Neth-ER | Netherlands house for Education and Research

December 2025

INVEST IN MOBILITY TO BOOST SKILLS IN EUROPE

Neth-ER Reaction to the Erasmus+ Proposal



Introduction

Neth-ER welcomes the European Commission's proposal for the Erasmus+ programme within the next Multiannual Financial Framework (2028-2034), but considers the proposed budget of €40.8 billion insufficient to meet the programme's expanded objectives. The next Erasmus+ programme must support high-quality education and increased learning mobility, and reduce the administrative burden. To achieve this, the **budget must be doubled to at least €60 billion**. While a certain level of flexibility within the set programme budget is desirable, it is important to preserve the current proportional distribution across education sectors to ensure fair support for all sectors involved.

This ambition is in line with the calls by Draghi[1] and Letta[2] for increased investment in education and skills as indispensable elements to Europe's competitiveness and resilience. Letta has stressed the importance of a strong European education area for the fifth freedom. Likewise, Niinistö[3] has stressed the importance of education for democratic resilience. Erasmus+ is a cornerstone of this vision and must be funded accordingly.

Neth-ER calls for:

1. A doubled Erasmus+ budget of €60 billion, preserving the proportional distribution of the budget across all education sectors. At least 50% of the total budget must be allocated to mobility, aligned with the Erasmus+ programmes 2024-2020 and 2021-2027

2. Prioritising mobility for personal development and soft skills, in addition to professional skills for the labour market

3. Increased mobility funding for all learners, with particular attention to equal opportunities and recognition for VET students and green mobility incentives

4. Explicit guarantee of long-term investment pathways for both European University Alliances and Centres of Vocational excellence

5. Concrete and structural simplification measures, including simplified grants, calls, user-friendly digital tools, and training support

[1]The Draghi report: In-depth analysis and recommendations (Part B), p. 267.
[2]Letta Report "Much More Than a Market" (April 2024), p. 34.
[3]Niinistö (2024) Safer together: A path towards a fully prepared Union, p. 74.

List of Recommendations by Neth-ER

Articles

- **Article 3** should make explicit that mobility experiences in se enable learners to develop soft skills and democratic competences that strengthen Europe's society and long-term competitiveness.
- **Article 6** should embed recognition in Erasmus+ capacity building actions to not remain a policy ambition alone. Embedding recognition in Article 6 supports employability and promotes equal opportunities on the European labour market. Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) provide a suitable framework to test and scale up such initiatives.
- **Article 6** should include concrete, long-term investment pathways for both University Alliances and CoVEs.
- **Article 8** must include concrete measures to inform and support students with fewer opportunities.
- **Article 9** should be amended to increase the total budget to €60 billion, explicitly set a minimum 50% allocation to mobility, and include a paragraph establishing the proportional distribution across higher education, vocational education, and other sectors.
- **Article 9** must earmark sufficient funding for mobility, inclusion and accessibility across all sectors to ensure equal access for all learners.
- **Article 12** must include concrete simplification efforts that effectively reduce the administrative burden on institutions and users for grants and calls.
- **Article 19** should include standardised rules and procedures to limit diverging implementation by national agencies and stimulate uniformity and digitalisation.

Recitals

- In addition to Article 3, **recitals** should make explicit that **mobility experiences *in se*** enable learners to develop **soft skills and democratic competences** that strengthen Europe's society and long-term competitiveness.
- Both the **Alliances and CoVEs are integral partnerships** in the European knowledge ecosystem and therefore should be **equally acknowledged** in the recitals.

General

- The **regulation** must prioritise **personal development and democratic life** more – objectives also explicitly stated in Article 165 TFEU.
- The **regulation** should include **structural measures to strengthen sustainable mobility** incentives. These may include partnerships with European rail operators offering reduced fares or flexible booking options, simplifying reimbursement for sustainable transport, improving digital tools to help students calculate distances and plan routes with the lowest possible emissions, and reducing administrative barriers for those choosing sustainable travel.
- **Real simplification** requires reducing the amount of participant data requested, critically reviewing the necessity and format of documents such as the Learning Agreement, and implementing simpler, more user-friendly reporting and IT systems.
- When simplifying measures are introduced, the Commission must **support implementing institutions by offering adequate training opportunities**.

1. Double the Budget

The Erasmus+ budget must be doubled to at least €60 billion, with at least 50% dedicated to mobility and a preserved minimum proportional distribution across all education sectors to ensure quality education and equal opportunities.

In line with Neth-ER's campaign 'Double Knowledge', we call for a doubled Erasmus+ budget of at least €60 billion. This is crucial to sustain the positive trajectory of the current programme and achieve Europe's goals for quality education, mobility[4] and skills development. At least 50% of the total budget must be allocated to mobility, aligned with the Erasmus+ programme 2014-2020 and 2021-2027[5]. While budget flexibility is needed to address emerging needs, it is important to preserve the proportional distribution of the budget across all education sectors[6] to ensure equal opportunities for all learners.

A minimum of €60 billion is needed to respond effectively to growing mobility demands[7] and rising per-student costs[8], while realising quality education, strengthening democratic resilience and equipping learners with the skills needed in a rapidly changing world. The current proposal sets the total budget at €40.8 billion, but introduces additional ambitions , such as the Erasmus+ scholarships in Article 27. At the same time, new priorities emerge, such as the inclusion of students with fewer opportunities and diverse mobility formats such as blended intensive programmes.

Article 9 should therefore be amended to increase the total budget to €60 billion, explicitly set a minimum 50% allocation to mobility, and include a paragraph establishing the proportional distribution across higher education, vocational education, and other sectors.[9]

[4] According to the country report for the Netherlands of the Education and Training Monitor (2024), 13.1% of Dutch higher education graduates had a learning mobility experience abroad, far from the EU target of 23%.
[5] Erasmus+ 2021-2027 interim evaluation & Erasmus+ 2014-2020 final evaluation
[6] In the current programme, at least 34% is allocated to the higher education sector, and 22% to the vocational education sector (Regulation (EU) 2021/817, Article 17)
[7] According to the national overview of the Erasmus+ programme in the Netherlands, the number of participants going abroad through Erasmus+ (both students and staff) continued to increase in 2023. See: European Commission, Erasmus+ Annual Factsheet 2023 – Netherlands, ec.europa.eu.
[8] European University Association, Use and Impact of the Erasmus+ Programme (2021-27) at Higher Education Institutions, 2025, noting rising mobility costs and financial pressure on institutions, eua.eu
[9] The EP has repeatedly underlined the need for a substantial increase in the Erasmus+ budget to match the programme's ambitions for inclusion, quality and mobility. In its 2023 own-initiative resolution on the implementation of Erasmus+, the EP stated its determination to ensure predictable funding and a tripling of the current envelope.

2. Balance Between Education and Skills

Erasmus+ must keep education and personal development as its core, ensuring that the growing focus on skills for the labour market – while instrumental – does not overshadow the broader educational and societal mission of the programme.

Personal development beyond employability

The regulation must put more emphasis on personal development and create a more equal balance between education and skills. Erasmus+ must continue to promote learning and innovation that serve both students' development and regional needs. The first recital of the proposal frames the programme primarily around professional skills for employability and industry needs, narrowing the programme's educational mission for quality education as a goal in itself. As Draghi[10] also underlines, Europe's declining educational performance[11] hinders both innovation and inclusion. While professional skills development is indeed essential in a changing labour market ...

... the regulation must prioritise personal development and democratic life more – objectives also explicitly stated in Article 165 TFEU.

Transformative mobility experiences foster soft skills and societal impact

Erasmus+ must actively prioritise and fund mobility as a transformative learning experience that in itself contributes to democratic values and a thriving European society. Studying or working with international peers on projects or internships abroad helps students develop creative and critical thinking, intercultural communication, and problem-solving skills that directly benefit themselves as well as the communities they engage with. Connections built across borders foster international solidarity – essential in responding to global challenges and the current geopolitical climate. Soft skills acquired through academic and extracurricular experiences, including intercultural awareness, adaptability, and resilience, hold lifelong value that extends far beyond employability. These soft skills gained through mobility also contribute to the ability to adapt and respond to needs of the fast-changing labour market.

Therefore, both the recitals and Article 3 should make explicit that mobility experiences in se enable learners to develop soft skills and democratic competences that strengthen Europe's society and long-term competitiveness.

[10] The Draghi report: A competitiveness strategy for Europe (Part A), p. 37 & The Draghi report: In-depth analysis and recommendations (Part B), p. 267
[11] PISA 2022 Results (Volume I) The State of Learning and Equity in Education

3. More Mobility Opportunities for all Learners

Erasmus+ must increase funding for international mobility for all learners, improved recognition policy and green mobility incentives.

Increase mobility funding and inclusion for all sectors

Learning mobility is a core action within Erasmus+ and must receive increased funding for all education sectors to sustain and expand its impact. Learning mobility remains well below the 2030 targets, the latest Education and Training Monitor (2024 shows. No more than 5.1% of VET learners take part in learning mobility, compared to the target of 12%, and mobility in higher education remains below its 23% target.[12] Article 8 rightly addresses diversity and inclusion, but the proposal lacks concrete measures to inform and support students with fewer opportunities to apply for mobility. VET students in particular require targeted support with additional funds to extend equal access and opportunities for all learning pathways, sectors and levels.

Article 9 must earmark sufficient funding for mobility, inclusion and accessibility across all sectors to ensure equal access for all learners. Article 8 must include concrete measures to inform and support students with fewer opportunities.

Embed recognition of qualifications in Erasmus+ capacity building

Neth-ER welcomes the Commission's proposal in Article 7 to support policy development on the implementation of the European Qualifications Framework and other tools for recognition of qualifications.

However, recognition should not remain a policy ambition alone, but be embedded in Erasmus+ capacity building actions under Article 6.

Evidence from recent cross-border impact assessments[13] shows that fragmented and slow recognition procedures hinder both student mobility and employer recruitment at all education levels, particularly in border regions. Initiatives such as the MOVE-Certificate[14] in the Dutch-German border region demonstrate how joint modules and (digital) recognition of learning outcomes can make skills transferable across borders, enhancing employability and equal opportunities on a transnational labour market.

Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) provide a suitable framework to test and scale up such initiatives. Embedding recognition in Article 6 supports employability and promotes equal opportunities on the European labour market.

This would moreover strengthen the position of VET as an equally high-quality pathway alongside higher and academic education.[15]

[12] Education and Training Monitor 2023 (europa.eu)
[13] ITEM Cross-Border Impact Assessment 2025: 360° labour market: Challenges and solutions for recognising professional qualifications in cross-border regions
[14] MOVE Certificate (website in Dutch)
[15] This is in line with commitments 1 & 14 of the Herning Declaration

Dedicated funding for green mobility incentives

Erasmus+ should further strengthen concrete support for sustainable mobility by increasing financial compensation for low-emission travel modes such as rail or bus, and by improving access to practical alternatives to air travel. Such measures make choosing rail or bus travel more attractive than flying and would therefore align Erasmus+ with the EU's broader climate and education goals. While higher grants for green travel have indeed been in place, a 2024 report by ESN shows that additional structural measures are needed.[16]

Measures include partnerships with European rail operators offering reduced fares or flexible booking options, simplifying reimbursement for sustainable transport, improving digital tools to help students calculate distances and plan routes with the lowest possible emissions, and reducing administrative barriers for those choosing sustainable travel.

[16] Dias, R., Kotkievicz, G., Lepore, S., .(2025). Championing Green Mobility Through the Erasmus+ Programme. Erasmus Student Network AISBL

4. Structural Investment in Sustainable Partnerships

Erasmus+ must provide structural and equal long-term investment pathways for European University Alliances and Centres of Vocational Excellence.

Sustainable results require long-term funding alongside mobility budget

In order to be viable in the long term, European Universities Alliances and Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) require predictable funding that allows institutions to plan beyond short-term project cycles. Importantly, this funding must not come at the expense of mobility funding, as individual learning mobility must remain at the core of the Erasmus+ programme. The Commission must consider that every project collaboration and network develops differently in their outputs and goals and that delivering sustainable and concrete outputs requires time. Institutions should not end up needing to prioritise short-term project results over strategic collaboration, as this would undermine Europe's ambitions for inclusion, regional development and talent. Without structural, long-term EU funding, valuable long-term collaboration cannot continue to flourish.

Both the Alliances and CoVEs require concrete, long-term investment pathways[17] in Article 6.

Equal recognition for the Centres of Vocational Excellence

The Commission rightly supports the core education mission of the Alliances to achieve systemic impact through long-term EU level action (Recital 30). There is no mention in the recitals, however, of Centres of Vocational Excellence, despite their equally strategic role in delivering high-quality, future-proof education and regional innovation.

Both the Alliances and CoVEs are integral partnerships in the European knowledge ecosystem and therefore should be equally acknowledged in the recitals.

Demand for these initiatives is high: for CoVEs, for example, applications continue to increase, while available funding lags behind, further diminishing success rates.[18] While participation in university alliances should be guided by the principle of excellence, the development of these alliances should not lead to a two-tier system where only large or research-intensive institutions can participate. The Commission's proposal for the European Competitiveness Fund to support University Alliances should be made concrete as well – and designed to include the CoVEs on an equal basis.

[17] Letta has highlighted that these initiatives "must be supported with funding that matches their essential role in transforming the European higher education space" and called for increased funding.
[18] In the 2025 call, with an available budget of €60 million, 303 proposals were submitted; a steep rise compared to the 2024 call, with a budget of €56 million, when 132 proposals were submitted, of which 16 received funding.

5. Real Simplification for Institutions and Individuals

Erasmus+ must deliver concrete simplification measures that structurally reduce the administrative burden on institutions and participants, such as simplified grants and calls and user-friendly digital tools under article 12.

Reduce administrative burden: structurally simplify grants and calls

Erasmus+ must provide structural and targeted simplification measures across the entire programme period. Despite earlier simplification efforts, participating institutions continue to report administrative burden and digital infrastructure challenges.[19] Without meaningful reform, participation – particularly among smaller and newcomer organisations – is at risk of decline.

Article 12 must include concrete simplification efforts that effectively reduce the administrative burden on institutions and users for grants and calls.

Firstly, removing the distinction between different types of mobility grants – such as internships and study periods – would streamline processes and eliminate unnecessary duplication of work, while limiting the number of adjustments in a single call would ease budget management. In addition, merging HE student and staff mobility for EU and third countries (currently KA131) with International Credit Mobility projects (currently KA171) may indeed be effective for simplification, provided that previous simplification measures for third country mobility, including budget flexibility, remain unchanged and will apply for International Credit Mobility projects as well.

Simplify digital infrastructure

An urgent and logical step toward easing administrative complexity is to address the well-documented challenges[20] related to the digital infrastructure of Erasmus Without Papers,[21] the European Student Card,[22] and the Beneficiary Module.[23] Throughout the development and deployment of these digital tools, a user-oriented design and implementation process must remain a core priority.

Finally, Neth-ER suggests standardising rules and procedures under Article 19, to limit diverging implementation by national agencies and stimulate uniformity and digitalisation.

[19] COM(2025) 395 on the interim evaluation of the 2021-2027 Erasmus+ programme and the final evaluation of the 2014-2020 Erasmus+ programme
[20] 2023/2002(INI) Implementation of the current Erasmus+ Programme 2021-2027.
[21] Erasmus Without Paper assessment report 2023.
[22] Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal (in Dutch)
[23] REPORT on the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027 | A9-0413/2023 | European Parliament

Address existing limitations: reduce data reporting and offer training

The proposal states the aim to simplify the programme by merging overlapping elements and creating a single-entry point of contact (Recital 7), and expanding the use of flat rate grants (Recital 40). These are steps in the right direction, however, grave concerns remain as to whether the proposed simplification measures will truly benefit participating institutions and individuals. Lump-sum financing is already standard practice for many institutions and does not meaningfully reduce the administrative burden.

Real simplification under Article 12 requires reducing the amount of participant data requested, critically reviewing the necessity and format of documents such as the Learning Agreement, and implementing simpler, more user-friendly reporting and IT systems. When simplifying measures are introduced, the Commission must support implementing institutions by offering adequate training opportunities.

Neth-ER | Netherlands house for Education and Research

The Netherlands house for Education and Research (Neth-ER) is the Brussels based association of eleven Dutch organisations active in research, innovation and education. These are:

ISO - Dutch National Student Association

JOB - Union of Vocational Students

KNAW - Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences

LSVb - Dutch National Student Union

MBO Raad - Netherlands Association of Vocational Education Colleges

Nuffic - Netherlands organisation for the internationalisation of education

NWO - Dutch Research Council

TNO - Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research

UMCNL - UMCNL

UNL - Universities of the Netherlands

VH - Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences

Aarlenstraat 22, 1050 Brussels, Belgium
neth-er@neth-er.eu
+32 2 5115040