



#WeStandTogether

Erasmus+ in connection to COVID-19

Open letter to the European Commission

by NA Directors Education & Training

April 2020

Introduction

At a time when the world is facing enormous challenges due to the outbreak of COVID-19, solidarity and cooperation between countries is a challenge in itself. However, this is a battle that we can only win when we work together, through transnational cooperation.

The European Commission is doing what it can to support the EU member states and to provide assistance in all possible ways. The focus is now on the direct emergency situation and its impact on European citizens, in all aspects of their lives. At the same time, we already need to start thinking about the next phase, of rebuilding our social and economic structures affected by the corona crisis. As Directors of the National Agencies Erasmus+ Education & Training, we strongly believe that the programme Erasmus+, by its spirit a programme fostering transnational cooperation, can contribute to this in many ways.

The present Erasmus+ programme

Erasmus+ is the EU flagship programme in the fields of education & training, youth and sport. By the end of 2020, the programme will have opened up opportunities for learning mobility for more than 10 million Europeans since 1987.

But the Erasmus+ programme is more than mobility of learners (of all ages), teachers and staff. It also enables institutions in the field of education and training in Europe and in the rest of the world to work in transnational partnerships and to exchange ideas, methods and good practices.

Studies and evaluations have shown that the programme is highly appreciated by European citizens. Erasmus+ has a proven impact on the personal and professional development of participants and on the quality of education and training as provided by the institutions in all sectors – from school education and vocational education and training to higher education and adult education.

The future Erasmus+ programme

Later this year, decisions will have to be taken with regard to the EU's priorities and areas of action for the period 2021–2027 and for the Multiannual Financial Framework in which funds are allocated

for these priorities and actions. We fully understand that the corona crisis will have a major impact on these decisions. The challenges that this crisis poses for us, will be a central element in the negotiations.

Therefore, we would like to share with you some thoughts on how the future Erasmus+ programme can contribute in addressing these challenges.

- **We need cooperation and mutual learning.** The economic impact of the corona crisis will be felt by many and for a long time. Unemployment rates will rise. The gap between those who will still earn a good income and those who will face painful financial constraints will grow. However, we cannot write off large groups in society. We need to equip people with the competencies needed for an economic recovery. This is not only in their personal interest, but also in the interest of Europe at large. It requires investing in education and training, addressing the needs not only for the near future but certainly also for later years. **This is where Erasmus+ is strong: it offers opportunities and a huge network for mutual learning between participants, organisations, sectors and countries.** Furthermore, strategic partnerships under Erasmus+ can be an accelerator for the development and implementation of new insights, methods and technologies.
- **We need to revitalise a European sense of belonging.** The corona crisis also will bring to the test the solidarity between European nations and citizens. No country can overcome this crisis by itself. We need to find ways to strengthen the bond between European citizens and to create a sense of belonging in a world where people feel more vulnerable than in decades. **Erasmus+ by its very nature offers opportunities to connect people and organisations across Europe.** It is a strong tool in (re)creating and supporting a European spirit and sense of belonging and to actually live this solidarity and cooperation.
- **We need to learn from new initiatives and experiments in education and training.** During the crisis, the world of education and training has experienced a dramatic disruption, and at the same time a digital leap, an explosion of new and creative ways of teaching and learning. This has unleashed a vast potential for using digitalisation in education and training and adopting blended learning techniques and virtual cooperation in the future. However, in order to fully use this potential and to maintain the desired quality of education and training, it is important to learn lessons from the present experiences. **Erasmus+ offers opportunities to bring these experiences together and to create a common body of good practices and effective methods.** Existing options of blended learning and virtual platforms should be further extended. This approach is of high relevance for vulnerable groups in society, who might be excluded due to a lack of access to these new forms of education and training.
- **We need to keep meeting face-to-face.** Albert Einstein once said: “Learning is experience. Everything else is just information”. Even though virtual learning will offer new approaches, the need for face-to-face learning, teaching and cooperation does not disappear. Online education and training, while offering opportunities for acquiring knowledge, cannot replace the experience of gaining interpersonal, intercultural and international competencies that can be achieved only by submerging yourself in a different environment and interacting directly with people from different backgrounds. **Erasmus+ has over 30 years of proven experience in this.** It offers tested approaches and working methods in creating conditions that can give learners, teachers and staff the trust that their safety and well-being during study, internships, teaching and other activities abroad will be safeguarded.

- **We need to make full use of the new openings in the Erasmus+ proposal.** In the proposal for a regulation establishing the new programme Erasmus+, submitted by the Commission to the European Parliament and to the Council in 2018, there is a strong focus on making the programme more inclusive and more flexible and on complementing existing ways of cooperation with virtual ones. **Given the impact of the corona crisis, these new features of the proposed Erasmus+ programme for the period 2021–2027 are more important than ever.**
- **We need to remain in touch with the rest of the world.** Europe cannot isolate itself. Therefore, the international dimension of Erasmus+ remains relevant as ever. COVID-19 does not respect borders of countries and continents, and economies have become interdependent on a world scale. As the corona virus has created a global crisis, we shall also need to collaborate with other regions in the world in facing the challenges and in creating a safe and sustainable environment for the years to come. **Erasmus+ provides opportunities and tested ways of cooperation for this type of global collaboration.**

Closing remark

Europe is going through a crisis that is unprecedented for many. Particularly now, it is important that #WeStandTogether.

This document reflects discussion outcomes that were shared unanimously or with a very large consensus among the NAs in the field of Education and Training. It does not necessarily reflect the opinion of each National Agency in all aspects.