

[illegible]

The bulk of the budget (80%) is channelled through the national agencies (NAs) in the participating countries (indirect management) while the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) disburses the rest. Of a total budget of EUR 25.92 billion for 2021-2027, 24.8% was committed and 19.3% was paid in the first two years; these percentages very nearly met budgetary targets.

EN

The budget represents a significant increase over the previous programme period, albeit less than the European Commission and the European Parliament had wanted. Surveys of NAs and a wider group of stakeholders carried out to support this study indicated relatively strong satisfaction with the increased budget from NAs and rather less strong levels of satisfaction among stakeholders. However, other evidence collected through comments on the surveys, interviews and position papers showed that the increase was nevertheless welcome. The areas that stakeholders would like to see better funded are KA1 and KA2.

Diversity and inclusion have always been important to the Erasmus programmes, but the 2021-2027 programme has a new emphasis that is being supported by the adoption of a new framework on the promotion of inclusion and diversity, and guidance on best practice. There is a strong agreement that Erasmus+ is contributing to improving diversity and inclusion. New features of the programme, such as small-scale partnerships, lump sums and two-stage proposal procedures, were welcomed as being likely to attract smaller organisations and newcomers. Stakeholders would nevertheless like to see more done to bridge the gap between the actual cost of individuals studying abroad and the grant they receive despite the introduction of top-up payments for those with fewer opportunities. The time and cost required to put in an application, and the fact that smaller organisations often need external help to make their application, are often deterrents for organisations with few resources. The procedures are complex to understand for small and new entrants to the process, such as young people.

Across a range of possible benefits, increasing non-formal and informal learning mobility, promotion of the participation of young people in democratic processes and civic engagement, promotion of inclusion and diversity, improving the quality of education, training and youth work and learning mobility stood out in the survey, with two-thirds or more of stakeholders seeing these activities, which are core Erasmus+ activities, as beneficial. There is considerable scepticism about the contribution to sport and some doubt about the contribution to the digital transition.

The programme's effectiveness is being undermined, however, by practical issues. Although aspects of applying for Erasmus+ funding have improved or are delivering well (e.g. in terms of clarity of the calls or communication about them), the efficiency of application, evaluation and reporting processes are being hampered by a lack of support and guidance, inconsistency across NAs. Above all, the user-unfriendliness of the proposal form and digital and IT tools is an issue.

Erasmus+ is proving resilient to external factors. It has weathered COVID-19 and adapted its approach to the accelerated adoption of digital environments. It has also absorbed the changes related to the UK's departure from the EU without perceptible problems, and it has facilitated the inclusion of refugees from Ukraine. Rising prices remain a concern to both NAs and stakeholders.

The following recommendations are made:

Recommendation 1: Strengthen coordination to ensure a common understanding of Erasmus+ rules

More coordination across the NAs driven by and monitored by the European Commission would lead to more consistent interpretation of the rules across the NAs and prevent NAs requiring documentation or input difficult for small organisations to obtain, while standardising the quality of evaluations across participating countries. The European Commission should ensure NAs and their evaluators have a clear understanding of the difference between project grants and operating grants, as the capacity-building objective of operating grants that differentiates them from project grants is not well understood.

Recommendation 2: Pursue further simplification

Simplification measures under the current programme have been welcomed, but there is further scope for simplification, including the proposal form, and more straightforward guidance in plain language.

Recommendation 3: Address IT issues

Issues with the new platform should be addressed as a matter of urgency as there is a risk of potential applicants being deterred from applying. Detailed research is needed into the extent of the problem of 'bugs' in the new system and the intrinsic difficulties in using the platform interface. Stakeholders believe that the interface needs simplifying. The Commission should also investigate why NAs have a more negative view of the IT systems than other stakeholders. The Beneficiary Module (BM), Online language support (OLS) and the Project Management Module (PMM) appear to pose particular problems, at least in terms of lack of user-friendliness.

Recommendation 4: Incentive inclusion in Erasmus+

Stakeholders consulted for this study emphasised the importance of fully accomplishing the inclusion ambitions outlined in project proposals and highlighting them in final reports. To this end, the European Commission could consider establishing European targets, accompanied by impact indicators, and a wider incentive system to guide and incentivise countries' contributions towards achieving inclusion within Erasmus+.

Recommendation 5: Address timeliness

More certainty is needed on when decisions are taken and payments are made. Stakeholders not only feel that it takes too long for award decisions to be taken but highlight uncertainties or delays in the timing of contracting and payments to beneficiaries. This adds to their administrative burden and complicates financial planning, which is particularly detrimental to small organisations and newcomers, thus undermining inclusion and diversity ambitions.

Recommendation 6: Improve communication on little known platform features

Stakeholders appear to have a low awareness of the Quality Label and Project Management Modules. This should be addressed at national and EU levels.

Recommendation 7: Improve transparency of the proposal evaluation process

Applicants should be given more detailed feedback on the strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement of their applications. Time devoted to this would bear fruit in the form of better-quality applications in the future. Information sessions on reporting requirements should be scheduled at the beginning of the project rather than waiting some months.

Recommendation 8: Improve transparency of the portfolio of the projects funded

The European Commission could consider increasing the transparency and searchability of the Erasmus+ portal and funding and tender opportunities portal to allow stakeholders and external parties to download and analyse comprehensive project data. Currently, very limited analysis can be carried out at the project and country levels, which limits the transparency of allocated funding.

Recommendation 9: Reduce financial risk

Develop a comprehensive manual or guidance document containing clarification of the requirements and best practices for financial reporting to remove current uncertainty and perceived ambiguity about expectations. This should also cover financial risk management to mitigate the risk of projects failing because of financial problems.

Further information

This executive summary is available in the following languages: English, French, German, Italian and Spanish. The study, which is available in English, and the summaries can be downloaded at: <https://bit.ly/3r4icyX>

More information on Policy Department research for CULT: <https://research4committees.blog/cult/>



Disclaimer and copyright. The opinions expressed in this document are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the European Parliament. Reproduction and translation for non-commercial purposes are authorised, provided the source is acknowledged and the European Parliament is given prior notice and sent a copy. © European Union, 2023.
© Image on page 1 used under the licence from Adobe Stock

Research administrator: Kristilna MILT Editorial assistant: Anna DEMBEK

Contact: Poldep-cohesion@ep.europa.eu

This document is available on the Internet at: www.europarl.europa.eu/supporting-analyses