

Norway's position paper on the future Erasmus+ programme

The Erasmus+ programme plays a vital role in fostering inclusion and diversity, democracy and civic engagement, digital transformation, and environmental sustainability across Europe. Norway takes great interest in the programme, and we are happy to convey our views to contribute to the upcoming deliberations. Through the Agreement on the European Economic Area (EEA Agreement), Norway is fully integrated in the internal market and participates in all parts of the Erasmus+ programme and the European Education Area. The EEA and Norway Grants contribute to cohesion targets and strengthen education and training cooperation between the EEA EFTA States and beneficiary Member States.

January 1st, 2024, marked the 30th anniversary of the EEA Agreement. On this occasion, the Foreign Ministers of the EEA EFTA States expressed: 'This anniversary provides us with an opportunity to celebrate the success and achievements of the EEA Agreement, and more importantly, to prepare for the future in an increasingly complex global environment.'¹ The Erasmus+ programme has an important role in addressing future challenges. Norway has participated in the Erasmus+ programme and its predecessors on a par with EU Member States for over 30 years, and we value this participation highly.

Norway submitted its Erasmus+ 2021-27 interim evaluation and Erasmus+ 2014-20 final evaluation to the European Commission on February 26, 2024. This evaluation shows that Erasmus+ has evolved into a programme that works increasingly well, and it is fair to state that the programme now provides a funding eco-system. The next programme period should build on the success of the current programme, with adjustments where necessary. This paper presents **Norway's views on what should be the overarching principles guiding the development of the next programme period.**

Main messages:

- **Continuity and stability**, both in terms of funding and structure, between programme periods to secure predictability for end-users. This should also include keeping the name, given that Erasmus+ is one of the best-known EU initiatives.
- The future programme should keep the **structure and distribution** of centralised and decentralised actions.
- **Clear priorities** give the programme a direction, and the four priorities of the current programme are highly relevant across all sectors and should be continued in the next period.
- **Upskilling and reskilling** through education ought to be further enhanced and prioritised in the next programme period and could potentially be an overarching priority
- **Inclusion** should still be a main priority and aim of Erasmus+. At the same time, we must also recognize the **excellence** initiatives' essential contribution to the programme's relevance and attractiveness.
- The future programme should be designed to **optimize impact** in order to reach the programme's objectives. KA2 is in this regard crucial.
- Further **simplification of administration**, i.e., of application processes, grant agreements and project documentation. **The principle of proportionality** should be guiding the programme rules.
- More **flexibility** within the decentralised allocation for Erasmus+ could ensure greater relevance, more impact and more targeted uptake of programme funding.
- **Synergies with other programmes** should be further enhanced.

¹ [30 years of European Economic Area](#)

1. Continuity and stability

At the overall level, Norway calls for stability in programme rules, name of the programme, and base structure of the programme in the transition to a new programme period. The focus should be on qualitative improvements, not a major overhaul of the programme. This should also apply to the IT systems, where focus should be on improving the existing systems. We believe that this will secure predictability for all parties involved, especially the end-users. The current structure with three actions should be maintained, as it is well known to experienced users, but also understandable for newcomers.

Norway would like to stress that the future programme should keep the current distribution of centralised and decentralised actions. To ensure the quality and relevance of projects and beneficiaries, we find it crucial to also keep the next programme largely decentralised. The National Agencies are equipped to understand the fields, recruit newcomers, validate organisations, follow up beneficiaries and monitor projects in a way that a centralised structure cannot.

In terms of continuity and stability we also find it essential that the youth sector has its own budget and its own priority areas. It is important to keep a diversity of action types, where the focus can be on individual learning of young people, competence development of youth workers, capacity building and quality improvement of organisations and structures clearly connected to the youth field, and strengthening of networks.

2. Clear overarching priorities

The four horizontal priorities have proven to give the programme a clear direction. In Norway, there are clear connections between priorities in Erasmus+ and national priorities in education, training, youth and sport and we see that this alignment contributes to a broad use and relevance of the programme. The current four horizontal priorities are relevant across all sectors, and we believe that they will also be highly relevant in the future. We therefore support the continuation of the current priorities in the next programme period.

The number of challenges that we will need to solve now, and in the future, will not decrease, but we would like to stress that Erasmus+ cannot, and should not, solve everything. The priorities for the future programme should be aligned with the goals of the programme, taking into consideration that it is a programme for education, training, youth and sport, with a strong focus on mobility. We should refrain from a priority overload.

Up-skilling and re-skilling

If the priorities in the future programme were to be adjusted, we would like to point out that addressing the skills gap and providing opportunities for up- and reskilling is a significant political priority across Europe. While the current Erasmus+ programme includes actions supporting projects for skills development and strengthening the connections between education, training, and employability, we believe there is potential for greater emphasis on skills throughout the programme, and skills could potentially be an overarching priority.

In relation to this it should be mentioned that the higher vocational education sector (HVET) is increasingly important to meet challenges in matching current and future skills needs by providing education that is close to the needs of the employers, and adaptable to people in need of upskilling and reskilling. HVET is placed differently within the National Qualification Frameworks across Erasmus+

programme countries with some positioned within and others outside the European Higher Education Area. This discrepancy complicates the search for appropriate partners and calls for some beneficiaries. We would therefore welcome a reflection around how to accommodate the HVET sector better in the future Erasmus+ programme.

International dimension

The Erasmus+ programme's openness to countries outside of the EU is a key strength and the programme should continue to be as open as possible to international cooperation. The new geopolitical context is challenging, but still, international cooperation remains a prerequisite for solving global challenges and Erasmus+ is an important tool for cooperation with global partners. The potential is huge, and we believe that the international dimension should be further increased and expanded across the programme, i.e., open to all sectors and to relevant countries beyond EU and Europe. In addition to capacity building, we would appeal for more equal partnerships which emphasizes mutual learning and benefit for all partner countries.

The presence of war in Europe and the ongoing rearmament calls for greater focus on the EU as a peace project. This includes peace building, human rights education, and knowledge and competence development through youth work in conflict and post-conflict areas. We appreciate the reinforced emphasis that projects should support the European values and underline the importance of continued cooperation with partners from regions neighbouring the EU and other third countries.

3. Optimizing impact

It is essential that the programme is designed in such a way that it fulfils all its objectives. Erasmus+ is a renowned and successful EU initiative which has had great impact on millions of individuals. The programme is best known as a mobility programme for younger generations, and this should continue to be the main priority. From a Norwegian perspective, KA1 functions well in its current state. Some of the novelties introduced in the 2021-2027 programme have been particularly successful. In primary and secondary education and training, the accreditation scheme has been well received and educational institutions and local and regional authorities have responded well to the opportunity to think more strategically about their international activities and predictability of funding.

However, going forward, Norway would like to underline the importance of KA2 to further increase and strengthen the impact of the programme.

KA2

KA2 is crucial for achieving many of the programme's overarching goals, as it engages organisations at the systemic level. In Norway, we observe that KA2 partnerships have a profound impact on various areas, including the integration of education and training with regional development, the advancement of pedagogical methods, institutional development, and cross-sectoral collaboration. In the current programme we are concerned that so few projects can be funded under the decentralised KA2 actions that we may lose the critical mass necessary to attract good applicants and to ensure the continued broad relevance of the action. We must acknowledge the essential role of KA2 initiatives in enhancing the programme's relevance and appeal.

Ensure partnership relevance

To ensure the ongoing success of KA2 and to strengthen its impact, it is crucial for partnerships to maintain strong connections within their respective sectors and to address themes directly relevant to

sectoral needs and challenges. Over the last few years, we have observed increased participation from actors with a weak connection to and low relevance for the sectors. Despite recent measures to limit their participation, we believe they are insufficient, particularly concerning the rapid development of AI technology. To ensure partnership relevance, we therefore propose mandating the participation of at least one formal education provider for applications in the HED, SCH and VET sectors. Similarly, in the youth, adult and sport sectors, beneficiaries must prove a clear connection to and relevance for the respective fields. In the Youth sector for instance, the potential is great but the presence of actors with a less obvious link to the field, combined with the restricted budget available for the action, influences the impact. Additionally, we suggest increasing the relevance criterion's weight in assessments and urge the European Commission to explore adapting the application and eligibility check process to address this issue.

Partnerships for Excellence

One of the main novelties in Erasmus+ 2021-2027 for higher education has been the European University Initiative (EUI). Norwegian higher education institutions have responded positively to this initiative, and many of them are part of alliances today. Norway supports further development of the EUI action in the next programme period, as the full potential of these have not yet been reached. The same applies for the Erasmus+ Teacher Academies and the Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE). When the full potential of these alliances is reached, they can potentially have a profound impact on the European education sector. However, we also believe that it is important to keep a wide range of projects available to the entire sector, catering to different needs, and not concentrate the project funding to centralised excellence initiatives for the few.

Centralised actions

The KA3 actions supporting policy development and cooperation are important for systemic level impact. We would, however, welcome a thorough review of all actions funded under KA3, and other centralised actions, to ensure they are all aligned with the objectives of the programme.

4. Proportionality

In general, Norway calls for stability in programme rules in the transition to a new programme period. However, there is still potential for the programme to be improved to achieve the best possible results for its beneficiaries, and the principle of proportionality should be guiding the programme rules. Further simplification of application processes and project documentation will contribute to the inclusiveness of the programme.

At the user level, there should be a balance between the efforts needed to administer a project, and the funding awarded. If the funding awarded is not considered proportionate to the administrative efforts, it reduces the attractiveness of the programme for potential applicants and acts as a barrier to new, and especially, less resourced organisations. The Blended Intensive Programme (BIPs) is an example where efforts and outcome are not viewed as proportionate. The BIPs are highly popular initiatives, but institutions view them as far too burdensome administratively, in comparison to the funding received, as it involves the same kind of documentation as long term mobilities.

We would, however, like to stress that new ideas, particularly related to simplification, need to be properly developed and thought through from start to finish before becoming part of the programme. What might look like simplification at one level, does not necessarily signify simplification at other levels.

5. Strengthen synergies with other EU programmes

Education, training, and skills development are supported across many programmes and Norway calls for stronger synergies between these programmes. While there is recognition of the potential benefits of combining funding mechanisms, administrative obstacles often hinder successful synergies. Institutions face challenges navigating double funding rules and managing different reporting and financial regulations across EU schemes.

Fostering synergies between different funding mechanisms requires a strategic approach aimed at overcoming administrative barriers and promoting collaboration among stakeholders. In the next MFF, complementarities and synergies should be clearly outlined, both at policy and program levels to maximize the effects of the total investments in education, training, youth and sport.

Norway would like to stress that although we are in strong favour of more synergies, it is important to note that the next Erasmus+ should not be designed in such a way that non-member state programme countries are excluded from certain actions under the programme.

Synergies should not only be viewed in terms of using different funding mechanisms; focus should be on the added value of combining different programmes to achieve interrelated goals. Several EU programmes engage the same actors such as Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, Digital Europe and Interreg. Although these programmes support different measures and have different objectives, the fact that they are used by many of the same actors means that there is potential for complementary use.

In the current programme structure, we believe that the division between the European Solidarity Corps and the Erasmus+ is not optimal. The two programmes are closely connected both in objectives, target groups and in their implementation mode, and we believe the end users would more easily explore possibilities of synergies if the programmes were indeed one. We would therefore be in favour of a merger of the European Solidarity Corps into Erasmus+.

Closing remark

Participation in the Erasmus+ programme is important for Norway and the programme constitutes the backbone of internationalisation in the fields of education, training, youth and sport. As stated in Norway's interim evaluation: *For stakeholders, institutions and participants, the Erasmus+ programme enables activities and collaborations that would not otherwise be possible through alternative funding. The primary added value is the extensive collaborations and networks across borders, which in turn produce the outputs, results and outcomes.*

We hope that this position paper will be a positive contribution to the development of the next programme period, and we look forward to future discussions.

With regards to concrete suggestions for qualitative improvements, see the attached annex. We would also like to refer to the Norwegian Erasmus+ 2021-27 interim evaluation sent to the Commission in February 2024.

Annex

At the overall level, Norway calls for stability in programme rules in the transition to a new programme period. Even so, there is still potential for the programme to be improved to achieve best possible results for its beneficiaries. For the upcoming discussion on programme design, we would like to propose the following:

- A key improvement for the next Erasmus+ period should be to simplify administration. While we recognize the need to streamline the grant agreements across programmes and actions, they have become unnecessarily complicated. This is especially true for the smaller actions with excessive application forms and contracts, which are disproportionate to the funding level. We have also seen that KA1 projects in higher education are perceived as harder to administer than in the previous programme.
- Better adapt the application process and its terminology to the administrative resources and language of the various target sectors. A key factor in improving the accessibility of Erasmus+ is to simplify the project applications. Especially for those actions that are intended to provide a low-threshold access to the programme. However, the fact of the matter is that the application form constitutes a barrier for newcomers. Simplification can be achieved by reducing the number of questions asked and by exploring the possibility of simplifying the grant rates (see below). Such an approach will eliminate unnecessary bureaucracy and make it easier for applicants to participate in the programme.
- Continue the efforts to limit project factories, i.e., organisations with no or weak connection to the various sectors in the programme.
- Continue the improvement of existing IT systems both at the system and user level, particularly the Beneficiary module. Ensure continuity and maintenance of IT systems across programme periods.
- Improve access to information and transparency about centralised actions for both NAs and users. Centralised actions are the most complex and time consuming to prepare. Users find it difficult to plan well as the calls change from year to year on short notice.
- Reconsider the budget profile. A more linear budgetary profile during the programme period may contribute to more predictability and a broader mobilisation to the programme. We also believe this may promote more strategic planning of mobility flows, better preparation, and quality of cooperation projects as well as more timely allocation of adequate resources on the part of beneficiaries. There should also be a more linear budget between programme periods, so that the new programme period does not start with funding below the level of funding for the final stages of the previous programme period.
- More flexibility within the decentralised allocation for Erasmus+ (between actions and/or sectors) could ensure greater relevance and greater uptake of programme funding.
- Climate change and sustainability need to be further prioritised in the programme, and we fully support the emphasis on green travels. However, to realize the programme's full potential, Erasmus+ needs to consider aspects beyond green mobility to achieve substantial impact.

KA1

From a Norwegian perspective, KA1 functions well in its current state. Even so, there is potential for improvement, and we would like to propose the following for the upcoming discussion on programme design of KA1:

- **Easy transition for accredited organisations**

It is crucial to ensure a seamless transition for accredited organizations to the new Erasmus+ programme period, much in the same way the ECHE holders and VET-Charter holders were offered a light procedure in the transition between the former and the current programme period. However, this should be accompanied by necessary control mechanisms to ensure that organisations which do not meet the required quality standards are not automatically transitioned to the new period. This will maintain the integrity of Erasmus+ and ensure that funds are used effectively and for their intended purpose.

- **Long-term grant agreements**

For further simplification and long-term planning and commitment, we also propose that the European Commission investigates the possibility to have one single contract for the duration of an accreditation with grant requests being treated much like interim reports are now. This could be a fitting solution in the educational sectors, however, some cautiousness should be shown towards such long term contracts in sectors where the organisations' infrastructure and turnover is higher.

- **Streamlining mobility activities across sectors**

To optimize Erasmus+, we should streamline mobility activities across sectors as much as possible. This involves standardising types of activities and promoting international mobility across all sectors. This would facilitate the communication of the programme and make it easier for beneficiaries with accreditations in different sectors. Furthermore, we propose to initiate a discussion on whether today's staff mobility activities are adequate, or if there are needs in the sectors that are not met with today's design.

- **Simplification of grant rates**

To make Erasmus+ even more accessible and equitable, grant rates should be further simplified. While measures like extra support for participants with fewer opportunities and green travel rates have been introduced to further the transversal priorities in the programme, all such extra features contribute to an administrative excess, while at the same time not necessarily being effective. As an example, applying for expensive travel costs is complicated and generates a lot of administrative work for beneficiaries and National Agencies alike. We therefore call for a discussion on how grant rates could be further simplified, whilst keeping transversal priorities in mind. This could include looking into questions like: Can generic and more fine-tuned distance bands substitute applications for expensive travel? Can introducing monthly or even semester-based rates simplify the grant calculation for long-term mobilities? Is the inclusion support working as intended, meaning, does it actually further the participation of participants with fewer opportunities? Can the number of regions be reduced for international mobility?

- **Youth Participation Activities**

The Youth Participation Activities (KA154) has potential for great impact in terms of empowering youth and promoting youth participation, but the current format requires a review. There is a need to simplify, or even split the action into a low threshold version for informal groups of young people, possibly including micro grants, and a more advanced version for projects aiming for structural or political impact. Nevertheless, the new KA154 should still foresee the option of national projects, as they constitute a steppingstone for participation, entail less risk for groups of young people and smaller organisations, and succeed in bringing Europe to the local communities.

KA2

- **Simplification**

The introduction of the lump sum model has contributed to simplifying the administration for both beneficiaries and NAs. It serves as a successful example of a willingness to make the

management process leaner and allow beneficiaries to focus more on project management and outcome and NAs on follow-up and dissemination of results. We strongly advise the lump sum model to be kept, and one should be open to further develop it in dialogue with stakeholders, including streamlining the model for both centralised and de-centralised actions. The introduction of the lump sum model has been very positive to simplify the administration of both cooperation and small-scale partnerships. However, the current requirement of two obligatory application rounds per year for small-scale partnerships constitutes unnecessary administrative excess. It should thus be abandoned and left for NAs to decide as with the other actions in the programme.

- **Keeping KA2 broadly relevant and accessible**

We believe that the current structure of both centralised and decentralised administration should continue, particularly since the current decentralised actions may serve as stepping-stones to the centralised ones. Additionally, one should consider decentralising the management of partnerships for cooperation in the sport sector, providing the budget is sufficient to warrant such a change. It is positive that KA2 actions now provide a broad spectrum of opportunities which meet the needs of diverse target groups. Beneficiaries may range from small organisations with low administrative capacity and little or no experience with international projects to large organisations with extensive cooperation networks and a long experience with funding from various EU programmes and initiatives. This inclusiveness should be maintained in the next project period.

In some instances, restrictive administrative rules beyond the rules of the Erasmus+ programme stand in the way for the successful participation of organisations. The “Funding and tenders portal”, which is run by the Research and Innovation executive agency (REA) and used for all Erasmus+ centralised actions, has stricter rules for participation than the Erasmus+ programme itself. Specifically, participants need to provide proof of financial and legal independence on a level Norwegian primary and secondary schools are unable to, as they are owned by municipalities and counties. The consequence is that they are blocked from participating in actions such as CoVEs or Teacher Academies, even though the Programme Guide for Erasmus+ specifically asks for schools to be part of these projects.

- KA2 should continue to offer two different types of projects, with one of them targeting newcomers and organisations with fewer resources. The latter could also benefit from a simpler application form corresponding to the target groups.
- We support the lump sum model as it gives beneficiaries a predictable budget and flexibility in their project management. However, this demands clear guidelines for what is expected at final report level. Further development of guidance for NAs and beneficiaries in the management of and reporting on projects funded under this financing model is strongly recommended to ensure alignment between NAs and equal treatment.

Training and Cooperation Activities

- Key action 3 holds significant importance within the programme as it focuses on supporting policy reforms, cooperation and innovation in the fields of education, training and youth. Through KA3, important initiatives such as Training and Cooperation Activities (TCA) are facilitated. Maintaining this opportunity for networking, partner finding, and capacity building is crucial for attracting newcomers, improving project implementation, supporting research, and enhancing the quality in the youth and educational sector in Europe. The close international cooperation among TCA officers is also invaluable for sharing insights and fostering links between NA’s strategies.