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REPORT

on the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027
(2023/2002(INI))

Committee on Culture and Education

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EXPLANATORY STATEMENT - SUMMARY OF FACTS AND FINDINGS

1. Introduction

The objectives of this implementation report are to assess and evaluate the execution of the Erasmus+ programme for the period 2012-2027, in addition to identifying good practices and addressing any challenges in the programme;

This interim evaluation will assess the overall effectiveness and performance of the programme, including new initiatives and the delivery of inclusion and simplification measures;

The Rapporteur has gathered information and drafted this implementation report following intensive consultations with a wide range of stakeholders. The findings primarily rest on the following written sources:

- The results of a survey issued to Erasmus+ National Agencies (NAs) from the countries who can participate in the Erasmus+ 2021-2027 programme.
- The results of a survey issued to a wider set of stakeholders who are involved in the Erasmus+ 2021-2027 programme;

In addition, the Rapporteur also availed of the studies evaluating the early implementation of the programme that were commissioned by the Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies and the European Parliamentary Research Service;

In addition to the above-mentioned surveys and studies, meetings of Shadow Rapporteurs with NAs and stakeholders from pan-European organisations were organised in June and July 2023 to discuss the programme's implementation;

The Rapporteur has been in regular bilateral contact with a large number of stakeholders from all the programme's sectors to gather additional information. He also met with representatives of the Commission's Directorate-General for Education and Culture (DG EAC) and the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA).

Finally, the Rapporteur also considered key Commission documents, including the annual work programmes for the implementation of Erasmus+.

Despite all efforts to collect the relevant information, undertaken with the support of the EP administration, the Rapporteur is well aware that he could not carry out a fully-fledged quantitative and qualitative assessment of Erasmus+ after less than three years of programme implementation. Additional information needs to be assimilated during the remaining programme period in order to acquire a full picture. This will be indispensable when evaluating the final impact of Erasmus+ 2021-2027;

Accordingly, this implementation report intends to provide an overview of the programme's implementation over the first two and a half years of its existence. It illustrates the opportunities and the main challenges and provides suggestions for improvement for the remaining four and a half years of the programme's life span. The conclusions and

recommendations should feed into the European Commission's mid-term evaluation report, due by the end of 2024. The report also provides some ideas for the design of the future programme period;

2. Origin and structure of the programme

The original Erasmus programme was an international student exchange programme that has been in existence since 1987, supporting education and training. It underwent several iterations, with each phase building upon the successes and lessons of the previous ones. During the programming period 2014-2020, Erasmus became a central component of the new Erasmus+ programme;

The Erasmus+ programme encompasses various sectors in the fields of education, training, youth and sport, and it promotes international cooperation and mobility through different key actions and funding mechanisms. It also supports initiatives such as European Universities, Centres of Vocational Excellence, DiscoverEU and the European Student Card initiative;

It provides young people – mostly students, pupils and apprentices – with various opportunities to study, train and work abroad; there are also opportunities for adult learners and teaching staff;

While the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027 has maintained the same structure as its predecessor, it has strengthened its priorities in four areas: i) inclusion and diversity; ii) digital transformation; iii) environment and the fight against climate change; and iv) participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement;

Overall, the programme's structure is designed to foster collaboration, mobility, innovation, and policy reform across the board. It has played a significant role in enhancing European cooperation and promoting international understanding through educational exchange and inter-cultural learning. As such, it is one of the EU's flagship programmes, and enjoys a high degree of recognition and popularity among citizens in Europe and further afield.

3. Main conclusions and recommendations

3.1. Preliminary remarks

The Erasmus+ programme for the years 2021 to 2027 aims to reach up to 12 million participants. It holds significant importance as a key instrument to build a European Education Area and support the implementation of the European strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond. Its underlying sectoral agendas advance youth policy cooperation under the Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027 and develop the European dimension in sport;

The beginning of the current programme proved difficult, starting with a delay in the approval of the Multiannual Financial Framework and, consequently, the Erasmus+ Regulation itself. This was followed by the COVID-19 outbreak and an overall difficult economic situation aggravated by the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, causing also high inflation rates across Europe. All this brought unprecedented challenges to the activities falling under Erasmus+. A general sentiment of the institutions involved in the implementation of Erasmus+ centres on the lack of flexibility illustrated during the COVID-19 crisis, in

particular by EACEA. While the measures of the European Commission and EACEA to adapt to the Ukrainian crisis are appreciated, many institutions expressed a clear viewpoint that more could have been done, and that national funding sources were more easily available than funding received under Erasmus+.

3.2. Size and outreach of the programme

The interest in the programme is very high and is currently at the same level as before the COVID-19 pandemic. With the exception of adult education, the demand for mobility and cooperation activities is much higher than the opportunities available;

It was difficult to implement mobility actions during COVID-19, thus the first year, 2021, saw necessary adjustments by reducing funding for mobility (KA1) and increasing funding for cooperation and innovation partnerships (KA2). It is important that Erasmus+ was not suspended or ceased during the pandemic;

Even during the pandemic, however, physical mobility activities still took place to a considerable degree. The Commission and National Agencies allowed more flexibility; learners and teaching staff were also willing to change their initial plans, and although postponed, they continued to travel. This was accompanied by an extension of virtual and blended learning (eLearning/distance learning), and the building of an infrastructure for digitalised learning opportunities – something that might have taken much longer to achieve without the pandemic;

The mobility of adult learners, as a new opportunity, is not sufficiently well advertised yet, and the uptake is relatively low. Numbers, however, have increased from 2022 to 2023 and demand in 2024 is expected to match the opportunities;

Youth participation activities seem to attract a lot of interest. Barriers to participate, however, continue to be considerably high, considering the combination of intricate administration and application processes for small-sized applicant organisations and the inability of informal youth groups to apply;

At the same time, the results of the consultations for this report underline that Erasmus+ has indeed become very popular and undoubtedly one of the most successful European brands.

3.3. Recognition and Transferability of Credits

According to a survey of the Erasmus Student Network, almost a third of respondents reported they did not receive full credit recognition, which is far from the objectives laid out in the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education. The Rapporteur, therefore, asks the Commission to work towards greater recognition of credits earned during mobility periods, making it easier for students to transfer credits between institutions and ensuring the academic value of their experiences. In addition, the feasibility and need for a ‘Joint European Degree’ should be explored.

3.4. Main features and structure

The current programme is based on the same approach as the previous programme of clustering activities under Key Actions (KA 1 Learning Mobility of Individuals, KA2 - Cooperation among organisations and institutions, KA3 – Support to policy development and cooperation) plus Jean Monnet Actions. The KA approach now applies to sport as well, unlike the previous programme. The three key actions of the Erasmus+ programme have been well established and are accepted by the various communities in the fields of education, training, youth, and sport.

3.5. Programme Priorities and Impact

Individual mobility continues to be a central component of Erasmus+. While mobility actions enjoy high popularity and receive positive feedback on most aspects, there is room for improvement when it comes to clarity of funding rules and enhancement of programme management, especially via digital tools. Changes to the grant agreement should be a priority in the second phase of the programme, in order to ensure that all participants receive their grants before their mobility commences. Currently, Erasmus grants do not completely meet the additional costs of studying abroad. Funding for education within the Multiannual Financial Framework should increase so that it is possible to attain the set goal of wide access to high-quality mobility and keep up with the increases in actual mobility costs. In addition, DiscoverEU has become a well-established, easy-to-access activity, which is highly sought after by young people;

In terms of outreach towards the wider public in Europe, learning mobility is the most effective activity when we consider the numbers of individuals. This also applies to value-for-money. Small-scale partnerships also reach out to many individual participants. This becomes evident when looking at project reports and listening to the feedback of project promoters;

At first glance, a programme set-up with a few key actions seems simple and easy-to-understand. All actions, however, consist of sub-actions with a lot of variety within each one. This makes the programme relatively complex and difficult for target groups to understand. It also makes the programme's administration challenging;

Inclusion and Diversity:

Erasmus+ places a strong emphasis on promoting inclusion, diversity, and equal opportunities for all participants, to overcome any barriers related to their background, socio-economic status, abilities, or other characteristics. Projects and activities are encouraged to address barriers to participation and promote social cohesion;

The single biggest barrier to achieving inclusion is the insufficient level of grants provided. Strategies need to be further developed to ensure that underrepresented groups, including individuals with disabilities and those coming from marginalised communities, have effective access to Erasmus+ opportunities;

The European Parliament considers inclusion as central; it focuses especially on the support provided to disadvantaged groups to facilitate their participation. Parliament requests specific information on the socio-economic background of participants and the financial impact of disabilities. At present, this data is not available due to a lack of properly functioning IT tools, in addition to the fact that it is still too early to have completed projects;

Green and Digital Transitions:

Erasmus+ has a strong and legitimate focus on physical mobility, which needs to be balanced with the mitigation of climate change. It is clear that steps have been taken to increase the amount of green travel and higher rates are available for more environmentally friendly ways of travelling;

The Rapporteur welcomes the efforts dedicated to bring about a digital transformation, in particular by stepping up efforts to foster ‘Erasmus without papers’ and the ‘European Student Card’. Linking programme management and the participation of individuals to the eID initiative is particularly important. Implementation, however, is not happening at the initial planned speed. The Rapporteur requests the Commission to enhance digital processes, procedures and tools and to improve the interoperability between the different tools that are available;

Promoting Young People’s Participation and Democratic Values:

Erasmus+ aims to empower young people to engage actively in their communities, participate in decision-making processes, and contribute towards building a strong sense of democratic values and active citizenship. Projects are encouraged to foster critical thinking, media literacy, and youth participation in democratic processes;

Research shows that participation in Erasmus+ increases a better understanding and support of European values. According to a study by the ESN, the majority of students identify more as global citizens and with the EU following their Erasmus+ experience without losing identification with their countries and regions. Civic engagement and participation in democratic life is one of the new priorities of the programme, as KA2 will devote greater attention to ‘common values, civic engagement and participation’, but progress has yet to become evident. Overall, Erasmus+ actions in the field of citizenship education are considerably lacking in systemic impact. Making civic engagement a priority in learning mobility experiences in Higher Education would contribute to the achievement of objectives laid out in the European Strategy for Universities. It would also constitute an integral part of the horizontal priorities of inclusion and participation in democratic life of the programme. Erasmus+ should also promote the 2024 European elections and motivate participation.

3.6. Budget

The estimated overall budget available for 2021-2027 is EUR 26.51 billion, made up of EUR 24.57 billion at current prices and a ‘top-up’ of EUR 1.938 billion in current prices from the Commission’s revenues from fines. Most of the budget (up to 83 %) is earmarked for education and training. Compared to the previous programme, the budget for Erasmus+ has almost doubled, which is undoubtedly a welcome development, despite falling short of the tripling originally requested by the European Parliament. The doubling of the budget, however, has coincided with a surging inflation;

The Rapporteur suggests that the annual budget allocations should have been distributed more evenly over the programme years, in particular for well-established activities;

It can also be observed that during the current programming period, the number of youth organisations receiving Erasmus+ centralised grants managed directly by EACEA has decreased;

It should be noted that the Sport sector has very limited funds, which constrains the scope for mobility, the development of innovation and transnational cooperation. Synergies with the EU4Health programme 2021-2027 also need to be ensured;

The budget available for actions in adult learning and education (ALE) is becoming increasingly unpredictable. The current total amount and the share it represents, 5.8 % of the total budget for education and training, are not sufficient to achieve a participation of 60 % of adults in ALE by 2030. This is within a background of a lack of structural funding for ALE at national and regional levels in Europe, leading to a high degree of dependence on EU project funding.

3.7. Programme Administration

To address past criticism that the programme is excessively bureaucratic, Erasmus+ 2021-2027 introduces a range of simplification measures, such as two-stage proposals, lump sums and small-scale partnerships, all of which have been welcomed by stakeholders. There has been a marked effort to provide clarity about the aims of calls and on the communication of these calls;

From the perspective of the beneficiaries and the National Agencies, there are, however, a number of shortcomings. Examples are the cumbersome registration process, application forms and other processes that require many details, which are hard for smaller entities and individuals to deliver without specific support;

Furthermore, the lack of support or guidance from the central level to the NAs hampers evaluation and reporting processes and leads to inconsistencies between NAs. Over and above, IT tools are an issue;

The ‘continuous reporting’ request is very cumbersome for beneficiaries and takes away valuable time from project implementation. This requirement should be reconsidered in the remaining programming period and the future programme;

The Rapporteur, therefore, strongly recommends an easing of administrative requirements at all levels and stages, including the application phase. Clearly, the current situation prevents small beneficiaries from applying for Key Action (KA) 1, e.g. youth exchanges, as well as KA2 small-scale partnerships, which are specifically intended for smaller organisations;

IT Issues:

Despite the centrality of the digitalisation priority in the programme, the slow advancement of digital tools foreseen to support the programme’s implementation is falling short of all expectations, negatively affecting the participation and the implementation of the programme. It is also hindering necessary data collection and monitoring, and ultimately poses a high reputational risk to the overall image of the programme;

The Rapporteur strongly urges the Commission to ensure that existing digital tools and systems used for the programme’s management and implementation are user-friendly. These should be working properly and to their full extent. He calls on the Commission to tackle, without delay, the serious persistent issues relating to the Erasmus+ IT tools and to test them on a sufficiently large scale before their further implementation. He also notes that there are similar issues with IT tools in other EU-funded programmes, including the European

Solidarity Corps and Creative Europe.

3.8. Cooperation and Synergies

The EU has been actively working to strengthen cooperation and creating synergies between Erasmus+ and other EU initiatives, programmes, and funding instruments. These efforts aim at maximising the impact and effectiveness of EU investments in education, training, youth, research, innovation, and regional development. There is, however, considerable room for improvement and the inter-operability of programmes needs to be facilitated both at national and central (EC) level. There is also a need to improve the link between centralised and decentralised actions within the programme.

3.9. Cooperation between EC, Executive Agency (EACEA) and National Agencies

EACEA is responsible for most of the centralised administration. In order to implement projects (e.g., European Universities Alliances), good communication and coordination between EACEA and NAs is required. So far, this is not the case. In 2023, EACEA and NAs signed a Memorandum of Understanding, but this has yet to lead to some improvement. More coordination across the NAs, driven and monitored by the EC, would improve consistency in the interpretation of rules across NAs and help improve the standardisation and quality of evaluations. The EC should ensure NAs and their evaluators have a clear understanding of the difference between project grants and operating grants. It is evident that the capacity-building objective of operating grants that differentiates them from project grants is not well understood.

3.10. European Universities initiative

The centrality of the European Universities initiative has facilitated further attention and dialogue at national and institutional levels on removing the remaining obstacles to international cooperation in higher education. Some Member States have already enacted long-awaited legislative changes that will be beneficial not only to the alliances participating in the initiative, but also to other forms of cooperation, and higher education institutions outside existing Alliances. Nonetheless, a fast track to funding for existing Alliances should be avoided to ensure a fair and equitable system to all;

The further development of the European Universities should be thoroughly informed by the upcoming separate evaluation of the initiative, and based on a sound monitoring framework, to build on what has worked well, in addition to taking stock of what has not worked well. A reconsideration and recalibration of the multiplying overall objectives will be required;

European Universities should be further supported and developed under Erasmus+. This should not, however, be at the expense of other forms of cooperation that are equally vital to support targeted innovation and the development of practical solutions, and which support wider participation of higher education institutions in Erasmus+.

4. Conclusion

The strengths of Erasmus+ 2021-2027 include its overarching position as a programme, which has stood the test of time (more than 35 years, if we count Erasmus) and now has become a globally recognised brand. Accordingly, the Rapporteur insists that the visual branding of Erasmus+ has to maintain a clear link with the EU;

The benefits of Erasmus+ extend far beyond formal education. Overall, participating in the programme offers numerous benefits, from personal growth and cultural enrichment to enhanced employability, improved rounded education, and a more interconnected and inclusive Europe. The programme enables participants to establish networks and form lasting friendships with peers outside their immediate circle;

It is clear that the great potential of Erasmus+ requires sufficient funding in the future to continue with its far-reaching impact on individuals and societies across Europe and beyond;

Results from Parliament's evaluation suggest that it is essential for the future success of the programme that technical issues do not undermine its effectiveness and that further simplification of the programme is urgently required;

The upcoming MFF mid-term evaluation is due to be finalised by the end of 2024 and is expected to deliver further insights into the achievements and shortcomings of the current programme;

First and foremost, Erasmus+ needs to be a programme that is close to the people and accessible to all.

MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027 (2023/2002(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Articles 165 and 166 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/817 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 establishing Erasmus+: the Union Programme for education and training, youth and sport and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013¹,
- having regard to its resolution of 15 September 2020 on effective measures to ‘green’ Erasmus+, Creative Europe and the European Solidarity Corps²,
- having regard to its resolution of 11 November 2021 on the European Education Area: a shared holistic approach³,
- having regard to its resolution of 23 November 2021 entitled ‘EU sports policy: assessment and possible ways forward’⁴,
- having regard to its resolution of 19 May 2022 on establishing the European Education Area by 2025 – micro-credentials, individual learning accounts and learning for a sustainable environment⁵,
- having regard to its resolution of 23 June 2022 on the implementation of inclusion measures within Erasmus+ 2014-2020⁶,
- having regard to the study entitled ‘EU funding programmes 2021-2027 in culture, media, education, youth and sports: first lessons, challenges and future perspectives – Erasmus+’ published by its Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union on 11 September 2023⁷,
- having regard to the study entitled ‘Early implementation of four 2021-2027 EU programmes: Erasmus+, Creative Europe, European Solidarity Corps and Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (Strand 3)’ published by its Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union on 20 July 2023⁸,

¹ OJ L 189, 28.5.2021, p. 1.

² OJ C 385, 22.9.2021, p. 2.

³ OJ C 205, 20.5.2022, p. 17.

⁴ OJ C 224, 8.6.2022, p. 2.

⁵ OJ C 479, 16.12.2022, p. 65.

⁶ OJ C 32, 27.1.2023, p. 58.

⁷ Study – ‘EU funding programmes 2021-2027 in culture, media, education, youth and sports: first lessons, challenges and future perspectives: Erasmus+’, European Parliament, Directorate-General for Internal Policies, Policy Department B – Structural and Cohesion Policies, 11 September 2023.

⁸ Study – ‘Early implementation of four 2021-2027 EU programmes: Erasmus+, Creative Europe, European Solidarity Corps and Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (Strand 3)’, European Parliament, Directorate-

- having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure and Article 1(e) of, and Annex 3 to, the decision of the Conference of Presidents of 12 December 2002 on the procedure for granting authorisation to draw up own-initiative reports,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Culture and Education (A9-0413/2023),
- A. whereas Erasmus+ ('the programme') is an EU flagship programme supporting education, training, youth and sport in Europe and beyond;
 - B. whereas Erasmus+ is crucial in fostering a European sense of belonging and understanding between diverse cultures, enabling the strengthening of a European identity that exists alongside national identities;
 - C. whereas the 2021-2027 programme has an estimated overall budget of EUR 26.2 billion and places a strong focus on inclusion, the green and digital transitions, and promoting young people's participation in democratic life;
 - D. whereas the European Universities initiative has been much more successful and far-reaching than initially envisaged; whereas the ambition is to have 60 European Universities Alliances involving more than 500 higher education institutions by mid-2024;
 - E. whereas demand for the programme largely exceeds the available financial resources, negatively affecting participation and the number of projects that can be funded;
 - F. whereas the programme contributes to reducing inequalities and improving social cohesion and gender equality at European and Member State levels by increasingly focusing on learning mobility that is accessible for all, in particular for people with fewer opportunities and small-scale organisations;
 - G. whereas inclusion officers play an important role in promoting diversity and inclusion in Erasmus+;
 - H. whereas the participation of individuals with fewer opportunities, adult learners, young people, third-country nationals and small-scale partnerships and organisations is still hindered by heavy administrative requirements;
 - I. whereas the programme's objectives are being pursued through three key actions (KAs), namely 'Learning mobility of individuals' (KA1), 'Cooperation among organisations and institutions' (KA2) and 'Support to policy development and cooperation' (KA3);
 - J. whereas the rising costs of living, high inflation rates and other challenges are putting additional pressure on the programme's budget;
 - K. whereas students with fewer resources face greater obstacles to enjoying Erasmus+ student mobility; whereas the increase in housing rental prices and the scarcity of student accommodation make it difficult for students to find affordable accommodation and the problem has worsened in recent years;
 - L. whereas uncertainties or delays in the timing of contracting and payments to

General for Parliamentary Research Services, 20 July 2023.

beneficiaries add to their administrative burden and complicate financial planning, which is particularly detrimental to small organisations and newcomers, thereby undermining the ambitions to achieve inclusion and diversity;

- M. whereas the programme has been a driving force for the European Education Area and should continue to respond to future trends in education to keep up with societal and technological change;
- N. whereas the professional development of youth workers positively impacts the quality of projects in Erasmus+ and the disparities in youth workers' status in different Member States hinders the development of projects in the youth sector of the programme;

State of affairs and successes

1. Highlights that the programme focuses on an increasing variety of measures, including lifelong learning, better inclusion of people with fewer opportunities⁹ and the removal of barriers to learning mobility, in particular the lack of automatic recognition of qualifications, and financial barriers;
2. Acknowledges that the existing structure works well, successfully bringing together formerly separate programmes, thus providing a good funding ecosystem;
3. Acknowledges the importance of a sufficient variety of actions rather than a one-size-fits-all approach;
4. Values the 'learning community' that Erasmus+ has managed to create, made up of participants, beneficiaries, stakeholders, National Agencies (NAs) and EU institutions;
5. Welcomes the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the European Education and Culture Executive Agency and NAs; highlights the importance of improving and maintaining a constructive and cooperative communication between these two parties;
6. Expects the memorandum of understanding between the European Education and Culture Executive Agency and NAs to produce tangible improvements, leading to the exchange of good practices and the clarification of roles and responsibilities to achieve consistency, coherence and effective communication by NAs;
7. Points out that learning mobility and small-scale partnerships have proven to be highly effective activities to reach out to the wider public across Europe, providing excellent value for money considering the number of individual participants;
8. Recognises that learning mobility and training of staff is a powerful multiplier for mobility among learners;
9. Is aware that the programme's horizontal priorities have been very well received by different sectors and stakeholders;
10. Welcomes the ambition to bring about a digital transformation of the programme, and

⁹ For a definition of people with fewer opportunities see Article 2(25) of Regulation (EU) 2021/817.

digital learning opportunities;

11. Emphasises that these formats may be used as a valuable complement to physical mobility in specific situations, but do not provide the same quality of experience and benefits, nor do they act as a substitute for meaningful interaction on the ground;
12. Appreciates the steps being taken to increase the amount of green travel and the higher funding rates being paid for more environmentally friendly ways of travelling; encourages even more efforts to achieve this goal, though this should not become a barrier for access to the programme in areas where green options are not yet accessible;
13. Recognises that the new flagship actions have demonstrated their added value;
14. Acknowledges the warm welcome of the European Universities initiative by higher education institutions and its centrality in facilitating efforts to remove obstacles to international cooperation in higher education; highlights that mobility projects, the creation of common curricula and research cooperation between universities in Europe are instrumental to address needs in strategic areas; stresses the importance of the initiative to the European strategy for universities;
15. Welcomes the steps taken towards a joint European degree label and common European diplomas;
16. Welcomes the new opportunities provided by Teacher Academies;
17. Welcomes the newly established Centres of Vocational Excellence and notes that their successful roll-out plays a key role in modernising vocational education and training (VET) provision in Europe;
18. Notes that DiscoverEU, which was initiated by Parliament, has become a well-established, popular and easy-to-access informal learning activity which brings young people, including those with fewer opportunities, closer to the EU, encouraging their future involvement in other EU projects;
19. Highlights that centralised actions in sport managed by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) proved useful to promote the European dimension in sport; recognises that the introduction of mobility in 2023 as a decentralised action boosts the exchange of sports staff and coaches;
20. Recalls that the 2021-2022 budget absorption was almost 100 % despite a delayed start to the programme;
21. Notes the necessary adjustments owing to the pandemic, with a temporary reduction in funding for learning mobility and increased funding for cooperation and innovation partnerships;
22. Appreciates the swift reaction and enhanced flexibility of the programme to support Ukrainian students, teachers, educators and educational institutions;
23. Notes that some processes for applying have improved, by being made simpler and more efficient;

24. Highlights the very low error rates in comparison with other EU funding programmes, especially considering the programme's complexity;
25. Highlights that all interested countries meeting the requirements of the programme, including Switzerland and the UK, are welcome to join the programme and thus contribute to European learning mobility; supports the participation of civil society organisations from associated countries;

Challenges and problems

26. Points out that insufficient grants to cover the costs of learning mobility and delays in payments are among the biggest deterrents to participants in mobility projects;
27. Regrets that many young people with fewer opportunities are kept from spending longer periods of time abroad by financial or other obstacles;
28. Acknowledges that the process of NAs drawing up national plans for inclusion and diversity has been difficult;
29. Regrets the fact that complicated administrative processes at all stages considerably hinder the participation of newcomers and small-scale organisations, particularly in the school, youth, VET and sports sectors, as well as in adult education;
30. Regrets that it remains time-consuming to apply for Erasmus+ funding and that applicants often cannot apply without external support, discouraging the participation of small organisations and benefiting project-writing consultancies;
31. Is concerned by the fact that almost a third of students in higher education mobility reported that they did not receive full credit recognition and calls for action to align with the objectives laid down in the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education; underscores that this hinders the creation of a genuine European Education Area and forms a significant barrier to students who depend on completing their degree in a timely manner;
32. Regrets the lack of encouragement of partnerships between schools and non-profit organisations which have the knowledge to help teachers access quality learning mobility;
33. Considers that the recognition of VET as a path of equal value to academic studies is overdue; moreover, is worried by the remaining obstacles to seamless VET mobility, such as policies fragmented between national and EU level;
34. Regrets the insufficient funding for Centres of Vocational Excellence in view of the demand for them;
35. Is disappointed by the low uptake of adult learning and education activities, given its importance;
36. Welcomes the lump sum approach being applied in cooperation projects, as many beneficiaries acknowledge it as an effective simplification measure; notes, however, that the requirement of 'continuous reporting' can be a burden, especially for smaller organisations;

37. Regrets the fact that in 2022, the number of beneficiaries of centralised youth operating grants was reduced drastically, severely impacting an already COVID-weakened, volunteer-led youth civil society sector;
38. Regrets also the significantly fewer successful applications from youth and volunteer-led organisations for centralised grants, particularly in the European Youth Together and Key Action 2, Cooperation Partnerships in the field of Youth, and the subsequent reduction in the latter's budget in 2023;
39. Notes that the Erasmus+ sport sector has very limited funds in some areas, particularly for the organisation of events, thus limiting its scope;
40. Deeply regrets the slow and incomplete development of the IT infrastructure and the improper functioning of IT tools such as the Beneficiary and Project Management modules and the Online Language Support (OLS), which increases the workload of all those involved in the programme's implementation, discourages the participation of newcomers and undermines the programme's ambition to widen participation; notes that this inhibits optimal implementation, risks flawed and incomplete programme documentation and monitoring, and jeopardises evidence-based development in the future and notes further that similar issues exist with IT tools in other EU-funded programmes, including the European Solidarity Corps;
41. Deplores the fact that IT issues also severely affect data availability, which is essential for the ongoing mid-term review, thus necessitating a much more onerous evaluation methodology and exacerbating the administrative burden;
42. Points out the need to take the impact of AI seriously, since it has already facilitated fraudulent actors, but could also ease the workload of NAs and improve data collection;
43. Underlines the existing inconsistencies with regard to reporting expectations, evaluation results and general information-sharing across the different NAs, which creates different implementation standards for beneficiaries and affects equity in the programme's functioning;
44. Is concerned about the shortage of professionals and volunteers to implement the programme and requires clarification as to whether this has an impact on the absorption of funds;

Improving the current and designing the future Erasmus+ programme

45. Calls on the Commission, the Member States, national authorities and NAs to keep Erasmus+ close to the people and ensure it remains a bottom-up 'citizens' programme' offering quality education and mobility opportunities for young people and learners of all ages;
46. Emphasises that the overarching purpose of Erasmus+ is broad and goes beyond labour market needs;
47. Asks that the programme be simplified at all levels, including by assessing whether existing (sub-)actions can be merged, and that this EU flagship programme not be overloaded with new tasks and initiatives that dilute its core objective;

48. Calls on the Commission to remove all barriers, including financial, linguistic and administrative barriers, such as those created by the new ICT tools, in order to achieve a truly inclusive programme embracing diversity, while not reducing the number of grants available to beneficiaries;
49. Insists that digital tools should be optimised by 2025 at the latest to create a user-friendly, accessible, reliable, speedy and efficient environment that respects data protection;
50. Emphasises that issues with the IT infrastructure similar to those experienced in the current programme period are unacceptable; calls on the Commission to stabilise the existing IT-tools and not change them with each new programming period, and expects the IT infrastructure of the next Erasmus+ generation to be fully operational from day one, particularly with regard to the Beneficiary Module;
51. Calls for thorough trials and consultations with NAs and end users before rolling out additional features or new IT tools, and for compliance with the EU Web Accessibility Directive to be ensured;
52. Calls on the Commission to correct the limited transparency and usability of the results section 'Projects funded under this topic' in the portal for funding and tender opportunities, so that data can be downloaded by stakeholders to analyse the characteristics of successful and rejected projects in terms of organisation, budget amounts, lead country of project or project type;
53. Requests that the Commission consider charging for digital tools and online activities to support learning separately, particularly when they are used to prepare for an activity, in order to avoid excessively high advance payments;
54. Insists that the simplification of application procedures and requirements and the improvement of the guidelines, particularly for individuals, must remain a high priority, as they are barriers to the programme; points out that inadequacies often affect young, first-time participants the most;
55. Requests proportionate registration, application and reporting processes in terms of the length of documents and a reduction in administrative and bureaucratic requirements, particularly for smaller grants;
56. Points out that proposal forms need to be accompanied by clear rules and guidance in understandable language; calls on the NAs to further improve feedback to applicants;
57. Calls on the Commission to provide continuous training to EACEA project officers and NAs' staff and clear communication about the interpretation of Erasmus+ initiatives;
58. Recalls that the early, transparent and reliable communication of deadlines and steps is the basis for fair and equal access to the programme;
59. Calls on the NAs to organise information sessions on reporting requirements at the beginning of the projects; suggests a comprehensive revision of reporting and accounting so that the same information is not requested repeatedly;

60. Calls on the NAs to empower their inclusion officers to implement the plans for inclusion and diversity;
61. Calls on the Commission to strengthen its work with stakeholders on European 'inclusion targets' for the programme and to make available data on projects which include participants with fewer opportunities;
62. Calls for a better balance between quantitative (the number of beneficiaries and supported projects) and qualitative objectives within the programme, and emphasises that improving the quality of education must continue to be a focus of Erasmus+;
63. Urges the Commission to step up efforts on the programme's digital transformation, in particular on achieving an 'Erasmus Without Paper' for all education and training sectors; calls on the Commission to establish the 'European Student Card' following the initial planning, and to help higher education institutions adopt digital learning mobility nominations and transcripts of records by 2025;
64. Asks for an increase in the upfront payments for beneficiaries with fewer opportunities and to provide beneficiaries with timely payments;
65. Asks for a more frequent and regular review and adjustments to the inflation rate index of grants and unit costs in order to align them with the cost of living, inflation and the needs of beneficiaries;
66. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to help address the problems of accommodation for Erasmus+ mobility students;
67. Calls on the Commission to evaluate the alliances' readiness for autonomy together with them before the end of their funding period, in order to determine whether they need some form of targeted support to achieve autonomy within a reasonable time frame, as well as for the stabilisation and deepening of alliances through project-related future funding;
68. Calls on the Commission to discuss with the co-legislators, as early as possible, the sustainable continuation of the European Universities Alliances as a flagship initiative; stresses that such a future-oriented vision must make these alliances the spearhead of European higher education; recalls that the European University Alliances should serve as models and that the Commission and the Member States should create framework conditions which are fully interlinked to the European Higher Education Area and the European Education Area as well as a legal status for European Universities Alliances;
69. Calls on the Commission to use the programme's tools to encourage accommodations that would open up sectors where women are underrepresented such as IT, science, technology, engineering, the arts and mathematics, entrepreneurship and VET, and subsequently to facilitate women's integration into these segments of the labour market; suggests that the Commission foster gender balance in the programme;
70. Stresses that by improving co-creation, Erasmus+ can support education to respond to new societal needs with methodologies that foster the development of an adapted set of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, and draws attention particularly to the programme's contribution to the transition towards digital education;

71. Calls for the wider use of and clearer rules for virtual and blended learning and the building of infrastructure for digitalised and remote learning opportunities, extending them to other educational sectors in order to facilitate smoother and more flexible transitions and to facilitate inclusion;
72. Suggests the development of synergies between Erasmus+ and other multiannual financial framework (MFF) programmes to fund improvements in access to educational tools for areas and communities where connectivity or access to technologies are low, similarly to what is being tested in a preparatory action;
73. Asks for eTwinning and the European School gateway to be integrated fully and seamlessly into Erasmus+ and to be better promoted among teachers and school staff;
74. Asks the Commission and the Member States to promote the European dimension in teachers' professional development and to encourage mobility among them; asks for provisions to be made to substitute teachers or to compensate them for time spent on Erasmus+ projects;
75. Suggests that the 'Jean Monnet for Schools' action become decentralised so that it is managed by the NAs in order to simplify access for schools;
76. Underlines the need to allocate more funding to opportunities aimed at primary schools and pupils, given the very high level of demand in most programme countries;
77. Calls on the Commission to resolve the issues caused by the quantitative limitation implicit in institutional accreditation, given the programme's ambition to be inclusive, particularly with regard to schools, given their sheer number across the EU;
78. Calls on the Commission to examine how synergies between Erasmus+, other MFF programmes and the EU Strategy on Combating Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish Life (2021-2030) can be established and promoted so that secondary schools have better access to the network of Holocaust memorial sites and their pupils are given the opportunity to visit at least one of these sites in Europe during their school careers;
79. Requests that the Commission issue a call for projects to enable secondary school students to visit a site connected with the atrocities committed by totalitarian regimes in Europe;
80. Asks the Commission to issue calls for proposals in Erasmus+ to support schools in the fight against all forms of bullying and discrimination, and to enhance school psychological counselling;
81. Calls on the Commission to foster the role of Erasmus+ in increasing a sense of belonging, civic engagement, a better understanding of the Union and support for European values, and to turn the programme into a true promoter of European democracy;
82. Asks the Commission to introduce the EU citizenship education component with curricular and extracurricular activities, connected to learning mobility, which are certified by micro-credentials, develop active citizenship and embrace non-discrimination;

83. Welcomes the action's learning component and asks the Commission to assess its outcomes with a view to strengthening the educational dimension by establishing stronger synergies between learning mobility and DiscoverEU;
84. Calls for the development of DiscoverEU in order to promote a more inclusive action;
85. Suggests considering ticket quotas for group trips, as insisting too rigidly that all peers in a group must be aged exactly 18 to qualify as a DiscoverEU group can be counterproductive;
86. Asks the Commission to assess options for a more integrated approach towards youth activities across EU programmes, learning from the experience of the European Year of Youth 2022 and in consultation with youth stakeholders on the design, implementation and evaluation of grants and instruments in the field of youth;
87. Calls on the Commission to strengthen the programme's alignment with the EU Youth Strategy, the 11 youth goals and the outcomes of the EU Youth Dialogue; calls for a better definition of objectives and roles for projects in Key Action 2 in the field of youth in a way that reinforces youth work, the professional development of youth workers and non-formal education;
88. Calls on the EACEA and the NAs to create a communications strategy that reaches out to new youth organisations, particularly those led by or working with youth with fewer opportunities, and to provide them with additional support in writing project proposals and capacity building using Support, Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities for Youth (SALTO);
89. Recalls the need for sufficient funds for small partnerships in all sectors of the programme to facilitate entry by small organisations and inexperienced persons, and to offer them real prospects for development;
90. Insists that the programme is key to establishing the European Education Area and asks for greater synergies with the European Solidarity Corps programme; urges the Commission and the Member States to initiate an open method of coordination on the mutual recognition of competences acquired during periods of European mobility or civic engagement;
91. Suggests that the programme offer greater support to measures such as individual learning accounts and micro-credentials which improve the permeability of educational systems;
92. Stresses the importance of promoting mobility among VET students, among other reasons in order to reach young people with fewer opportunities; calls on the Member States to develop synergies between Erasmus+ and other funding programmes to facilitate learning mobility among VET learners and low-skilled workers and to improve territorial and regional cooperation;
93. Urges the development of a dedicated online tool tailored to the needs of teachers, instructors and learners in initial and continuing VET, as the current tools have proven insufficient;

94. Calls on the Commission to discuss with the co-legislators, as early as possible, its vision on the sustainable continuation of the Centres of Vocational Excellence as a flagship initiative;
95. Calls for a holistic educational approach within the Centres of Vocational Excellence and calls on the Member States to make these centres the driving force behind the development of joint European VET qualifications, curricula and diplomas;
96. Calls on the Commission to study the status of VET learners who are on mobility; insists that the organisations hosting apprenticeships be required to sign a quality charter in line with the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education and calls for better monitoring of the working conditions and for adequate remuneration for the individuals participating in Erasmus+ apprenticeships;
97. Suggests that the programme continue to support projects that promote a wide variety of skills, including artisanal crafts, in order to preserve them;
98. Calls on the Commission to reconsider its adult learning strategy in collaboration with NAs and relevant stakeholders, given the target of 60 % of adults participating in adult learning and education by 2030;
99. Calls on the Commission to increase the visibility of the support available for adult learning and education activities; suggests that unspent funds are not immediately siphoned away to other actions but used for cooperation in adult education and to ease the uptake of mobility among adult learners with fewer opportunities through awareness campaigns, easy-to-fill-in applications and greater synergies with the European Social Fund Plus across Member States;
100. Calls on the Commission to improve communication on and the promotion of sport funding in Erasmus+; calls for a better representation of sport associations in the awarded projects, as non-sport organisations such as non-governmental organisations and consultancies are often over-represented as beneficiaries;
101. Stresses that the programme's capacity to provide support in crisis situations is necessarily very limited and the Commission should additionally facilitate cooperation between Member States to address common challenges comprehensively, safeguarding the programme from being overloaded;
102. Calls on the Commission and the NAs to endeavour to ensure that prospective participants, who are third country nationals, residing lawfully in the EU, do not face difficulties during the application process, making the programme truly inclusive;
103. Points out that cooperation with non-associated third countries can be very difficult, and calls on the Commission to systematically monitor, improve and strengthen the international dimension of the programme;
104. Asks that closer attention be paid to issues concerning the international dimension of the programme such as data protection rules for non-EU countries, the impact of geopolitical issues and visa-related issues;
105. Calls on the Commission to provide for the necessary programme flexibility in the

design of the next generation of Erasmus+, while ensuring uniformity and proper scrutiny of the programme, including by Parliament;

106. Insists that NAs, beneficiaries and other stakeholders, including young people, and Parliament are actively involved in a continual, dialogue-based process to optimise the current and the next generation of Erasmus+; suggests that the Commission explore how AI tools can be used to aid with the evaluation of the programme and provide clearer insights into needs and possible developments without replacing human decision-making;
107. Asks the Commission to re-evaluate the need for increased visibility of the direct link between the EU and Erasmus+ as its flagship programme in order to increase awareness of that link among current and future beneficiaries;
108. Urges the Commission and the Member States to ensure that synergies between Erasmus+ and other programmes such as Horizon Europe or the European Social Fund Plus are fully exploited, and that the programme is better connected with other EU policies such as the 2020-2025 anti-racism action plan; and the EU Disability Rights Strategy 2021-2030;
109. Requires timely updates from the new inter-programme group between the Commission's Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture and its Directorate-General for Research and Innovation on its results in terms of synergies between Horizon Europe and Erasmus+;
110. Stresses the need to accelerate synergies between the European Education Area, the Digital Education Action Plan and the European Skills Agenda in shaping a digital education policy;
111. Requests the Commission, the EACEA and NAs to analyse and systematically implement concrete measures that break down existing silos in the programme structure in order to increase synergies between different educational areas and actors so as to improve permeability and rebalance the programme, while maintaining the distinctions that are necessary for effective political scrutiny;
112. Calls for centralised and decentralised actions to be better linked and for the use of flexible funding instruments such as micro-grants to be enhanced; suggests that given the positive experiences gained with micro-grants during the pandemic, they should be maintained in a targeted way;
113. Calls on the Commission to conduct proper piloting and testing when introducing new administrative measures such as top-ups and lump sums to avoid creating additional administrative barriers to beneficiaries;
114. Calls for operating grants to support the development of strategic sectors that often rely on volunteers and for structured and regular cooperation between stakeholders and beneficiary representative organisations;
115. Calls for an improvement in the quality of evaluations of operating grants;
116. Encourages stronger incentives and better guidance so that the Seal of Excellence label

will start having a tangible positive impact on Erasmus+;

117. Calls on the Commission to consistently follow up on any indications that an accredited beneficiary does not respect European values, with the aim of ensuring confidence in the established accreditation mechanism and to take appropriate action as a result, which must lead to expulsion if the allegations are substantiated and cannot be immediately and permanently remedied; points to the need for stricter monitoring in the next programming period;
118. Calls on the Commission to take better account of fraud, such as letterbox companies or inclusion top-ups that do not actually reach groups with fewer opportunities, and to make the actions taken to counter such abuses more transparent;
119. Calls for more gradual and predictable budgetary increases in the next multiannual financial framework programming period, and insists that, from the very beginning in 2028, funding levels must not be less than those of the last year of the current programme (2027) in order to ensure the smooth continuity and stability of the programme's actions and activities;
120. Declares its determination to ensure a substantial increase in the Erasmus+ budget in the 2028-2034 programming period and commits itself to tripling the current envelope, taking the requirements of the programme into account;

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121. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the Erasmus+ National Agencies.

ANNEX: ENTITIES OR PERSONS FROM WHOM THE RAPPORTEUR HAS RECEIVED INPUT

Pursuant to Article 8 of Annex I to the Rules of Procedure, the rapporteur declares that he has received input from the following entities or persons in the preparation of the report, until the adoption thereof in committee:

Entity and/or person
Institute MOVIT Institute for Development of Youth Mobility, Slovenia
Centre of the Republic of Slovenia for Mobility and European Educational and Training Programmes
Swedish National Agency (NA) for Erasmus+
OeAD, Austria's Agency for Education and Internationalisation
JINT, Nationaal Agentschap voor Erasmus+ Jeugd in Vlaanderen
EU University Association
Academic cooperation association
European Vocational Training Association
European Association of Institutes for Vocational Training
Lifelong learning platform
The European Association for the Education of Adults
Erasmus Student Network
Youth Forum
European Students' Union
EFIL - European Federation for Intercultural Learning
European Olympic Committee, EU Office
Erasmus+ Civil Society Coalition
National Youth Council of Hungary
Movetia – Switzerland National agency for the promotion of exchanges and mobility in the education system
DZS, Czech National Agency for International Education and Research

The list above is drawn up under the exclusive responsibility of the rapporteur.

INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE

Date adopted	28.11.2023
Result of final vote	+: 22 -: 3 0: 2
Members present for the final vote	Asim Ademov, Andrea Bocskor, Ilana Cicurel, Laurence Farreng, Tomasz Frankowski, Catherine Griset, Sylvie Guillaume, Hannes Heide, Irena Joveva, Petra Kammerevert, Niyazi Kizilyürek, Niklas Nienaß, Marcos Ros Sempere, Monica Semedo, Andrey Slabakov, Michaela Šojdrová, Sabine Verheyen, Theodoros Zagorakis, Milan Zver
Substitutes present for the final vote	João Albuquerque, Ibán García Del Blanco, Chiara Gemma, Łukasz Kohut, Marcel Kolaja, Emmanuel Maurel, Wolfram Pirchner, Rob Rooker

FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE

22	+
PPE	Asim Ademov, Tomasz Frankowski, Wolfram Pirchner, Michaela Šojdrová, Sabine Verheyen, Theodoros Zagorakis, Milan Zver
Renew	Ilana Cicurel, Laurence Farreng, Irena Joveva, Monica Semedo
S&D	João Albuquerque, Ibán García Del Blanco, Sylvie Guillaume, Hannes Heide, Petra Kammerevert, Łukasz Kohut, Marcos Ros Sempere
The Left	Niyazi Kizilyürek, Emmanuel Maurel
Verts/ALE	Marcel Kolaja, Niklas Nienaß

3	-
ECR	Rob Rooken, Andrey Slabakov
NI	Andrea Bocskor

2	0
ECR	Chiara Gemma
ID	Catherine Griset

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention