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**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE
COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE
COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

Mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme (2014-2020)

{SWD(2018) 40 final}

Erasmus+ is the Union programme supporting actions in the fields of education and training, youth and sport. With a budget of **EUR 16.45 billion for the period 2014-2020**¹, the programme aims to provide to over **4 million persons** the opportunity to gain competences and have a personal, socio-educational and professional development through studies, training, work experiences or volunteering abroad worldwide. It aims to foster quality improvements, innovation, excellence and internationalisation of **organisations** active in education and training, youth and sport. Erasmus+ also helps European countries to modernise and improve their education and training **systems** as well as their youth and sport **policies**, reinforcing their role as drivers for growth, employment, competitiveness, innovation and social cohesion.

This **mid-term evaluation** report on the Erasmus+ programme, including the evaluation of the long-term impact of its predecessor programmes, is submitted pursuant to Article 21 of Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council² and is accompanied by a staff working document (SWD) presenting all evidence. It builds on national reports submitted by the programme countries, an evaluation report by an external independent contractor, other reviewed studies, experience in managing the programme, and **over a million responses from all interested parties**. It assesses progress in implementing Erasmus+ in the period 2014-2016 in all participating countries³, prior to the full budget increase. It also examines the long-term impact of seven predecessor programmes from the period **2007-2013** (*ex post* evaluation), including in partner countries.

Erasmus+ is well on track to **achieve its performance indicators**, as set in the legal basis, with notably over less than three years, **1.8 million individuals** taking part in mobility activities, and **more than 240 000 organisations** involved in cooperation projects. Considering the baseline of the evaluation, between 2007 and 2016, the programmes under review funded learning mobility for more than **4.3 million young people and more than 880 000 practitioners**. In addition, many more people benefited from cooperation projects involving **940 000 participating organisations**.

Overall, the evaluation shows that **Erasmus+ is highly valued by stakeholders and the public**. The findings of this evaluation, as detailed in the SWD, show that all the programmes evaluated proved to be **highly effective**. Their European added value is undisputed. In addition, Erasmus+ is seen as being **more coherent, relevant** and only partly **more efficient** than its predecessors. Building on suggestions in the national reports and taking into account recommendations made by the external evaluator, it makes proposals to adjust the implementation of the current programme to help reach its full potential by 2020, and considers suggestions for improvements with a view to a successor programme.

¹ Including funding from external action instruments

² OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 50 budget

³ Programme countries: the EU Member States, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Turkey. Partner countries: other non-EU countries.

Effectiveness

The evaluation found that **Erasmus+ is highly valued** by its stakeholders as well as the general public, which identifies the programme as **the third most positive results of the EU**. Programme beneficiaries report satisfaction rates above 90 %.

For **learners** (students, apprentices, volunteers, young people, etc.), the evaluated programmes had, and continue to have, a positive effect on the **acquisition of skills and competences**, thereby increasing **employability** and entrepreneurship and shortening the transition from education to employment (13% higher, compared to individuals who did not take part in Erasmus+ or its predecessor programmes). The evaluation indicates that the Erasmus+ programme fosters willingness to work or study abroad (+31%) and the development of foreign language skills (7% higher in tested proficiency); that it influences individuals' positive perception of the value of learning for their professional and **personal development** (+8%); and that it improves even students' completion rates (+2%)

There is also evidence of a **contribution to a more cohesive Union**. The Erasmus+ programme fosters positive social/civic behaviour and a **sense of feeling 'European'** (+19% compared to non-participants). It reaches out to disadvantaged young people (11.5% of the total number of participants in Erasmus+) more than its predecessors or comparable national schemes. Yet the evaluation points to the need to do more to reach out to the more vulnerable in society and to facilitate the participation of smaller-size organisations.

- Within the current programme architecture to 2020, the Commission will step up its efforts to **make Erasmus+ more accessible** to individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds or with special needs. It will take steps to **facilitate the participation of schools and other small-scale actors** in the programme.
- After 2020, the Commission will consider how to further **boost the inclusion dimension** of any future programme, through increased integration of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in education and training, youth and sport activities.

For **practitioners** (teachers, trainers, youth workers, staff, etc.), participation translates into professional development — notably in terms of **wider networking** options (+22 percentage points) and greater use of **digital resources** (+5 points) — coupled with stronger attachment to Europe (+6 points).

For **participating organisations** (schools, universities, vocational education and training and adult education providers, youth and sport organisations, etc.) the expected changes are gradual and differ in intensity across the sectors of the programme. Continued participation is needed for deeper transformation. But the evaluation shows the programme has a **clear 'Europeanisation' effect**⁴.

Though less visible, the evaluation also confirmed that the **programmes reviewed had an impact on the formulation and implementation of education, training, youth and sport**

⁴ SWD, 5.1.2.1

policies⁵, especially in the case of higher education where the relevant budget was large enough, or had an indirect effect by funding policy cooperation between authorities. In the long run, the programmes have instilled in Europe the perception that **learning mobility brings benefits to individuals** and that **its learning outcomes are to be commonly validated and recognised**. The programmes evaluated have also been **important for the EU's global outreach**, notably in facilitating the recognition of qualifications between Europe and partner countries.

The systemic effects are matched by **progress in disseminating** the results of the projects funded thanks to a single dedicated platform⁶. However, the **evidence that the project results are used by policy makers is not always clear**, especially if the latter are not engaged in the project from the beginning.

- **To boost the impact on policy**, the Commission will consider additional ways of fostering system-level effects and to mainstream successful project results at national level more effectively.
- In preparing future programmes, it will explore options for developing and financing **at larger scale** (notably with the support of the European Structural and Investment Funds) those successful Erasmus+ projects that have the potential to trigger structural reforms at national level.

Overall, the evaluation showed that, at mid-term, Erasmus+ has **achieved or exceeded most of the indicators** set in the legal basis for it. Demand greatly exceeds the funding available. For the future, without prejudice to the next Multi Financial Framework, the evaluation confirmed the programme's **capacity to absorb an overall budget increase**. If that was the case, it suggested that the current **share-out between the sectors of the programme could be modified** to reinforce those sectors for which a budget increase would determine the most efficient gains in terms of impact. **School education, vocational education and training (VET) and youth activities**, where the impact of the programmes was proven albeit not yet as widespread as in higher education due to smaller budget allocations, were identified as **having high potential** for expanded participation in Erasmus+ activities in the coming years.

- As of 2018, new actions and activities will be launched under Erasmus+ with a view to **increasing the number of mobility opportunities** for school pupils, VET learners and apprentices.
- In its communication *Strengthening European identity through education and culture*⁷, the Commission sets out a vision for boosting the future Erasmus+ in all categories of learners (including pupils, students, trainees and apprentices) and teachers, with the aim of **doubling the number of participants** and reaching out to learners from disadvantaged backgrounds by 2025⁸.

⁵ SWD, 5.1.2.2

⁶ <http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects>

⁷ *Strengthening European identity through education and culture — The European Commission's contribution to the leaders' meeting in Gothenburg*, 17 November 2017, COM(2017) 673

⁸ Without prejudice to the next Multi Financial Framework

The **Master Loan Guarantee Facility** has only recently started up. The first beneficiaries gave positive feedback. So far however, it has **not yet lived up to volume expectations** due to delays to its launch, low take-up among financial institutions and a lack of awareness among students.

- Until 2020, the Commission intends to **reduce the yearly budget allocations to the Master Loan Guarantee Facility**, without altering the overall allocation set for other higher education activities.

EU added value and relevance

In light of the outcomes delivered, the evaluation highlights the **undisputable European added value** of the programmes evaluated⁹. This stems from the high volume and broad scope of the activities funded, together with fairer access to learning mobility, mainstreamed best practices, deeper EU integration and a clear international dimension. Other schemes funding comparable action at national level remain significantly smaller both in volume and scope. They are most unlikely to be able to substitute for Erasmus+ funding.

The evaluation showed that Erasmus+ is **better aligned with EU policies** than its predecessors and is flexible enough to adapt to emerging EU-level needs such as increasing social inclusion and preventing violent radicalisation¹⁰. To maximise the programme's impact, the evaluation recommends that **priorities be reduced in number and better focused**.

- In the current programme, greater emphasis was placed on action that contributes to **social inclusion** following the **Paris Declaration**¹¹, the new priority areas under **ET 2020** and the **Youth Strategy**¹² or the **New Skills Agenda for Europe**¹³.
- The future programme should continue to **help implement the EU's political priorities**, while keeping the flexibility to adjust as needed and being highly relevant to participating countries. Some actions, notably those supporting partnerships, could be **focused on fewer priorities**.

The final evaluation of the programme will also assess the outcomes of the large-scale Knowledge Alliances and Sector Skills Alliances introduced within Erasmus+ for the purpose of **boosting innovation** in higher education and VET. These actions were not sufficiently complete to be evaluated at mid-term.

⁹ SWD, 5.5

¹⁰ SWD, 5.2

¹¹ Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education, Paris, 17 March 2015.

¹² 2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of ET 2020, OJ C 417, 15.12.2015, p. 25; Council Resolution laying down a specific EU work plan for youth (2016-2018), OJ C 417, 15.12.2015, p. 1.

¹³ COM(2016) 381 of 10 June 2016

- Up to 2020, the Commission will further consolidate the **different ways of handling projects** mainly aimed at promoting cooperation and exchanges, as distinct from projects aimed at fostering innovation.
- In the new programme, ways of **boosting innovation** will be considered.

The evaluation also noted that there is potential to introduce better-targeted actions to **maximise the relevance of Jean Monnet** activities and **the programme's added value** in the **adult learning** sector.

Teaching and research on EU matters is now relatively widespread in higher education. By contrast, there is a need for greater understanding of European integration and a greater sense of belonging to Europe among the youngest generations, in the aftermath of economic and political crises of the last ten years.

- **Jean Monnet** could in the future programme be redesigned to **cater for a wider target group** (including schools) in order to raise awareness on what its common European values are.

The evaluation underlines that the impact on the adult learning sector, which currently targets a wide population, is diluted due to the fragmented and diverse nature of the sector.

- The Commission will consider how to **increase the focus of EU support for transnational activities in the adult learning sector**.

Coherence

The evaluation found a **high level of complementarity between** Erasmus+ and other relevant EU policies and programmes (e.g. the European Social Fund and Horizon 2020). Although the level of synergies varies, it is striking that the evaluation detected **very few overlaps**¹⁴.

The programme's **strong internal coherence** compared to its predecessors stems from its **lifelong learning coverage**. Bringing together fields that are often kept separate (at national level) in a single EU programme is perceived as encouraging complementarity and an international outlook¹⁵.

Cross-sectoral cooperation within Erasmus+ has increased sharply (+23 percentage points compared to predecessor programmes). The vast majority of cooperation projects now include at least one organisation from another programme sector. Cooperation between education and training and civil society is gradually happening under Erasmus+.

The evaluation highlighted that the programme has clearly benefited from **simpler** architecture, grouping activities into three key actions (individual mobility, cooperation, and policy reform support), as expected in the impact assessment. The **single brand name** has contributed to the programme's **increased visibility**, to the benefit of each sector. Erasmus+

¹⁴ SWD, 5.3.2

¹⁵ SWD, 5.3.1

has improved its **geographical balance**, better involving small countries and countries from Central and Eastern Europe.

Coherence **can still be improved in relation to sport**. To achieve meaningful results, resources should not be spread too thinly.

- The Commission will seek to **increase the focus of some sport actions, notably on social inclusion aspects**, and reduce overlap with youth activities.

*Efficiency and simplification*¹⁶

Evidence shows that Erasmus+ **mobility actions are clearly cost-effective**, especially learners' mobility (with a cost for the EU of 15€/per day/learner). A key challenge will be to **improve the efficiency of decentralised actions with partner countries**, which have specific criteria and fragmented budgets coming under the EU's external relations funds.

Management costs (at 6 % of the Erasmus+ budget¹⁷) **are reasonable**, especially compared to similar national schemes (14 % on average), although **greater economies of scale could have been achieved**. More efficiency gains are therefore expected by 2020.

In terms of simplification, the integrated nature of Erasmus+ allows cross-field tools to be used for grant application, monitoring, audit or dissemination. **Following a difficult transitional period** between the predecessor programmes and the current programme, there is broad agreement that Erasmus+ has seen major improvements (e.g. simplified grants, digitalisation, the VET Charter and online language support¹⁸) but that **procedures and IT management tools should be made easier to use** to reduce the administrative burden on implementing bodies and beneficiaries in proportion to the grants they receive.

- From 2018, the Commission will make it easier to apply for grants by introducing online web forms. These incremental **improvements will continue** throughout the programme's life.
- The future programme should further consolidate current efficiency gains, especially **reducing the administrative burden** by simplifying application and reporting procedures, making IT tools more interoperable and user-friendly, and increasing budget flexibility, while preserving accountability.

The **decentralised implementation mode through national agencies is now well established**. A **truly performance-based approach** to programme management was introduced in 2014. Building on the acknowledged improvement in monitoring outcomes in Erasmus+, some indicators need to be fine-tuned and **less data could be collected from participants and better used**.

¹⁶ SWD, 5.4

¹⁷ Including management fees for National agencies, supported through the operational budget.

¹⁸ <https://erasmusplusols.eu/>

- The communication between the Education, Culture and Audiovisual Executive Agency and national agencies has been improved in order to increase **synergies between centralised and decentralised actions**.
- The Commission will consider how to perfect Erasmus+ monitoring by extending it to cooperation projects and centralised actions with a view **to mining the data collected, in a proportionate way, so that decision making is informed by evidence**.