

Erasmus 2021-2027

Impact assessment (SWD(2018) 277) accompanying a Commission proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on establishing 'Erasmus': the Union programme for education, training, youth and sport, and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013

This note is one of a series of brief initial appraisals of European Commission impact assessments (IAs) accompanying the multiannual financial framework (MFF) proposals, tailored to reflect the specificities of the MFF package and the corresponding IAs.¹ It provides an initial analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the European Commission's [impact assessment](#) accompanying the above-mentioned [proposal](#), submitted on 30 May 2018 and referred to the Committee on Culture and Education (CULT).²

Political and legal context; objectives

The Erasmus programme is an international student exchange programme that has been running in Europe since 1987, supporting education, training and sport. The current Erasmus+ 2014 to 2020 spending programme has a budget of €4.7 billion (in current prices) (IA, p. 13). The proposed budget for the 2021 to 2027 programming period has been increased to EUR 30 billion (in current prices) (article 14 of the proposal). The focus of the new programme is on being inclusive and on doing more to reach young people with limited opportunities (IA, p. 4). The same ambition is reflected in the 2025 [vision](#) for a European Education Area,³ which calls for the number of participants to be doubled and for efforts to be made to reach out to learners from disadvantaged backgrounds (IA, p. 5).

The impact assessment builds on the conclusions of the [mid-term evaluation](#) of the 2014 to 2020 Erasmus+ programme.⁴ The IA provides a detailed overview of these conclusions, focusing on the standard evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, EU added value, and coherence and synergies (IA, pp. 6-10). For example, the evaluation called in part for cuts to red tape, for instance through further simplification of administrative procedures, wider access to the programme for disadvantaged groups and increased international opportunities, a review of the Master Loan Guarantee Facility,⁵ and stronger and new synergies with other EU legal investments and funds (IA, Table 1, p. 9).

The IA identifies challenges for the future Erasmus programme, based on the findings of the mid-term evaluation. These include the knowledge, skills and competences gap, the need to make Erasmus more socially inclusive, limited participation in democratic life and the lack of a sense of European identity, limited opportunities for and access to cooperation between organisations from different countries, and the insufficient scope and volume of international (non-EU) mobility and cooperation (IA, pp. 15-21).

The **general objective** of the Erasmus+ programme as described in the IA is 'to support the educational, professional and personal development of people in education, training, youth and sport, in Europe and beyond, thereby contributing to sustainable growth, jobs and social cohesion and to strengthening European identity'. Three **specific objectives** are as follows: 1) to promote the learning mobility of individuals in the field of education and training; 2) to promote non-formal learning mobility and active participation among young people; and 3) to promote the learning mobility of sports coaches and staff. In addition, the promotion of cooperation, inclusion, excellence, creativity and innovation is also one of the specific objectives targeting the three areas of activity. (IA, p. 22). The IA details further practical operational objectives of the programme. However, these generally appear to repeat the specific objectives, organised under each of the three key actions.

Programme structure and priorities; delivery mechanisms of the intended funding

The IA discusses two scenarios for continuation of the programme: to keep it in the current format with an adjusted budget on account of Brexit, or to strengthen the programme to make it more inclusive and make improvements to address the challenges raised by the mid-term evaluation. The IA clearly focuses on presenting the suggested improvements to the current programme, with no discussion of alternative measures to respond to the challenges identified. Regarding delivery mechanisms and management modes, the IA mentions that the programme's current infrastructure will be maintained,⁶ based mainly on grants and direct management by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) together with indirect management by national agencies.

The IA explains that the approach to the future post 2020 programme will be twofold: to maintain stability, giving existing actions greater focus, boosting the clarity of objectives and increasing efficiency, and 2) to discontinue certain underperforming actions, such as the Student Loan Guarantee Facility and Jean Monnet support for associations, where a lack of efficiency was indicated in the mid-term evaluation (IA, pp. 24-25). In addition, the IA proposes a limited set of new measures 'in line with the broader ambition for the new programme', such as European universities and centres of vocational excellence, without clarifying what is meant by this ambition – the budget increase, the increase in groups targeted or new, better streamlined measures, or indeed the broader EU policy objective of building a European education area by 2025.

The impacts on the Erasmus structure and the EU budget are assessed broadly and qualitatively for a set of rationalised and improved actions described in the IA. The IA explains that these actions are based on the findings of the mid-term evaluation and stakeholder consultation, and aim to maintain the programme's current structure (IA, p. 25). The actions are arranged under five focus areas (pp. 25-47):

- 1) forward-looking knowledge, skills and competence development, new alliances with the relevant stakeholders (p. 25);
- 2) 'Erasmus – a reality for all': a more inclusive programme, reaching out to those from disadvantaged backgrounds (p. 28);
- 3) promoting awareness and learning on EU matters (p. 34);
- 4) ambitious international dimension (p. 36);
- 5) simplification, coherence and synergies (p. 37).

A summary table comparing the proposed improved actions against the challenges identified in the mid-term evaluation is provided on pp. 40-41. Generally the actions offered appear to follow the identified challenges and set objectives, such as higher inclusion and participation of disadvantaged groups. Some potential risks are discussed briefly on page 44. These include lack of convergence and synergies between the EU and other funding programmes and insufficient take-up and low responsiveness across the target population.⁷ No analysis of socio-economic impacts is provided in the IA despite the focus of the programme on social inclusion.

Budgetary or public finance implications

The financial envelope for the programme is set at €30 000 000 000 in current prices. The budget is to be implemented mainly by national agencies established in each of the Erasmus programme countries (85 % of the budget), as well as the EACEA.

SME test / competitiveness

SMEs are not identified among the stakeholders affected. The Commission claims to have consulted companies as socio-economic actors, together with public authorities, civic organisations, sectorial bodies, etc. under the two open public consultations (IA, Annex 2, p. 59). Regarding work-based training and apprenticeships, as well as in the light of the Young European Entrepreneurs programme, the IA could have perhaps elaborated on cooperation between companies and Erasmus participants.

Relations with third countries

An ambitious international dimension for Erasmus is one of the main priorities for improvement in the new proposal, focusing on increased opportunities for mobility and cooperation for individuals and

organisations from less developed countries, and offering more opportunities for cooperation and mobility with developed and emerging countries (IA, p. 36). The IA does not analyse the potential implications for student exchanges arising from Brexit.

Simplification and other regulatory implications

The conclusions in the mid-term evaluation report regarding the administrative burden and bureaucracy suggested mainstreaming use of online web forms to simplify the application process and simplified formats for small-scale actors (IA, p. 10). These suggestions appear to be taken on board both in the IA (under simplification) and in the proposal, and complementarities with other MFF funds, such as ESIF and Horizon 2020 are discussed in Annex 4.

Subsidiarity / proportionality

The legal basis for the proposal is Articles 165 and 166 of the TFEU. The IA merely states that the Commission took the principles of subsidiarity, proportionality and efficiency into account when designing the new programme (IA, p. 48). Several national parliaments have scrutinised the proposal, but none has issued a reasoned opinion on subsidiarity or proportionality grounds. The deadline for submission was 17 September 2018.

Quality of data, research and analysis

The IA follows the recommendations expressed in the mid-term evaluation on the implementation of the 2014 to 2020 Erasmus programme closely. The evaluation was outsourced to an external contractor. The priorities and action steps are described in detail, but the IA offers no description of the actual operation of these actions in practice.⁸

Stakeholder consultation

The Commission conducted six online public consultations for the MFF proposals clustered by policy area, rather than one online public consultation for each accompanying IA as normally required by the [better regulation guidelines](#). Instead of the mandatory 12-week duration, these six public consultations ran for eight weeks, from 10 January to 9 March 2018, including the [open public consultation in the area of values and mobility](#) among them, with 1 127 responses considered of relevance for Erasmus. Another [public consultation was conducted specifically for the mid-term evaluation](#) of the programme and ran from 28 February to 31 May 2017. Annex 2 of the IA (pp. 58-62) gives an insight into this consultation in the form of a brief synopsis.

The opinions expressed in the stakeholder consultation appear to have been taken into account in the drafting of the IA, as the Member States and stakeholders supported the main approach taken by the new programme, namely maintaining stability and continuity with the current programme in terms of structure (evolution, not revolution) (IA, p. 23). The Commission refers consistently to the stakeholders' opinions throughout the IA, without referring to specific groups of respondents.

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring indicators are identified in the IA in a dedicated chapter (IA, Chapter 5, p. 49). The IA explains that monitoring will be continuous in order 'to assess the progress towards achieving the output and results targets of the programme, and to track the performance indicators in the short, medium and longer-term based on predefined targets and benchmarks' (IA, p. 50).

Regarding the monitoring indicators,⁹ the Commission will be empowered to adopt delegated acts. An interim evaluation requirement is maintained under the new programme, and the Member States will submit the implementation report to the Commission by 30 April, 2024. The Commission would carry out the final evaluation no later than four years after the end of the 2021 to 2027 Erasmus period.

Commission Regulatory Scrutiny Board

The Regulatory Scrutiny Board (RSB) gave [a positive opinion with reservations](#) on the draft IA on 13 April 2018 (IA, p. 54). Annex 1 of the IA includes a chapter on how the RSB recommendations have been

covered in the final version (pp. 54-57), in accordance with the better regulation guidelines. Its key criticisms appears to be sufficiently addressed in the IA.

Coherence between the Commission's legislative proposal and the IA

The proposal's provisions generally appear to follow the recommendations expressed in the IA.

Conclusions

The IA essentially builds on the recommendations expressed in the mid-term evaluation on the implementation of the 2014 to 2020 Erasmus+ programme. It consists largely of a detailed presentation and substantiation of the proposals for improvement without the discussion of alternatives normally required in an IA. The impacts of the planned actions on the Erasmus structure and the EU budget are assessed in broad terms, with a qualitative approach, but an analysis of socio-economic impacts is lacking. The Commission consistently refers to stakeholders' opinions throughout the IA. However, more details on the opinions of specific groups of respondents, as well as more concrete examples of intervention strategies and delivery mechanisms would have benefited the quality of the IA.

ENDNOTES

¹ The almost parallel adoption of the spending programmes and the MFF proposals had an impact on the IA process and resulted in simplified IAs, with their format and scope differing from the standard IAs as defined by the Commission's Better Regulation Guidelines (see also [Toolbox 10 Financial Programmes and Instruments](#)).

² For more detail on the background to the proposal, see D. Chircop, [Erasmus 2021-2027 The Union programme for education, training, youth and sport](#), legislative briefing, EPRS, European Parliament, November 2018.

³ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on strengthening European identity through education and culture, Strasbourg, 14 November, 2017, p. 13.

⁴ Parliament adopted an [implementation report](#) on Erasmus+ on 18 January 2017. See A. Zygierewicz, [The Erasmus+ Programme \(Regulation EU No 1288/2013\)](#), EPRS, European Parliament, July 2016.

⁵ Discontinued in the proposal for the 2021 to 2027 Erasmus programme.

⁶ The IA explains that the mid-term evaluation found the delivery mechanisms and management modes fit for purpose (IA, p. 48).

⁷ The IA states that 'risk management and mitigation strategies will be developed at the programming level', without providing any details on this.

⁸ Some general information on what the new actions will contain and how they will be managed is available in the Commission staff working document [Main actions implementing the Erasmus programme](#) (SWD(2018) 276 final).

⁹ According to the conclusions of the Court of Auditors [Special Report](#) 22/2018: Mobility under Erasmus, the performance indicators are not fully aligned with the general and specific objectives of the regulation, making performance evaluation difficult (p. 9).

This briefing, prepared for the Committee on Culture and Education (CULT), analyses whether the principal criteria laid down in the Commission's own better regulation guidelines, as well as additional factors identified by the Parliament in its Impact Assessment Handbook, appear to be met by the IA. It does not attempt to deal with the substance of the proposal.

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