

EU support for education: Improving young people's chances on the job market

- The EU's ERASMUS+ programme is investing **€14.7 billion** in education (2014-2019).
- ERASMUS+ will enable **4 million young Europeans to study or learn abroad**.
- **Experience abroad increases young people's chances on the job market** and reduces their risk of unemployment.

Support for education, training and youth in Europe

School and university students, as well as people in professional training, benefit from EU support for education. The EU funds exchange programmes such as the popular [Erasmus programme](#), which allows students to spend up to a year in another EU Member State. Less well known are other EU-funded opportunities for young people learning a job to gain additional qualifications. These exchanges offer invaluable possibilities to live in another country, to significantly improve language skills, and to gain new experience abroad.

Trans-European mobility is therefore at the core of EU education policy. Mobility allows students and apprentices to obtain better professional qualifications and eases their access to labour markets. The EU has a supporting function in education policy, and seeks to help Member States achieve the overall objective of high quality education ([Lisbon Treaty](#), Article [165](#)). As education policies are decided at the Member State level, the EU facilitates cooperation between Member States, while supporting the mutual recognition of diplomas and fostering mobility. Despite its limited role on paper, the EU's support in education policy has proved significant. The Erasmus programme alone gave close to 3 million students the opportunity to study and learn abroad between 1987 and 2013.

2014-2020, under the new [ERASMUS+ programme](#), **4 million Europeans** will be given an opportunity to gain experience abroad. ERASMUS+ now includes the entire gamut of EU support for mobility in the field of education, training, youth and sport within one single framework. Its budget amounts to **€14.7 billion** for the 2014 to 2020 period. The **European Parliament** has successfully [demanded](#) an increase in the budget available for education, including for ERASMUS+. The programme covers such areas as:



Data source: [European Commission](#).

EU's key contribution to education

The EU's education and training strategic framework ([ET 2020](#)) offers support for almost all stages of learning, including academic and non-academic education, in order to contribute to the development of quality education: early childhood (preschool, kindergarten), school, vocational training (apprenticeships), higher education (universities, etc.), professional (re-)training and adult education.

Academic education

Transnational academic cooperation and student mobility are important parts of the Europe [2020 strategy](#) for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and jobs. By promoting studies abroad and facilitating the mobility of students, the EU has contributed to improving the skills and employability of students across Europe. For example, the EU has let strong support to the [Bologna process](#), which is a collective effort of public authorities, universities, students, employers from [48 countries](#) to ensure comparability in academic standards and quality of higher-education qualifications within a [European Higher Education Area](#). The Bologna process has been critical in easing the recognition of qualifications and periods of study across Europe, thus facilitating student exchanges. Moreover, the EU has developed instruments to facilitate the recognition of knowledge, competences and skills, such as:

- the [European Qualifications Framework](#), which helps to compare national qualifications systems and to make qualifications across European countries easier to understand; and
- the [Europass](#), a type of skills passport, which is free of charge and allows students (and apprentices) to present to employers their qualifications and experience from across Europe.

The mobility opportunities supported by the EU enrich the professional and academic lives of many European students and allow them to develop new skills that can significantly enhance their employability, notably adaptability and flexibility, language knowledge, intercultural competence, self-reliance and self-awareness. A 2014 [study](#) on Erasmus by the European Commission included an evaluation of the impact of mobility on the skills and employability of students, highlighting two striking effects:

- the risk of long-term unemployment for Erasmus students after graduation was 50 % lower than for non-mobile students, and
- the unemployment rate of mobile students was 23 % lower five years after graduation.

Non-academic education and vocational training

Good quality **early childhood** education [can help](#) level social differences, because it supports the children in greatest need: those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Therefore, EU education ministers and the Commission have agreed to aim to offer places in [early childhood education/preschool](#) to 95 % of all children from four years of age. An EU working group is currently developing methods to help Member States monitor the quality of their provision.

EU funding totalling [€8 billion](#) (2014-2020) will contribute to Member States' efforts to increase the number of pupils **leaving school** with the necessary skills to pursue further education and find a job. Such [basic skills](#) include reading, mathematics and science. EU-funded research has highlighted the categories of children who are particularly [vulnerable](#) to dropping out of school and put forward possible solutions to help them stay in school. For instance, the EU [finances](#) the individual coaching of young people in danger of leaving school without a qualification and has helped to [fund a new school](#) in Sweden to help early school leavers return to education. Children from schools across Europe can also work on common projects through [eTwinning](#) and the [School Education Gateway](#), which are EU-funded online platforms that connect schools.

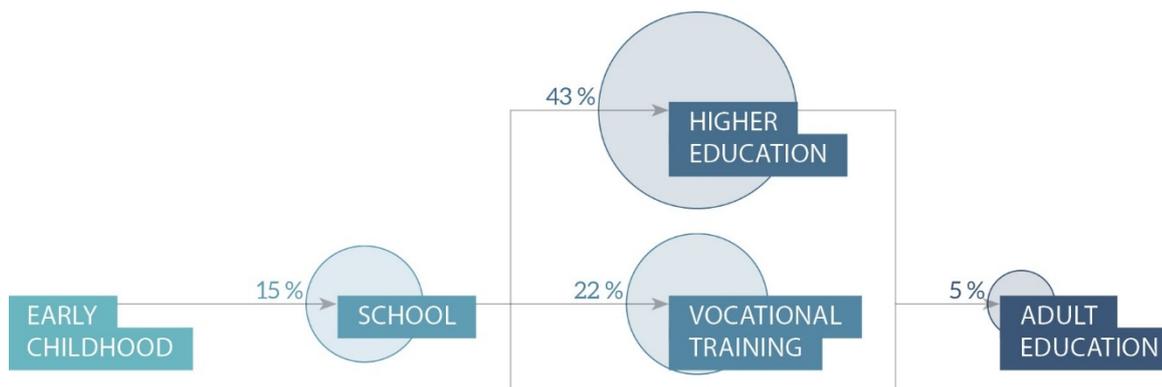
Outside school, the EU fosters **youth exchanges**. The [European Voluntary Service \(EVS\)](#), which has existed for 20 years, has already enabled 100 000 young people to volunteer abroad. One example of an EVS project is a [cultural centre in Sicily](#), where young people can help organise environmental activities for schoolchildren or work with immigrants. For the 2014 to 2020 period, [600 000 young people](#) aged between 13 and 30 will receive EU funding for the EVS or shorter-term youth exchanges.

In the area of non-academic education, the EU has also developed support for **vocational education and training (VET)**. Vocational qualifications are an important factor in helping young people to find paid employment – as people with low levels of education are three times more likely [not to be in employment, education or training](#) than qualified people. The EU aims to give at least [6 % of apprentices](#) the opportunity to study or train abroad. From 2014 to 2020, ERASMUS+ will fund traineeships of up to 12 months for [650 000 young people](#) in a company or another workplace abroad (public or non-governmental organisation, etc.) or in a VET school with periods of work-based learning in a company. This is illustrated by a German-Spanish exchange where students from a vocational training school spent a few months [in Spain](#), working in logistics in local transport companies. The apprentices, some of whom were next in line to take over family businesses, took away valuable experience that they would be able to use at home. Sending apprentices across borders also generates **European added value**: according to a Commission [study](#) people who learn foreign languages and become proficient in them are more likely to find employment.

Finally, the EU [helps adults](#) needing to acquire or improve basic skills and older workers needing to retrain or to keep their skills up to date. For instance, through the [European Social Fund](#) and the [European Globalisation Adjustment Fund](#), the EU helps [young mothers in the United Kingdom](#) combine childcare and employment, and helps workers to retrain or set up their own businesses after losing their jobs. [ERASMUS for Young Entrepreneurs](#), originally proposed by the European Parliament, brings together young and experienced entrepreneurs.

Teachers from all stages of learning can receive EU funds to [teach abroad](#) or observe other teachers for up to two months. This also enables them to exchange ideas on teaching methods with colleagues from other EU countries.

Share of ERASMUS+ funding per education sector:



Data source: [European Commission](#); remaining share for future allocation of funds.

Challenges to and responses by education policy

Unemployment among young people remains high in Europe, more than double the rate of the [general population](#). The youth unemployment rate in the EU as a whole reached [18.5 %](#) (4.2 million young people aged under 25) in September 2016. The highest rates were recorded in Greece with 44.6 %, Spain with 42.8 % and Italy with 37.4 %.

In that context, investment in education and training is crucial to increase the chances of young people on the labour market. Most EU Member States spend within a range of 3.1 % and 6.2 % of their GDP on education. Through a series of specific financing programmes, the EU gives an additional boost to investment in education and training. Besides ERASMUS+, two other EU European funds contribute to improving education across Europe in the period 2014-2020:

- the [European Social Fund](#) dedicates up to [€26.7 billion](#) to education and training; and
- the [European Regional Fund](#) is to allocate €6.5 billion to education infrastructures.

In addition, the [European Fund for Strategic Investments](#), a new budgetary tool aimed at boosting growth and investment in the EU, provides financial support for projects contributing to education. By offering EU guarantees, it attracts private capital and therefore enables the financing of projects that would otherwise not be realised. The fund also includes financing opportunities for SMEs willing to invest in education.

Activities and benefits of possible future EU support for education

Spending on education needs to be offset, inter alia, against the costs of young people not employed. In 2012, the [European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions](#) outlined that European economies lose approximately €153 billion per year because of the inability to place young people in gainful employment. More EU activities along the lines of the ERASMUS+ programme, would help more young people to secure qualifications and find a job by promoting mobility opportunities. The [Jacques Delors Institute](#) argues that €5 billion a year would allow 200 000 young people to gain experience in a different country annually. Such a programme would help to fill the many vacant apprenticeships in EU Member States. It would also feed into the EU's [Youth Guarantee](#), which aims to ensure that young people receive a good-quality offer of employment or further education within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving education. Although [youth unemployment](#) dropped from a peak of 24.4 % in early 2013 to 18.5 % in autumn 2016, the EU still needs to achieve better results.

The EU's contribution to the education of European citizens has added a new and vital cross border dimension to national education efforts. Experiences abroad have proved to be a major asset for young people on the job market. The EU plays a crucial role as a coordinator and facilitator to support apprentices and students, education institutions and many more to cooperate across borders. In other words, the EU's investments in education in the form of mobility and other support are a key element in the future of young Europeans.

Philipp Hingerl, trainee at the German software company Corel GmbH – Mindjet:

Originally from Germany, Philipp spent three weeks at a software company in Brighton (UK) as part of an ERASMUS+ mobility programme for apprentices. During his stay in Brighton, he benefited from education-relevant experience that his company in Germany could not offer. At the company in Brighton he had the opportunity to learn about warehouse processes, for example. He appreciates having experienced in the UK how things can be done in a different way, which is helping him and his company in Germany to improve their working systems. Finally, getting to know native speakers helped him to improve his English and to become more familiar with the British lifestyle and culture.

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