

Erasmus+: Evolution, Structural Challenges and Future Design

Assessment of the legislative
proposal for the 2028–2034
programme period



RESEARCH FOR CULT
COMMITTEE

Erasmus+: Evolution, Structural Challenges and Future Design

Assessment of the legislative
proposal for the 2028–2034
programme period

Abstract

This study examines the historical evolution of the Erasmus+ programme and assesses the legislative proposal currently discussed for the 2028–2034 programme period. It identifies structural challenges related to linking broader ambitions to budgetary realities; balancing flexibility with governance and oversight in Erasmus+; the adequacy of support; inclusion and unequal access; and administrative complexity. The study also evaluates whether the proposed changes correspond to the problems identified in programme evaluations and studies.

This document was requested by the European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education.

AUTHORS

Ockham IPS: Bert-Jan BUISKOOL, Gert-Jan LINDEBOOM, Alexander ESPÉRET

ADMINISTRATORS RESPONSIBLE

Denise CHIRCOP, Michaela FRANKE

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

Ivona KLECAN

LINGUISTIC VERSION

Original: EN

ABOUT THE EDITOR

To contact the Policy Department or to subscribe to updates on our work for the CULT Committee please write to: poldep-just-a@europarl.europa.eu

Manuscript completed in May 2026

© European Union, 2026

DISCLAIMER AND COPYRIGHT

The opinions expressed in this document are the sole responsibility of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position of the European Parliament.

Reproduction and translation for non-commercial purposes are authorised, provided the source is acknowledged and the European Parliament is given prior notice and sent a copy.

Image on cover page © European Union, 2026.

CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	4
LIST OF TABLES	5
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
1. THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF ERASMUS+	8
1.1. 1987–1994: Mobility as an Instrument for European Cooperation	8
1.2. 1995–2006: Sectoral Expansion under the Lisbon strategy	9
1.3. 2007–2013: The Lifelong Learning Programme	10
1.4. Erasmus+ 2014–2020: Functional Integration and Output Orientation	11
1.5. The current Erasmus+ programme (2021–2027)	13
1.6. Impact of Erasmus+ on European Identity	14
1.7. Structural development and remaining challenges	16
2. REVIEWING THE ERASMUS+ PROPOSAL	18
2.1. Linking broader ambitions to budgetary realities	19
2.1.1. Evolution of the issue	19
2.1.2. Review of the Commission proposal	20
2.1.3. Recommendations	22
2.2. Balancing flexibility with governance and oversight in Erasmus+	22
2.2.1. Evolution of the issue	22
2.2.2. Review of the Commission proposal	24
2.2.3. Recommendations	25
2.3. Adequacy of support	26
2.3.1. Evolution of the issue	26
2.3.2. Review of the Commission proposal	28
2.3.3. Recommendations	28
2.4. Inclusion and unequal access	29
2.4.1. Evolution of the issue	29
2.4.2. Review of the Commission proposal	31
2.4.3. Recommendations	32
2.5. Administrative complexity	33
2.5.1. Evolution of the issue	33
2.5.2. Review of the Commission proposal	34
2.5.3. Recommendations	35
3. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS	37
REFERENCES	39

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AWP	Annual Work Programme
CULT	Committee on Culture and Education (European Parliament)
EACEA	European Education and Culture Executive Agency
ECA	European Court of Auditors
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EU	European Union
HICP	Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices
LLP	Lifelong Learning Programme
MFF	Multiannual Financial Framework
NA	National Agency
RIA-AE	Research and Innovation in Adult Education Network
RAY	Research-based Analysis and Monitoring of European Youth Programmes
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Main programmes in the historical development of Erasmus+

17

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Erasmus+ is one of the European Union's most visible and widely recognised programmes. Since its creation in 1987, it has enabled millions of learners, teachers and professionals to participate in mobility, cooperation and exchange across Europe. Over time, the programme has evolved from a mobility scheme for higher education students into a policy instrument which covers education, training, youth and sport. The programme initially covered the Member States of the European Economic Community in 1987, expanded alongside successive enlargements of the European Union, and, since the introduction of Erasmus+ in 2014, has explicitly included participation from non-EU countries through different association arrangements.

This expansion has been accompanied by increasing policy ambition. Erasmus+ is now expected to contribute not only to mobility and institutional cooperation, but also to wider objectives such as inclusion, skills development, democratic participation and societal resilience. At the same time, the programme has grown in financial scale and political importance. The debate on the future of Erasmus+ for the 2028–2034 period takes place in a context where the programme is highly successful, expected to expand to new countries, and subject to increasing expectations.

This study identifies the programme's persistent structural challenges related to governance, funding, inclusion, financial adequacy and administrative complexity, and evaluates whether the proposed reforms effectively address these issues.

Overview of the legislative proposal for the 2028–2034 period

The Commission proposal for the 2028–2034 period introduces significant changes to the programme's structure, funding model and governance, presented under the objectives of simplification, increased flexibility and alignment with broader Union priorities.

The proposal restructures the programme architecture by replacing the current Key Action framework with a broader pillar structure and integrating the European Solidarity Corps into Erasmus+. It also reduces the level of detail defined in the basic act, including the removal of predefined sectoral allocations, and shifts a larger share of decision-making to the implementation phase through Annual Work Programmes. As a result, these programmes become the primary mechanism for determining priorities and allocating resources. The role of the Programme Committee is not mentioned in Commission proposal, representing a shift in how Member States are involved in the adoption of programme priorities.

In addition, the proposal introduces a range of simplification measures, including increased use of standardised cost models, simplified procedures for application, reporting and control, and continuation of accreditation-based access routes.

Assessment of the proposals

Erasmus+ has steadily expanded from a mobility programme into a broader policy instrument expected to support education, youth, sport, skills, inclusion, democratic participation and societal resilience. Although the budget is increased, the programme's objectives are also expanded, creating a risk that resources remain insufficient. The absence of detailed budget allocations by sector or action makes it harder to assess whether funding will match political ambitions.

A central issue is the balance between flexibility and oversight. The proposal gives the Commission greater discretion to define priorities through Annual Work Programmes, while reducing predefined allocations and no longer mentioning advisory comitology procedures. This may improve adaptability,

but it weakens transparency, parliamentary scrutiny and Member State involvement. Stronger monitoring and evaluation will therefore be essential, yet the proposed indicators defined at the level of the Common Performance Framework, appear too broad to assess effectiveness, sectoral balance, inclusion outcomes or value for money at programme level.

The adequacy of support is another major concern. Erasmus+ grants increasingly fail to cover actual living, travel and housing costs, especially in expensive cities and for participants with fewer resources. The proposal recognises this issue by allowing more flexible financial support and introducing housing support, but it does not fundamentally reform grant calculation. It also insufficiently addresses support for sending and hosting organisations, project management costs, and the increasing workload of national agencies.

On inclusion, the proposal introduces stronger measures such as national inclusion action plans, and targeted support. Yet it does not translate the EU's 20% participation target for people with fewer opportunities into binding programme-specific targets or measurable benchmarks. It also does not fully address the organisational effort needed to support vulnerable learners.

Administrative complexity remains a barrier, especially for smaller and less experienced organisations. The proposal maintains useful simplification measures such as accreditation, simplified costs and small-scale partnerships, and introduces "very low value grant partnerships". However, the shift from three Key Actions to two pillars is not clearly justified by evidence and may create transitional burdens. The proposal also lacks indicators to measure whether administrative burden is actually reduced, such as time-to-grant or reporting workload.

Overall conclusion

Overall, the proposal increases flexibility and ambition, but does not sufficiently explain how this will improve effectiveness or safeguard accountability. The European Parliament and Council should seek clearer priorities, stronger allocation principles, formal involvement in Annual Work Programmes, more detailed indicators, and better mechanisms to monitor programme implementation. Without these adjustments, there is a risk that the programme becomes broader but less transparent, harder to steer, and less predictable for beneficiaries and implementing bodies.

1. THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF ERASMUS+

This chapter examines the evolution of the Erasmus programme from its launch in 1987 to the current programme period. It looks at how it has developed from a mobility scheme for higher education students into a broader programme covering education, training, youth and sport. The chapter traces the main stages in this development, and for each phase, it looks at the key policy choices, the motivations and the role of the European Parliament in the development of the programme's objectives, (geographical) scope and functioning. The chapter also examines how Erasmus+ has affected participants' sense of European identity and its relationship with national and regional identities.

1.1. 1987–1994: Mobility as an Instrument for European Cooperation

The launch of the Erasmus programme in 1987 was the first large-scale initiative of the European Community to support cross-border student mobility in higher education. The programme was introduced in a political context shaped by the consolidation of the Single Market and growing recognition that deeper economic integration required stronger cooperation in other areas between European countries. At the same time, it was still difficult for students to pursue their interest to study abroad because of the differences between national education systems and the lack of recognition of study periods across borders.

Erasmus aimed to promote student mobility, strengthen cooperation between universities and improve the recognition of study periods completed abroad.¹ These objectives were supported through instruments such as inter-institutional agreements between participating universities and the gradual development of common credit recognition practices, later formalised through the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). The programme combined educational objectives with a broader ambition to strengthen the European dimension of higher education. At this stage, Erasmus remained primarily a mobility instrument rather than a broader education policy tool.

This growing role for European cooperation in education was also shaped by legal and institutional developments. In particular, the *Gravier v City of Liège* judgment by the Court of Justice of the European Communities (1985)² clarified that access to vocational training fell within the scope of Community law and could not be restricted based on nationality. Later treaty reforms reinforced this development.

During this early phase, the European Parliament adopted several resolutions calling for stronger cooperation in higher education and for the development of a European student mobility programme. Its formal powers in education policy were however still limited. Erasmus was launched before the European Community had a clearly defined treaty basis for action in education, which partly explains why institutional roles surrounding the programme were not yet fully defined.³ The programme was established through a Council decision based on a proposal from the European Commission, with the Parliament acting in a consultative capacity. Once launched, programme design and implementation

¹ Council of the European Economic Council (1987). *Council Decision of 15 June 1987 adopting the European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (Erasmus)*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec/1987/327/oj/eng>

² European Court of Justice (1985). *Gravier v City of Liège*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=eli:ECLI:EU:C:1985:69>

³ Corbett, A. (2005). *Universities and the Europe of Knowledge: Ideas, Institutions and Policy Entrepreneurship in European Community. Higher Education Policy 1955–2005*. Palgrave Macmillan.

were mainly carried out by the Commission and national agencies.³ Parliament's influence remained indirect and was exercised mainly through political debate and its role in the EU budgetary process.

In its initial phase, Erasmus focused on higher education mobility and operated with a modest budget. It started with a budget of ECU 85 million for the 1987–1990 period (approximately EUR 222 million in 2025 prices), which increased to ECU 192 million for 1991–1994 (approximately EUR 449 million in 2025 prices). Governance arrangements were relatively simple and implementation was largely decentralised. The European Commission defined priorities and allocated budgets, while national agencies managed calls for proposals, selected beneficiaries and distributed grants. Monitoring focused mainly on participation, institutional involvement and financial implementation.

Despite its modest budget and narrow focus, the programme succeeded in establishing student mobility as a structural element of European higher education and developed strong recognition across the Union. It also supported sustained cooperation between universities across borders, including the development of mobility networks and shared practices for recognising study periods abroad. These developments helped lay the foundation for later initiatives aimed at improving the compatibility and transparency of European higher education systems, including the Bologna Process launched in 1999.

1.2. 1995–2006: Sectoral Expansion under the Lisbon strategy

Building on the success of the Erasmus programme, the Maastricht Treaty introduced, for the first time, a clear legal basis for EU action in education, thereby also giving Parliament and the Council a role as co-legislator. Article 126 of the Treaty establishing the European Community (now Article 165 TFEU) set out a framework for European cooperation in education, while explicitly preserving Member State responsibility for the organisation and content of education systems.⁴ This provided an institutional basis to expand EU initiatives.

Within this new context, the European Union launched broader programme frameworks in 1995: the Socrates programme for education and the Leonardo da Vinci programme for vocational education and training.⁵ Erasmus, which had been established in 1987 as a standalone programme focusing only on higher education mobility, was integrated into Socrates as one of its main actions. Other Socrates-actions targeted different parts of the education system, including school education (Comenius), language learning and other forms of educational cooperation. In the later Socrates II programme (2000–2006), cooperation and mobility in adult education was supported through the Grundtvig action. Together with the Leonardo da Vinci programme, and the Youth programme which supported non-formal learning and exchanges outside of formal education, cooperation was extended across a wider range of sectors.⁶

The role of the European Parliament at this time was that of a co-legislator alongside the Council, helping in the adoption of the individual programmes. This gave Parliament influence over the objectives, scope and budget of each of the three programmes, within what was still a fragmented structure of separate initiatives. Also, within the Socrates programme its strategic role was still rather

⁴ European Union (1992). *Treaty on European Union (Maastricht Treaty)*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/treaty-of-maastricht-on-european-union.html>

⁵ Council of the European Union (1995). *Decision No 819/95/EC establishing the Socrates programme; Council Decision 94/819/EC establishing the Leonardo da Vinci programme*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec/1995/819/oj/eng>

⁶ Council of the European Union (2002). *Detailed work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of Education and training systems in Europe*. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/2d17e529-6c81-4b85-8d19-e9dbe65a93c0>

limited compared to later programmes, as sectoral actions (school education, higher education and adult education) were shaped individually rather than within a single integrated framework.

The objectives of the cooperation in education and training also broadened significantly during this period. Education became more closely linked to wider economic and social objectives, especially after the adoption of the Lisbon Strategy in 2000.⁷ Lifelong learning, employability, labour market adaptability, social inclusion and active citizenship became central themes. At the same time, the EU strengthened coordination between Member States through the Open Method of Coordination, which introduced common objectives, indicators, benchmarks and peer learning activities. The financial scale of EU programmes also increased as cooperation expanded. The Youth programme (2000–2006), for example, had a budget of EUR 520 million in 2000 prices (around EUR 885 million in 2025 prices). Socrates II operated with a budget of EUR 1.85 billion in 2000 prices (around EUR 3.15 billion in 2025 prices), while Leonardo da Vinci II had a budget of EUR 1.15 billion (around EUR 1.95 billion in 2025 prices). This growth reflected both the broader scope of activities and the growing number of participants.⁸

Despite the expansion in objectives and funding, the programme architecture remained largely segmented. Each of the three programmes (Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci and Youth) operated under its own legal basis, governance arrangements, type of activities, and funding mechanisms. Selection procedures, action types and reporting requirements differed across sectors. Although coordination was encouraged at policy level, no integrated programme framework existed.⁹ Monitoring systems also remained largely activity-based, focusing on participation, partnerships and budget implementation.¹⁰

The main achievement of this period was the extension of EU cooperation across multiple education and youth sectors. At the same time, the coexistence of separate programmes created new challenges. Fragmentation reduced overall coherence and visibility, and cooperation across sectors remained difficult because programmes operated under different rules and funding arrangements. As policy objectives increasingly converged across sectors, pressure grew to bring these initiatives together in a more integrated programme framework in later periods.¹¹

1.3. 2007–2013: The Lifelong Learning Programme

The sectoral approach developed in earlier stages led to a fragmented programme landscape, which the European Union sought to address through the introduction of the Lifelong Learning Programme

⁷ European Council (2000). *Lisbon European Council 23 and 24 March 2000: Presidency conclusions*. <https://dorie.ec.europa.eu/en/details/-/card/340747>

⁸ European Commission. *Final evaluation of the Youth programme (2000–2006)* (2009); *Final evaluation of the second phase of the Socrates programme (2000–2006)* (2007); *Final evaluation of the Leonardo da Vinci II programme* (2010). <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2008:0398:FIN:EN:PDF>

⁹ European Commission (2009). *Final report on the implementation and impact of the second phase (2000–2006) of the Community action programmes in the field of education (Socrates) and vocational training (Leonardo da Vinci) and the multiannual programme (2004–2006) for the effective integration of information and communication technologies (ICT) in education and training systems in Europe (eLearning)*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2009:0159:FIN:EN:PDF>

¹⁰ Council of the European Union (2009). *Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020)*. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=oj:JOC_2009_119_R_0002_01

¹¹ European Commission. (2004). Communication from the Commission: The new generation of Community education and training programmes after 2006 (COM(2004) 156 final). <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52004DC0156>; European Commission (2004). *Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing an integrated action programme in the field of lifelong learning*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52004PC0474>

(LLP) in 2007.¹² The LLP brought existing initiatives together under a single framework while keeping the recognisable sectoral strands. It included four sub-programmes: Comenius for school education, Erasmus for higher education, Leonardo da Vinci for vocational education and training, and Grundtvig for adult learning. At the same time, youth policy continued to operate through a separate programme, Youth in Action (2007–2013), focusing on non-formal learning, exchanges and civic engagement.

The objectives of the LLP reflected the broader policy set by the Lisbon Strategy and during this period, lifelong learning became a central concept in European education policy. The programme linked different education sectors to wider economic and social objectives, and aimed to make learning and mobility more accessible, improve the quality and efficiency of education systems and strengthen cooperation.

At governance level, the LLP was based on a single legal basis and a common budget covering education and training activities. The European Parliament acted as co-legislator, contributing to the definition of the programme's objectives, structure and financial envelope alongside the Council. Sectoral differentiation was maintained through the four sub-programmes, and the existence of transversal actions supported policy development, dissemination and cooperation across sectors. Developments outside EU programmes also supported greater cooperation. In particular, the Bologna Process, launched in 1999, promoted the creation of the European Higher Education Area and increased transparency and compatibility between national systems.¹³ Instruments like qualifications frameworks, the ECTS and quality assurance frameworks supported cooperation between institutions and reinforced mobility objectives.

The LLP achieved high implementation efficiency in terms of budget execution and programme management. Participation expanded across sectors, and demand for mobility and cooperation projects consistently exceeded available funding. The programme operated with a total budget of EUR 6.9 billion (approximately EUR 10.33 billion in 2025 prices). Between 2007 and 2010 alone, nearly 1.3 million learners and staff received mobility grants, and approximately 45,000 inter-institutional contracts were managed each year.¹⁴

Although the LLP brought together multiple sectors into an overarching framework, it maintained clear sectoral strands in sub-programmes. Each sub-programme continued to target specific groups and used different formats, which limited the potential for joint courses between high schools and universities, teacher exchanges, or other forms of cooperation across different sectors. The wide range of objectives reflected the broad policy agenda, but also increased administrative complexity and sometimes reduced the strategic focus. Monitoring at programme level focused mainly on participation, contracts and financial implementation rather than on measurable structural change.¹³ At the same time, most data were generated through project-level reporting, which provided detailed information on activities and outputs but made it more difficult to assess wider programme impact.

1.4. Erasmus+ 2014–2020: Functional Integration and Output Orientation

The Lifelong Learning Programme had already reduced fragmentation by bringing earlier programmes under a single legal framework. However, cooperation across sectors remained largely limited, as it was

¹² Council of the European Union (2006). *Decision No 1720/2006/EC establishing the Lifelong Learning Programme*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec/2006/1720/oj/eng>

¹³ European Commission (2018). *The European Higher Education Area in 2012: Bologna Process Implementation Report*. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/2fe152b6-5efe-11e8-ab9c-01aa75ed71a1/>

¹⁴ European Commission (2014). *Interim evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme 2007–2013*. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10317-2011-INIT/en/pdf>

organised through separate programme strands. Erasmus+ aimed to address this by introducing a more integrated programme structure, organised by function rather than by sector.

For the 2014–2020 period, the previous programmes, including the Lifelong Learning Programme and Youth in Action, were combined into a single structure. This was organised around three Key Actions: learning mobility, cooperation for innovation and exchange of good practices, and support for policy reform.¹⁵ Sport was also introduced as a new area of EU cooperation. The objectives of Erasmus+ reflected the priorities of the Europe 2020 strategy, with a focus on skills development, employability, innovation, social inclusion and European values.¹⁶ The programme had a budget of EUR 14.8 billion plus EUR 1.68 billion from external instruments in 2014 prices (EUR 20.83 billion in 2025 prices).¹⁷

Compared to earlier programmes, the Key Action structure marked a shift in programme design. Activities were no longer organised mainly by sector, but by function. Mobility was grouped under Key Action 1, cooperation projects under Key Action 2 and policy support under Key Action 3. This approach aimed to simplify the programme architecture, encourage cooperation across sectors and allow more flexible programme implementation. At the same time, however, sectoral budgets remained largely ringfenced, resulting in a matrix structure in which cross-sectoral cooperation was encouraged in principle, but constrained in practice by the underlying budgetary structure.¹⁸

Another important development was the expansion of the programme's geographical scope. Before Erasmus+, separate initiatives such as Erasmus Mundus and Tempus supported cooperation with countries outside the EU, but these activities remained institutionally distinct from the main education and training programmes and had limited influence on their internal structure and priorities.¹⁹ Erasmus+ brought these strands together within a single framework and introduced a more structured approach to participation by non-EU countries. It now distinguished between "programme countries", which participate fully across all actions of Erasmus+, and "partner countries", which can take part in selected activities (mostly international mobility and cooperation projects). All EU countries are programme countries, as are third countries that have an association agreement with the European Union. Third countries which are programme countries are required to contribute financially to the programme and to establish implementation structures comparable to those in EU Member States, including national agencies responsible for programme delivery. This distinction allows for different levels of integration into the programme for non-EU members, while maintaining the option for partner countries to have limited participation in Erasmus+.

The introduction of Erasmus+ took place in a context in which the European Parliament already had a stronger role in shaping EU education programmes. It contributed as co-legislator to the programmes' objectives, scope and overall structure. Its role in implementation is by definition more limited, with yearly priorities and the allocation of funding set across Key Actions through Annual Work Programmes.

¹⁵ Council of the European Union (2013). *Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 establishing Erasmus+*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2013/1288/oj/eng>

¹⁶ European Commission (2010). *Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52010DC2020>

¹⁷ European Commission (2025). *Report on the interim evaluation of the 2021–2027 Erasmus+ programme and the final evaluation of the 2014–2020 Erasmus+ programme*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52025SC0186>

¹⁸ Idem.

¹⁹ European Parliament and European Council (2008): *Decision No 1298/2008/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2008 establishing the Erasmus Mundus 2009–2013 action programme for the enhancement of quality in higher education and the promotion of intercultural understanding through cooperation with third countries*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec/2008/1298/oj/eng>

These were adopted in the programme committee chaired by the Commission through implementing acts, involving structured procedures with Member States.

Another important development was a stronger focus on results and impacts. Cooperation projects, particularly under Key Action 2, were expected to define outputs, as well as expected results in advance and demonstrate their approach to dissemination and towards reaching impact.²⁰ While understandable as attempt to strengthen transparency and the result orientation of the Fund, this also increased reporting requirements for beneficiaries. At the same time, this did manage to shift programme-level monitoring indicators towards measuring results and impacts²¹.

A particular challenge was to demonstrate the system-level impact of cooperation projects (Key Action 2 (KA2)). Many cooperation projects were small and context-specific and did not have a broader frame of reference against which their possible (contribution to) wider impacts could be assessed.²² Monitoring remained largely based on project-level data and was not systematically linked to indicators of national policy change. As a result, evidence of impact remained strongest in higher education mobility, which by definition lends itself better for a more quantitative analysis of possible impacts, on students, staff and institutions. For other parts of the programme the focus on project-level data did not allow meaningful aggregations or comparisons due to their largely qualitative nature.

1.5. The current Erasmus+ programme (2021–2027)

Building on the programme architecture introduced in 2014, the current Erasmus+ programme for the period 2021–2027 represents the latest stage in the evolution of EU cooperation in education, training, youth and sport. The Key Action structure introduced in 2014 has been maintained, but the programme period now places greater emphasis on four horizontal priorities. These being inclusion and diversity, digital transformation, environmental sustainability and participation in democratic life. These priorities are integrated across all programme actions rather than addressed through separate initiatives.

The financial scale of the programme has increased compared to the previous period. The initial financial envelope amounts to EUR 21.71 billion in 2018 prices (around EUR 26.55 billion in 2025 prices). However, this increase is more limited than the expansion observed in earlier programme periods. Volunteering activities, which were previously part of the Erasmus+ Youth strand, through the European Voluntary Service, were later reorganised under the European Solidarity Corps (ESC), which became a stand-alone programme with its own legal basis and budget under the Multiannual Financial Framework. As a result, the 2021–2027 Erasmus+ programme no longer finances these activities.

The governance structure remains largely unchanged compared to the previous programme period. The European Parliament and Council define the legal framework, objectives and financial envelope through the legislative process. Parliament contributes to setting the overall policy direction and embedding political priorities in the programme's basic act. Operational priorities are proposed by the European Commission and adopted by the Member States through the programme committee (comitology). These work programmes set yearly priorities and guide the allocation of funding across programme actions.

²⁰ European Commission (2018). *Mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme (2014–2020)*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2018:050:FIN>

²¹ See for instance Vroonhof, P, van der Graaf, A & Buiskool, B (2018), [Research for CULT Committee – Erasmus+: Towards a New Programme Generation](#), European Parliament, Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies, Brussels.

²² European Court of Auditors (2018). *Special Report Mobility under Erasmus+: Millions of participants and multi-faceted European Added Value, however performance measurement needs to be further improved*. https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/publications?ref=SR18_22

The programme's governance structure was significantly stress-tested during several major crises in the current period. The COVID-19 pandemic, which began shortly before the launch of the 2021–2027 programme, disrupted international mobility and significantly affected the implementation of programme activities. Later, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine created issues for Ukrainian students who were directly affected by the war and for other students because of the resulting inflation of travel and living costs of mobility activities.

In both instances, exceptional measures were introduced to ensure continuity of the programme. During the pandemic, mobility rules were temporarily adapted to allow greater flexibility in the organisation of activities, with the introduction of blended mobility formats and changes to eligibility conditions. Reduced mobility levels caused by the pandemic initially led to delays in spending, but these funds were subsequently reallocated within the programme to support recovery and continued participation. In response to rising costs, grant levels and financial parameters were adjusted to maintain accessibility. Targeted support was mobilised for participants directly affected by the war in Ukraine, within the margins of the existing MFF. These adaptations were made within the existing governance structure, mainly through Annual Work Programmes, the annual budgetary procedure and adjustments to implementation rules.

1.6. Impact of Erasmus+ on European Identity

Over nearly four decades, Erasmus and the programmes that later evolved into Erasmus+ have given more than 18 million Europeans the opportunity to study, train, work and volunteer abroad.²³ In 2024 alone, the programme supported almost 1.5 million mobilities, through over 34,400 projects involving over 85,600 organisations across Europe.²⁴ These activities have generated a wide range of measurable effects across education systems, labour markets and society. Among these, the programme's contribution to the development of a European identity has become increasingly prominent over time.

In its early phases, European identity was not an explicit policy objective of the programme. The focus was primarily on higher education mobility, with identity formation emerging as a secondary effect of cross-border exchange. Since the introduction of the Erasmus+ programme period for 2014 – 2020, civic participation and shared values have become more explicitly embedded in the programme's objectives. This is reflected in the expansion of activities to youth, school education and volunteering, as well as in the introduction of horizontal priorities related to participation in democratic life and common values.

Empirical evidence consistently shows that participation in Erasmus+ is associated with a stronger sense of European identity. The Erasmus+ Higher Education Impact Study (2019) finds that a large majority of participants, often reported as over 80%, experiences a stronger sense of belonging to Europe following their mobility period.²⁵ Other surveys point in the same direction. For example, in a more recent Erasmus Student Network (ESN) survey using a pre- and post-test design, students reported a stronger sense of belonging to Europe and the EU after their mobility experience, with identification with the EU increasing from 3.81 to 4.01 on a five-point scale.²⁶ Mobility participants also showed a high intention to vote in the 2024 European elections (76%), which is significantly higher than the 41% reported for young people in the European Parliament Eurobarometer.²⁶ This suggests that

²³ Erasmus+ (2026). *Programme level overview of project data*. <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/resources-and-tools/factsheets-statistics-evaluations/statistics/data/overview> (consulted on March 24, 2026).

²⁴ European Commission (2025). *Erasmus+ annual report 2024*. <https://op.europa.eu/publication-detail/-/publication/eb9511a3-c05a-11f0-a612-01aa75ed71a1>

²⁵ Erasmus Student Network (ESN) (2024). *Participation in learning mobility as a driving force to change the European Union*. ESN.

²⁶ European Parliament Eurobarometer, EB 101.1, Spring 2024.

international mobility can foster active citizenship and greater engagement with European democratic processes. In addition, students identified exchange opportunities, freedom of movement, and Europe's global role among their key policy priorities, underlining the broader civic and political impact of mobility experiences. This is further supported by more recent evaluation evidence involving broader groups of participants across sectors, such as the interim evaluation of the 2021–2027 programme. It shows that participation is associated with a stronger sense of EU citizenship and more positive attitudes towards the EU, with 52% of participants reporting that they feel 'European' compared to 42% of non-participants. These effects are often linked to added intercultural awareness, language acquisition and cross-border experiences.²⁷

The relationship between mobility and identity formation can be further understood by examining the underlying mechanisms through which these effects occur. A substantial body of literature suggests that European identity develops primarily through processes of social interaction and interpersonal contact. Drawing on theories of intergroup contact, Mitchell (2012) shows that participation in Erasmus fosters more positive attitudes towards Europe through direct engagement with peers from different national backgrounds.²⁸ Similarly, Van Mol (2013) finds that it is not mobility per se, but the intensity and quality of social interaction during the exchange that drives identity formation.²⁹ Participants who engage more actively in transnational networks tend to report stronger European identification. At the same time, research indicates that these interactions often take place within international student communities rather than with local populations, which may shape the nature of the identity that emerges.³⁰ This suggests that the development of European identity is contingent on the depth and diversity of social experiences during mobility, rather than being an automatic outcome of participation.

The strength of these effects also varies across participant groups and programme components. Much of the most robust evidence is derived from higher education mobility, where participants typically engage in longer-term and more immersive experiences. In such contexts, sustained interaction and exposure to different academic and social environments create favourable conditions for identity formation.³¹ By contrast, other strands of Erasmus+, including vocational education and training, school education and youth exchanges, tend to involve shorter and more heterogeneous formats. As a result, identity-related outcomes are more variable and less systematically measured.

Available evidence points to comparable patterns. In the youth field, data from the Research-based Analysis of Erasmus+ Youth in Action (RAY) network show that 92% of participants report improved ability to engage with people from different cultural backgrounds, while 88% report improved communication with people speaking other languages and 76% indicate a greater appreciation of cultural diversity. In addition, participation is associated with stronger civic engagement and European belonging: 54% of participants report increased engagement in civil society, and a substantial share indicate a stronger sense of closeness to Europe following participation.³² These findings are consistent

²⁷ RAY Network (2024). Factsheet: Erasmus+ Youth and European identity. https://www.researchyouth.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/RAY_Thematic-Factsheets_06_European-Identity_20241028.pdf

²⁸ Mitchell, K. (2012). *Student mobility and European identity: Erasmus study as a civic experience?* Journal of Contemporary European Research, 8(4), 490–518.

²⁹ Mol, C. (2013). Intra-European student mobility and European identity: A successful marriage? *Population, Space and Place*, 19(2), 209–222.

³⁰ Goksu, F. (2020). Intercultural mobility and European identity: Impact of the Erasmus programme. & Mitchell, K. (2015). Rethinking the Erasmus effect on European identity. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 53(2), 330–348.

³¹ Mitchell, K. (2012). *Student mobility and European identity: Erasmus study as a civic experience?* Journal of Contemporary European Research, 8(4), 490–518.

³² RAY Network. (2024). Factsheet: Erasmus+ youth and European identity. https://www.researchyouth.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/RAY_Thematic-Factsheets_06_European-Identity_20241028.pdf

with earlier research identifying EU education and mobility programmes, including Erasmus+ and its predecessors, as among the most effective instruments for fostering European identity and a sense of belonging to the Union.³³

Comparative evidence across strands remains limited, but existing studies suggest that differences in duration, structure and learning context play an important role in shaping the extent to which participants develop a sense of European belonging.³⁴ In addition, the effects of mobility may differ depending on participant roles, with staff mobility and youth work activities generating more indirect or diffuse impacts, for instance through institutional change or community-level engagement.

At the same time, evidence suggests that the development of European identity through Erasmus+ does not come at the expense of national or regional identities. Empirical studies indicate that participants tend to develop a stronger sense of European belonging while maintaining, or even reinforcing, their attachment to national contexts. Sigalas (2010) finds that cross-border mobility is associated with increased European identification without a corresponding decline in national identity.³⁵ Similarly, Mitchell (2012) finds that international mobility reinforces existing identities while increasing reflexivity towards them. European identity therefore emerges as an additional layer of belonging, coexisting with national and regional identities rather than replacing them.³⁶

Despite these measurable effects, the role of European identity within the programme remains only partially operationalised. While it has become a more explicit objective, it is not consistently translated into clearly defined outcomes, indicators or monitoring frameworks across programme actions. As a result, identity-related impacts are primarily captured through self-reported perceptions rather than embedded in a structured framework for programme evaluation.

1.7. Structural development and remaining challenges

The evolution of the programme that now forms Erasmus+ can be understood as a gradual expansion of scope combined with repeated efforts to address limitations of earlier programme designs. As described, this process has contributed to a wide range of benefits. At the same time, the gradual expansion (as highlighted in Table 1) has shaped the historical structure of the programme. The shift from higher education mobility to multiple sectoral programmes addressed the limited scope of the original Erasmus scheme. The introduction of the Lifelong Learning Programme responded to the coexistence of separate sectoral programmes, while the creation of Erasmus+ aimed to overcome continued separation between programme strands. The current programme, in turn, made efforts to add focus on horizontal priorities (inclusion and diversity, digital transformation, environmental sustainability and participation in democratic life) in all aspects of the programme.

While the historical reforms improved certain aspects of programme design, they did not fully resolve structural tensions that have developed over time. These tensions relate to increasing programme complexity, the growing gap between policy ambitions and measurable impact, and the balance

³³ Stroeker, N., van der Graaf, A., & Buiskool, B.-J. (2014). *Communicating 'Europe' to its citizens: State of affairs and prospects*. European Parliament, Directorate-General for Internal Policies, Policy Department B: Structural and Cohesion Policies.

³⁴ Cojocaru, M. G. (2020). *Erasmus mobilities and European identity: A literature review*. *European Journal of Education*, 55(1), 56–69.

³⁵ Sigalas, E. (2010). *Cross-border mobility and European identity: The effectiveness of intergroup contact during the Erasmus year abroad*. *European Union Politics*, 11(2), 241–265.

³⁶ Mitchell, K. (2012). *Student mobility and European identity: Erasmus study as a civic experience?* *Journal of Contemporary European Research*, 8(4), 490–518.

between legislative steering and programme implementation. The main issues, as well as the policy proposals aiming to address these, are further examined in the following chapters.

Table 1: Main programmes in the historical development of Erasmus+

Period	Programme	Cost (in ECU/EUR million, current prices)	Cost (in EUR million, 2025 prices) ³⁷
1987 – 1990	Erasmus I	85.0	–
1990 – 1994	Erasmus II	192.0	–
1995 – 1999	Socrates I	850.0	1 587.6
	Leonardo da Vinci I	620.0	1 158.0
2000 – 2006	Socrates II	1 850.0	3 110.3
	Leonardo da Vinci II	1 150.0	1 933.4
	Youth programme	520.0	874.2
2007 – 2013	Lifelong Learning Programme	6 970.0	10 049.0
	Youth in Action	885.0	1 276.0
2014 – 2020	Erasmus+ (core MFF)	14 774.0	19 320.0
	Erasmus+ external action instruments	1.7	2.2
2021 – 2027	Erasmus+ (core MFF)	24 574.0	25 178.3
	Additional top-up ³⁸	1 700.0	2 181.7
	Erasmus+ external action instruments	2 200.0	2 254.1

For comparability, programme envelopes were converted into 2025 prices using HICP inflation indices (Eurostat, [prc_hicp_ainr](#)) and the midpoint year of each programming period as reference. This provides an approximate indication of relative funding levels across periods. No comparative HICP data exist prior to 1997.

³⁷ Comparisons across programming periods should be interpreted with caution, as EU programme structures, scope, accounting methods, and the use of current versus constant prices differ between periods.

³⁸ Additional Erasmus+ appropriations from the MFF programme reinforcement mechanism (Annex II of Regulation 2020/2093), expressed in 2018 prices.

2. REVIEWING THE ERASMUS+ PROPOSAL

On 16 July 2025, as part of a legislative package for programmes under the 2028–2034 MFF, the European Commission proposed a regulation establishing the 2028–2034 Erasmus+ programme. This new programme is intended to replace the Erasmus+ and ESC programmes from 2021–2027. The proposal comes at a moment when Erasmus+ has grown beyond its original focus on student mobility and occupies an increasingly broad role within the Union’s policy agenda. The Commission proposal reflects this evolution and proposes Erasmus+ to cover action on education and training, youth, and sport, but also seeks to position Erasmus+ as a multi-purpose policy instrument expected to respond to a growing range of political and economic priorities, in addition to promoting high-quality lifelong learning, developing life and employability skills and key competences for all, fully aligned with the ambition in the *Union of Skills* Communication.³⁹ The following major changes to Erasmus+ can be identified in comparison with the regulation governing the current programme.

- The Commission proposal for the new Erasmus+ broadens the scope to include the European Solidarity Corps (ESC), including volunteering in support of humanitarian aid operations.
- An overall indicative financial envelope for the new combined fund is proposed of €36.2 billion in 2025 prices (€40.8 billion in current prices), excluding possible additional contributions from external action instruments. No detailed allocations per policy field or action are foreseen.
- Changes to the programme architecture include restructuring the fund into two pillars ‘Learning opportunities for all’ and ‘Capacity building support’, which the Commission justifies as allowing greater flexibility in the allocation of resources and stronger alignment with wider Union priorities.
- New targeted measures are introduced towards strategic educational fields, as well as new tools to reach out to a broader range of participants with fewer opportunities. For this purpose, the proposal includes a dedicated chapter on inclusion and diversity, building on its predecessor that also incorporated a chapter on inclusion.
- In terms of governance, it is noteworthy that the proposal does not mention advisory comitology procedures for the adoption of Annual Work Programmes through implementing acts.
- Alongside these structural and governance changes, the proposal emphasises simplification through streamlined management arrangements, wider use of simplified cost options, and reduced administrative burden for beneficiaries.
- In addition to these issues, other elements of the proposal include the participation of third countries, the role of national agencies, and more specific provisions regarding communication, management and audit that are not explored in detail in this report.⁴⁰

These changes are presented in the following sections against the background of how the programme has evolved over time, with each section providing an initial analysis of the extent to which the Commission proposal responds to 5 identified issues:

- Linking broader ambitions to budgetary realities (Section 2.1)
- Balancing flexibility with governance and oversight in Erasmus+ (Section 2.2)
- Adequacy of support (Section 2.3)
- Inclusion and unequal participation (Section 2.4)
- Administrative complexity (Section 2.5)

³⁹ Council of the European Union (2025), *Council Recommendation on the Union of Skills*. Brussels: Council of the European Union.

⁴⁰ European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS). (2026). *A reworked Erasmus+ for 2028–2034* (Briefing No. PE 782.658). European Parliament.
[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2026/782658/EPRS_BRI\(2026\)782658_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2026/782658/EPRS_BRI(2026)782658_EN.pdf)

2.1. Linking broader ambitions to budgetary realities

2.1.1. Evolution of the issue

A structural tension in Erasmus+ concerns the **gap between the programme's political ambitions and its operational capacity**. The programme is expected to reach a growing number of participants and contribute to an expanding set of policy priorities (see chapter 1) but remains constrained by its budget and capacities.

Education mobility has attracted substantial political attention over the last decades, for instance formalised in ambitious mobility targets.⁴¹ According to these targets, **at least 23% of higher education graduates should have the opportunity to experience a study or training period abroad by 2030, while for VET students, a lower benchmark of 12% was set**. These targets are not met in practice: in higher education only around 11.0% of graduates are currently able to experience mobility during their studies,⁴² while in VET this remains around 5.3%.⁴³ No mobility objectives are set for the other sectors.

Erasmus+ is the key mobility programme at EU level, and while it has the potential to contribute to such targets (it aims to support mobilities of 10 million individuals in 2021–2027),⁴⁴ the size of its budget means that the programme alone cannot be expected to come even close to meeting the targets established by the above-mentioned recommendation. **Demand for funding has consistently exceeded available resources**, not only for KA1 mobility for staff and learners, but also for cooperation between organisations (KA2) and support for policy development (KA3). The immediate result is limited success rates for applications, when organisations often invest considerable time and resources in preparing applications only to be rejected. This comes at a cost for applicants and programme administrators.⁴⁵

While the programme's budget has increased over successive programming periods, both in nominal and in real terms (see section 1.7), **the imbalance between available funding and the programme's ambitions remains unresolved**. This is partly due to the accompanying expansion in the programme's objectives and scope. In fact, in addition to the original ambition to support mobility and cooperation, the objectives of Erasmus+ have evolved to cover priorities such as inclusion, skills development and democratic participation, all of which have also widened the scope and the pool of potential participants.

The current programming period already foresees **synergies with other funds** (such as ESF+) to partly help address this funding gap (see article 3(5)). Specifically, Article 26 of the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) 560 and Article 17(8) of the Erasmus+ Regulation 2021–2027, allows Member States to transfer funds from ESF+ or ERDF to Erasmus+. This allows the resources to be managed under a single set of Erasmus+ rules, providing substantial simplification. However, such mechanisms have not

⁴¹ Council of the European Union. (2024). Council Recommendation "Europe on the Move" – learning mobility opportunities for everyone. Official Journal of the European Union.

https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C_202403364

⁴² European Commission (2020). *The European Higher Education Area in 2020*.

https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-06/ehea_bologna_2020_chapter05_0.pdf

⁴³ European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture. (2025). Education and training monitor 2025: comparative report. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/30c1ccaa-bfdd-11f0-a612-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

⁴⁴ European Commission (2021), *Erasmus+ 2021–2027 – Enriching lives, opening minds through the EU programme for education, training, youth and sport*, Publications Office of the European Union.

⁴⁵ European Commission (2025). *Report on the interim evaluation of the 2021–2027 Erasmus+ programme and the final evaluation of the 2014–2020 Erasmus+ programme*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52025SC0186>

been widely used so far. Only Germany was mentioned as example in the mid-term evaluation of the current Erasmus+ programme, transferring money to support higher education mobility for students with fewer opportunities. Another possibility for creating synergy was the "Seal of Excellence", that is made possible by the Common Provisions Regulation (Article 73(4)) and in the Erasmus+ Regulation (Article 32). This allows that high-quality Erasmus+ proposals which cannot be funded due to budget constraints can receive a "Seal of Excellence", making them eligible for alternative funding from ESF+ or ERDF. However, the evaluation of the current programme (2021-2027) found low awareness of this mechanism among stakeholders. The Commission's impact assessment explains the low uptake by drawing attention to insufficient coordination among national contact points at national level, as well as a lack of common operational frameworks – with aligned criteria, funding rules, and implementing tools, at EU level. According to the mid-term evaluation of the current Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027, there were national synergy examples, but most of them rely on budget separation. This forces organizations to follow two sets of different funding and reporting rules, which is burdensome for both agencies and beneficiaries.⁴⁶

The result is a **persistent mismatch between the programme's objectives and available resources**. Policy ambitions have expanded over time, both in terms of the scale of participation and the range of objectives the programme is expected to address, but the programme's budget has not grown at the required pace to keep up. This results in a gap between what the programme is expected to deliver and what it can achieve in practice.

2.1.2. Review of the Commission proposal

In the new proposal, the key response to growing demands and increasing expectations is to **raise the programme budget**. The indicative financial envelope for the new combined fund of Erasmus+ and ESC is proposed at €36.2 billion in 2025 prices (€40.8 billion in current prices), excluding possible additional contributions from external action instruments. This represents a **27% increase compared to the current programming period (2021 – 2027)**, where Erasmus+ and ESC have a combined allocation of EUR 28.4 billion in 2025 prices (see Chapter 1.7).⁴⁷ However, the proposed MFF regulation for 2028-2034 no longer guarantees that programmes such as Erasmus+ will benefit from revenues stemming from EU competition fines, as provided for in Article 5 of the current MFF Regulation. Instead, these resources would be channelled through a broader flexibility instrument rather than earmarked for specific programmes, as set out in Annex II of the current MFF regulation.^{48, 49}

The **proposal also repropose possible synergies with other EU instruments (such as ESF+, the European Competitiveness Fund and Horizon Europe)**, placing greater emphasis on combined and cumulative funding, interoperability of digital systems, alignment with shared strategic priorities and operational flexibility through Annual Work Programmes. However, the extent to which these synergies would succeed in practice or how this could guarantee more attention to education mobility more generally is not specified.

⁴⁶ Idem.

⁴⁷ This includes the top-up of EUR 1.7 billion as foreseen in Article 5 of Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2020/2093, Annex II, but excludes additional contributions from external action instruments. The budget for ESC in 2021-2027 is EUR 1.0 billion.

⁴⁸ European Commission. (2025). *Proposal for a Council regulation laying down the multiannual financial framework for the years 2028 to 2034* (COM(2025) 571 final). European Commission. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52025PC0571&qid=1753801194712>

⁴⁹ Council of the European Union. (2020). *Council Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2020/2093 of 17 December 2020 laying down the multiannual financial framework for the years 2021 to 2027* (OJ L 433I, 22 December 2020, pp. 11–22). EUR-Lex. <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2020/2093/oj>

At the same time, as already indicated, **the proposed financial increase is accompanied by a further expansion of the programme's scope and objectives**. The proposal includes new instruments, e.g. a scholarship scheme, which would further broaden the range of supported activities and may require higher levels of funding per participant. It also introduces the possibility of full or partial association of third countries, which could impact the programme's geographical scope. However, it remains unclear how the new status of 'partial association' would affect the programme's budget and what 'partially associated' countries would contribute to the programme. As a result, the additional resources risk being offset by these novelties. The European Parliament acknowledged these constraints in its recent resolution on the MFF proposals, calling for a reinforcement of the Erasmus+ budget to €47.39 billion in current prices (equivalent to approximately €42 billion in 2025 constant prices).⁵⁰

Consequently, the **proposal does not seem to fully address the current tension between the programme's ambitions and its capacity** to deliver effectively. If the programme does not receive necessary resources to handle expanding participation, new activities and a wider range of policy objectives, the alternative is to clarify priorities and establish limits. A more sustainable response may require clearer strategic choices made in advance, for example through more explicit targets for individual mobilities or a more precise definition of the scope of additional measures envisaged under the programme.

Because of the current mismatch between ambitions and the size of the budget, **several national agencies have advocated greater possibilities to reallocate resources between programme components** to reduce situations in which one sector does not fully spend its budget while another faces persistent oversubscription. During the public consultation referred to in the preparatory impact assessment underpinning the new proposal, some stakeholders also called for additional flexibility to adapt to new and unforeseen developments.⁵¹

In response, the **European Commission proposes removing earmarking between education sectors and actions in the new programme altogether, as well as between directly (European Commission) and indirectly (national agencies) managed funds**. The proposed budget structure significantly reduces the granularity of budget lines, distinguishing only between education on the one hand and youth and sport on the other, without further differentiation by education sector. While this approach would increase the Commission's flexibility to redefine the programme's priorities through Annual Work Programmes, it also reduces the ability of the co-legislators to steer the programme ex ante, and it may weaken transparency and oversight regarding how funding is distributed across sectors at EU level.

Despite the desire for greater flexibility in shifting budgets between sectors and actions and in responding to emerging needs, the mid-term evaluation concluded that **Erasmus+ 2021–2027 had already demonstrated considerable flexibility and resilience** in responding to major external challenges. At the same time, national agencies were able to reallocate budgets between Key Actions (KAs) and sectoral fields within a framework that also maintained overall strategic direction and accountability.⁵² The mid-term evaluation furthermore highlighted the importance of stability and continuity in the programme's structure and management as key factors for its success and efficient

⁵⁰ European Parliament resolution of 28 April 2026 on the proposal for a Council regulation laying down the Multiannual Financial Framework for the years 2028 to 2034 (COM(2025)0571 – [C10-0000/2025 – 2025/0571R\(APP\)](#))

⁵¹ This is the main point the European Commission makes in its Impact assessment report (SWD (2025), 550 final), for instance on page 14.

⁵² European Commission (2025). *Support study for the Erasmus+ 2021–2027 interim evaluation and the Erasmus+ 2014–2020 final evaluation*. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/ccca2cf61-6099-11f0-a9d0-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

delivery across different programming periods. This finding was also confirmed by national evaluations. Unpredictable budget allocations and administrative changes can undermine the sustainability of internationalisation efforts, particularly for smaller organisations.⁵³

2.1.3. Recommendations

Within the tension between ambition and resources, the proposal reveals a complementary tension that between **expanding ambitions and maintaining a clear strategic focus**. While an increased budget and greater implementation flexibility may strengthen the Commission's capacity to respond to new priorities or sudden changes in demand, the broader scope and reduced earmarking also risk diluting transparency and limiting the ability to steer and monitor the programme effectively. The extent to which additional resources will be sufficient, therefore, depends not only on the size of the budget increase, but also on clearer prioritisation of objectives and choices about how the programme's resources will be allocated in practice. This calls for more clarity at this stage of the legislative process, as the adoption of the programme regulation represents the principal moment at which the European Parliament and Council can define strategic priorities and funding structures *ex ante*. Once the programme architecture is established, the ability of the co-legislators to influence these priorities during implementation becomes considerably more limited (see also Section 3.2 on governance).

Based on the analysis above, several recommendations can be formulated to better align the ambitions of Erasmus+ with the programme's operational and financial realities.

- **Clarify strategic priorities and core objectives within the programme regulation itself.** If Erasmus+ is expected to address an expanding range of policy priorities, clearer choices should be made about which objectives are central to the programme and which are complementary, and how these relate to the allocated budget. This would help avoid further expanding expectations on the programme without sufficient resources to support them.
- **Ensure that budget increases are proportionate to the expansion of programme objectives and activities.** By better specifying the link between priorities and allocated budgets, the legislative proposal can also help ensure that additional priorities, target groups and instruments be accompanied by corresponding financial resources, to avoid diluting existing actions and creating increasing competition for limited funding.
- **Introduce more explicit participation and mobility targets linked to available resources.** Clear benchmarks, such as those included in the current 2021–2027 programme, would improve transparency regarding what the programme can realistically achieve and help align political expectations with operational capacity.
- **Preserve some level of earmarking between sectors and actions to safeguard strategic balance, transparency, and predictability.** While some flexibility in reallocating resources is useful, completely removing earmarking creates uncertainty and risks weakening oversight over programmatic choices.

2.2. Balancing flexibility with governance and oversight in Erasmus+

2.2.1. Evolution of the issue

Like all European funds and programmes, Erasmus+ is governed by a multi-level structure in which authority is distributed across legislative, executive and implementation levels. Starting from a Commission proposal, the European Parliament and the Council define the programme's legal framework stipulating objectives and a financial envelope through the ordinary legislative process. In

⁵³ Ockham IPS & SEOR (2024) National Evaluation of Erasmus+ in the Netherlands (2014–2020/ 2021–2027). Final report.

this governance structure, a central challenge concerns the balance between operational flexibility for the Commission and effective political oversight by the co-legislators and Member States. In the current legal framework of Erasmus+ and its predecessors the (co-)legislators have empowered the Commission, through the legal basis, to propose Annual Work Programmes in the form of implementing acts which are adopted through the comitology procedure by qualified majority. This gives Member States' representatives the possibility to shape the Annual Work Programme in the Programme Committee⁵⁴. The role of Parliament is limited to scrutiny, which does not give it a formal veto, but does ensure that the European Parliament is routinely informed of draft and adopted acts.⁵⁵ If Annual Work Programmes were adopted by a delegated act instead, both Parliament and Council could introduce a right to object to a draft act or even to revoke the delegation altogether within the delegation itself. Currently, the European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education carries out scrutiny by regularly inviting the responsible Commissioners to its Committee meetings to answer questions, receive comments and discuss progress on the implementation of the programme's priorities.

The operational implementation of the programme is divided between direct and indirect management. Certain actions, particularly those linked to policy experimentation, European networks or large-scale cooperation projects, are managed centrally by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) on behalf of the Commission. Most individual mobility actions and smaller-scale cooperation projects, however, are implemented through indirect management by national agencies designated by participating countries.

Within this governance structure, a persistent challenge has been to effectively monitor and assess the programme's performance. The programme pursues system-level aims to support the quality level of learning opportunities and the development of trust between education systems, as well as broader objectives related to inclusion and diversity, digital transformation, environmental sustainability and participation in democratic life.⁵⁶ Despite an extensive monitoring and evaluation framework, measuring the performance and impact of Erasmus+ has been subject to several important limitations. The mid-term evaluation for 2021-2027 for instance points to the predominant focus on outputs, such as participation rates and numbers of projects, which are easy to quantify but do not necessarily capture the programme's longer-term structural contribution to achieving these objectives.⁵⁷ This point was also made by the Parliament, which in 2024 called "for a better balance between quantitative and qualitative objectives within the programme, [emphasising] that improving the quality of education must continue to be a focus of Erasmus+."⁵⁸

At the same time, the decentralised governance structure creates challenges for consistent monitoring across countries and sectors, particularly where implementation practices and reporting capacities differ between national agencies and beneficiary organisations. This creates an important governance challenge: where implementation is decentralised and operational discretion is high, effective

⁵⁴ Vroonhof, P, van der Graaf, A & Buiskool, B (2018), Research for CULT Committee – Erasmus+: Towards a New Programme Generation, European Parliament, Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies, Brussels.

⁵⁵ See Article 11 of Regulation 182/2011 laying down the rules and general principles concerning mechanisms for control by Member States of the Commission's exercise of implementing powers, *OJ L 55*, 28.2.2011, pp. 13–18.

⁵⁶ European Commission. *Programme priorities*. <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/about-erasmus/programme-priorities>

⁵⁷ European Commission (2025). *Support study for the Erasmus+ 2021-2027 interim evaluation and the Erasmus+ 2014-2020 final evaluation* <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/cca2cf61-6099-11f0-a9d0-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

⁵⁸ European Parliament resolution of 16 January 2024 on the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027 ([2023/2002\(INI\)](#))

monitoring and evaluation mechanisms become essential instruments for ensuring accountability, strategic steering and transparency across the programme.

2.2.2. Review of the Commission proposal

Section 2.1 already highlighted how the Commission proposal increases the importance of the Annual Work Programmes as instruments for defining operational priorities and the allocation of funding during the programming period. The proposal replaces the current structure based on three Key Actions by a more consolidated framework with fewer programme components. This reduces the extent to which activities and funding streams are predefined in the legislative framework and allows for greater discretion in how actions are defined, and resources are allocated over time.

The proposal appears to combine this more centralised approach to prioritisation in the programme in the name of 'flexibility' with reduced formalised oversight mechanisms. The proposal no longer mentions the existing procedural framework that Annual Work Programmes are to be adopted through implementing acts under comitology procedures. Instead, it refers in general terms to Article 110 of the Financial Regulation, which would grant the Commission the ability to adopt Annual Work Programmes as financing decisions, without having a procedure that seeks inputs from Member States or even inform Parliament. The proposal does not include a detailed justification for this choice, and the impact assessment only mentions broad efficiency gains as possible justification.⁵⁹ From this perspective, it is notable that the mid-term evaluation did not provide evidence that the role of the Programme Committee hampers programme implementation or its effectiveness.⁶⁰ On the contrary, the evaluation assessed the structure as well established and fit for purpose.⁶¹

In this context, the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation systems becomes even more critical. Where fewer elements are predefined in the legislative framework, such as earmarking of budgets or detailed programme components, oversight increasingly depends on the ability to at least assess implementation ex-post, through monitoring frameworks and performance indicators.

For the 2028–2034 MFF, the Commission has proposed a new monitoring framework, the 'Performance Regulation', which focuses more strongly on the programmes' contributions to overarching EU priorities and to the EU's budgetary performance framework.⁶² In contrast to the current programme generation, there is no detailed set of Erasmus+ specific output and result indicators in the Erasmus+ proposal itself. This shift is a meaningful step towards an impact orientation in the programme, but it may come at the expense of the visibility of outcomes that are either sector-specific or target-group specific. This point is echoed in a recent opinion of the European Court of Auditors, which raised concerns that the currently proposed indicators are insufficient to assess the programme's overall effectiveness and value for money.⁶³ This concern was also expressed in a recent briefing requested by

⁵⁹ For instance on the Impact assessment report (SWD (2025), 550 final), page 35.

⁶⁰ European Commission (2025). *Report on the interim evaluation of the 2021–2027 Erasmus+ programme and the final evaluation of the 2014–2020 Erasmus+ programme*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52025SC0186>

⁶¹ European Commission (2025). *Report on the interim evaluation of the 2021–2027 Erasmus+ programme and the final evaluation of the 2014–2020 Erasmus+ programme*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52025SC0186>

⁶² European Commission. (2025). Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a budget expenditure tracking and performance framework and other horizontal rules for the Union programmes and activities (COM(2025) 545 final). <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52025PC0545>

⁶³ European Court of Auditors (2026). Opinion 12/2026 concerning the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Erasmus+ programme for the period 2028–2034, and repealing Regulations. (EU) 2021/817 and (EU) 2021/888 (paragraphs 33–42). https://www.eca.europa.eu/ECAPublications/OP-2026-12/OP-2026-12_EN.pdf

the BUDG and CONT Committees on the performance framework for the 2028–2034 MFF: the smaller set of proposed indicators in the performance regulation may not sufficiently capture the nuances of different EU programmes, potentially blurring the specific objectives of individual sectors. It also concludes that the framework favours what can be measured through standardised quantitative indicators, potentially marginalising qualitative dimensions.⁶⁴ This loss of specificity is also mentioned in relation to the merger of the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) into Erasmus+, which might lead to the loss of separate monitoring and dedicated resources for volunteering and solidarity actions.⁶⁵

For the moment, it is not clear how the impact of the programme will be consistently monitored through a dedicated mechanism for Erasmus+ ensuring comparability across sectors and countries. It is also unclear how such a monitoring system will build on existing initiatives, such as the RAY network for youth programmes and the RIA-AE network in adult education, which already provide examples of how such approaches can be operationalised by combining transnational survey data, qualitative research, and longitudinal analysis to assess programme effects at different levels.⁶⁶ These bottom-up initiatives are initiated in conjunction with national agencies, to support the assessment of the programme's impact.

The combination of broader objectives, reduced earmarking and more aggregated monitoring therefore risks weakening transparency and comparability across sectors and beneficiary groups. In practice, this could make it more difficult for legislators, stakeholders and beneficiaries to assess whether resources are distributed in line with programme objectives or whether certain sectors or groups are systematically underfunded or excluded.

2.2.3. Recommendations

Taken together, the proposal constitutes a clear departure from the existing framework and reflects a broader rebalancing of Erasmus+ governance towards greater executive flexibility and strategic adaptability. While this may improve the programme's responsiveness to changing political priorities and uneven demand, it also risks weakening the mechanisms through which co-legislators and stakeholders can steer, monitor and evaluate implementation over time. In particular, the Commission would gain greater discretion in defining annual priorities and funding allocations, while the modalities for ex ante oversight by Member States and the European Parliament are no longer explicitly codified in the legislative act. Moreover, the shift towards more horizontal monitoring of broader policy contributions and impacts is not accompanied by stronger tools for assessing the programme's overall effectiveness, sectoral balance or value for money ex-post.

Based on the analysis above, several recommendations can be formulated to ensure that greater flexibility in the future Erasmus+ programme is balanced with adequate governance, transparency, and accountability mechanisms.

⁶⁴ European Parliament (2026), Performance Framework for the 2028–2034 MFF, briefing requested by the BUDG and CONT Committees, Brussels.

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2026/783967/BUDG_BRI\(2026\)783967_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2026/783967/BUDG_BRI(2026)783967_EN.pdf)

⁶⁵ European Parliament, Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies (2026), EU Funding Instruments for Policy Fields under the Remit of the CULT Committee, Research for the CULT Committee, Brussels.

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2026/784019/IUST_STU\(2026\)784019_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2026/784019/IUST_STU(2026)784019_EN.pdf)

⁶⁶ Ockham IPS, ITT and Artédud (2024). *Transnational analysis of the impact of Erasmus+ on the Adult Education Sector*.

https://www.ria-ae.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/ria-ae.eu/Documents/Transnational_publications/First_survey_round/Transnational_report_2023_2024.pdf

- **Reassess the balance between flexibility and accountability in the legislative proposal.** Flexibility in a legislative proposal should support responsiveness and innovation of the programme but should not come at the expense of democratic oversight, transparency, or the ability to assess the programme's effectiveness over time. This means that minimum thresholds should be defined ex-ante for budget allocations, alongside governance mechanisms that allow co-legislators and stakeholders to steer, monitor, and evaluate implementation over time.
- **Maintain stakeholder involvement and transparency around annual priority setting and funding allocations.** This calls for defining procedures that avoid that the Commission can enact major shifts in priorities, reallocations of budgets, or changes in implementation approaches without justification. Even if greater flexibility is pursued, there is value in continuing the practice where Annual Work Programmes are adopted through transparent procedures that allow for systematic consultation of the Programme Committee and scrutiny by the (co-)legislators. The European Parliament should reflect on whether the use of delegated acts, rather than implementing acts, would be more appropriate in areas where enhanced democratic scrutiny and parliamentary involvement are considered important.
- **Develop a more balanced monitoring and evaluation framework that combines broader impact indicators as defined for the MFF with Erasmus+-specific indicators** on participation, inclusion, sectoral balance, quality of learning outcomes, and long-term structural effects. It should also include indicators to measure the programme's contribution to dedicated EU policy targets as included in the Education and Training Monitor of the European Commission. Quantitative indicators should be complemented by qualitative evidence to better capture the programme's educational and societal impact.
- **Introduce a mechanism to streamline data collection on programme impact across sectors and countries,** building further on existing initiatives, such as the RAY network for youth programmes and the RIA-AE network in adult education, which already provide examples of how such approaches can be operationalised by combining transnational survey data, qualitative research, and longitudinal analysis to assess programme effects at different levels. These initiatives could be supported by a general mechanism at central level, further aligning these sectoral approaches (for example, through the establishment of an "observatory" to measure programme impact).

2.3. Adequacy of support

2.3.1. Evolution of the issue

In addition to the overall gap between programme ambition and available resources, a separate structural issue concerns the **adequacy of funding levels provided to participants and the implementing NA**. Erasmus+ provides financial support to participants undertaking mobility periods abroad. These grants are intended to help cover additional costs associated with studying, training or volunteering in another country, such as travel, accommodation and living expenses. To account for differences in costs between destinations, the programme provides differentiated levels of financial support. This is adjusted to reflect variations in living costs across locations through country groupings, while a simple and comparable funding system is maintained through standardised grant levels.

However, as costs increase across Europe, these **adjustments do not keep pace with rising living and travel expenses**. The mid-term evaluation for the 2021 – 2027 programme period notes that Erasmus+ contributions increasingly fall short of the additional cost of covering accommodation, travel and daily

expenses in host countries, reporting disparities between different destinations in expense coverage.⁶⁷ A recent survey in Higher Education also points to this issue, showing that more than one third of participants report that their grant is insufficient to cover living costs.⁶⁸ The mid-term evaluation too indicates that the current rigidity of the standardised grant levels per country grouping does not always account for local price variations. Urban–rural differences and other within-country disparities have led different stakeholders to advocate for a redesign of the grant system based on a combination of a European baseline grant and cost-of-living adjustments at city level.⁶⁹ Although Erasmus+ grants were never intended to fully cover all costs, the growing gap between grant levels and actual expenses is becoming a real barrier to participation. This increasingly affects not only participants with fewer resources, but a broader range of participants and institutions, who must rely on additional personal or institutional funding to take part. This raises concerns about the programme’s accessibility and its ability to reach its broader objectives.

Other evidence points to **limited support for organisations involved in KA1 mobility**, given the strong focus on individual grants and low consideration of the structural and operational needs of sending and hosting organisations. This concern was especially raised in the youth and adult education sectors, where many smaller organisations lack the capacity to facilitate mobility activities. The lack of funding for hosting organisations reduces their willingness and ability to participate which in turn creates difficulties in finding suitable partners to host visits and training activities, particularly for organisations without established cooperation networks. Organisations with long-standing partnerships experience fewer problems, as both sending and hosting organisations perceive a clear return on investment through reciprocal exchanges.⁷⁰ Beneficiaries also reported insufficient funding for the project management costs of KA2 projects. This increases coordination risks and administrative burdens, especially for smaller organisations within adult education and the youth sectors.⁷¹ These limitations were less evident among more institutionalised sectors, like School Education, Higher Education and Vocational Education & Training.

Finally, the mid-term evaluation points out that although management fees for national agencies are generally considered reasonable compared to other programmes, **NAs face increasing pressure due to expanding roles and expectations**. Management fees have increased over the years, but they are still considered insufficient to cope with higher programme budgets, stricter compliance and monitoring requirements, new priorities and impact strategies, knowledge management activities, the dissemination of results, support for less experienced applicants, activities to detect fraud, and challenges such as malfunctioning IT tools and the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, all of which have increased the administrative workload for NA staff. At the same time, many NAs have reported that as the percentage of the budget used to calculate the contribution towards management expenditure has remained stable, the increase was not keeping pace with rising costs, considering the rate of inflation. The mid-term evaluation also points out that the expected economies of scale resulting from programme consolidation have not yet materialised.

⁶⁷ European Commission (2025). *Report on the interim evaluation of the 2021–2027 Erasmus+ programme and the final evaluation of the 2014–2020 Erasmus+ programme*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52025SC0186>

⁶⁸ Erasmus Student Network (2024) ESNsurvey – 15th Edition: Making Quality Mobility a Reality for All. https://esn.org/sites/default/files/news/xv-esnsurvey_final-report.pdf

⁶⁹ Erasmus For All (2024). *Erasmus for All Policy Recommendations*. <https://zenodo.org/records/14016480>

⁷⁰ Ockham IPS & SEOR (2024) National Evaluation of Erasmus+ in the Netherlands (2014–2020/ 2021–2027). Final report.

⁷¹ Buiskool, B.-J., Krichewsky-Wegener, L., & Erckrath, M. (2024). Transnational analysis of the impact of Erasmus+ on the adult education sector. RIA-AE Network. https://www.ria-ae.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/ria-ae.eu/Documents/Transnational_publications/First_survey_round/Transnational_report_2023_2024.pdf

2.3.2. Review of the Commission proposal

As is the case in the current regulation, the proposal for the 2028–2034 Erasmus+ programme proposes **that grants for learning mobility** should make use of simplified cost options (lump sums, unit costs, and flat rates) as addressed in Article 12(5), considering the living and subsistence costs in the host country). When funds are distributed to Member States for management, the allocation formula should also explicitly include the cost of living in the Member State as a primary criterion (Article 12(2)). The proposal also indicates that the Commission may adjust or may authorise the national agencies to adjust, based on objective criteria, the financial support mechanisms to improve access to people with fewer opportunities (Article 8 (4)). For the first time, housing support (Recital (34)) is introduced as a specific measure to remove obstacles for people with fewer opportunities, recognising that the lack of affordable accommodation is a primary barrier to mobility. However, no details are yet provided regarding the delivery mechanism. Instead, the proposal frames housing support as part of a broader set of financial support and inclusion measures (Article 8).

While the proposal increases the overall programme budget and emphasises the need for providing sufficient funding, it **does not introduce structural changes to how individual grants are calculated or how support levels relate to actual participation costs**. As a result, it does not address how rising costs affect the level of support provided to end beneficiaries. By contrast, stakeholder initiatives explicitly identify this gap and propose targeted solutions. The Erasmus4All partnership, for example, advocates for a redesign of the grant system based on a combination of a European baseline grant and cost-of-living adjustments at city level.⁷² This approach aims to align financial support more closely with actual participation costs and to improve both adequacy and transparency. In addition, Erasmus4All calls for regular updates of grant levels in response to inflation and for a stronger evidence base on student expenditure to inform funding decisions.

The proposal also **does not address how the programme could better support the structural and operational needs of sending and hosting organisations involved in mobility activities** beyond providing individual grants, nor does it address the inadequate funding of project management costs for Strategic Cooperation projects. Similarly, it provides little detail on the increasing management costs faced by national agencies (NAs) implementing the programme at the decentralised level. The proposal only states that the Commission provides financial resources to support NA operations and that participating countries should ensure adequate national co-financing, at least equivalent to the Union contribution for management tasks as referred to in Article 20(5)(b). To optimise management costs, the proposal introduces measures aimed at streamlining implementation and achieving economies of scale. These include reducing the number of national agencies implementing the programme (recital (49) of the proposed regulation) and providing NAs with common IT systems and guidance to simplify project management and reporting procedures (article 20 (9)), thereby helping to reduce the administrative burden on implementing bodies. However, no information is provided on the share of the programme budget allocated to NAs for managing the funds.

2.3.3. Recommendations

The **Commission proposal for the 2028–2034 Erasmus+ programme acknowledges the growing pressure on the financial adequacy of the programme and introduces several positive elements**, including a larger overall budget, greater flexibility for national agencies to adjust support mechanisms for participants with fewer opportunities, and the introduction of housing support as a targeted inclusion measure. The proposal also recognises that simplified cost models should better reflect living

⁷² Erasmus For All (2024). *Erasmus for All Policy Recommendations*. <https://zenodo.org/records/14016480>

and subsistence costs in host countries and that management allocations to Member States should consider differences in cost of living. These measures demonstrate an awareness that financial barriers increasingly affect programme accessibility and implementation.

However, the proposal **remains limited in addressing the structural nature of the problem**. While it recognises rising costs, it does not fundamentally reconsider how grant levels are calculated or how financial support should evolve in response to changing economic conditions across Europe. The continued reliance on broad country groupings and standardised grant levels risks maintaining the current mismatch between grants and actual participation costs, particularly in cities and regions with rapidly increasing housing and living expenses. Although housing support for participants with fewer opportunities is an important step, it frames affordability primarily as an inclusion issue rather than as a broader structural challenge affecting an increasingly wide range of participants.

The proposal also **pays insufficient attention to the organisational dimension of mobility and cooperation projects**. The absence of dedicated support for hosting organisations of learning mobility and the limited recognition of project management costs for KA2 projects create structural barriers for newcomers and smaller organisations, undermining the programme's objectives of inclusion, diversification and broad participation. A similar tension can be observed in the management of the programme at decentralised level. The anticipated economies of scale from programme consolidation have not yet materialised, raising questions about whether further consolidation alone can realistically address increasing operational pressures.

Based on the analysis above, several recommendations can be formulated to strengthen the adequacy of support to participants.

- **Rethink a more dynamic grant calculation model** that combines a European baseline grant with periodic cost-of-living adjustments at regional or city level, supported by regular monitoring of participant expenditure and inflation.
- **Recognise affordability as a broader structural challenge affecting all participants**, not only those classified as participants with fewer opportunities.
- **Develop dedicated support mechanisms for hosting and sending organisations involved in mobility activities**, particularly in youth and adult education sectors where organisational capacities are more limited.
- **Increase recognition and funding of project management and coordination costs for KA2 cooperation projects**, especially for smaller organisations and newcomers to the programme.
- **Align Erasmus+ budget allocated to national agencies for programme management and implementation with increasing tasks and roles**. Reassess assumptions regarding economies of scale from programme consolidation and ensure that simplification measures are complemented by adequate human and financial resources for national agencies.

2.4. Inclusion and unequal access

2.4.1. Evolution of the issue

Erasmus+ has **increasingly prioritised inclusion as a core objective**, aiming to widen participation and ensure that individuals from diverse backgrounds can benefit from international mobility and cooperation activities. This includes a specific focus on participants with fewer opportunities, including those facing economic, social or geographical barriers. This ambition has become even more relevant following the adoption of the Council Recommendation 'Europe on the Move' in May 2024, which set a new target of reaching at least 20% participation of people with fewer opportunities among all learners

benefiting from learning mobility by 2027. Achieving this objective will require additional measures and resources.⁷³

The current Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027 implemented several **measures to promote inclusion and diversity**, ranging from financial incentives for individuals (top-up grants; special needs funding; outermost Regions Support; blended mobility), support tools and practical measures (online linguistic support; grant for accompanying persons), comprehensive strategies (National Inclusion and diversity strategies and framework for inclusion measures; inclusion officers; SALTO Inclusion & Diversity Resource Centre) to strategic project calls aimed at systemic change. The mid-term evaluation indicates that stakeholders consider this shift towards more social inclusion a commendable step forward.

Programme data indicate that **progress has been made in increasing participation in underrepresented groups**, as the share of participants with fewer opportunities has increased over successive programme periods. The share of individuals with fewer opportunities participating in Key Action 1 (KA1) mobility increased from approximately 10% in the previous programme period to around 15% in 2023. The mid-term evaluation also concludes that strategic and structural improvements were made at the level of the national agencies, including a diversity and inclusion strategy and having dedicated staff, and that most stakeholders agree that the programme is performing well regarding the inclusion and diversity priority.⁷⁴

However, **progress is still far from the 20% target** as defined in the Council Recommendation 'Europe on the Move' in 2024. The mid-term evaluation of the current programme 2021-2027 shows participation rates of disadvantaged groups still differ significantly between sectors, ranging from 9% in school education and sport to 28% in the youth sector, as well as between urban and rural areas, and the engagement of EU outermost regions also varies.⁷⁵ Especially the physical distance and the lack of local infrastructure in remote and rural areas were identified as factors that make these groups particularly hard to reach. It was also emphasised that grants often do not realistically cover the costs for participants from rural areas, especially when trying to utilise "green" travel options, which can be more expensive than air travel.

Individuals with greater financial resources, institutional support or prior international experience are more likely to participate. Individuals with fewer resources are less likely to apply or to complete mobility, even when eligible.⁷⁶ The mid-term evaluation highlights several critical **concerns regarding the adequacy of resources for both organisational support and the specific needs of people with fewer opportunities within KA1 mobility**. It concludes that current grants and top ups are often reported as insufficient to cover the complex, cumulative needs of the most marginalised groups, such as those with disabilities or those in remote areas. These patterns reflect a broader distinction between formal access and effective access. While the programme may be formally open to a wide range of participants, actual participation depends on a combination of financial, organisational and personal factors. These include not only the cost of participation for individuals, but also the ability to take time

⁷³ Council Recommendation of 13 May 2024 'Europe on the Move' — learning mobility opportunities for everyone (OJ C, C/2024/3364, 14.6.2024).

⁷⁴ European Commission (2025). *Report on the interim evaluation of the 2021–2027 Erasmus+ programme and the final evaluation of the 2014–2020 Erasmus+ programme*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52025SC0186>

⁷⁵ European Commission (2025). *Report on the interim evaluation of the 2021–2027 Erasmus+ programme and the final evaluation of the 2014–2020 Erasmus+ programme*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52025SC0186>

⁷⁶ Evrard, Gisele (2023). *Making Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps more inclusive*. <https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-4496/MakingEUProgrammesMoreInclusiveDeskResearch.pdf>

away from work or study, the availability and level of institutional support and perceived risks associated with participation.⁷⁷

As already noted in Section 2.3, **compensation for the work involved in organising KA1 mobility activities is considered inadequate** for both sending and hosting organisations, particularly when supporting vulnerable groups. This is especially challenging for smaller organisations with limited operational capacity. The current system, which is based on the provision of individual mobility grants, does not provide sufficient operational support for the intensive preparation, coordination, and tailor-made guidance required for participants from highly vulnerable backgrounds. The mid-term evaluation therefore concludes that the **lack of an adequate organisational support component limits the programme's overall inclusiveness and the effective participation of smaller stakeholders**.⁷⁸

Finally, the **absence of a precise and uniform interpretation of the concept across Member States** continues to limit consistent implementation across countries and limits comparability at European level to fully understand participation patterns.⁷⁹

2.4.2. Review of the Commission proposal

The proposal for the 2028–2034 Erasmus+ programme places a **strong emphasis on inclusion and diversity, outlining a comprehensive set of measures** to ensure that individuals, particularly people with fewer opportunities, have effective access to the programme. To remove barriers for these groups, the proposal identifies several concrete tools and measures (see chapter 3, article 8) such as targeted and adjustable financial support, including the authority for national agencies to adjust grants based on objective criteria to improve access for disadvantaged participants (article 8(4)).

The Commission also proposes to include housing support as a measure to remove economic barriers related to the lack of affordable accommodation, as well as preparatory and lifecycle support, accessible formats and communication, and awareness-raising activities specifically targeting rural and remote areas. The proposal also introduces **several structural changes to embed inclusion more firmly into programme management**, such as the requirement to develop or update national inclusion and diversity action plans (Article 8(6)), provide dedicated staff support for inclusion and diversity, the possibility to prioritise high-quality projects that actively involve participants with fewer opportunities during the grant award process (both in Recital 34) and the continued use of small-scale partnerships (article 6(a)), alongside the introduction of “very low value grant partnerships”, to improve access for smaller or less experienced organisations (explanatory memorandum, page 16).

The 2028–2034 proposal **strengthens and expands existing inclusion measures, mainly by providing targeted and adjustable financial support to individuals** but does not fundamentally change how participation inequalities are addressed. No specific reference is made as to how the need for more organisational support is addressed, by providing organisational grants next to individual mobility grants for sending and hosting organisations. It also remains unclear how the underlying factors that drive unequal participation, including personal circumstances (mental barriers, family or caregiving obligations and health issues) or administrative or financial hurdles, are tackled. Participation in Erasmus+ depends not only on access to support, but also on the ability of individuals and organisations to manage the remaining costs, constraints and risks associated with participation. This makes

⁷⁷ European Commission (2025). *Report on the interim evaluation of the 2021–2027 Erasmus+ programme and the final evaluation of the 2014–2020 Erasmus+ programme*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52025SC0186>

⁷⁸ Idem.

⁷⁹ Idem.

organising mobility for those having fewer opportunities extremely labour-intensive, requiring extensive preparation, coordination and follow-up, not covered by the individual grants provided.

These factors continue to influence who can participate and under what conditions. Evidence from the current programme period suggests that measures such as inclusion and diversity action plans at the level of national agencies have contributed to **incremental improvements but still have not fundamentally changed participation patterns**.⁸⁰

A second concern is that, although the 2028–2034 Erasmus+ programme operates within the broader policy framework of the Council Recommendation ‘Europe on the Move’, which aims to reach at least 20% participation of people with fewer opportunities among all learners benefiting from learning mobility by 2027, the proposal itself does not translate this ambition into clear programme-specific targets. Nor does it provide a measurable pathway for achieving this objective over the course of the programming period. As a result, the proposal **lacks intermediate benchmarks and concrete monitoring mechanisms** that would allow progress to be systematically tracked and steered over time. This creates important risks for programme monitoring and accountability. Without clearly defined targets and sufficiently granular indicators, it becomes more difficult to assess whether inclusion measures are effective, whether participation gaps between sectors or countries are narrowing, and whether certain groups remain systematically underrepresented. The absence of a clear monitoring framework may also reduce the ability of the Commission, Member States, national agencies and co-legislators to identify implementation problems at an early stage and adapt policies accordingly.

Finally, the proposal **does not further clarify the definition of vulnerable groups**. Instead, it moves away from a generic definition by requiring each national agency to develop or update a national action plan addressing the specific access barriers within its own national context.

2.4.3. Recommendations

The proposal for the 2028–2034 Erasmus+ programme **significantly strengthens the focus on inclusion and diversity**. It introduces a broad set of measures to improve access for people with fewer opportunities. These measures build on positive developments observed during the current programme period, where national agencies have made strategic and structural improvements and participation of people with fewer opportunities has increased. However, the **proposal does not fundamentally change how participation inequalities are addressed**. Based on the analysis above, several recommendations can be formulated to strengthen the adequacy of support to participants.

- **Consider introducing dedicated organisational support for sending and hosting organisations to cover the additional workload associated with supporting disadvantaged learners.** This could include dedicated organisational grants to cover the additional preparation, coordination, mentoring, and follow-up activities required to support participants with fewer opportunities.
- **Translate inclusion ambitions into clear programme-specific targets and measurable intermediate benchmarks within the Regulation itself.** This should include measurable intermediate benchmarks, sector-specific monitoring indicators, and regular reporting requirements to assess progress towards participation goals for people with fewer opportunities (in line with the target set in the Council Recommendation ‘Europe on the Move’).

⁸⁰ Evrard, Gisele (2023). *Making Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps more inclusive*. <https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-4496/MakingEUProgrammesMoreInclusiveDeskResearch.pdf>

2.5. Administrative complexity

2.5.1. Evolution of the issue

Participation in Erasmus+ depends not only on eligibility or access to funding, but on the **capacity of organisations to manage the programme's administrative and procedural requirements**. These requirements create administrative complexity at multiple levels, affecting both participating organisations, individuals and the national agencies responsible for programme implementation, and require sufficient staff capacity, expertise and organisational resources to be managed effectively. As a result, participation is constrained by organisational capacity, with direct implications for the number and type of participants that can access the programme.

Successive programme reforms have aimed to simplify programme management, including through the further harmonisation of management procedures, financial rules, and application processes across actions, as well as through the use of standardised funding mechanisms (such as lump sums and unit costs), accreditation schemes, and the introduction of small-scale partnerships. Evaluations point to benefits resulting from these simplification measures. The mid-term evaluation of the current 2021–2027 programme concludes that the transition from “actual costs” to unit costs and lump sums is widely regarded as one of the programme’s most effective developments. In addition, the extension of accreditation schemes to school education, adult education, and youth has significantly streamlined programme management by fostering long-term planning and financial security for institutions. It has provided organisations with simplified annual access to funding under KA1, reducing the repetitive burden of submitting new applications. Furthermore, the introduction of Small-scale Partnerships has created a vital entry point for newcomers and less experienced organisations.⁸¹

These changes, however, **have not fundamentally reduced the level of administrative capacity required to participate**, as highlighted in programme evaluations. The mid-term evaluation of the current 2021–2027 programme still identifies several challenges, including administrative complexity during the application process, disproportionate documentation requirements such as grant agreements, especially for smaller projects, increased workload caused by IT system failures and missing functionalities that hinder reporting, heavy monitoring requirements and time constraints for staff.⁸² The mid-term evaluation therefore included several actions that could further minimise the administrative burden, such as shortening the Programme Guide to make it more accessible for less experienced users, simplifying grant agreements, improving IT functionalities, and providing “funding maps” or visual overviews to help newcomers navigate opportunities without requiring expert knowledge.⁸³

Standardised rules and requirements support harmonisation and comparability across the programme, enabling national agencies to manage large volumes of projects within a common framework and to generate comparable information on programme performance. Although harmonisation between actions has led to greater coherence and alignment across the programme, with the reduction from 13 to 3 specific objectives and greater coherence across actions, the mid-term evaluation notes that it has also created **unintended burdens** in some cases. The same rules and requirements that enable harmonisation and oversight at programme level also place significant demands on participating organisations. In practice, similar administrative and compliance requirements often apply across

⁸¹ European Commission (2025). *Report on the interim evaluation of the 2021–2027 Erasmus+ programme and the final evaluation of the 2014–2020 Erasmus+ programme*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52025SC0186>

⁸² Idem.

⁸³ Idem.

projects of different sizes and organisational capacities, limiting the extent to which obligations are proportionate to the scale of participation. As a result, organisations with limited experience or administrative capacity face greater barriers to participation, while more established organisations are better positioned to comply with programme requirements. The mid-term evaluation of the current programme therefore recommends introducing grant agreements that are more proportionate to the size of the grants, especially for smaller projects, and reconsidering the lump-sum model to ensure it remains proportionate to the size of the partnership and maintains cost-efficiency.⁸⁴

The mid-term evaluation also strongly emphasises the **importance of stability and continuity between programming periods**, describing the transition from the 2014–2020 to the 2021–2027 period as a successful case of “evolution rather than revolution”. This is appreciated not only by implementing organisations (the Commission, national agencies and EACEA), which benefit from clear roles and a stable management structure, but also by beneficiary organisations, as it allows for long-term planning within the sector. Consulted stakeholders and national agencies during the mid-term generally welcomed the refinements made in the current period but explicitly recommended that the programme architecture should not be altered further in any significant way. Experience shows that the introduction of novelties within certain actions of the programme often leads to a slow start in the early years, as seen with newly introduced initiatives such as Jean Monnet Actions in schools and vocational education and training, as well as mobility in adult learning.⁸⁵

2.5.2. Review of the Commission proposal

The proposal for the 2028–2034 Erasmus+ programme prioritises simplification as a core objective to address the “complexities, weaknesses and rigidities” of previous funding instruments.

A first set of changes concerns the overall structure of the programme. The current architecture based on three Key Actions, mobility (KA1), cooperation (KA2) and policy support (KA3) would be reorganised into **two broader programme pillars** centred on ‘learning opportunities for all’ and ‘capacity building support’. While this represents a shift in the intervention logic, the proposal also builds substantially on the existing programme architecture and retains many current action types. Mobility remains a distinct strand, while cooperation and policy support are grouped under a common ‘capacity building’ pillar, in which the existing distinction between cooperation actions and policy-support measures is kept at operational level. This restructuring is intended to simplify the programme framework and reduce perceived fragmentation between different types of actions. In parallel, the proposal **integrates the European Solidarity Corps into Erasmus+** to create a single framework for learning mobility, volunteering and youth participation opportunities. This unification avoids the duplication of administrative processes, such as separate work programmes, monitoring, and communication activities.

The proposal, however, **does not clearly explain which specific problems the new structure is intended to address**. The mid-term evaluation of the current programme does not identify major shortcomings in the existing architecture. On the contrary, it concludes that the current structure, organised around the three Key Actions (KA1, KA2, and KA3), is generally coherent, appropriate and functioning well. The mid-term evaluation mainly refers to challenges related to the separate positioning of the Jean Monnet Actions outside the Key Action structure, which has created some confusion among stakeholders. The mid-term evaluation also highlights more specific issues, including difficulties in assessing the cost-effectiveness of KA3, the continued use of real costs for certain

⁸⁴ Idem.

⁸⁵ Idem.

activities under KA2 and KA3, and barriers to participation for small organisations, particularly in KA2. In fact, the proposal for the new regulation does not clearly demonstrate how the proposed two-pillar structure would address these issues, nor why they could not be resolved within the current architecture. The Commission's proposal for a new programme structure ought to have been better substantiated with evidence demonstrating specific shortcomings in the existing architecture. At the same time experience from the 2014 – 2020 programme period was that the introduction of a new structure, such as the Key Action framework, required both national agencies and participating organisations to adapt administrative processes, systems and programme management practices.⁸⁶ Such transitions require time and may temporarily affect implementation efficiency and the organisations' ability to engage with the programme, which in turn effects participation negatively. A similar dynamic might happen were the programme architecture to be modified again through changes to the Key Action framework, as proposed for the upcoming period.

The proposal also does not provide further indication on **budget breakdown or earmarked percentages for each of the two pillars**. While this provides flexibility to define allocation while implementing the programme (See section 2.1), it can make it difficult for potential applicants to understand the scale of opportunities available to them and reduce the stability and continuity of pillars.

Alongside these structural and governance changes, the proposal emphasises simplification through streamlined management arrangements, wider use of simplified cost options, and a reduced administrative burden for beneficiaries, reinforcing this commitment without explaining in detail how the approach differs from the current programme. To facilitate access for smaller organisations and first-time applicants, it includes **differentiated requirements for projects of different sizes**. The Commission is required to ensure that application and reporting requirements remain proportional to the grant level, preventing smaller projects from being overwhelmed by bureaucracy. Therefore, a new partnership type is introduced called "very low value grant partnerships" with a strongly reduced administrative burden for applicants.

At the same time, the proposal also confirms the **continued use of accreditation systems**, through which organisations with approved Erasmus Plans and quality standards receive simplified and more stable access to programme funding. This appears to be a logical continuation, based on the positive experience gained during the current programme period.

A general remark is that although the current proposal prioritises simplification as a strategic objective to reduce the administrative burden, the **proposal does not include specific programme-level indicators** to monitor whether this reduction is being achieved. Nor does it provide indicators to quantify the "time-to-grant" or the number of staff hours required for reporting at beneficiary level, both of which are critical metrics for measuring a genuine reduction in administrative burden.

2.5.3. Recommendations

The proposal clearly **recognises administrative complexity as a major barrier to participation** and continues several successful simplification measures from the current programme, including accreditation systems, simplified cost options and dedicated access routes for smaller organisations.

Overall, further attention is needed to ensure that simplification efforts translate into a genuine reduction of administrative burden for beneficiaries and national agencies. In particular, the following recommendations can be made:

⁸⁶ European Commission (2018). *Mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme (2014–2020)*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2018:050:FIN>

- Provide **clearer justification for the proposed programme architecture**, including evidence of which specific problems the new two-pillar structure is intended to solve.
- Introduce **measurable programme indicators on administrative burden**, including time-to-grant, reporting workload, and administrative costs for beneficiaries and national agencies.
- Ensure sufficient **stability, transparency, and continuity between programming periods**, including **clearer information on budget allocations** per pillar or key action within the new programme structure.

3. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The current proposal represents a **significant shift in the governance of the Erasmus+ programme compared to previous programming periods.**⁸⁷ In earlier programme cycles, the basic act defined more detailed priorities, structures and indicative allocations, thereby establishing a clearer and more stable framework for implementation. The current proposal places greater emphasis on flexibility, with no predefined allocations per sector or type of actions, and a stronger reliance on Annual Work Programmes to determine priorities and funding decisions during the implementation phase. While this approach increases adaptability, the proposal does not explain sufficiently why this shift is necessary or how it improves the functioning of the programme.

From this perspective, it is notable that the mid-term evaluation does not provide evidence that the current governance and programme structure hamper implementation or reduce effectiveness.

On the contrary, the evaluation concludes that the existing structure, organised around the three Key Actions (KA1, KA2 and KA3), is generally coherent, appropriate and functioning well. Likewise, the evaluation assessed the current governance arrangements, including the role of the Programme Committee, as well established and fit for purpose. While the Commission justifies these changes partly on the basis of increasing flexibility and responsiveness to emerging priorities, the evaluation of Erasmus+ 2021–2027 already concluded that the programme demonstrated considerable flexibility and resilience in responding to major external challenges within the current framework. National Agencies were able to reallocate budgets between Key Actions and sectoral fields while maintaining overall strategic direction, accountability and implementation stability.

Moreover, the mid-term evaluation highlighted stability and continuity in programme structure and management as important success factors for efficient delivery across programming periods.

National evaluations similarly emphasised that predictable governance structures and stable implementation arrangements are particularly important for long-term planning, institutional learning and the sustainability of internationalisation strategies, especially for smaller organisations and newcomers. There is consensus amongst stakeholders across sectors that the removal of earmarking creates uncertainty in sectors and undermine long term planning and that the discontinuation of the programme committee could have several important downsides for the governance, legitimacy and implementation of Erasmus+. In its partial general approach (PGA), the Council has already updated the governance model of the Erasmus+ programme to strengthen Member States' power of scrutiny, reinstating the Programme Committee that exists under the current Erasmus+ programme, which would give Member States greater influence over the governance of the programme. Also, the Council's PGA provides greater visibility to actions currently falling with the scope of the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) programme, as well as to all sectors covered by Erasmus+, by explicitly referring to activities for each sector.⁸⁸

The greater emphasis on flexibility, with no predefined allocations per sector or type of actions, and a stronger reliance on Annual Work Programmes to determine priorities and funding decisions, has **direct**

⁸⁷ European Commission (2018). *Proposal for a 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.* <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52018PC0367>

European Commission (2011): *Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing "ERASMUS FOR ALL" The Union Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport.* <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52011PC0788>

⁸⁸ General Secretariat of the Council (2026): *Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Erasmus+ programme for the period 2028–2034, and repealing Regulations (EU) 2021/817 and (EU) 2021/888: partial general approach* <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8265-2026-INIT/en/pdf>

implications for the role of the European Parliament. Parliament is expected to fulfil a framework-setting and scrutiny function, providing democratic legitimacy to Union programmes through its involvement in defining objectives, priorities and budgetary orientations. To perform this role effectively, the Parliament needs sufficient influence over what the programme is expected to achieve. It also requires meaningful involvement in the choices that shape its implementation and the ability to monitor and steer those choices over time.

Under the proposed model, it is not clear that these conditions are met in practice. The reduced level of detail in the proposed regulation, combined with the increased reliance on implementation-stage instruments, **limits the extent to which the Parliament can shape priorities and exercise control during the programming period.** In the absence of clearly defined frameworks, Parliament's capacity to perform its role is weakened.

This lack of clarity has consequences for the operation of the programme and the evaluation of its effectiveness. A **more flexible and less predefined framework may reduce predictability for implementing actors**, including national agencies and beneficiaries, particularly where priorities and funding conditions are subject to change over time. This affects planning capacity, consistency in implementation and the comparability of actions across years. In addition, where objectives and allocations are less clearly specified beforehand, it becomes more difficult to assess whether the programme delivers on its intended goals. The absence of stable reference points complicates monitoring, limits the ability to track progress over time and reduces the transparency of performance assessments.

This places a dual responsibility on both the European Commission and the European Parliament.

- **The Commission needs to provide a clearer justification for the proposed governance model and changes made.** This includes explaining the rationale for reducing predefined allocations, clarifying how flexibility will lead to improved effectiveness, and specifying how accountability, monitoring and evaluation at programme level will be ensured in practice. Without this, the rationale for the proposed governance model remains unclear.
- **From Parliament's perspective, the proposal should be re-shaped to ensure a more assertive role for the institution to safeguard its prerogatives.** This includes seeking greater clarity in the proposed legislation on programme priorities and allocation principles, ensuring formalised involvement in the adoption and scrutiny of Annual Work Programmes, and establishing mechanisms that allow for ongoing monitoring and steering of implementation, including through strengthened programme indicators. Without such adjustments, there is a risk that Parliament will not be able to fully exercise its framework-setting and control functions.

REFERENCES

- Buiskool, B., Krichewsky-Wegener, L., & Erckrath, M. (2024). Transnational analysis of the impact of Erasmus+ on the adult education sector. RIA-AE Network.
https://www.ria-ae.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/ria-ae.eu/Documents/Transnational_publications/First_survey_round/Transnational_report_2023_2024.pdf
- Cojocaru, M. G. (2020). *Erasmus mobilities and European identity: A literature review*. European Journal of Education, 55(1), 56–69.
- Corbett, A. (2005). *Universities and the Europe of Knowledge: Ideas, Institutions and Policy Entrepreneurship in European Community. Higher Education Policy 1955–2005*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Council of the European Economic Council (1987). *Council Decision of 15 June 1987 adopting the European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (Erasmus)*.
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec/1987/327/oj/eng>
- Council of the European Union (1995). *Decision No 819/95/EC establishing the Socrates programme; Council Decision 94/819/EC establishing the Leonardo da Vinci programme*.
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec/1995/819/oj/eng>
- Council of the European Union (2002). *Detailed work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of Education and training systems in Europe*. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/2d17e529-6c81-4b85-8d19-e9dbe65a93c0>
- Council of the European Union (2006). *Decision No 1720/2006/EC establishing the Lifelong Learning Programme*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec/2006/1720/oj/eng>
- Council of the European Union (2009). *Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020)*. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=oj:JOC_2009_119_R_0002_01
- Council of the European Union (2013). *Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 establishing Erasmus+*.
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2013/1288/oj/eng>
- Council of the European Union. (2020). *Council Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2020/2093 of 17 December 2020 laying down the multiannual financial framework for the years 2021 to 2027* (OJ L 4331, 22 December 2020, pp. 11–22). <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2020/2093/oj>
- Council of the European Union. (2024). Council Recommendation "Europe on the Move" – learning mobility opportunities for everyone. Official Journal of the European Union. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C_202403364
- Council Recommendation of 13 May 2024 'Europe on the Move' – learning mobility opportunities for everyone (OJ C, C/2024/3364, 14.6.2024).
- Council of the European Union (2025), Council Recommendation on the Union of Skills. Brussels: Council of the European Union.
- Erasmus For All (2024). Erasmus for All Policy Recommendations.
<https://zenodo.org/records/14016480>
- Erasmus Student Network (2024) ESNsurvey - 15th Edition: Making Quality Mobility a Reality for All. https://esn.org/sites/default/files/news/xv-esnsurvey_final-report.pdf
- Erasmus Student Network (ESN) (2024). Participation in learning mobility as a driving force to change the European Union. ESN.
- Erasmus+ (2026). Programme level overview of project data. <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/resources-and-tools/factsheets-statistics-evaluations/statistics/data/overview> (consulted on March 24, 2026).

- European Commission (2004). Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing an integrated action programme in the field of lifelong learning. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52004PC0474>
- European Commission (2009). Final report on the implementation and impact of the second phase (2000–2006) of the Community action programmes in the field of education (Socrates) and vocational training (Leonardo da Vinci) and the multiannual programme (2004–2006) for the effective integration of information and communication technologies (ICT) in education and training systems in Europe (eLearning). <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2009:0159:FIN:EN:PDF>
- European Commission (2010). Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52010DC2020>
- European commission (2011): Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing "ERASMUS FOR ALL" The Union Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52011PC0788>
- European Commission (2014). Interim evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme 2007–2013. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10317-2011-INIT/en/pdf>
- European Commission (2018). Mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme (2014–2020). <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2018:050:FIN>
- European Commission (2018). Proposal for a 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. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52018PC0367>
- European Commission (2018). The European Higher Education Area in 2012: Bologna Process Implementation Report. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/2fe152b6-5efe-11e8-ab9c-01aa75ed71a1/>
- European Commission (2020). The European Higher Education Area in 2020. https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-06/ehea_bologna_2020_chapter05_0.pdf
- European Commission (2021). Erasmus+ 2021–2027 – Enriching lives, opening minds through the EU programme for education, training, youth and sport, Publications Office of the European Union.
- European Commission (2025). Erasmus+ annual report 2024. <https://op.europa.eu/publication-detail/-/publication/eb9511a3-c05a-11f0-a612-01aa75ed71a1>
- European Commission (2025). Report on the interim evaluation of the 2021–2027 Erasmus+ programme and the final evaluation of the 2014–2020 Erasmus+ programme. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52025SC0186>
- European Commission (2025). Support study for the Erasmus+ 2021–2027 interim evaluation and the Erasmus+ 2014–2020 final evaluation.
- European Commission. (2025). *Proposal for a Council regulation laying down the multiannual financial framework for the years 2028 to 2034* (COM(2025) 571 final). European Commission. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52025PC0571&qid=1753801194712>
- European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture. (2025). Education and training monitor 2025: comparative report. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/30c1ccaa-bfdd-11f0-a612-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

- European Commission. (2004). Communication from the Commission: The new generation of Community education and training programmes after 2006 (COM(2004) 156 final). <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52004DC0156>
- European Commission. (2025). Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a budget expenditure tracking and performance framework and other horizontal rules for the Union programmes and activities (COM(2025) 545 final). <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52025PC0545>
- European Commission. Final evaluation of the Youth programme (2000–2006) (2009); Final evaluation of the second phase of the Socrates programme (2000–2006) (2007); Final evaluation of the Leonardo da Vinci II programme (2010). <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2008:0398:FIN:EN:PDF>
- European Commission. Programme priorities. <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/about-erasmus/programme-priorities>
- European Council (2000). Lisbon European Council 23 and 24 March 2000: Presidency conclusions. <https://dorie.ec.europa.eu/en/details/-/card/340747>
- European Court of Auditors (2018). Special Report Mobility under Erasmus+: Millions of participants and multi-faceted European Added Value, however performance measurement needs to be further improved. https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/publications?ref=SR18_22
- European court of Auditors (2026). Opinion 12/2026 concerning the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Erasmus+ programme for the period 2028–2034, and repealing Regulations (EU) 2021/817 and (EU) 2021/888 (paragraphs 33–42). https://www.eca.europa.eu/ECAPublications/OP-2026-12/OP-2026-12_EN.pdf
- European Court of Justice (1985). Gravier v City of Liège. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=clii:ECLI:EU:C:1985:69>
- European Parliament (2026), Performance Framework for the 2028–2034 MFF, briefing requested by the BUDG and CONT Committees, Brussels. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2026/783967/BUDG_BRI\(2026\)783967_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2026/783967/BUDG_BRI(2026)783967_EN.pdf)
- European Parliament and European Council (2008): Decision No 1298/2008/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2008 establishing the Erasmus Mundus 2009–2013 action programme for the enhancement of quality in higher education and the promotion of intercultural understanding through cooperation with third countries. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec/2008/1298/oj/eng>
- European Parliament Eurobarometer, EB 101.1, Spring 2024.
- European Parliament resolution of 16 January 2024 on the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme 2021–2027 (2023/2002(INI)).
- European Parliament resolution of 28 April 2026 on the proposal for a Council regulation laying down the Multiannual Financial Framework for the years 2028 to 2034 (COM(2025)0571 – C10-0000/2025 – 2025/0571R(APP)).
- European Parliament, Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies (2026), EU Funding Instruments for Policy Fields under the Remit of the CULT Committee, Research for the CULT Committee, Brussels. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2026/784019/IUST_STU\(2026\)784019_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2026/784019/IUST_STU(2026)784019_EN.pdf)
- European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS). (2026). A reworked Erasmus+ for 2028–2034 (Briefing No. PE 782.658). European Parliament.

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2026/782658/EPRS_BRI\(2026\)782658_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2026/782658/EPRS_BRI(2026)782658_EN.pdf)

- European Union (1992). Treaty on European Union (Maastricht Treaty). <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/treaty-of-maastricht-on-european-union.html>
- Evrard, Gisele (2023). Making Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps more inclusive. <https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-4496/MakingEUProgrammesMoreInclusiveDeskResearch.pdf>
- General Secretariat of the Council (2026): Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Erasmus+ programme for the period 2028–2034, and repealing Regulations (EU) 2021/817 and (EU) 2021/888: partial general approach. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8265-2026-INIT/en/pdf>
- Goksu, F. (2020). Intercultural mobility and European identity: Impact of the Erasmus programme. & Mitchell, K. (2015). Rethinking the Erasmus effect on European identity. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 53(2), 330–348.
- Mitchell, K. (2012). Student mobility and European identity: Erasmus study as a civic experience? *Journal of Contemporary European Research*, 8(4), 490–518.
- Mitchell, K. (2012). Student mobility and European identity: Erasmus study as a civic experience? *Journal of Contemporary European Research*, 8(4), 490–518.
- Mol, C. (2013). Intra-European student mobility and European identity: A successful marriage? *Population, Space and Place*, 19(2), 209–222.
- Ockham IPS & SEOR (2024) National Evaluation of Erasmus+ in the Netherlands (2014–2020/2021–2027). Final report.
- Ockham IPS, ITT and ArtéduC (2024). Transnational analysis of the impact of Erasmus+ on the Adult Education Sector. https://www.ria-ae.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/ria-ae.eu/Documents/Transnational_publications/First_survey_round/Transnational_report_2023_2024.pdf
- RAY Network (2024). Factsheet: Erasmus+ Youth and European identity. https://www.researchyouth.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/RAY_Thematic-Factsheets_06_European-Identity_20241028.pdf
- Sigalas, E. (2010). Cross-border mobility and European identity: The effectiveness of intergroup contact during the Erasmus year abroad. *European Union Politics*, 11(2), 241–265.
- Stroecker, N., van der Graaf, A., & Buiskool, B.-J. (2014). Communicating ‘Europe’ to its citizens: State of affairs and prospects. European Parliament, Directorate-General for Internal Policies, Policy Department B: Structural and Cohesion Policies.
- Vroonhof, P, van der Graaf, A & Buiskool, B (2018), Research for CULT Committee – Erasmus+: Towards a New Programme Generation, European Parliament, Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies, Brussels.

Website:

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2026/05/11/erasmusplus-council-agrees-position-on-the-eu-s-flagship-programme-for-education-and-training-youth-and-sport/>

This study examines the historical evolution of the Erasmus+ programme and assesses the legislative proposal currently discussed for the 2028–2034 programme period. It identifies structural challenges related to linking broader ambitions to budgetary realities; balancing flexibility with governance and oversight in Erasmus+; the adequacy of support; inclusion and unequal access; and administrative complexity. The study also evaluates whether the proposed changes correspond to the problems identified in programme evaluations and studies.

PE 789.677

IUST/2026/A/CULT/IC/005

PDF ISBN 978-92-848-3685-7 | doi: 10.2861/2584429 | QA-01-26-146-EN-N

Print ISBN 978-92-848-3686-4 | doi: 10.2861/7033686 | QA-01-26-146-EN-C