Improving the participation in the ERASMUS programme

Presentation for the European Parliament’s Committee on Culture and Education

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EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESEARCH PROJECT

• A study for the EP, DG-IP, Policy Department B: Structural and Cohesion Policies: *Culture and Education*

IMPROVING THE PARTICIPATION IN THE ERASMUS PROGRAMME

• Research consortium:
  – Center for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS)
  – International Centre for Higher Education Management (ICHEM)
  – Andersson Elffers Felix (AEF)
  – ECOTEC Research & Consulting
AIM OF THE STUDY

IMPROVING THE PARTICIPATION IN ERASMUS

• Are there financial and other barriers that hinder ERASMUS participation?
  – Current state of student mobility in Europe?
  – Do financial barriers limit ERASMUS participation?
  – ERASMUS accessible for all socio-economic groups?
  – Other factors of influence? (awareness, motivation, grant amounts ...)
  – What mechanisms can increase number of ERASMUS students?
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- Desk research: literature review and existing statistics

- Student survey: in 7 countries (CZ, FI, D, PL, ES, SE, UK) greatest variety in perceived financial barriers and in ERASMUS participation
  - 21,145 respondents (8,697 non-ERASMUS)

- Case studies: in 4 countries (FI, NL, PL, ES) site visit interviews with many stakeholders (individual and in focus groups)
ADDED VALUE of this study

– Validation of results from previous studies using all existing data and studies available

– New student survey: *including non-participating students*
  → *their motivations and perceived barriers*

– In depth case studies: *insight views from many stakeholders*
KEY FINDINGS: participation in ERASMUS

• Continuous increase in ERASMUS participation
• Proportion of students active in ERASMUS is about 4% (but strong variation per country)
• ERASMUS participation lower in New Member states but grows fastest there

• Reasons for mobility: personal development (‘soft skills’), financial and career benefits less important
• ERASMUS students mostly from higher SES groups, traditional research universities and larger city areas
GDP/capita versus change in ERASMUS partic.
KEY FINDINGS: financial barriers

- Financial constraints most important obstacle to mobility: 57% of non-E students find study abroad too expensive. 29% reject E-grant because it does not cover costs.

- Main barrier is balance between expected costs and benefits.

- In countries with high mobility the labour market effect declines → less mobility (mobility is a luxury).

- Limiting factor for ERASMUS participation by lower-SES: if no labour market benefits, then they are sensitive towards additional costs, study delay, recognition problems, etc.
KEY FINDINGS: financial barriers

- Willingness to participate influenced by gross level of grant and uncertainties about costs, grant level, new environment, payment schedule, ...

- Potential number of students that do not study abroad for financial constraints varies between 980,000 and 1.5 million

- Independent student support stimulates mobility (universal grants)

- Extra mobility grants signal importance of internationalisation
KEY FINDINGS: other potential barriers

• Four other sets of barriers to ERASMUS participation
  – Conditions of the ERASMUS programme
  – Compatibility of HE systems
  – Non-awareness about the ERASMUS programme
  – Personal factors

• Only 24% of students not interested to study abroad

• 34% of students not mobile because they fear their ‘foreign’ credits will not be recognised
KEY FINDINGS: other potential barriers

- 62% of students want to choose hosting institutions outside the listed ERASMUS partners
- 41% of students fear to have too little language skills
- 46% not mobile for reasons of personal relationships & family
- 53% of students wishes more and better information
- 35% of ERASMUS-students → administrative burden too high
KEY FINDINGS: other potential barriers

• ERASMUS image is more ‘social’ than ‘academic’

• 33% of ERASMUS students faced uncertainties about education system abroad, lack of education consistency/compatibility, and concerns about quality abroad

• Factors regarded unimportant:
  – Length of study visit & length of programmes
  – Work responsibilities at home
  – Lack of programmes in English
  – Lack of support in form of student services
RECOMMENDATIONS on financial barriers

• Serious need for more ERASMUS grants (unmet demand)

• Strong variation in importance of mobility barriers between countries → mobility policies should be nationally targeted

  Also need for national studies on ERASMUS participation

• Countries with high participation suffer from fixed budgets:
  – They disappoint large groups of students
  – Or lower ERASMUS grants
  – Or add national funding

  Call for more central coordination to reallocate budgets among higher and lower participation countries
RECOMMENDATIONS on financial barriers

• Limit private student contributions as labour market benefits of mobility decrease

• Encourage contributions from hosting enterprises (internships)

• Promote the long-term benefits of intercultural ‘soft skills’

• Address SES differences at national level (prevent extra ERASMUS bureaucracy)

• Promote mobility in less developed regions (structural funds)
RECOMMENDATIONS on financial barriers

• Improve and promote general information on costs related to mobility (per destination country)

• More transparency about grant levels

• Pay (part) ERASMUS grants up-front (cover high starting costs)

• More transparency about co-funding opportunities and portability of national student support
RECOMMENDATIONS on other barriers

• Serious attention should be paid to recognition issues (2nd ranked mobility barrier)

• ERASMUS grants more in context of joint/double degrees: obligatory stay abroad, better recognition, more integrated curricula, more efficient stay abroad (less costly)

• Room for short intensive programmes involving students/teachers from multiple countries

• Open ERASMUS for longer stays abroad
RECOMMENDATIONS on other barriers

- Further promote the placements programmes: Broaden the success!
- Enhance mobility opportunities in secondary education: that seriously increases interest in HE student mobility
- Strengthen ERASMUS promotion, through:
  - A European-wide ERASMUS info-portal, also uniform ‘ERASMUS introduction courses’ for all students, or …
  - Variety of national and institutional images, but using best practices of alumni, buddy’s, experience sharing, “do’s & don’t’s”, professionalise ERASMUS Student Networks, etc. …
THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

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