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The future of Erasmus+ is the future of Europe

Why further invest in (higher) education at EU level?



ACA POLICY PAPER
FEBRUARY 2025

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Key Messages

As the preparations of the new Erasmus+ programme (2028-2034) will reach a critical stage, ACA members bring forward the compelling **evidence** demonstrating the ultimate importance of the programme's higher education pillar for EU's renewed political agenda, its multiple ambitions and expected benefits.

1 Since its launch, the Erasmus+ mobility actions have been crucial for developing **transformative skills and competences** of higher education students and staff, fostering their personal development and enabling them to become successful (future) employees, entrepreneurs, innovators, and active citizens, fostering Europe's innovation-driven and socially inclusive growth.

2 The Erasmus+ programme is the core enabler of **Europe's talent pipeline**, attracting and retaining highly skilled graduates in Europe, trained in multi and interdisciplinary high-quality study programmes. It is also responsible for creating a **world-wide** informal network of **influential 'Europe ambassadors'** active in all walks of life, contributing in indirect ways to the European economy and society, promoting the European brand.

3 The essentially diverse portfolio of **Erasmus+ cooperation projects** brings together higher education institutions and other socio-economic actors from different countries, to jointly tackle common **local and regional development** goals and offer solutions for more connected and efficient innovation ecosystems, supporting upskilling, social mobility and enhancing institutional development.

4 Looking into the future, a resilient, competitive and socially cohesive Europe is also one which welcomes, on equal footing, **all students, all higher education institutions** and that fructifies **all enriching international collaboration opportunities**. It is built on a further **inclusive** Erasmus+ programme, that diversifies student participation opportunities and the variety of forms of institutional collaboration, preventing favouring one dominant model at the expense of others.

5 Having evolved into a unique funding ecosystem, Erasmus+ supports most of the EU strategic goals and, thus, requires **tripling of its budget** in the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) to **remain on a positive track**, or a **five-fold increase** for a **substantially larger systemic impact**, benefitting the economy and society at large.

Executive Summary

(Higher) education is closely interlinked with all policy areas from security to climate change to competitiveness. Education, skills and knowledge are the basis for achieving the European goals and objectives. Further investments into (higher) education are, therefore, essential.

And yet, a *resilient, competitive and socially cohesive* Europe cannot exist – in the words of European Commission President Ursula Von Der Leyen – without the solid foundation of a healthy and forward-looking (higher) education system that tackles skills gaps and fosters democratic values and active citizenship. Nor can it exist without the EU investing into *"infrastructure, innovation, education, and other areas, which are essential for developed economies to keep their competitive edge in global markets"* to quote Mario Draghi's report, and thus not without a strong Erasmus+ next programme generation (2028-2034).

The latter is not only the core belief of ACA members – many of them serving also as National Agencies for Erasmus+ in the field of higher education in their countries – it is also *the reality*, as attested by a compelling body of evidence presented in this paper.

Erasmus+ is crucial for developing transformative skills and competences of higher education students and staff, fostering their personal development and enabling them to become successful (future) employees, entrepreneurs, innovators, and active citizens, fostering Europe's innovation-driven and socially inclusive growth.

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- Short-term study abroad, i.e. **Erasmus+ student exchanges**, as supported through Erasmus+ Key Action 1 (KA1) – KA131 and KA171 – **tangibly enhance five of the ten future skills** identified by the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs 2025 report as **core to employers' workforce**, largely matching the **transformative competences** identified by the OECD as essential to tackle 21st century challenges. Amongst these are resilience, flexibility and agility; creative thinking; motivation and self-awareness; empathy and active listening; curiosity and lifelong learning, as well as responsibility and sustainability.
 - Importantly, **competences** such as *adaptability*, likewise enhanced through study abroad, are also key for the increasingly necessary upskilling and reskilling, with 39% of employers expecting workers' core skills to be disrupted by 2030, i.e. in only five-years' time. Skills and competences development necessitates thus a **lifelong learning approach**, in which higher education plays an important role, but that are likewise fostered at each level of formal, as well as informal and non-formal education.

- Beyond **preparedness for the global labour market**, study abroad fosters the internationality of mobile graduates' careers, their career ambitions and **labour market performance**, as well as mobile students' **personal development**, identification with **democratic values**, and a sense of European citizenship and identity. All attested by multiple impact studies, as detailed in the body of this paper.
- **Staff mobility** (supported through KA1) enables mobile staff to be more innovative and in touch with the labour market, while **offering international exposure to non-mobile students**, enhancing their inter-cultural understanding, and developing positive views about Europe.
- Overall, mobility in higher education is important for boosting the attractiveness and quality of teacher training and the **teacher profession** – a cornerstone of the European Education Area (EEA), as highlighted in the Europe on the Move – Learning mobility opportunities for everyone Council Recommendation (2024).

The Erasmus+ programme is the core enabler of Europe's talent pipeline, attracting and retaining highly skilled graduates in Europe, trained in multi and interdisciplinary excellence-driven study programmes. It is also responsible for creating a world-wide informal network of influential 'Europe ambassadors' active in all walks of life, contributing in indirect ways to the European economy and society, promoting the European brand.

- Flagship programmes such as **Erasmus Mundus** have been for the past 20 years, and continue to be, a **magnet for global talent attraction**, supporting over 34,000 highly-capable and carefully selected scholarship holders and some 14,000 non-scholarship holders from over 180 countries around the world to study at over 600 higher education institutions in Erasmus+ programme countries, in over 585 inter and multi-disciplinary, highly-integrated joint study programmes, supporting EU critical technologies and sustainable development goals (SDGs). The influential alumni of the programme – true Europe ambassadors – are spread all over the world, with 40% of Erasmus Mundus graduates having returned to their country of origin, and 32% having moved to another (Erasmus+ programme) country.
- The **European Universities alliances** – now 65 and bringing together over 570 higher education institutions – have the potential to further increase the attractiveness of Europe as a top study and research destination by offering access to excellent joint programmes, flexible learning paths, as well as to enhance the skills and competences development of students enrolled in their innovative cross-border campuses.

The essentially diverse portfolio of Erasmus+ cooperation projects brings together higher education institutions and other socio-economic actors from different countries, to jointly tackle common local and regional development goals and offer solutions for more connected and efficient innovation ecosystems, supporting upskilling, social mobility and enhancing institutional development.

- **International cooperation projects** between higher education institutions, as well as with industry partners and social actors, supported through the diverse partnership formats under Key Action 2 (KA2) create both **economic benefits at system level**, such as more and better patents and economies of scale, as well as **non-economic benefits**, namely positive attitudes towards open borders and democracy at **system level**, along strengthened research and teaching capacity, more and better scientific output, and increased attractiveness to foreign students and academics at **institutional level**. Overall, 80% of higher education institutions participating in such partnerships felt better equipped to tackle skills mismatches in the labour market by fostering interdisciplinarity, facilitating better ICT integration, as well as strongly supporting development and application of innovative pedagogies.
- **University-industry cooperation** enabled through Erasmus+ KA2 projects offer mutually beneficial outcomes as industry partners contribute to improving the relevance of higher education programmes in the rapidly developing economic context, gaining in return access to upskilling opportunities, and subsequent increased expertise and qualifications.

Looking into the future, a resilient, competitive and socially cohesive Europe is also one which welcomes, on equal footing, all students, all higher education institutions and that fructifies all enriching international collaboration opportunities. It is built on a further inclusive Erasmus+ programme, that diversifies student participation opportunities and the variety of forms of institutional collaboration, preventing favouring one dominant model at the expense of others.

- ACA members strongly believe that a competitive Europe is also one further rooted in a truly *inclusive Erasmus+ programme*, in which **every student** and **every higher education institution** can take part, on equal footing, in a diverse set of international mobility and institutional cooperation opportunities, that are fit for purpose. The current diversity of mobility formats and types of partnerships are essential for the sector, and should be safeguarded, and further enhanced, in line with changing contexts, individual, institutional and societal needs, the partly decentralised approach to cooperation partnerships helping to safeguard an essential principle - institutional autonomy (increasingly under threat in other parts of the world).

- It is also a Europe that is increasingly **globally connected**, not only with like-minded partners, but also open to dialogue and to building bridges with higher education institutions in systems that might not share the same values, as a necessary step to foster peace, mutual understanding, as well as the increasing economic prosperity. With rising geopolitical tensions, international cooperation and mobility is more important than ever.
- A two-tier approach to institutional partnerships and beneficiaries' involvement in the programme would hamper Europe's competitiveness, rather than enhance it.

Having evolved into a unique funding ecosystem, Erasmus+ supports most of the EU strategic goals and, thus, requires tripling of its budget in the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) to remain on a positive track, or a five-fold increase for a substantially larger systemic impact, benefitting the economy and society at large.

- Building on the existing evidence, Erasmus+ is demonstrably no longer *just* a programme, or a simple tool that solely delivers on the political agenda. It has evolved into a complex **funding ecosystem**¹ of diverse, yet coherent actions, that have both supported the continuous development and implementation of European strategic cooperation in the field of education, training and youth, in line with evolving political priorities, as well as ensured continuous adaptability and relevance to the changing needs of the citizens of Europe.
- To deliver on all this, Erasmus+ (2028-2034) needs to be **equipped with a proportionate budget**, especially given the programme's growing importance as the main funding instrument for international mobility and institutional cooperation in the majority of EU member states and countries associated to the programme. A minimum **three-fold budgetary increase** to the 2021-2027 levels would be needed to allow for some minimal growth in the programme, still requiring some careful prioritisation, while a **five times increase** would be necessary to properly consolidate current actions, while integrating enough innovations to deliver on the ambitious vision of a more **resilient, competitive and socially cohesive Europe**. Important would also be a more linear budgetary progression, as well as strengthening the bottom-up character of the programme through a solidification of the decentralised actions.

¹ Cf. Erasmus+ into the next era – a contribution from the NA Directors in the fields of Education & Training and Youth to the Final Evaluation Erasmus+ 2014–2020 and the Interim Evaluation Erasmus+ 2021–2027, January 2024.

1. Background

We are living in times when sound investments into (higher) education seem more important and more urgent than ever, within Europe, as well as around the world. And yet, the increasing geopolitical tensions, conflicts and global polarisation, coupled with the need to increase defence expenditure, the need to address growing societal challenges (climate change, ageing, food, mental health, etc.), prepare for further potential health crises, while dealing daily with uncertainty and the unknown, make this investment into (higher) education less guaranteed than ever.

It is thus essential to understand why **bolder investments in (higher) education** through the next generation of European Union (EU) programmes in education and training – Erasmus+ 2028-2034 – are not only desirable, but an actual must for building, in line with the ambitious vision of European Commission President Ursula Von Der Leyen, during her second term in office, a more *resilient, competitive and socially cohesive* European Union. The President's vision rests on successfully: tackling the skills and labour gaps (through, e.g. the upcoming *Union of Skills* communication), on talent attraction and retention, on "putting research and innovation at the heart of our economy", as well as on a series of objectives and measures for fostering social cohesion, regional and local relevance, democratic values and active citizenship, as well as wider societal impact.

The vision is further supported through the upcoming work of **Roxana Mînzatu, Executive Vice-President for Social Rights and Skills, Quality Jobs and Preparedness**, who will focus on strengthening the European Education Area (EEA) to support a *common approach to skills through, inter alia, the upcoming Union of Skills Communication*; the European Degree as a flagship for learning mobility and support for European Universities Alliances; attracting skilled workers from outside the EU; and developing a new STEM Education Strategic Plan. Ms Mînzatu already expressed support for **stronger funding of Erasmus+** in the next MFF, as well as her commitment to make Erasmus+ **more inclusive** (setting a new target of 25% of programme's beneficiaries coming from vulnerable backgrounds, compared to the current 17%), while stepping up vocational education and training (VET). Last but not least, she also highlighted her aspiration to improve **funding synergies** between different EU programmes, such as Erasmus+ and the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) in particular.

A *resilient, competitive and socially cohesive* Europe cannot thus exist without a strong Erasmus+ (2028-2034) programme. The strengthening of the programme entails both a consolidation of the innovations and elements that work well in the current programme generation, as well as on further innovating, together with the sector, where innovation is due, in response to changing societal needs, while supported by an adequate budget.

In this paper, ACA members, in their capacity as national agencies funding and supporting international cooperation in higher education in their countries, many of them also serving as National Agencies (NA) for Erasmus+, aspire to

1. First, **highlight the status quo**, by referring to a compelling body of evidence, how the three Key Actions of the Erasmus+ programme have been already soundly supporting the renewed political priorities, including skills (*and competences*) development, employability, organisational attractiveness and competitiveness, cooperative partnership-building, as well as, at system level, democratic participation and active citizenship (promoting, inter alia, European values); and
2. Second, outline in broad terms **what would be necessary**, in their views, **in the next seven-year funding period, to strengthen the Erasmus+ programme**. A second, upcoming ACA policy paper due in spring 2025 will further outline in more detail concrete improvements in the next programme generation, and specific funding implications, building on this vision.



2. Status quo – evidence on the contribution of Erasmus+ to new political priorities

Overall, Erasmus+ has become **the main funding programme for intra-European and international cooperation and mobility for most higher education systems in Europe**, due to the increased budget and the important novelties introduced in the current programme generation (2021 – 2027). On average, Erasmus+ supports about 60% of all outgoing mobility for studies in Europe and about 29% of mobility for internships. In addition, the programme has become an essential instrument to retain interest in study abroad of the current student generations in various programme countries, striving to counteract the increasing systemic barriers and concerns students are facing (through tailor-made support such as the top-ups, or by fostering inclusive communication). Intra-European mobility levels, essential for building European citizens and empowering them with the skills and competences needed on the labour market, as well as with the democratic values supporting thriving societies, would be markedly lower without the Erasmus+ grants and the additional top-ups for inclusive participation or green travel.

Over **15 million learners** (i.e. students, as well as academic and administrative staff) were mobile to date with Erasmus+ and its predecessor programmes, across the different levels of education, Erasmus being by now *the brand name* for the European Union (EU), and the synonym to student exchanges worldwide.

This importance of Erasmus+ as a funding instrument has further grown in light of repeated cuts in public funding for (higher) education at member states' level (see [ACA policy input](#) of December 2023 on the mid-term evaluation of the programme), a phenomenon that is in itself worrying. In order to meet the future skills and competences, talent, innovation and cohesion challenges, long-term investments at both the EU and the member states' level are needed, in the field of higher education in general as well as in its international cooperation dimension, and be done in a synergetic manner.

This **significant role** played by the programme is also attested by the **very high level of satisfaction of the higher education sector** with the current programme generation, and especially with the management of the decentralised actions. The latter enable more responsive and context-specific implementation, which higher education institutions

particularly appreciate, enhancing alignment with institutional priorities, as well as national and EU education goals².

As the core funding instrument, the importance of Erasmus+ in shaping Europe's future citizens and future workforce, as well as in shaping Europe's social cohesion should therefore not be underestimated. On the contrary, and for the multiple evidence presented below, it should be properly acknowledged through adequate support and increased funding in the next programme generation.

2.1 Skills and competences development, in a lifelong learning paradigm

Skills³ and competences⁴ development is inherent to higher education, as it is in all other levels of education, and not only from a labour market perspective, but also in terms of social and economic innovation, active citizenship and democratic participation.

Skills and competences development are enhanced through an **incremental, lifelong learning approach**, from pre-primary, to adult education, in which, as the latest World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs 2025 report shows, strategies for continuous upskilling and reskilling are becoming more necessary than ever. Overall, 39% of employers expect workers' core skills to change by 2030, i.e. in only five-years' time.

The **role** that **higher education** plays in further *boosting* the skills and competences developed through prior education, as well as fostering *new skills and competences*, is supported by the **accumulating evidence** of the sustained work of both **universities of applied sciences** (including **specialised institutions**), as well as by **research-intensive universities**, to innovate and adjust their curricula to both increasingly complex societal, as well as labour market's needs, anticipating future skills and enhancing graduates' global awareness and employability.

Of the *ten skills* listed in Future of Jobs report 2025 as being **core for surveyed employers' workforce** (with a high degree of similarity across sectors), **five**, namely:

1. Resilience, flexibility and agility;
2. Creative thinking;
3. Motivation and self-awareness;

² EUA (2024). Erasmus+ mid-term review: university and student perspectives on student mobility. Retrieved from: https://www.eua.eu/downloads/events/erasmus%20midterm%20review%20survey%20ii_student%20mobility_eua_final_pdf.pdf

³ Understood as: „Ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems“ (cf. Terminology of European education and training policy: https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4117_en.pdf) or, put more simply as a *specific ability to perform a task*.

⁴ Understood as: „Ability to apply learning outcomes adequately in a defined context (education, work, personal or professional development“ (Idem) or, more simply, the *broader combination of skills, knowledge, and behaviors needed to excel in a role*.

4. Empathy and active listening;
 5. Curiosity and lifelong learning;
- are (further) developed through international experiences in higher education (be they study abroad experiences or internationalisation at home), as attested by growing evidence. This list largely matches the **transformative competences** for 2030, identified by the OECD as essential to tackle 21st century challenges, namely: *creativity and innovation*; *empathy and respect*; and *responsibility and sustainability*.

Erasmus+ student exchanges – both for studies and traineeships (as supported through KA131 and KA171) – continue to be instrumental in fostering these core skills and competences valued by employers (see below), with multiple positive benefits to both students' personal development, as well as graduates' employability and career prospects. In that respect, and as the same studies show, skills should be understood in the broader sense of both skills (including life skills) *and* competences, which are as essential for being successful academically, at work, and in life, as they are for building democratic and inclusive societies and innovative economy. At the same time, it should be stressed that higher education is about much more than producing qualified employees for the rapidly changing labour market.

Concretely, as **two editions of Erasmus+ Impact studies**⁵ show:

- Former Erasmus(+) mobile students reported **gains in their knowledge, skills and competences** in areas that are **relevant for employers**: 80% of participants felt they had improved their adaptability, critical thinking, planning and organisational skills, ability to take a decision, while 90% of participants reported to have improved their knowledge of the host country, interaction with people from other cultures and intercultural competences. National studies⁶ additionally show an enhancement of independence (86% of respondents), confidence (86% of those surveyed), and openness to new ideas (85% of respondents), which along *adaptability*, are crucial for facilitating reskilling and upskilling.
- In total, 40% of students who went on Erasmus(+) **traineeships** were offered jobs within the companies/organisations in which they did their traineeship, and around 10% started their own company, with many more (75%) planning to do so in the future.

An increasing number of statistically relevant quantitative studies also attest to the positive impact of short-term study abroad on the graduates' careers, and more concretely,

⁵ Souto-Otero, M. et al. (2019). Erasmus+ Higher Education Impact Study, EU Publications Office. Retrieved from: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/94d97f5c-7ae2-11e9-9f05-01aa75ed71a1>, and

Brandenburg, U. et al. (2017). The Erasmus Impact Study. Effects of mobility on the skills and employability of students and the internationalisation of higher education institutions. EU Publications Office. Retrieved from: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/13031399-9fd4-11e5-8781-01aa75ed71a1>

⁶ DAAD (2025). Once in a Lifetime: Erasmus+. Wirkungsstudie, Bonn. Retrieved from: <https://eu.daad.de/service/auswertung-und-statistik/studien-und-auswertungen-der-na-daad/de/88103-wirkungsstudie-once-in-a-lifetime-erasmus/>

- **career orientation:** formerly mobile graduates have a *greater maturity and clarity regarding their career paths and professional (identity) development*⁷.
- **internationality of graduates' career:** formerly mobile graduates are *more likely to also work abroad during their early career*⁸; are more likely to be involved in *international work in their home country*⁹; have *better language skills and use them more frequently for their work*¹⁰; and are *more globally minded and oriented*¹¹.
- **labour market performance:** formerly mobile graduates are *more likely to enrol in further education and obtain a PhD*¹²; attain positions of *higher social status*¹³; receive *slightly higher wages on average*¹⁴.
- **career adaptability:** with values significantly above the scale mean, the Erasmus+ alumni have high levels of career-related adaptability (i.e. psychological resources for coping with job-related tasks and changes)¹⁵.

Higher education institutions have worked hard in recent years to closely accompany many of their students, through specialised career guidance services, to **'translate' the multiple benefits of their study abroad experiences** into their professional CVs, in a way that is both recognisable by and valuable to employers. This is because, as recent studies show, employers are not necessarily aware that the skills and competences they search for in their ideal candidates are fostered by studying abroad.

The skills development role of short-term mobilities also positively benefits **mobile academic and administrative staff**. The Erasmus+ Impact studies further show that higher education staff who took part in an Erasmus+ mobility were *more innovative and in touch with the labour market than their peers*: around 60% of mobile staff reported to use learning in multidisciplinary groups, to teach making use of ICT and use Open Educational Resources compared to less than 45% of non-mobile staff, while 59% reported to have invited staff from enterprises to teach (compared to 40% of staff who have not participated in an Erasmus+ mobility).

Erasmus+ helped staff to use innovative methods: 43% reported that they had started to use at least one innovative teaching method during their stay abroad. Participants in the programme also reported to have **influenced non-mobile students** by having improved their inter-cultural understanding, transversal and social skills through the programme, and formed strongly positive views about Europe. Overall, *mobility is important for boosting*

⁷ Roy, A., Newman, A., Ellenberger, T., & Pyman, A. (2019). Outcomes of international student mobility programs: A systematic review and agenda for future research. *Studies in Higher Education*, 44(9), 1630-1644.

⁸ Di Pietro, G. (2012). Does studying abroad cause international labor mobility? Evidence from Italy. *Economics Letters*, 117(3), 632-635.

⁹ Netz, N. (2012). Studienbezogene Auslandsmobilität und Berufsverbleib von Hochschulabsolvent (inn) en (Vol. 14, pp. 259-313). DEU.

¹⁰ Moore, I., Torgerson, C., & Beckmann, N. (2021). Systematic review measuring the efficacy of study abroad in undergraduate language learners on linguistic proficiency gains. *Review of Education*, 9(3), e3306.

¹¹ Wiers-Jenssen, J., Tillman, M., & Matherly, C. (2020). Employability: How education abroad impacts the transition to graduate employment. In *Education Abroad* (pp. 135-149). Routledge.

¹² d'Hombres, B., & Schnepf, S. V. (2021). International mobility of students in Italy and the UK: does it pay off and for whom?. *Higher Education*, 82(6), 1173-1194.

¹³ Waibel, S., Petzold, K., & Rüger, H. (2018). Occupational status benefits of studying abroad and the role of occupational specificity—A propensity score matching approach. *Social Science Research*, 74, 45-61.

¹⁴ Netz, N., & Cordua, F. (2021). Does studying abroad influence graduates' wages? A literature review. *Journal of International Students*, 11(4), 768-789.

¹⁵ DAAD (2025). Once in a Lifetime: Erasmus+. Wirkungsstudie, Bonn. Retrieved from: <https://eu.daad.de/service/auswertung-und-statistik/studien-und-auswertungen-der-na-daad/de/88103-wirkungsstudie-once-in-a-lifetime-erasmus/>

the attractiveness of the teacher profession – a cornerstone of the European Education Area (EEA), as highlighted in the Europe on the Move – Learning mobility opportunities for everyone Council Recommendation (2024).

Regarding the diversified types of **institutional collaborations and partnerships supported through KA2**, an impact study¹⁶ found that **80%** of the participating **higher education institutions** felt better equipped to tackle skills mismatches in the labour market by fostering interdisciplinarity, facilitating better ICT integration, as well as strongly supporting development and application of innovative pedagogies.

Over 40% of projects developed tools and approaches for innovative teaching, which, combined with better ICT integration, contributed to an improved workforce in higher education institutions, higher numbers of university graduates with improved digital competences, better higher education accessibility to students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, etc. Similarly, predecessor consortia (such as Knowledge Alliances), proved effective and relevant in addressing skills mismatches and increased 'resilience' of graduates, by emphasising business needs and focusing on soft and transversal skills development.

Further, according to a recent study, many of the current 65 **European Universities alliances**, involving over 570 higher education institutions, also built their educational offer by **taking into account the skills gap** between supply and demand in local job markets, striving that their students develop the skills and competencies required locally, and which are expected to result in better employability¹⁷, while the report also points that it is "still relatively early to assess the full-scale impact".

The university-businesses partnerships supported through KA2 were rated as **equally beneficial for higher education and industry partners**. Higher education institutions find that the industry partners contribute to improving the relevance of their education programmes, and that being connected to the industry makes them better able to follow the rapid developments that often occur in the labour market. For the industry partners, increased access to upskilling opportunities, and subsequent increased expertise and qualifications, are highlighted as the main benefits¹⁸.

All in all, **international cooperation projects** create both **economic benefits at system level**, such as more and better patents and economies of scale, as well as **non-economic benefits**, namely positive attitudes towards open borders and democracy (**at system level**), along strengthened research and teaching capacity, more and better scientific output, and

¹⁶ European Commission (2019). Study on the impact of Erasmus+ Higher Education Strategic Partnerships and Knowledge Alliances at local, national and European levels on key Higher Education policy priorities. Retrieved from: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/9369267b-7ae2-11e9-9f05-01aa75ed71a1>

¹⁷ Grumbainaitė, I., Colus, F. & Buitrago Carvajal, H. (2025). Report on the outcomes and transformational potential of the European Universities initiative. EU Publications Office. Retrieved from: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/db43f6ca-da14-11ef-be2a-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

¹⁸ Sentraliserte tiltak i Erasmus+. Norske erfaringer og utbytte (2025). Retrieved from: <https://www.ideas2evidence.com/sites/default/files/Undersøkelse%20om%20sentraliserte%20tiltak%2014.1.25.pdf>

and increased attractiveness to foreign students and academics **at institutional level**¹⁹.

From a programme perspective, these partnerships are extremely important also because they strongly support the horizontal priorities of Erasmus+, though, for example, developing innovative learning and teaching methods, and by supporting diversity and inclusion (e.g., developing tools for inclusive pedagogies, inclusive communication, inclusive student services) and leading to necessary institutional transformations in the priority areas. Through this, more students and staff have access to programme related opportunities, and are better supported in their development of relevant skills and competences.

2.2 Social cohesion, diversity and inclusion, and democratic participation

With an increasing focus on inclusion and diversity as well as civic engagement, the Erasmus+ programme has been instrumental in developing attitudes and behaviours supporting active citizenship and European values, both via KA1 and KA2 actions.

Students that were mobile with Erasmus(+) reported an **improvement of skills that help foster social cohesion**: 95% reported to get along better with people from other cultural backgrounds and 93% to better consider cultural perspectives and differences when others have different ideas or opinions.

Overall, Erasmus(+) students reported a **higher impact on their personal development** (e.g. the ability to assess own strengths and weaknesses), social engagement, intercultural openness, and their academic success than participants in other mobility programmes, scoring higher than the latter on the related impact indexes²⁰.

As the Erasmus+ Impact studies further showed, Erasmus+ also contributed to the enhancement of social cohesion, boosting **European identity**, with over 32% of Erasmus+ students identifying themselves only or primarily as Europeans after completing their mobility period – compared to 25% before the mobility period.

The programme is also a way to **make Europe tangible for young students**, by giving them access to an education experience in another Erasmus+ programme country (through KA131 and the international opening of KA131). Through the latter actions, 4% of all mobile students and staff in 2023 went abroad to an Erasmus+ partner country (i.e. double than in the previous year), the total number of non-European destinations being 134 countries²¹.

¹⁹ Crăciun, D. & Orosz, K. (2018). Benefits and costs of transnational collaborative partnerships in higher education – EENEE Analytical Report 36. EU Publications Office. Retrieved from: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/09cf3e0b-e6f6-11e8-b690-01aa75ed71a1>

²⁰ Souto-Otero, M. et al. (2019). Erasmus+ Higher Education Impact Study, EU Publications Office. Retrieved from: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/94d97f5c-7ae2-11e9-9f05-01aa75ed71a1>

²¹ European Commission (2024). Erasmus+ annual report 2023. Retrieved from: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/884d8a20-ac87-11ef-acb1-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

In the current programme generation, a special boost was given to social cohesion through the setting of diversity and inclusion and of participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement as two of four horizontal priorities (across all fields of education, and across all actions, from mobility to partnerships).

Participation of higher education **students with fewer opportunities** (i.e. encountering different one or several of the eight types of participation barriers²²) in the regular Erasmus+ mobilities for study and traineeships has significantly improved in the current programme generation, reaching 17% of mobile students in 2023 that have received an 'inclusion top-up' in addition to their regular Erasmus+ grant²³. This is extremely important not only because of the statistical increase, but because study abroad has been proven to be even more impactful for students with fewer opportunities, than it is for students not encountering specific disadvantages²⁴.

The new formats of **Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs)** introduced through Erasmus+ (2021-2027), shorter mobilities and virtual exchanges showed positive preliminary results, particularly in their inclusivity – facilitating the participation of students who typically struggle with the traditionally longer Erasmus+ exchanges duration. They also showed increasing take up rates by the sector and by students – e.g. 9% of mobile students carried out a blended mobility opportunity in 2023²⁵ – their potential needing to be further explored in the remaining part of the current programme period.

The participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement priority is particularly supported through cooperation partnerships funded under **KA2**, and typically aimed to develop diverse skills and competences for democratic participation.

Overall, the projects supporting this priority better equipped participating students with skills in influencing decision-making and societal processes, especially by using social media; coached staff, especially in the context of working life and promotion of inclusive instruction, helping them to apply new pedagogical methods and tools in line with the needs of different types of students and supported their community engagement; supported professional development and strengthened the underlying values of institutions, fostering awareness of what needs to be done to reach different target groups²⁶.

²² European Commission (2025). Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2025, Version 2. Retrieved from: https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2025-01/erasmus-programme-guide-v2.2025_en.pdf

²³ Idem.

²⁴ Van Hees, V., Ferencz, I., Posset, H. and Wöckinger, A. (2021). Making mobility programmes more inclusive Inclusive Mobility - From policy to inspiration. Retrieved from: <https://www.siho.be/sites/default/files/214162%20ARTEVELDE%20-%20Mobility%20BOOKLET%20TwinDsign%20%289%29.pdf>

²⁵ European Commission (2024). Erasmus+ annual report 2023. Retrieved from: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/884d8a20-ac87-11ef-acb1-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

²⁶ EDUFI (2024). Achieving great impacts through small actions together – democratic life, common values and civic engagements priorities. Retrieved from: <https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/Achieving%20great%20impacts%20through%20small%20actions%20together%20-%20democratic%20life.pdf>

2.3 Talent attraction and retention, but also global connectivity

In addition to the growing intra-European mobility, Erasmus+ has a long track record, of over 20 years in **attracting top students, particularly from outside of Europe** through its **flagship programme Erasmus Mundus**, another well established and attractive **global brand** (often compared to the prestigious Fulbright programme). Erasmus Mundus took the development of truly joint study programmes in the European context to new quality heights, supporting both their joint design, delivery, as well as certification. It has paved the way for the transformational European Universities initiative (EUI) and inspired the vision and criteria for a European degree (label).

A recent impact study (European Commission 2024²⁷) shows that the Erasmus Mundus programme stands out through the exceptional quality of the 350 inter and multi-disciplinary joint study programmes at Master's level that were funded to date. Over the last two decades, the programme attracted over 34,000 top talent, carefully selected scholarship holders, and some 14,000 non-scholarship holders from over 180 countries around the world. The latter study(ied) at over 600 higher education institutions in Erasmus+ programme countries (and a few institutions outside of Europe) to obtain the reputable Erasmus Mundus labelled degree.

The programme remains **highly selective, hand-picking the best students** that are highly motivated to study in innovative and **forward-looking, cross-cutting fields of study**, many addressing EU critical technologies (e.g., artificial intelligence, energy) and **big societal challenges** (climate, democratic values, global health, etc.) and meant to create the type of graduates that will be able to address them. The study programmes provide the respective students with a truly European educational experience (Erasmus Mundus students studying at three higher education institutions in three different countries, as a standard) and is attested to have had a **multi-layered impact** at global (through the increasing collaboration with higher education institutions around the world), European, national, institutional as well as personal level.

The biggest impact of the programme rests however in the **soft power of its numerous and very influential alumni** (as attested in the graduate impact surveys²⁸), who are spread across all areas of work (from governments, innovative start-ups, leading research organisations, to entertainment industry, etc.), and who serve as ambassadors of Europe around the world, with 40% of Erasmus Mundus graduates having returned to their country and 32% having

²⁷ European Commission (2024). 20 years of Erasmus Mundus. Beyond borders and boundaries. Retrieved from: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/fa2067a3-18cb-11ef-a251-01aa75ed71a1>

²⁸ Jühlke, R., Dau, J., Unger, M. (2023). Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Graduate Impact Survey 2023. Comprehensive report of results. Retrieved from: <https://www.em-a.eu/post/graduate-impact-survey-2023-results>

moved to another (Erasmus+ programme) country. The high employability of these graduates is also attested through multiple alumni impact studies²⁹.

Beyond talent attraction and partial retention, the impact of the Erasmus+ programme also rests in the **global connectivity** it enabled through the growing formal participation of international students and higher education partners, facilitating the propagation of European good practices, and of values, but also of learning from other world regions, while working towards the greater good, further strengthened through the KA171 and the international opening of KA131 in the current programme generation.

As outlined in ACA's evaluation of the past Erasmus+ programme (2014-2020), the introduction of KA107 mobilities had greatly supported the global attractiveness of European higher education, while establishing extensive partnerships with diverse partner countries, higher education institutions and broader socioeconomic actors. In this respect. The decentralised approach of KA107 significantly broadened **access to the international dimension** of mobility for a broader group of higher education institutions in Europe, including smaller, specialised institutions, a notable improvement over the previous programme generation, in which this support was integrated under another action. This strategic shift enabled brand new international collaborations for the benefit of many more students, through the specific funding allocated for cooperation with priority regions, which was now further enhanced through a more flexible approach within KA131, staying within the 20% margin of all mobilities.

The newer **European Universities alliances** have the potential to further increase the attractiveness of Europe as a top study and research destination by offering access to excellent joint programmes, flexible learning paths, and to study at multiple higher education institutions in Europe that are part of the alliance.

2.4 Regional relevance and impact

The Erasmus+ programme has also been instrumental in tackling regional disparities across the EU, both the mobility actions, as well as the partnerships making a tangible and positive contribution. The previous Erasmus(+) impact studies attested the **highest impact of the programme on students from countries with a lower GDP**. The latter reported the highest levels of impact of mobility on their studies (76 points in the Study Impact Index, compared to 68 points for students from high GDP countries³⁰). By region, participants from Southern

²⁹ See for instance Graduate Impact Survey 2023 Results: <https://www.em-a.eu/post/graduate-impact-survey-2023-results>.

³⁰ Souto-Otero, M. et al. (2019). Erasmus+ Higher Education Impact Study, EU Publications Office. Retrieved from: [Erasmus Higher Education Impact Study \(2018\)](https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/94d97f5c-7ae2-11e9-9f05-01aa75ed71a1), European Commission. Retrieved from: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/94d97f5c-7ae2-11e9-9f05-01aa75ed71a1>

European programme countries and partner countries reported the highest impact, while participants from Western European programme countries reported the lowest one.

Although the main aims of the Erasmus+ programme are not economic ones, and credit mobile students are not driven by economic rationales, **Erasmus+ student mobility** generates financial flows between countries that trigger positive **economic and fiscal effects, at national, as well as regional level, supporting the local economy and job creation**. At least two studies to date showcased the **net economic effects of Erasmus+ incoming students** for the host country's economy (once all costs and benefits are factored in). In Slovenia³¹, the final domestic gross added value (GVA) effect settled at EUR 7.8 million and 194 jobs, of which 47 directly in the education sector. The fiscal effects added up to EUR 3.1 million in taxes and social insurance contributions. The sectors that benefited most from Erasmus+ included education services, the sectors that are concerned with short- and long-term accommodation of incomings, as well as transport and trade sectors. Similarly, in Austria³², Erasmus+ incoming students triggered a GVA effect of ca. EUR 12.4 million, contributing to about 150 full time equivalent jobs.

University-(local)business collaboration was already an objective in the previous programme periods, aiming to both enhance graduates' employability and strengthen the competitiveness of the local economy. In the current Erasmus+ generation, European Universities alliances have managed, at least in numerical terms, to expand this collaboration to a new critical mass, anchoring their activities in local and regional ecosystems through an extensive network of over 2,200 associated partners³³.

³¹ CMEPIUS, 2019. The economic effects of Erasmus+ on the Slovenian economy. Retrieved from: <https://erasmusplusresearch.eu/research/economic-effects-erasmus-slovenian-economy>

³² OeAD, 2018. The effects of Erasmus+ incoming participants on the Austrian economy. Retrieved from: <https://www.ihs.ac.at/research/research-projects/projectdetail/the-effects-of-erasmus-incoming-participants-on-the-austrian-economy/>

³³ Grumbinaitė, I., Colus, F. & Buitrago Carvajal, H. (2025). Report on the outcomes and transformational potential of the European Universities initiative. EU Publications Office. Retrieved from: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/db43f6ca-da14-11ef-be2a-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

3. The way forward – what is broadly needed for a stronger Erasmus+ 2028-2034

Building on the existing evidence, Erasmus+ is demonstrably no longer *just* a programme, or a simple tool that solely delivers on the political agenda. It has evolved into a complex **funding ecosystem**³⁴ of diverse, yet coherent actions. The latter have both supported the continuous development and implementation of European strategic cooperation in the field of education, training and youth, in line with the evolving political priorities, and also ensured continuous adaptability and relevance to the changing needs of citizens in Europe.

To further enhance the programme's contribution to building a resilient, competitive and socially cohesive, democratic Europe, it is essential to *start with the right foot* in planning the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF).

Consequently, Erasmus+ (2028-2034) needs to be **equipped with a proportionate budget**, especially given the programme's growing importance as the main funding instrument for international mobility and institutional cooperation in the majority of EU member states and countries associated to the programme.

A minimum **three-fold budgetary increase** to the 2021-2027 levels would be needed to ensure some minimal progress in the programme's objectives, particularly on the ambitious mobility targets set under the Europe on the Move initiative, still requiring some careful prioritisation and lacking adequate support.

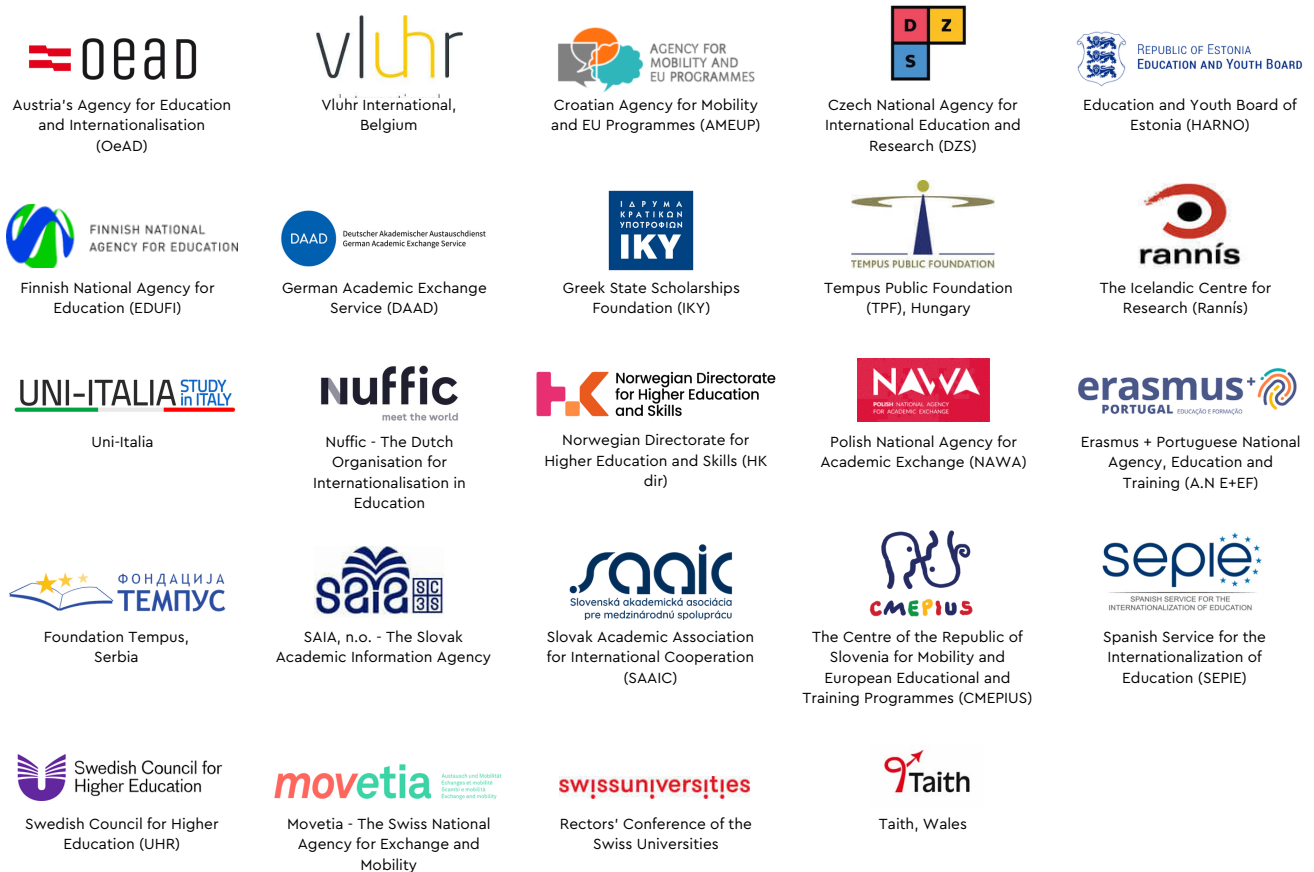
A **five times increase** would be necessary to properly consolidate the current well-functioning and highly impactful actions, particularly under KA2, catering for the full range of higher education institutions in Europe, *and* foster innovation to deliver on the ambitious vision of a more **resilient, competitive and socially cohesive Europe**.

In this context, it would be important to implement a budgetary approach following a **linear model**, with programme's annual budgets distributed in a more even way. Compared to the current incremental growth of funds throughout the MFF, this new budgeting approach could facilitate better long-term planning by the sector, and further strengthen decentralised actions, catering for bottom-up initiatives to safeguard the programme's broad relevance for the sector, individual faculty and the local ecosystems.

³⁴ Erasmus+ into the next era – a contribution from the NA Directors in the fields of Education & Training and Youth to the Final Evaluation Erasmus+ 2014–2020 and the Interim Evaluation Erasmus+ 2021–2027, January 2024.

ACA's suggestions on how to concretely further consolidate the existing successful actions, and on the introduction of potential innovations will be published in mid-spring 2025, via a separate policy paper, and debated at a Stakeholder event planned for the end of April 2025. For the latest updates, check [ACA's events page](#).

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About ACA

Working under the motto "the European voice of national organisations for the internationalisation of higher education", the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA) is a leading European association supporting research, innovative practice-development and smart policymaking in international higher education. Created in 1993 as a member-driven platform, ACA provides a shared voice to national agencies for the internationalisation of higher education in Brussels and represents them in Europe and globally. Within ACA, the member organisations enhance their capacities and join forces in supporting and 'doing' internationalisation. ACA also has a long track record in conducting sound research and providing expert advice on key developments in international higher education to universities, governments and supra-national organisations alike. ACA's core membership and identity is distinctly European, 'with an eye' on global trends. The association is supported by a Brussels-based Secretariat that plays a coordinator and expert role for the membership.

