



## HIGHER EDUCATION

In accordance with the subsidiarity principle, higher education policies are decided at the level of the individual Member States. The role of the EU is therefore mainly a supporting and coordinating one. The main objectives of Union action in the field of higher education include encouraging mobility of students and staff, fostering mutual recognition of diplomas and periods of study, and promoting cooperation between higher education institutions.

### LEGAL BASIS

Education — and in this context also higher education — was formally recognised as an area of EU competency in the Maastricht Treaty of 1992. The Treaty of Lisbon amending the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) did not change the provisions on the role of the EU in education and training. Under Title XII, Article 165(1) states that ‘the Union shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity’. In Article 165(2) of the TFEU, it is stated that Union action is to be aimed at ‘developing a European dimension in education; encouraging mobility of students and teachers, by encouraging, inter alia, the academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study; promoting cooperation between educational establishments; developing exchanges of information and experience on issues common to the education systems of the Member States; and encouraging the development of distance education’.

In addition, the Treaty of Lisbon contains a provision that can be described as a horizontal ‘social clause’. Article 9 of the TFEU states: ‘In defining and implementing its policies and activities, the Union shall take into account requirements linked to the promotion of a high level of employment, the guarantee of adequate social protection, the fight against social exclusion, and a high level of education, training and protection of human health’.

Moreover, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which has the same legal value as the Treaties (Article 6 of the TEU), states: ‘Everyone has the right to education’ (Article 14).



## OBJECTIVES

### A. 'Europe 2020' and 'Education and Training 2020'

The [Europe 2020 strategy](#) raised European political interest in higher education ([COM\(2010\) 2020](#)). Focused on 'smart', 'sustainable' and 'inclusive' growth, the goals of Europe 2020 are to be achieved through more effective investment in education, research and innovation. The [Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training](#) (ET 2020) was adopted by the European Council in May 2009<sup>[1]</sup>. It set several objectives to be reached by 2020, among them:

- The proportion of 30 to 34-year-olds with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 40%;
- At least 20% of higher education graduates and 6% of 18 to 34-year-olds with an initial vocational qualification should have spent some time studying or training abroad;
- At least 82% of 20 to 34-year-olds having successfully completed upper secondary or tertiary education who left education one to three years ago should be in employment.

### B. The Bologna Process

In addition to the Member States' own political initiatives, the EU actively supports the priorities of the Bologna Process, which, since its inception in 1999, has worked towards more comparable, compatible and coherent systems of higher education in Europe, culminating in the creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) with the Budapest-Vienna Ministerial Conference Declaration of March 2010.

### C. The renewed EU agenda for higher education

In 2017, the Commission published the 'renewed EU agenda for higher education' ([COM\(2017\) 0247](#)). It focuses on four priority areas:

- Aligning skills development in higher education with the needs of the labour market;
- Making higher education widely accessible and more inclusive and increasing its societal outreach;
- Boosting the innovation capacity of higher education;
- Increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of higher education.

### D. The European Education Area

In May 2018, following the Gothenburg summit, the European Commission published a communication entitled 'Building a stronger Europe: the role of youth, education and culture policies' (COM(2018) 0268). This document describes the Commission's vision of building a European Education Area, including:

- A strengthened Erasmus+ programme;

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[1]OJ C 119, 28.5.2009, p. 2.



- The creation of at least 20 European Universities by 2024. This should contribute to the emergence of European degrees, which would be recognised throughout Europe;
- The creation of a European student card to facilitate mobility;
- A proposal for a Council recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education diplomas and the outcomes of learning periods abroad (COM(2018) 0270).

## ACHIEVEMENTS

### A. Erasmus+

Formally adopted in December 2013<sup>[2]</sup>, [Erasmus+](#) has the central aim of investing in education, training, youth and sport in Europe through a single integrated programme. Erasmus+ combines previously separate sectoral and transversal policies in the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP, 2007-2013) in the fields of higher education (Erasmus, Erasmus Mundus, Tempus, bilateral programmes with other countries or continents), school education (Comenius), vocational education and training (Leonardo da Vinci), adult education (Grundtvig), youth (Youth in Action), and European integration studies (Jean Monnet). In addition, sport is included for the first time. Erasmus+ has a budget of EUR 14 billion, and cooperation is possible both among Member States and between Member States and third countries. Erasmus+ aims to restructure and streamline activity around three 'key actions' across the targeted sectors:

- Learning mobility of individuals;
- Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices;
- Support for policy reform.

Within the overarching architecture of Erasmus+, higher education assumes a central role. A minimum of 33.3% of the total budget for Erasmus+ is earmarked for higher education. Two million higher education students are expected to participate in mobility programmes during the period from 2014 to 2020. Erasmus+ not only supports the mobility of students and staff in higher education, but also funds Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees and Erasmus+ Master Loans. Since 2018, it also supports the European Universities project: following the first call, 17 European Universities involving 114 higher education institutions from 24 Member States were selected.

The Commission issued its proposal for a successor programme (2021-2027) in May 2018 ([COM\(2018\) 0367](#)). There is no change to the overall architecture of the programme, including the three key actions already established under Erasmus+. However, it is proposed that the budget be doubled to EUR 30 billion as compared with the 2014-2020 programming period.

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[2]OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 50.



## B. Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions (MSCA)

The MSCA scheme, which is part of the EU framework programme for research and innovation 2014-2020 ('Horizon 2020'), supports research training and career development focused on innovation skills. The programme funds worldwide and cross-sector mobility that implements excellent research in any field. As regards higher education, MSCA grants encourage transnational, intersectoral and interdisciplinary mobility. The MSCA has become the main EU programme for doctoral training, financing 25 000 PhDs and postdoctoral research projects. In addition to fostering mobility between countries, the programme also seeks to break the real and perceived barriers between academia and other sectors, especially business. It also funds the [European Researchers' Night](#), a series of public events that take place across Europe each year on the fourth Friday in September to promote the work of researchers. The MSCA should not change substantially under the new EU framework programme for research and innovation 2021-2027 ('Horizon Europe').

## ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Thanks to its increasing political importance over recent decades, Parliament has managed to exert a growing influence on the shaping of higher education policies in Europe.

### A. Mobility

Parliament has successfully worked for an increase in the budget available for existing programmes in the field of higher education, including Erasmus+. In February 2017, it adopted a resolution on Erasmus+[<sup>3</sup>], which analyses the first years of implementation of the programme, underlines its successes, and suggests changes to improve the second part of the multiannual framework programme. For the next generation of the Erasmus+ programme, Parliament proposed tripling the budget to EUR 41 billion, thus enabling the participation of more students and greater inclusivity. Parliament also stressed the need for better cooperation with other European funding programmes and cofinancing for actions currently not funded by Erasmus+[<sup>4</sup>]. The final text of the new regulation on Erasmus+ is to be negotiated and agreed with the Council at the beginning of the 9th parliamentary term. Concerning the eventuality of a no-deal Brexit, Parliament has also played a central role with a view to securing the rights and status of young people currently partaking in an Erasmus+ exchange programme[<sup>5</sup>].

### B. Links with employment

Throughout the years, Parliament has always been interested in higher education and its links with employment. In 2012, Parliament adopted a resolution on modernising Europe's higher education systems[<sup>6</sup>], calling on higher education institutions to integrate lifelong learning into their curricula and to adapt to new challenges by creating new fields of study reflecting the needs of the labour market. Following the

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[3]OJ C 252, 18.7.2018, p. 31.

[4]Texts adopted, [P8\\_TA\(2019\)0324](#).

[5]Texts adopted, [P8\\_TA\(2019\)0167](#): Continuation of ongoing learning mobility activities under the Erasmus+ programme in the context of the UK's withdrawal from the EU.

[6]OJ C 258 E, 7.9.2013, p. 55.



Commission communication of 30 May 2017 on a renewed EU agenda for higher education ([COM\(2017\) 0247](#)), Parliament adopted, on 12 June 2018, a resolution on modernisation of education in the EU<sup>[7]</sup>: concerning higher education, this resolution calls for the creation of a European Education Area and encourages Member States to invest more in higher education and to foster cooperation between higher education, the world of work, industry, research communities and society as a whole.

### C. The Bologna Process

Parliament has shown a long-standing interest in the consolidation and progress of the Bologna Process. In 2012, it adopted a resolution<sup>[8]</sup> stressing the importance of the Bologna reforms for the creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and for the objectives set in the Europe 2020 strategy.

In a resolution of 28 April 2015<sup>[9]</sup>, Parliament took the view that the Bologna reforms contributed to the improvement of the quality of educational systems and to the attractiveness of higher education in Europe. The Bologna Process also made higher education structures more comparable, providing quality assurance systems in the recognition of diplomas.

In April 2018, Parliament adopted a resolution on the implementation of the Bologna Process<sup>[10]</sup>. It requested that the next 2018 EHEA Ministerial Conference in Paris provide a critical assessment of the process. The resolution stressed the need to improve the social dimension of education, with concrete opportunities for access to higher education for students with disabilities and from disadvantaged backgrounds. It advocated accessible and equitable mechanisms for the allocation of mobility grants and allowances. It also called for the EU and the Member States to increase their education budgets in order to guarantee that public higher education is free and accessible to all.

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[7]Texts adopted, [P8\\_TA\(2018\)0247](#).

[8]OJ C 251 E, 31.8.2013, p. 24.

[9]OJ C 346, 21.9.2016, p. 2.

[10]Texts adopted, [P8\\_TA\(2018\)0190](#).

