and technical glitches have posed challenges for NAs and beneficiaries alike.

To address these issues, we strongly emphasise the need for functioning IT systems within the programme. It is essential to prioritise stability and reliability when developing and implementing new technological solutions. Rather than rushing into new platforms, it is prudent to **rely on existing working tools until new systems are fully developed and proven to be functional**. This approach minimises disruptions and ensures a smoother transition for funding recipients and NAs.

Addressing functionality issues and streamlining administrative processes are crucial steps to optimise the efficiency of the Erasmus+ programme. By rectifying IT problems, enhancing communication and support mechanisms, and **relying on**

proven tools, we can eliminate unnecessary obstacles and ensure that the programme operates smoothly and effectively. This will contribute to the overall satisfaction of beneficiaries, end-users and NAs, and help to maintain the strong reputation and attractiveness of the Erasmus+ brand.

The role of National and Commission Agencies

In order to foster simplification and flexibility we believe it pertinent to address the role of both National Agencies and the Commission Agency and their cooperation.

To improve efficiency and knowledge sharing, we suggest increasing support and collaboration between the European Commission and NAs on centralised actions. Enhanced cooperation and information exchange will better **equip NAs to promote and inform about the centralised actions effectively**. By strengthening the partnership between the Commission and NAs, the programme can optimize resources, improve communication, and ensure effective implementation at all levels. As part of this process the current distribution of central actions between key action 2 and 3 could also be further streamlined.

In the process of simplifying the programme the European Commission and the NAs still have to continue their efforts to ensure that the allocated funds are used in accordance with the objectives of the programme and that the risk of organisations without affiliation to the education, youth and sport sectors applying for grants to cooperation partnerships is minimised. Therefore, we support that the target groups for applying for grants to cooperation partnerships are limited to institutions and organisations active within the fields of education and training, youth and sports. This approach will also increase the impact of the implemented projects within the fields.

Decentralised allocation of the majority of funds has proven to be effective in promoting local initiatives and tailoring actions to national needs. We support the continuation of this approach and recommend to further consider possibilities to allow NAs to have greater flexibility in distributing the decentralised funds based on the specific national circumstances and priorities. As such **flexibility margins could be increased for NAs**, empowering them to adapt to specific national circumstances effectively. This could also encompass more flexibility in allocation of funds tied to specific regions. Along the same line we would also encourage considering a more even distribution of application deadlines throughout the year.

Finally, smaller programmes such as **Euroguidance, Europass, EQF and Youth-Wiki should not be upheld as separate contracts**, but instead be part of the general administration of the programme, as it would streamline the administrative processes.