

Summary of the European Students' Union's input to the public consultation on the **ERASMUS+ programme midterm review**

The European Students' Union (ESU) calls on the European Commission to increase accessibility and quality of the ERASMUS+ programme, providing more opportunities for students and staff members from underrepresented backgrounds to participate in mobility programmes.

Accessibility and Funding

20% mobility target

The available funding within the Key Action 1 - higher education mobility - is too little to increase participation of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. There are no targets or measures that would systematically allow to address these imbalances and shortages. Even though there is a target of 20% of graduates in 2020 to have participated in the mobility programmes, there are no objectives for the composition of the 20% that would be accompanied by specific measures to increase the participation of learners with fewer learning opportunities. There should be measures set in place for the upcoming programme that would target access for the underrepresented groups.

Accessibility and flexibility

The limited amount of grants that support individuals to participate in Key Action 1 - higher education mobility is an obstacle itself. The biggest obstacle for students' participation in mobility is the lack of financial support, especially for underrepresented groups, including students with disabilities, students from lower-socio economic backgrounds etc. When it comes to the teaching staff in higher education - there is more flexibility needed from the side of the higher education institutions to arrange teaching periods abroad.

Short term mobility programmes should be reintroduced to offer more mobility opportunities for students who are less flexible when it comes to long-term periods abroad, due to employment, care responsibilities or other reasons.

The conditions set for the mobility in higher education are not based on equity and are not supporting mobility to be equitable and accessible for all. It would require more learning support offered to those students who need it, as well as more flexibility and increased financial support for disadvantaged students especially. Specific allocation of funding should follow to achieve these objectives.

The European Students' Union (ESU) is being used to refer to "ESIB - The National Unions of Students in Europe" Belgian asbl BE0890.019.936, due to the fact that both legal entities are going through a merging process. Likewise the visual identity of ESU is being used instead of the one from ESIB.

Recognition of mobility periods abroad

Currently the recognition of ECTS after a mobility period is not done automatically in all the higher education institutions, although it is required with the introduction of the the learning agreements.

Instead, students might face extra exams or even repeated study periods at their home institution. National Agencies together with higher education institutions and stakeholders should work towards eliminating such practices and work towards full recognition of ECTS gained during the mobility programme, according to the learning agreements. National unions of students report that learning agreements set in place between the student and the higher education institutions is not necessarily a reality in all higher education institutions. Learning agreements should be set in place and be mandatory. Higher education institutions should receive necessary support and training to implement the learning agreements, therefore contributing to automatic recognition of learning.

Overlapping funding opportunities:

[overlapping with other national grant schemes or international grants offered by other intergovernmental organisations like Council of Europe]

The funding opportunities might be overlapping in the area of student mobility, when government or universities are offering bilateral cooperations for student mobility. However, these funding instruments are not *directly* overlapping, and the ERASMUS+ funding provides unique and absolutely necessary support for mobility in higher education, that otherway would not happen to this high extend.

When it comes to other international funding opportunities, they are rather complementing each other, and supporting common inter-institutional objectives (for example, EU and the Council of Europe in the field of youth cooperation and policy). Therefore, it cannot be perceived as negative overlap, but rather as one that is supporting common objectives and providing more opportunities.

ERASMUS+ masters' loan scheme

ERASMUS+ masters loan scheme should be ceased as it does not increase the accessibility of mobility. It has not proven to the fit for purpose to increase the accessibility of mobility, and banks from only four countries have signed the contract with the European Investment Fund, indicating that the system is not working. Instead, the money should be re-invested in grants for the student mobility. Until February 2017 only 130 students have used this financial instrument.

ESU thinks that funding should be invested in support mechanisms like grants, and not financial instruments that benefit the banks more than they benefit students.

Budget distribution

The budget is way too low to achieve the objectives and reach out to learners, individuals and young people in Europe. It is not enough to grant same opportunities to everyone in terms of access. Also the ratio between approved/rejected quality projects in Key Action 2 and Key Action 3 is too high, stating that the demand for the funding is much higher than the programme is offering. In the next period (2021-2027) more resources should be allocated to ERASMUS+ programme or its successor. Currently, the ERASMUS+ programme receives only 1.36% of the EU budget.

The budget distribution between the three Key Actions of the programme is appropriate (i.e. learning mobility of individuals (min 63%), cooperation between organisations (min 28%), support for policy reform (min 4.2%)). Although the distribution seems reasonable, further flexibility regarding the funding distribution within the National Agencies is required. It should be evidence-based and transparent. This policy should be revised, because in some countries there is a demand for different funding levels for different activities, according to the realities of different organisations (within the project's funding allocation).

The current 3.5% of the total budget allocated to the ERASMUS+ master loan scheme should be reallocated to the higher education mobility and grants in particular.

There should be additional centralized grants for KA2 as well, that are not distributed through the national agencies. It would offer European NGOs more equal footing in comparison with national stakeholders, when it comes to applications. Currently National Agencies can favour projects with a national context and project partners that overall can impact projects that are meant to target European level only.

Projects

Currently the bureaucracy in the application and reporting process is at a high level and in addition, the low ratio of approved projects proves that there is not enough money in the programme. These are some of the biggest burdens when it comes to access to project funding.

Regularly checking if the priorities in the calls correspond with the realities in the organisations that the funding is targeted to is absolutely necessary. Sometimes the funding available is for very specific objectives that are on the agenda of the EC, however not corresponding the needs of wider youth organisations or NGO sector.

Recently promoted topics like European citizenship and active citizenship are a good example how to engage these topics in ERASMUS+ work through the projects. There should be more calls like the Social Inclusion call, promoting these values and supporting international and national organisations in working with such topics.

Volunteering in NGOs should be recognised as a co-funding for project, considering that the NGOs, especially youth organisations operate under tight budgets, but as well as big part of the human resources are working on voluntary terms. It would increase the accessibility of the programmes and project funding to a large audience.