

Erasmus post-2020 proposal: new policy goals need even more investment

On 30 May the European Commission released its [proposal for the 2021-2027 Erasmus programme](#). The European University Association (EUA) welcomes the draft as a solid basis for discussion on the programme's future, including the much-needed budget increase. The Association finds, however, that policy makers should further reflect on how much it will cost to reach the objectives set out at the 2017 Gothenburg Social Summit and in the related [Commission Communication](#) on the creation of a European Education Area by 2025. Given the EU's ambition for a more social Europe, EUA believes that the proposal requires a more explicit stance on social inclusion and equity.

EUA has weighted the Commission's proposal against the university sector's recommendations, which resulted from an [EUA Europe-wide member survey](#), as well as the Association's [campaign on EU funding for universities](#).

In general, EUA calls on the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council to consider the following points during negotiations on the future programme:

- The budget must match the new policy objectives.
- Ambitions for social inclusion and equity must translate into concrete actions and appropriate funding.
- Cooperation is key for European higher education. New cooperation actions, such as the "European Universities", must not take priority over other types of higher education cooperation as both are equally important and need sustainable funding.

More specifically, EUA calls on policy makers to reflect on:

A budget increase that matches political ambitions

- Doubling the Erasmus budget is a move in the right direction, given that the current programme is underfunded. However, the new programme is supposed to support additional actions, like the creation of networks of "European Universities". As Erasmus+ is one of the education programmes that generates the highest added value, and given the new policy goals, the budget needs more than doubling.
- The Commission proposal would bring a substantial increase to the higher education budget, but would not double it, despite the fact that many new EU policy goals relate to this area.
- Investing in education means investing in social cohesion, European integration, citizenship and European values. Such an important investment deserves more reflection from policy makers. The European Parliament has called for a tripling of the Erasmus budget, demonstrating a deeper commitment to these issues.

Transcending the limits of the European education budget

- The Commission's proposal mentions potential synergies with other funding programmes, such as Horizon Europe and the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). This would enable European higher education institutions to respond better to society's needs and engage in collaborations outside the sector. EUA welcomes this suggestion and calls for it to be expanded to other Union instruments such as the external cooperation instruments, the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), the European Social Fund Plus and the European Regional Development Fund.
- In line with the overall objective of further simplification, increasing synergies and better connecting various EU funding instruments should however not lead to increased complexity for beneficiaries and applicants.

Strengthening links with neighbours and the wider world

- The proposal calls for the future Erasmus programme to be open to third countries. This opens the door for participation of the UK after Brexit and is also a consequent step towards global collaboration.
- The quality and reputation of higher education depends on international exchange, openness and cooperation. These are crucial in fostering European integration, as well as ties with other parts of the world. EUA, therefore, welcomes the proposal to open the new programme up to the world.

Cooperation at the heart of European higher education

- The new programme proposes additional types of cooperation actions. The "European Universities" initiative inspires the debate about European collaboration and demonstrates the value and potential of European higher education cooperation.
- Cooperation is as important as mobility. It develops and promotes the innovative approaches that tomorrow's higher education will need. It generates dynamics that go beyond the periods of project funding and sets the basis for high-quality mobility exchanges.
- Policy makers must ensure that all different types of partnership actions, traditional ones and new ones, are sufficiently funded.
- It is still to be seen how the new programme will support opportunities for cooperation between universities, schools, employers and other organisations. This is crucial for enhancing the quality and social relevance of education.

Emphasis on equity and inclusion

- The European higher education sector has called for a truly inclusive programme. The proposal promises increased investment to enhance accessibility and allow for the participation of more disadvantaged students, including migrants. Inclusion together with learning mobility and cooperation are named in the specific key objectives. This must, however, be reflected in the actions and the budget.
- EUA has called for setting aside a part of the budget for a flexible response to emerging challenges. In the current proposal, some of the funding for education and training is not allocated for a specific purpose. This could be turned into a transparent mechanism for flexible funding to be used in such circumstances.

EUA will continue to follow the negotiations for the Erasmus+ programme and provide further input and evidence from the sector. EUA's position is informed by an extensive member survey that resulted in a detailed set of [recommendations](#) and [additional points](#).

With more than 800 members, the **European University Association** (EUA) is the representative organisation of universities and national rectors' conferences in 47 European countries.

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