

EUA input to the public consultation on the next Multiannual Financial Framework:

EU funding for cross-border education, training and solidarity, youth, media, culture, and creative sectors, values, and civil society

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In 2025, the European Commission will present its proposal for the next Multiannual Financial Framework, which will set the priorities for 2028-2034 and define the future architecture of EU funding programmes that are crucial for universities, such as Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe. The European University Association (EUA) outlines the following recommendations as its contribution to the European Commission's public consultation on the next MFF focusing on EU funding for cross-border education, training and solidarity, youth, media, culture, and creative sectors, values, and civil society.

EUA's comments are based on the Association's 2023 [consultation of 500 higher education institutions](#) in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), which confirmed that Erasmus+ is of major importance to the sector as a crucial tool for improving the quality of education and contributing to society, in Europe and internationally.

EUA's study also showcases that Erasmus+ is a major vector for Europe's economic, social and technological transformation. For example, it confirms the relevance of the current Erasmus+ priorities of inclusion and diversity, civic engagement and greening. Erasmus+ supports Europe's universities to collaborate to address these priorities, which results in awareness raising, mutual learning and sharing of good practice.

Importantly, cross-border education is not only about higher education institutions, but also organisations including member state administrations and agencies, as well as society at large. Impact beyond the immediate beneficiaries is not always easy to map. For example, the European Universities alliances, beyond the core consortia, involve more than 2,000 associated partners, such as non-governmental organisations, enterprises and local and regional authorities, as well as higher education institutions from third countries.

The positive impact of Erasmus+ can go beyond Europe, as documented in a [2020 study conducted for the European Commission](#) that shows how Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility raises awareness among institutions in the European Neighbourhood about issues related to disadvantage and diversity. That is not to mention its effect on other transformation agendas, such as greening and sustainable development, nor its impact on research collaboration and economic development.

By enabling educational and cultural exchanges and collaboration across borders, Erasmus+, probably more than any other EU initiative, promotes European identity and unity. It also

demonstrates to citizens the value of the European Union and sends a strong signal internationally, promoting democracy, multilateralism and global cooperation. For these reasons, Erasmus+ is of crucial importance for Europe's competitiveness and the resilience of its economies and societies, in particular in times of multiple crises and democratic backsliding.

Overall funding for Erasmus+ is a strategic investment, which strengthens Europe. Therefore Erasmus+ must be one of the European Union's top priorities for the next MFF and its funding should be enhanced in line with the important policy objectives that the programme aims to address.

Importance of policy priorities

The contribution of Erasmus+ to inclusion and diversity, civic engagement, digital transformation and climate action are of key importance to Europe's universities. Linking these priorities to mobility and inter-institutional collaboration, as currently done under Erasmus+, contributes to awareness raising, mutual learning and the transfer of good practice in higher education institutions and societies, across Europe and beyond.

EUA's 2023 [consultation of higher education institutions](#) confirms that Erasmus+ has had a significant impact, but also that the programme's action and leverage in these priority areas can and needs to be enhanced. A thorough assessment of measures under Erasmus+, specifically for greening and inclusion, would be useful to enhance future impact and support beneficiaries in better addressing these policy priorities.

Beyond the identification of policy priorities, synergies between projects funded under Erasmus+ and other initiatives could be improved. The different Erasmus+ cooperation actions offer higher education institutions a range of valuable opportunities for engagement with other institutions, and with societal and economic partners, within and outside of Europe. They contribute to the individual institutions development and potential for innovation, as well as to system-level development and the implementation of the European Education Area and the European Higher Education Area. Nonetheless, this impact could be enhanced: apart from further simplification, the programme should encourage more synergies among projects and with other initiatives. At present, the decentralised management structure does not support this.

Obstacles and enablers for effective and efficient EU funding

On applying common rules, timelines and eligibility criteria to all relevant EU funds

There is vast, untapped potential in ensuring operational and funding synergies between EU policy instruments and funding programmes, as well as in coordinating with similar initiatives at national and regional levels. These synergies have the potential to significantly enhance the impact of EU funding and contribute to the efficient and smart governance of public funds.

While some efforts have already been made to facilitate these synergies, obstacles remain that must be overcome to fully unlock their potential. Currently, synergies are often well-conceived at the political level but fall short in practice. This is mainly due to the diversity of funding cycles and documentation requirements. The complexity of implementing projects funded from different sources deters potential beneficiaries.

To improve synergies, EU programmes should be made more straightforward, enabling beneficiaries to navigate opportunities more easily. Initiatives should be better harmonised, and overlaps should be eliminated. However, this does not mean that all funds should follow the same funding rules, including eligibility criteria, as these are often programme-specific. Attempts to create a single set of rules for all programmes could be highly complex, and missing the added value of specificities related to each sector. Any restructuring should focus on enhancing efficiency and simplification for the beneficiaries, rather than creating additional administrative barriers.

On reducing the number of EU funding programmes

Erasmus+ is highly valuable and provides significant impact for higher education institutions and their members. It is a crucial tool for improving the quality of education and contributing to society, both within Europe and internationally. Erasmus+ must be one of the European Union's top priorities for the next MFF.

While EUA welcomes efforts to enhance much needed synergies between EU funding instruments, integrating Erasmus+ and FP10 into a broader fund such as the foreseen Competitiveness Fund poses risks that could undermine their core missions. EUA acknowledges that a common European Competitiveness Fund would be a big and bold step, unifying EU programmes across the board. However, flagship European initiatives such as Erasmus+ and the EU framework programme for R&I are not just about funding. They foster higher education and research mobility, capacity building and cooperation within Europe and internationally. Therefore, they must continue to exist as individual entities with their own identity, while the Competitiveness Fund should complement rather than absorb them.

On introducing more flexibility into resource allocation to react to crises and emerging needs

A balance between flexibility and stability is needed in the next EU funding cycle. In fast-moving technological areas like AI, Europe needs the ability to adapt quickly and reallocate resources as new needs emerge. Similarly, the EU budget should be sufficiently agile to react to crises. This proved to be of high importance to providing a quick and targeted response to recent emergencies, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, and escalating geopolitical tensions - including the Russian invasion of Ukraine and conflicts in the Middle East.

The Erasmus+ programme has already demonstrated its value in this regard, proving to be a useful tool in responding swiftly to crisis situations and emerging needs through targeted support actions, for example during the war in Ukraine. Based on the lessons learnt from recent crises, the Erasmus+ programme's resilience and capacity to respond should be systematically enhanced. This could also contribute to the general improvement of the programme in terms of simplification. In addition to the measures taken to establish a European programme for scholars at risk under Horizon Europe's Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, a dedicated action to support at-risk students should be explored under Erasmus+.

However, flexibility alone is not enough. The European higher education sector also needs predictability and long-term continuity, particularly when it comes to funding structures that support collaboration across borders, disciplines and sectors. Without stability, higher education institutions cannot plan or build lasting partnerships, and individuals may be discouraged from embarking on ambitious and innovative cooperation projects. Core budgets of the programme must not be diverted, without the introduction of new funding, to other priorities when funding is needed to address emerging challenges or shifting political landscapes. Rather, a flexibility margin or additional co-funding in synergy with other EU and national programmes should be enabled to address crises.

On simplifying rules and processes for applicants and beneficiaries

Simplification has been a longstanding commitment of European policy makers, and in some areas, there has been progress – for example, most higher education institutions find the application processes under Erasmus+ have been improved. Indeed, more than half of the respondents to [EUA's 2023 survey](#) indicated that the current Erasmus+ programme is easier to implement and has more simplified rules than the previous one. That said, only 8% of institutions subscribe to the statement “Erasmus+ has no major administrative burden”; this illustrates the need for further simplification to be a priority for the next programme, also with due consideration of digital processes.

In particular, it has become clear from EUA's survey results that digital tools are the biggest liability of the Erasmus+ programme. Higher education institutions find them neither robust nor reliable. Moreover, the increase the administrative burden for all parties involved. Experience in the past years has shown that once a tool has been rolled out and reached a satisfactory level of functioning for beneficiaries, it is likely to be replaced by a new tool which takes into account technical developments – and the use-and-improve cycle starts again.

Generally, any tool requires thorough consultation and thorough testing before it is rolled out. The European Commission should make better use of the expertise of higher education staff, other beneficiaries and end users in the development of new tools and processes and in the enhancement of existing ones.

EUA remains committed to contributing to the design of the next MFF and future priorities for EU financial programmes on behalf of universities in Europe and to safeguarding independent programmes with stable funding.

List of relevant publications:

- [Building on the success of Erasmus+. Recommendations for the interim evaluation of the programme \(2021-2027\)](#)
- [Paper on the Union of Skills, April 2025](#)

With more than 900 members and affiliates, the European University Association (EUA) is the largest representative organisation of universities and national rectors' conferences in 49 European countries. EUA is a recognised stakeholder in the development of EU programmes for research, education and innovation. The Association actively contributes to all major European-level dialogues as the next MFF begins to take shape. By engaging with policy makers and stakeholders, EUA seeks to place research, education and innovation at the forefront of Europe's competitiveness and prosperity.