

Joint ETUC-ETUCE

Reflection to Proposal on the Erasmus Programme 2021-27

October, 2018

Background

On 30 May 2018, the European Commission published its Proposal for [establishing 'Erasmus': the Union programme for education, training, youth and sport and repealing Regulation \(EU\) No 1288/2013](#).

The proposal presents the broad policy objectives of the **future Erasmus programme** which will support international cooperation, ***mobility and projects in all sectors of education, not only higher education***, for the period of 2021-2027.

The new proposal will be the successor of the present Erasmus+ Programme (2014-2020) and the former Lifelong Learning Programme (2007-2014).

The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) is the voice of workers and represents 45 million members from 90 trade union organisations in 38 European countries, plus 10 European Trade Union Federations.

The European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) is the defender of teachers' interests. It represents 132 education trade unions in 51 countries, in total numbers 11 million members all over Europe.

Our reflections on the Proposal

1. **Learning mobility** of the EU citizens is essential to create mutual understanding, a sense of belonging to the EU, to improve skills and competences, to act as democratic citizens and to have a better chance in the labour market. It is key to promoting common European values, fostering social integration, enhancing intercultural understanding and preventing radicalization.
2. **Concerning the policy objective**, we fully support that the regulation is based on the [European Pillar for Social Rights](#) and the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 to *Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*. We demand that future Erasmus Programmes should serve as a tool to implement the first principle of the Pillar in

order to ensure that quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning are rights for all.

3. We welcome that the programme puts the **European citizens** in the focus of the next programme as future beneficiaries, and its objective is to equip individuals with knowledge, skills, and competences needed to face social and economic challenges. The ever **changing labour market, social and economic challenges** require better preparation of the learners to be democratically active citizens and employees in quality employment. We expect that the future programme will consider **education from a holistic perspective** wherein key competences and basic skills should play a key role besides that of continuous upskilling in the framework of lifelong learning.
4. We support, furthermore, that the Regulation respects the **Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU** for the **right to equality**. We ask to identify in the regulation that specific support to **socio-economically disadvantaged people** should be ensured in the budget allocation. In addition, **gender balance** should be ensured when applying and granting mobility to individuals.
5. We call for **more personal assistance and specific funding for disabled people** in the programme. Regrettably, there is virtually no mention in the proposal how special needs students or disabled students will be able to benefit from the revised Erasmus programme. Despite the fact that the Proposal considers the situation of "people with disabilities and migrants, as well as Union citizens living in remote areas", it is not clear how disabled or special needs students will be catered for. Likewise, although virtual tools are useful for disabled learners, we do not wish them to replace the physical experience of studying abroad.
6. In addition to supporting **migrants**, we ask to put emphasis on **refugees** who need help to recognize their education and training and need further education and training to be integrated into the education systems and the labour market in the EU. Treating all citizens fairly, not only EU citizens is included in the [Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU](#), which also provides the basis of the new Erasmus Proposal.
7. Teaching about the **EU and awareness about European values and democratic citizenship** is increasingly important and the next Erasmus Programme's budget needs to be invested in this essential topic. Improving the people's sense of belonging to the European Union should be supported in the Programme. We also agree that the future programme will focus on the implementation of the **Paris Declaration**, as in Europe preventing extremism and radicalization is more important than ever.
8. While we agree that the future programme needs to be complementary to **other union's funds and programmes**, especially with the future ESF+, we would like to underline the importance of

the programme's **complementarity with the political objectives and activities of the Member States and the "Union"**. We believe that educational mobility shall be also seen from a social and economic policy perspective. Among the political objectives, the programme should implement the next generation of EU Strategy Framework for Education and Training and focus on how the programme will support the Member States, social partners and stakeholders to reach the indicators and benchmarks of the future strategies.

9. Concerning the **name of the new programme**, we believe that the name should ensure that the broad public understands that the programme supports **all education sectors, not only higher education**. As the Erasmus programme has just celebrated the 30th anniversary as an original higher education mobility programme, we still experience misunderstanding among the citizens between the original "Erasmus university students" mobility programme and the "Erasmus+ Programme for mobility and projects in the education sector". Therefore, even if the "+" sign disappears from the name, we are concerned that the programme will not be able to reach actors in sectors other than that of higher education. Therefore, we ask **not to change the name** again and even to consider including Erasmus in the original name, for example: "Erasmus Lifelong Learning Programme"
10. Furthermore, we would like to see that the budget of the next Erasmus Programme is allocated to the political objectives and activities which are discussed and agreed by the Council and the European Parliament in consultation with the social partners. We see that the Erasmus+ budget is used to implement policy initiatives which were not broadly consulted among the EU institutions and the social partners were also not necessarily involved in the design of these initiatives. Therefore, we call for more **transparency and effective involvement of the social partners** in the decision making on education and training policy priorities and in deciding the fair allocation of citizen's money to be spent under the future Erasmus Programme.
11. Widening the objectives of the programme towards **adult learning and CVET** is very well welcomed by us. However, the lowest budget is foreseen to be allocated again to adult learning and to the support of low-skilled adults. We wonder if this amount together with the future ESF+ budget will be sufficient to support 70 million low-skilled adults to be integrated into the labour market, retain their positions, and in their transition between contracts. Adult learning also targets **socio-economically disadvantaged people**, including refugees, who need even more support than before.
12. We welcome the increase of the budget for **teachers' mobility** to support their initial and continuous professional development. However, we would like to highlight that the proposal should mention that the teachers would need support from their schools (employers) to be replaced in their jobs while participating in mobility periods. They should also be supported in

language learning and their mobility leave should be considered as official working hours so that they do not have to use their private annual leave for professional mobility reasons.

13. As a defender of teachers' interests, ETUCE is deeply concerned about **the working conditions of the teachers** who work with hosting mobile students: teaching international students can be challenging and time-consuming (as they often have a different educational and academic background), and requires additional language skills and cultural awareness from school and university staff. ETUCE urges the European Commission to pay more attention to building a **supportive environment for teachers and educational personnel** and to the social dimension of teaching and learning of exchange students. We advocate for additional financial support and sufficient continuous professional development (including obtaining foreign language skills) to be provided for school and academic staff and researchers who teach international students. Without highly valued and skilled teachers, the programme would not be able to ensure a high quality educational experience abroad.
14. In addition, **career guidance services in schools and training institutions** should be well aware of the Erasmus' offers. The Programme should also put special emphasis on validation and **recognition of education and training periods** abroad and online. Therefore, the regulation should link budget allocation to strict quality assurance procedures and to descriptions of learning outcomes, to the Bologna Process and its fundamental values and national credit systems, and **to European tools which contribute to recognizing educational experiences abroad and ensuring quality learning**, like the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), to European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) and European Quality assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET).
15. Furthermore, we would like more awareness of the "**ErasmusPro**" initiative in the Proposal to facilitate apprentices' mobility in Europe while respecting the double status of apprentices in accordance with the ***Council Recommendation on European Effective and Quality Framework for Apprenticeship***. Guidance counsellors should promote mobility to apprenticeship to all.
16. We welcome the **doubling of the budget** and that the budget aims at reaching larger target groups and individuals with fewer possibilities. At the same time, we would like to see that **national education budgets are sustainable** and they are not cut in order to fill in the gap by the Erasmus Programme budget. The complementarity of European funds with national budgets should be a requirement for countries' access to these resources. The European Semester process should continue playing an active role to ensure fair investment in education, training and lifelong learning.

17. In addition, we would like to see that the increase of the budget will be allocated to fully support students' mobility who come from a socio-economically disadvantaged background and who cannot add their contribution to the grant. ETUCE has already called¹ on the European Commission to make the Erasmus programme **as inclusive as possible**. For example, currently, the statistics show that the majority of mobile higher education students come from privileged socio-economic and academic family backgrounds.² The **insufficiency of Erasmus grants** provided for studying abroad and the high costs of living in another country are mentioned by 63% of non-mobile students in 2016 as the main obstacles to participating in Erasmus exchange programmes for university students.³ Hence, the programme's limited financial support contributes to a larger gap between students from privileged socio-economic backgrounds and students from less privileged backgrounds. The funding available should **reflect the real costs of participating** in Erasmus. Moreover, we remind the European Commission that quality higher education is not a commodity and should be accessible by all. Therefore, we urge the European Commission to **increase financial assistance to all students** in order to provide people from disadvantaged backgrounds, including newly arrived migrants, with more opportunities to access quality higher education and to promote their inclusion in society.

18. **Simplification and** rationalization of applications to projects under the Erasmus Programme is indeed necessary. **Inclusiveness of any size and type of organizations** of any geographic area and region of the EU has been lacking, according to our research⁴. The EU-level and national trade unions lack the significant administrative and technical needs to prepare an application. For example, trade unions do not have the expertise and the means (own contribution and human resources) to apply to grants under Erasmus, sometimes they are not qualified to apply for grants. Also, **our member organizations** observe that grant provisions tend to favour those applicants that have already built a specific expertise and experience under the predecessor of Erasmus+,

¹ ETUCE comments on the 30th Anniversary of the Erasmus student exchange programme, 2017
<https://www.csee-etuice.org/en/news/archive/2249-etuice-comments-on-the-30th-anniversary-of-the-erasmus-student-exchange-programme>

² *The Erasmus Impact Study* (2014) stated that almost two thirds of students had at least one parent working as executive, professional or technician.

³ *What are the obstacles to student mobility during the decision and planning phase?* Intelligence brief No. 02 (2016). http://www.eurostudent.eu/download_files/documents/EV_IB_mobility_obstacles.pdf

⁴ ETUC – ETUCE – CEEP – EFEE: Investment in Education, 2017
https://www.etuc.org/sites/default/files/publication/files/investment_in_education_and_training_etuc_ccep.pdf

the Lifelong Learning Programme. We welcome, therefore, the good intention of the proposal to provide **small-scale grants** to support those who do not have experience yet in applying. We also insist that clearer guidance should be provided for the applicants.

19. Simplification, however must ensure that **mismanagement** is avoided. Therefore, we welcome that the proposal puts emphasis on the importance of independent audit bodies of the national agencies.
20. We still ask that **legal entity** should not be obligatory in certain cases, for example to registered trade unions, who often do not have a legal entity as some national laws do not require it.
21. **Dissemination and sustainability of the projects** are very important. We regret to see that there are many good projects which do not continue and we ask the Commission to ensure EU-level coordinated dissemination of the project outcomes.
22. We remind the Commission that the Erasmus budget is, after all, the financial contribution of the EU citizens we represent and they are entitled to have their say on its allocation. Therefore, **concerning the governance** we regret that the Erasmus Committee , which has a coordination role in defining the yearly work programme of the Erasmus+ Programme, did not provide seats to the EU-level social partners in the previous period (2014-2020). We therefore ask for a permanent seat on the governance committee and not only “observer status on an ad-hoc basis”.