Erasmus 2021-2027

The Union programme for education, training, youth and sport

OVERVIEW

The Erasmus 2021-2027 proposal was published on 30 May 2018. Establishing a new programme would ensure the continuation of the Erasmus+ funding programme for education, training, youth and sport. The Commission claims its proposal would double the funds available to €30 000 million in current prices, from €14 712 million dedicated to Erasmus+. The proposal would also triple the number of participants. While Erasmus+ offered mobility opportunities to more than 4 million people, the new programming period aims to reach up to 12 million participants. The new proposal also aims at greater simplification for end-users, incorporates sports in the main structure of the programme, expands the use of digitalisation, supports new areas of knowledge and introduces Discover EU, a new mobility initiative. Stakeholders agreed that the current programme is highly beneficial but lessons need to be learnt to help the next generation programme run more efficiently and effectively.


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<th>Committee responsible:</th>
<th>Culture and Education (CULT)</th>
<th>COM(2018) 367 30.5.2018</th>
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<tr>
<td>Rapporteur:</td>
<td>Milan Zver (EPP, Slovenia)</td>
<td>2018/0191(COD)</td>
</tr>
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<td>Shadow rapporteurs:</td>
<td>Krystyna Łybacka (S&amp;D, Poland)</td>
<td>Ordinary legislative procedure (COD)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Remo Sernagiotto (ECR, Italy)</td>
<td>(Parliament and Council on equal footing – formerly ‘co-decision’)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maria Teresa Giménez Barbat (ALDE, Spain)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Liadh Ní Riada (GUE/NGL, Ireland)</td>
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<td>Jill Evans (Greens/EFA, UK)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Isabella Adinolfi (EFDD, Italy)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dominique Bilde (ENF, France)</td>
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<td>Next steps expected:</td>
<td>Vote in committee</td>
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EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service
Author: Denise Chircop
Members’ Research Service
PE 628.313 – November 2018
Introduction

The proposal for a new regulation forms part of the upcoming 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework. Establishing a new regulation would ensure the continuation and evolution of Erasmus+ the European Union’s programme dedicated to education, training, youth and sport. The new programme proposes to maintain an integrated approach that covers lifelong learning in formal, non-formal and informal contexts. It maintains the objectives of improving people’s skills, their employability and engagement as citizens through education, training, youth and sport policies. It would also continue to facilitate the modernisation of education and training in Member States.

Context

The Commission highlights a number of declarations that focus on education, training and youth to clarify the proposed objectives of the programme. First of all, it cites the Rome Declaration of 25 March 2017, linking opportunities for mobility with education and training of the highest quality leading to cultural, social and economic development. Second, it mentions a resolution of the European Parliament of 14 September 2017, emphasising the need to increase the budget to make Erasmus more inclusive. Third, during the Social Summit in Gothenburg, the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission signed the European Pillar of Social Rights on 17 November 2017. This Pillar set out, as its first principle, the right to an inclusive education of high quality, to training and to lifelong learning. Respect of this principle would secure the right to acquire and maintain the necessary skills for full participation in society and the labour market. Fourth, the European Council conclusions of 14 December 2017 highlighted that EU actions in education have a role in bringing Europeans together to build a common future. European leaders therefore called for increased and extended learning mobility and exchanges to make them more inclusive. Fifth, in its communications of 14 February 2018 and 2 May 2018, the Commission pointed out that the budget has to live up to the promises made by EU leaders. It also pointed out the strong consensus on the need to step up mobility and exchanges alongside a demand for a strong youth focus in the next financial framework. Finally, the new programme is presented as the key component supporting the Commission’s vision of creating a European education area by 2025.

Existing situation

The current programme, Erasmus+, has been referred to as a success story. Apart from the 4 million participants in learning mobility, already cited; 25 000 strategic partnerships were formed with the participation of 125 000 schools, training, higher education and adult education institutions, youth organisations and enterprises; 150 knowledge alliances joined 1 500 higher education institutions and enterprises in highly innovative projects; and similarly, 150 sector skills alliances were set up between 2 000 vocational education and training providers and enterprises.

Erasmus+ is an umbrella programme that brings together a number of previous funding programmes, each linked to a particular sector of education, training and youth, with the introduction of sports. Merging these programmes in Erasmus+ increased the number of activities following a lifelong learning logic. The change also made it possible to begin to overcome fragmentation and to improve the coherence and relevance of EU’s action in the field. There were also some gains in efficiency and simplicity, but these were not equally successful for all aspects of the programme.

The European Parliament followed the implementation of Erasmus+ 2014-2020 closely, to propose improvements on the spot and to develop some insights that would be used in the round of negotiations for the next generation programme. In support of its discussion, EPRS undertook a European Implementation Assessment (July 2016), looking at both centralised and decentralised implementation, while a Policy Department study (July 2016) focused specifically on decentralised...
implementation. Both studies noted a balance in the programme’s objectives, but they agreed its implementation still needed fine-tuning. The studies recommended easier application procedures, clearer guidelines and role definitions as well as improvements in the IT and language learning tools. On the other hand, the lack of funding and the low rate of applicant success were described as threatening future interest in the programme.

During the interim evaluation, not all programme users expressed equal satisfaction with the new umbrella programme. Some were concerned that it lowered the visibility of actions in sectors such as adult education. At the same time, while national agencies covering education and training favoured more harmonisation in rules, national agencies covering youth thought streamlining ignored the specific needs of their sector. Furthermore, while a larger budget made it possible to approve some big projects, this was happening at the cost of smaller projects, for whom the administrative burden was too heavy. Erasmus+ also seemed to add a degree of distance between citizens and the institutions compared to the programmes it had replaced. For instance, schools had to go through their legal owners, such as local authorities, to present their projects, and young people wanting to do cross-border volunteering had to access the programme through an institution. On a different level, the success of Erasmus+ may be closing doors to students who want to undertake mobility on their own, as higher education institutions seem to prefer to promote student mobility through the programme.

There is evidence that learning mobility through Erasmus+ enhances the participants’ employability and their sense of being European and active citizens. However, the current programme has been criticised for capturing a limited and already privileged audience. Learning mobility in Erasmus+ was primarily open to higher education students. The implementation of the programme created obstacles to the participation of people with disabilities, people with less economic means and citizens in remote areas. Barriers are primarily linked with the level of grants, which do not cover all of the expenses. The length of the exchange periods can also be taxing for students who have other responsibilities which they cannot leave behind for extended periods of time, or who have serious financial constraints.

On a different level, while the Commission deplored that teaching about the European Union in national curricula remains fragmented and lacks a dimension of active participation, the current Erasmus+ offers school pupil mobility only as an exception. Moreover, the opportunities for vocational learners, apprentices and adults are limited when compared with the opportunities available to higher education students.

The current programme already uses virtual environments, such as the e-Twinning platform, to bring school pupils from classes in different parts of the EU together around a common project. The School Education Gateway and EPALE build cooperation between teachers and adult educators respectively, to enrich their ongoing professional development. Eurodesk and Salto-Youth offer online tools to aid searches for learning, training or youth work opportunities. In the meantime, ever larger sectors of the public increasingly access digital environments, whose potential continues to unfold as a matter of course. A new regulation is an opportune moment to consider the possibility to exploit digitalisation even further.

The Commission also admits that while the circulation of ideas, best practices and expertise contribute towards improvements in the quality of education, the capacity for cooperation produced by the current programme is insufficient, especially among small and grass-roots organisations. Cooperation also varies among regions and across sectors. The Commission pinpoints schools, adult learning establishments and youth associations as being less involved, and this hampers both institutional reforms and the modernisation of education, training and youth sectors locally and at the level of the EU.
Parliament's starting position

The \textit{resolution} on the implementation of Erasmus+, adopted on 2 February 2017, highlights that the programme's success has made it an EU flagship policy. It also expresses appreciation of the fact that the Commission was quick to react to feedback about difficulties encountered and made adjustments to the IT tools and adopted procedures for small sized projects. However, the resolution suggests that the Commission needs to do more to exploit fully the lifelong learning dimension of cross-sectoral cooperation, on the one hand, and to use the old 'brand names' alongside Erasmus+, on the other, to help applicants orient themselves better. The European Parliament calls for a stronger school education dimension, allowing as many people as possible to participate. It draws attention to the potential of Erasmus+ to support improvements in the quality of vocational education and training and to attract under-represented groups. Furthermore, it points out two types of obstacles to mobility. The first is the lack of automatic recognition of international qualifications. The second are financial barriers. The EP calls for the removal of these barriers to facilitate access. It suggests greater flexibility in mobility grants and administrative costs to favour longer stays and the exemption of the programme from taxation and social levies. This is justified, as studies have shown that participants' career prospects improve.

In its \textit{resolution} on the future of Erasmus+ of 14 September 2017, the European Parliament once more acknowledged the extremely positive impact of Erasmus+. It proposed that the successor programme should focus on lifelong learning and mobility and recommended that the priorities of the Erasmus programme should complement those of the EU Youth Strategy and other EU-funded programmes. The resolution encouraged Member States to use regional and social funds to increase their contribution to mobility grants. Parliament stressed that the new programme should be more open and accessible. It also drew attention to difficulties with the recognition of European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credits gained during mobility periods. It called for the creation of a European student eCard to give students Europe-wide access to services. Members emphasised the importance of fostering active citizenship, civic education and European identity through the programme. Finally, they expressed hope for a mutually satisfactory agreement in the context of the Brexit negotiations.

Council starting position

The Council held a policy \textit{debate} on 15 February 2018 on the mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme and orientations for the next programming period. Ministers wanted to see wider participation from peripheral regions and regions that lag behind economically. They also discussed how the programme could strengthen Europe’s capacity for innovation. The Austrian Presidency committed to start negotiations with the Council and work towards reaching an agreement on key parts of the programme.

Preparation of the proposal

In discussing the consistency of the \textit{proposal} with existing policy provisions, the Commission points out that the programme is one of the funding instruments under the 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework aimed at investing in people, social cohesion and values. In this capacity it would support Member States reach the goals of the Paris Declaration on 'Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education'. These include the promotion of citizenship, the endorsement of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination as common values, and the prevention of radicalisation and extremism through education and youth work. The Commission points out the potential of complementary objectives and action with the future \textit{rights and values programme} and the education dimension of its \textit{external action} in the light of the European Union \textit{global strategy} on foreign and security policy (June 2016) and the European \textit{consensus for development} (Council, 19 May 2017).
Erasmus would also contribute towards the implementation of the new agenda for culture and the new skills agenda for Europe, specifically by developing skills that sustain jobs, growth and competitiveness, as well as by helping with the educational and training aspects of the integration of newly arrived migrants. The programme would also help achieve goal number four of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals, which is about inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all.

An integral part of Erasmus’s core business would be the formation of a European education area and the promotion of the overall strategic framework for cooperation in education and training with its underlying sectoral agendas. In the school sector, the focus would be on school development and excellent teaching. The Copenhagen process would continue to drive efforts in vocational education and training. In the field of higher education, priorities would be set by the renewed EU agenda for higher education and the Bologna process. Likewise, the renewed agenda would frame initiatives in adult education. It would also advance youth policy cooperation along the lines of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 and continue to develop the European dimension in sport, especially grassroots sport and the EU work plan for sport.

The mid-term evaluation carried out by the Commission to assess the implementation of Erasmus+ in the 2014-2016 period highlighted the need to reach out to people with fewer opportunities and smaller organisations. It also indicated that a new programme would need to strengthen sectors that performed very well despite receiving less funding than other areas (school, vocational education and training and youth). The administrative burden would need to be lighter for beneficiaries. These views were echoed in the stakeholder consultations. At the same time, Member States, learning institution and programme participants expressed strong support for maintaining stability, strengthening the programme and reinforcing the synergies with the European Structural and Investment Funds. Stakeholders emphasised the need to prioritise social inclusion, fairness, modernisation of education and training, European identity, active citizenship, and participation in democratic life.

The impact assessment, also favoured a stronger, more inclusive and extended programme to deliver the Union’s post-2020 objectives of stepping up mobility for all categories of learners, increasing opportunities for smaller organisations and strengthening commitment to European identity and values. A larger budget would also put the programme in a position to act on the feedback it had received from stakeholders and the general public. The impact assessment was in favour of the current mix of management styles: direct or centralised management for actions with budgets that are too small to decentralise, those which are inherently pan-European or international, pilot actions and actions that require wide competition to achieve excellence; indirect or decentralised management was deemed ideal for the bulk of the funding. This is allocated to mobility and cooperation and requires proximity to the beneficiaries and adaptation to national systems and priorities. The final version of the impact assessment report was modified in view of the Regulatory Scrutiny Board’s opinion, which requested a clear outline of the rationale and added value of extending Jean Monnet activities to promote teaching and research in European studies, sport and adult learning; clarification of the relevance and effectiveness of school pupil mobility; an analysis of potential risks and ways to mitigate them; and a way to clarify the concept of inclusion and to elaborate the potential synergies with other future union programmes and instruments.

The Commission indicates that a regulation is the proportionate choice of instrument. It draws attention to the effectiveness of Erasmus+ and the strong added value that the European dimension brings to mobility and cooperation within the Union and internationally. The proposal is also considered to be fully consistent with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the Union.

The changes the proposal would bring

In response to feedback on the implementation of the 2014-2020 programme, the proposal presents a number of actions to make it more inclusive, although some of the onus of achieving this
may fall on Member States. To support progress, specific benchmarks would be used to monitor the programme’s success in diversifying the targeted public. A new initiative, DiscoverEU, would dedicate €700 million to eighteen year olds, who would visit another Member State for the first time. The new Erasmus programme would also expand non-formal learning mobility for young people and learning mobility opportunities for higher education students, vocational education students, staff and apprentices, and re-introduce mobility for school pupils and low-skilled adult learners. Virtual mobility would also allow individuals, who for some reason find it difficult to travel, to participate in cross-border exchanges and collaboration. On a policy level, the programme would facilitate flexible learning pathways. This could be particularly beneficial for learners with fewer opportunities whose educational careers are less likely to be linear and more likely to be interrupted.

Other digital tools, such as the European Student Card, would be introduced to make it easier for universities to handle larger numbers of mobile students. Students would also be able to access various services even before arriving at the hosting institution. This initiative is in line with one of the Parliament’s suggestions. Another idea is to create a one-stop shop that integrates other Union mobility schemes with a strong learning dimension from other policy areas to enhance coherence and facilitate access. Dedicated online platforms would also be used to enrich the mobility experience with preparatory and follow-up activities and networking opportunities. Finally, the programme would serve to encourage the emergence of bottom-up university networks across the EU by 2024, to be known as European Universities, and to support the development of transnational platforms of Centres of vocational excellence. The programme would maintain the same basic structure as the previous one with three key actions. The first key action caters for mobility, the second focuses on cooperation for innovation and the exchange of best practices, while the third supports policy development. Sports, which was a new area of action in the 2014-2020 programme, is now also included in key actions one and three. This means that sports coaches and staff would also benefit from mobility to participate in study visits, job shadowing, observation periods, or to attend training courses and networking events. School pupil mobility will also shift from key action two to key action one, to bring most of the mobility opportunities together.

The proposal mentions other efforts towards simplification such as lighter procedures for small organisations and newcomers with limited administrative capacity, including schools and associations in the adult education and youth sectors. In key action two, partnerships with a focus on developing innovation would be separate from those engaged in mutual learning and the exchange of best practices, for the sake of clarity. Lighter procedures would also be used to designate national agencies and independent audit bodies that are already employed in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Erasmus+ 2014-2020 programme.

Simplification would also be achieved by using the same rules and procedures that apply to all funding instruments and the Financial Regulation as far as possible. The streamlining of indicators and criteria for selection and improvements to online tools would also help beneficiaries and national agencies.

The proposal also draws attention to synergies with a number of other EU programmes. Box 1 lists the instruments mentioned in the proposal with which synergies and collaboration would be
possible. International measures could also be simplified by reducing the number of external cooperation instruments (currently four, plus the European Development Fund), and by rationalising the procedures needed to implement Erasmus under these instruments.

The Commission proposes to set out practical details in implementing acts. These acts ensure uniform conditions for implementation across the EU, but the European Parliament is not involved in the procedure for their adoption. Parliament therefore favours the use of delegated acts instead, which would guarantee proper oversight by Parliament and Council.

The proposal sets the financial envelope of the programme for the period 2021-2027 at €30 000 000 000, which (indicatively) would be distributed according to the table below.

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<th>Education and training</th>
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<tr>
<td>Higher education</td>
<td>At least €8 640 000 000</td>
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<td>Vocational education and training</td>
<td>At least €5 230 000 000</td>
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<tr>
<td>School education</td>
<td>At least €3 790 000 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult education</td>
<td>At least €1 190 000 000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jean Monnet</td>
<td>€450 000 000</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youth</th>
<th>€3 100 000 000</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sport</td>
<td>€550 000 000</td>
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| Operational costs of national agencies | At least €960 000 000 |

**Advisory committees**

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) appointed Tatjana Babrauskienė (GR II, Lithuania) as rapporteur and Imse Spragg Nilsson (GR III, Sweden) as co-rapporteur. The [opinion](#) was
adopted during its plenary on 17 October 2018. The Committee of the Regions nominated Ulrike Hiller (PES, Germany) as rapporteur. The Commission for Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture (SEDEC) adopted its draft opinion on 18 October 2018. The draft opinion is due to be voted in plenary on 5-6 December 2018.

**National parliaments**

The Romanian Senate, the German Bundesrat and the Slovenian, Spanish and Portuguese Parliaments agreed that the proposal for a regulation respects the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. Briefly, the German Bundesrat was happy that the programme will be reformed rather than changed completely and favoured the proposed increase in the budget. However, it asked that the regulation specify that communication activities would be limited to communicating about the programme itself, rather than EU policy in general. It also requested a clearer outline of the educational benefit of DiscoverEU and that the indicators to monitor the success of the programme would be specified in the regulation itself rather than in an implementing act. The Romanian Senate further commented that the current categorisation of countries of destination to establish levels of grants for learning mobility discouraged mobility to Group 3 countries (with low living costs) due to the low level of grants offered. It also indicated that the differences in grants is even more pronounced in strategic cooperation projects, putting Romanian researcher and academics at a disadvantage. The deadline for the submission of reasoned opinions on the grounds of subsidiarity was 17 September 2018.

**Stakeholders' views**

A stakeholder meeting was hosted by the rapporteur and the European Parliament’s Committee on Culture and Education on 27 September 2018. The meeting was attended by the shadow rapporteurs, a number of NGOs, representatives from national agencies and the European Commission. The organisers sought feedback on the current proposal and desired improvements in the future implementation of Erasmus. To begin with, it was suggested that lifelong learning would be identified as a specific objective of the programme. The participants also asked for a clear definition of what is intended by a cross-sectoral approach and greater flexibility to make cross-sectoral applications practicable.

Several participants agreed that the biggest issue with Erasmus+ is lack of inclusion, as the programme is not equally accessible to all social groups. Some participants claimed that the proposal was vague on how inclusion would be ensured in the future. For instance, there is no mention that inclusive mobility needs more decentralisation, greater preparation and more accessible language in the application forms. Others drew attention to the barriers faced by young people with disabilities in higher and vocational education. The programme therefore needs to offer additional support accompanied by a larger budget. National agencies also claimed they needed to be better equipped to be able to raise awareness of the programme among non-typical audiences. Synergies with the European Social Fund were seen as a way forward to support greater inclusion. Another suggestion to make the programme more inclusive was that it should also target early childhood education.

Some participants expressed concern that the new action, DiscoverEU, was only for young people who could afford the luxury of travel. However, others pointed out that the pilot project had targeted young people with fewer opportunities, and even if some commented that the educational content in the initiative was insufficient, others felt that the experience would in any case impart much-needed soft skills.

Some participants commented on the need to give greater prominence to the language learning component of mobility. More specifically they suggested that the language learning tool would be made available freely to the general public, given that it had been developed using public funds.
While it was acknowledged that access to the programme for smaller institutions had already improved since the launching of Erasmus+, youth representatives pointed out the difficulties experienced by local units. National agencies assumed that these units did not need support, if they formed part of a larger movement. However, to the contrary, their grassroots nature and total dependence on volunteers often meant that they did not have the resources needed to apply for an Erasmus+ project.

Some youth organisations indicated the desirability of allowing volunteering while studying abroad. Some commented on the importance of synergies with other EU programmes, such as the European Solidarity Corps and Horizon Europe. On the other hand, organisations commented that it was not clear for them how they could achieve these synergies as they applied for funds.

Representatives of organisations engaged in adult education commented on the fact that the focus on adult learners was restricted to low skilled learners, excluding other challenges that adult education also addresses. They pointed out that it is unlikely that the EU benchmark of a participation rate of 15% will be reached by 2020, as it currently stands at just 11%. These representatives pointed out that, to make real progress, adult education needs to engage in large scale projects at par with those in sector skills alliances.

Representatives from sports organisations regretted that mobility with third countries was not available in the field of sports, especially as sports events in Europe are usually organised to include all members of the Council of Europe. They also commented that only 25% of funding went to sports organisations per se, while the rest went to other NGOs or universities. They asked for an eligibility clause that would require the inclusion of at least one grassroots sports organisation, or at least a clause that puts proposals with at least one grassroots sports organisation at an advantage.

Others commented that the collaboration dimension of the programme was as important as mobility. Strategic partnerships had been a successful component of the programme. However, the proposal to separate cooperation partnerships from partnerships for innovation was challenged. A similar concern was expressed in the field of higher education.

With regard to the governance of the programme, some suggested that the programme would benefit from the participation of civil society organisations in its governance. Participants welcomed the stability in the architecture and objectives of the programme, but there was some discussion on the balance between centralised and decentralised actions. Some pointed out that, if the programme became too decentralised, it would lose its European dimension. On the other hand, national agencies suggested they should be in a position to support centralised implementation, especially as applicants to centralised actions often complained that they did not receive clear feedback on why their application had been rejected. This made the process opaque, and it was difficult for applicants to learn from their mistakes. Nevertheless, pan-European youth organisations complained about the fact that they could not apply for projects at the centralised level, making them excessively dependent on a particular national agency. Some organisations also pointed out that not all national agencies were equally good at supporting small applicants, and each agency interpreted rules very differently. This puts some applicants at a clear disadvantage.

There was a comment that the budget was not in fact doubled, and in any case that it was not sufficient, considering the ambitions of the proposal. Some participants warned against the temptation of using virtual mobility as a surrogate for physical mobility in order to boost participation numbers at very low cost. Concern was expressed that the budget would not increase steadily year on year, but that instead was concentrated towards the end of the programme period. Participants commented that this would require some management of expectations, as potential applicants might note a drop in funds when comparing the last year of the current programme with the first year of the new programme. This would engender disappointment following the attention surrounding the claim that Erasmus funds will be doubled.
Legislative process

The legislative proposal was published on 30 May 2018. The committee referral was announced in the European Parliament on 14 June 2018. The Committee for Culture and Education nominated Milan Zver (EPP, Slovenia) as rapporteur on 1 June 2018, while the Committee for Budgets and the Committee for Employment and Social Affairs nominated Jean Arthuis (ALDE, France) and Pavel Emilian (S&D, Romania) respectively as rapporteurs for opinions. The Committee for Development (DEVE) will also provide an opinion. The draft report was put before the CULT committee on 22 October 2018, with a deadline for amendments of 13 November 2018. It is expected that the vote in committee will be in January or February 2019.

EP SUPPORTING ANALYSIS


OTHER SOURCES

Erasmus programme for education, training, youth and sport 2021-2027, European Parliament, Legislative Observatory (OEL).

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First edition. The ‘EU Legislation in Progress' briefings are updated at key stages throughout the legislative procedure.