

**New Programme Generation
Erasmus 2021–2027
Proposal by the European Commission**

Reflections by NA Directors Education & Training

August 2018



Erasmus+

On May 30, 2018 the European Commission (EC) published its proposal for a new programme for education, training, youth and sport under the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021–2027.¹ This paper represents the reflections on this proposal of the directors of National Agencies (NAs) with activities in the areas of education and training in Erasmus+. The intention of this paper is to feed the dialogue about the proposal with insights from the agencies, based on their experience with the implementation of the current Erasmus+ programme and its predecessors as well as in all areas of education and training.

General impression

NAs in the field of education and training **appreciate the proposal** as the Draft Regulation

- clearly acknowledges the importance of the highly successful Erasmus+ programme,
- reflects the common understanding about this programme developed between European Commission, Member States, European Parliament and National Agencies,
- builds on the Mid-term Evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme and stakeholder consultations, and
- provides a solid basis for a seven-year programme period.

Continuity and stability

We welcome the **continuation of positive aspects of the Erasmus+ programme**:

- one programme for all educational sectors, youth and sport
- three clearly distinctive and compatible Key Actions
- aimed at a combination of personal, educational, professional and institutional development
- aimed at a combination of employability, social inclusion and European identity
- addressing the European and national system levels as well as institutions and individuals in education, training, youth and sport

Equally important is the **stability in terms of the governance** with regard to the implementation of the programme. The triangle European Commission/DG-EAC – Member States/National Authorities – NAs for decentralised activities remains unchanged; the overall, well-established governance and administrative structure will therefore be continued.

Transnational Cooperation Activities (TCAs) will not only be continued but will also be supported by SALTO Centres, which is important in terms of relevance, effectiveness and efficiency.

Innovation

While aiming at evolution rather than revolution, the proposal contains several **new elements that address the needs in the field of education and training**, as expressed in the Mid-term Evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme and stakeholder consultations:

- the possibility of short-term learning mobility
- the option of small-scale partnerships
- the extension of international endeavours in mobility to VET (after an increasingly successful international HE mobility scheme, albeit the heavy administration involved)

¹ Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing 'Erasmus': the Union programme for education, training, youth and sport and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013.

- pupils' mobility in groups for school education under Key Action 1 – Learning Mobility
- the possibility of blended mobility (a combination of physical and virtual mobility) and virtual cooperation

We welcome these additional elements, as they make the programme even more relevant. We also appreciate that elements that were not successful, such as the Student Loan Guarantee Facility, have been discontinued. We agree that partnerships for innovation that aim at achieving systemic impact at European level should be managed at centralised level by EACEA. However, our strong wish is that cooperation for innovation also remains an element in the partnerships at decentralised level.

Inclusion and access to the programme

The proposal shows a clear willingness to **broaden the reach of the programme** to groups that so far have been underrepresented. NAs strongly support the idea that **a more inclusive programme** stimulates not only the participation of people with special needs and/or fewer opportunities (including migrants and people living in remote areas), but also of organisations with little or no experience ('newcomers') or with smaller operational capacity. In order to ensure the relevance and attractiveness of the programme for groups that have so far been underrepresented, these groups need to be involved in the further development of the programme. Thus, the process towards a new programme itself also becomes more inclusive. It will also help us to further analyse what the barriers for participation have been and thus to design effective approaches to create equal chances and to pave the road for **more diversification of participants** in the programme.

Simplification and proportionality of rules and procedures to alleviate the administrative burden for beneficiaries and implementing bodies, as promised in the proposal, are a prerequisite for a more accessible and inclusive programme. We warmly welcome the intention to simplify application and reporting processes and to align grants selections, reporting, monitoring and control as much as possible, without losing sight of the desired high quality impact of the programme.

Synergies with other European programmes and initiatives

We appreciate the attention for **synergies and connections with other European programmes** (e.g. Horizon Europe and the European Solidarity Corps) and for collaboration between implementing bodies, although it is not clear yet how this will be operationalised. The suggestion to **upscale successful Erasmus projects** and to help promoters of Erasmus projects to apply for grants or develop synergies through the support of the European Structural and Investment Funds and the programmes relating to migration, security, justice and citizenship, health and culture is welcomed as an interesting way to multiply the impact of the Erasmus programme.

The **platforms eTwinning and EPAL** need to be sustained and funded at European level and to be linked closely to the implementation of other decentralised actions under Key Action 1 and Key Action 2. Furthermore, we would appreciate explicit references to **Europass and Euroguidance**, as they are at the core of European education and training and labour market policies.

Challenges

Ambitions

The European Commission has stated that the new programme will provide **learning and mobility opportunities to 12 million people**, in comparison to 4 million people in the current programme. This is quite ambitious, even with a budget twice as high as the budget for Erasmus+. The EC itself has

previously calculated that a budget of € 22 billion is required to maintain the level of 2020 in the seven subsequent years; with a correction for inflation between 2014 and 2021 this would even be € 26 billion. Therefore, a budget of € 30 billion is less spectacular than might be concluded at first sight.

In addition, tripling the number of participants will be a challenge given the ambition to particularly reach people and organisations that have not found their way to the Erasmus+ programme yet.

Making the programme more inclusive will require intensified efforts by all those involved in the implementation of the programme and might ask for higher grants for people from disadvantaged backgrounds. A tailor-made approach needs to be developed in order to enthuse the 'not-so-usual suspects'. Against this background, we would like to stress that **quantitative objectives should not come to the detriment of the quality of the programme** in terms of outreach, outcomes and impact.

We furthermore call for a **realistic and differentiated management of expectations**. There will be substantial differences in growth between educational sectors, whereas the message so far has been a general one: 2x the budget, 3x the number of participants.

Balance between objectives

Although the programme strongly builds on the foundations of the current Erasmus+ programme, there is **an impressive number of new elements** in the proposal: the development of a network of European universities; platforms of centres of vocational excellence; blended mobility / virtual cooperation; focus on 'digital skills & forward looking fields' (climate change, clean energy, artificial intelligence, robotics, data analysis, arts/design, etcetera); learning mobility in other sectors (public governance, agriculture & rural development, enterprise, law enforcement); national activities with a strong European dimension; DiscoverEU; Jean Monnet in other sectors than higher education; strengthening the outreach to 'third countries'. Such a **diversity of initiatives** might hamper the simplification as advocated in the proposal, particularly when they would involve a diverse mix of measures, rules and modalities of participation. It might also endanger the otherwise clear focus on three Key Actions and thereby weaken the potential impact of the programme.

Particularly with regard to DiscoverEU, we have noted critical remarks from many Member States as this activity might reinforce the image of Erasmus+ as a 'holiday programme' and is seen as less accessible for people with fewer opportunities, who cannot afford an accommodation – which seems at odds with the wish for a more inclusive programme.

The proposal aims to foster both **excellence and inclusion** (social and geographical), which requires striking a fine balance between the two. Although inclusion can be seen as an element of excellence, combining these objectives in concrete projects and activities does not come naturally.

As the Erasmus+ programme is known for its high-quality opportunities for people and organisations in the EU, new initiatives might want to adopt the name Erasmus and become part of the success story. We support the openness for new initiatives that enhance the goals and ambitions of the new programme in education, training, youth and sport, yet insist that the spirit of the programme and its quality standards be maintained and the new initiatives adopt the Erasmus programme rules.

Implementation

As always, the real potential of a new programme will only show when overall aims and objectives have been further elaborated and operationalised and the implementation has started. We understand that in this phase, it would be counterproductive to focus on practical details. However, we would like to draw attention to a number of crucial aspects with regard to the concretisation of

the proposal.

The management framework for the EC, EACEA and NAs needs to be conceived in a way that allows for an **easy start of or rather transition to the new programme**, without the disruptions that characterised the start of Erasmus+. **Appropriate and well-functioning IT tools** should be available at the start of the programme. Furthermore, there is a need for **consistent and stable rules and procedures**, as annual changes (although diminutive) make communication, implementation and administration very difficult for both potential beneficiaries and beneficiaries and implementing bodies. The **administration at European level needs a one-stop shop**, ideally one Directorate. The split across Directorates and even Directorates General have caused intricacies, different rules for implementation and, therefore, inefficiency.

Extensive attention will have to be given to **communication on the programme goals and options for mobility and cooperation**. In order to make the programme more inclusive and to enthuse people with fewer opportunities in particular, potential beneficiaries need to be addressed in a language which they can understand and which makes programme participation attractive to them and to the organisations that work with them. The programme needs to be **more user-friendly** and the **bureaucratic burden needs to be alleviated** in order to lower the threshold. Creating more opportunities for newcomers and small organisations might require limiting the opportunities for professional organisations and transnational partnerships that repetitively produce applications in various fields and countries as their main business model.

Financial aspects

In the budget as published in the regulation, a relatively large part has not been allocated to a specific educational sector. This 'flexibility margin' amounts to 22,61% of the Erasmus budget for education & training and will be allocated later by the EC. NAs have been informed that the actual 'flexibility margin' will be lower (around 6% of the budget for education & training and around 5.5% of the overall Erasmus budget), as considerable amounts will be allocated for centralised actions for specific educational sectors, managed by EACEA. We would prefer **more transparency about the planned budget allocation for centralised actions**, and suggest including these allocations in the regulation, so that Member States and the European Parliament have a more complete picture on which they can base their negotiations with regard to the budget.

Based on the experience with the Erasmus+ programme, the NAs would like to stress the importance of a **predictable programme budget, which develops gradually over the programme period**. Particularly when expectations run high at the start of the programme, a lack of budget increase in the first year(s) would be very discouraging for those interested to become or stay involved in the programme.

The role of National Agencies

We endorse the proposal for the establishment of a proportionate procedure for the **re-designation of NAs** that have been in charge of implementing the programme at national level and the independent audit bodies that have been responsible for auditing in the current programme period. We agree with the EC that the benefits of such a light procedure for the designation of the implementing structures will free up resources at national level in the preparations of the next generation programme and we are convinced that a re-designation of good functioning NAs will be **beneficial to potential beneficiaries and beneficiaries** of decentralised activities.

NAs expect to see an increase in their management responsibilities. Not only will they handle a larger budget and therefore a larger number of applications and projects, they will also need to invest more time and energy in reaching new potential beneficiaries, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds, and in providing proper support and guidance during the entire project life cycle. In addition, NAs will manage new types of decentralised activities such as pupil mobility in school education in Key Action 1 and small-scale partnerships in Key Action 2. Against this background, we are surprised to see a **decrease in the budget percentage for management costs at decentral level** from 3.4% to 3.2%. Furthermore, we recommend to take not only the amount of funds for grant support but also the different national situations (size of the country, living costs, distances etc.) into account when allocating management fees for the NAs.

We would like to underline the importance of a certain amount of **flexibility in the implementation of the programme at national level**, particularly with regard to learning mobility, without compromising the European character of the programme.

Final remark

As NAs, we are committed to help unleash the potential of the new programme. We appreciate the way in which DG-EAC has involved the NAs in Working Groups regarding the implementation of the present programme, and we look forward to contributing to the further elaboration and operationalisation of the new Erasmus programme in a similar manner.

This document reflects the feedback on the proposal that was shared unanimously or with a very large consensus among the NAs in the field of Education and Training. It does not necessarily reflect the opinion of each National Agency in all aspects.