

ERASMUS – APPLICATION AND RESULTS AT THE UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

“Erasmus” is the European Union programme for education, training, youth and sport. Its main aim is to make students in the EU “citizens of the world”. The programs’s follower is called “Erasmus+” and it runs for seven years, from 2014 to 2020, with organisations invited to apply for funding each year to undertake creative and worthwhile activities. Erasmus+ aims to modernise education, training and youth work across Europe. It is open to education, training, youth and sport organisations across all sectors of lifelong learning, including school education, further and higher education, adult education and the youth sector. It offers exciting opportunities for students to study, work, volunteer, teach and train abroad in Europe.

Key words: *education, university, program, student, exchange*

1. ABOUT ERASMUS

The program 'Erasmus' (the abbreviation for "ERASMUS" -European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students) was established in 1987 and represents an exchange program for students from the European Union (EU). The main objective of the project is to provide options for foreign exchange students from across the EU, and includes many of the best universities and educational headquarters on the continent.¹

'Erasmus' focuses on cross-border cooperation between countries in order to support the growth of international education, with over 4000 students participating in the program at any time is an excellent opportunity to practice and gain experience abroad. "Erasmus" together with a number of other independent programs was included in the “Socrates” program, established by the European Commission in 1994. The program "Socrates", ended December 31, 1999, was replaced by the "Socrates II" on January 24, 2000 which in turn was replaced by "Lifelong Learning Programme for 2007-2013" (“LLP”) on 1.01.2007.²

The program is named after the Dutch philosopher Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, known as an opponent of dogmatism, who lived and worked in many places in Europe to expand and acquire new knowledge, and who left his entire fortune to the University of Basel, Switzerland. At the same time, “ERASMUS” is a backronym carrying the meaning and function of the organization.

1.1 History of Erasmus

Until the official adoption of the “Erasmus” program in June 1987, the European Commission had been supporting pilot student exchanges for six years. The European Commission proposed the original Erasmus program in the early 1986, but the reaction of the then Member States varied: those with their own significant exchange programs (mainly France, Germany and the United Kingdom) were hostile to the idea; other countries voted largely in favor. Negotiations between the Member States and the European Commission worsened, and the latter withdrew the proposal in the early 1987 to protest against the inadequacy of the three-year budget proposed by some of the Member States. However, the French “AEGEE” (The Association des États Généraux des Étudiants de l'Europe), convinced French President François Mitterrand to support funding for the Erasmus program. In the next few months a compromise was developed with a majority of the Member States and the program was adopted by a narrow majority in June 1987.

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erasmus_Programme, “Erasmus Programme”

² http://www.erasmusprogramme.com/the_erasmus.php, “The Erasmus”

This method of voting was not accepted by some of the Member States who were against the idea and they take the issue with the adoption of the decision before the Court of Justice. Although the Court held that the adoption is vitiated by a procedural defect, the Court supported the decision on the merits; further decision taken in the light of the case law, is quickly adopted by the Council of Ministers.

The program started to build on the pilot student exchanges from 1981-1986, and despite being formally adopted shortly before the start of the 1987-1988 academic year, 3244 students are given the opportunity to participate in “Erasmus”, in the first year of the project. In 2006, over 150,000 students participate, or nearly 1% of the European student population. This percentage is higher among university teachers, where Erasmus mobility is 1.9% of the total number of university lecturers in Europe, or 20 877 people.

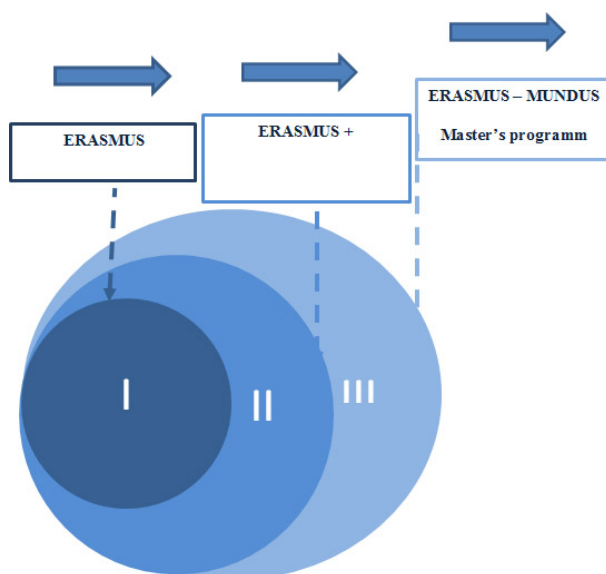
The Lifelong Learning Program 2007-2013 follows the “Socrates” program in the role of a general “umbrella” under which the Erasmus and other programs are in operation since 2007.

Erasmus + or Erasmus Plus is the new program that combines all the current EU schemes for education, training, youth and sport, which started in January 2014.

Erasmus Mundus is another parallel program that is oriented towards globalizing European education. While Erasmus program is open to students from across Europe, “Erasmus Mundus” is open to non-European citizens, whereas European students involved in it are exceptions.³

On May 9, 2012 Fraternité 2020 is registered as the first European Citizens' Initiative. Its aim is to increase the budget for EU programs such as the Erasmus exchange or the European Voluntary Service in 2014. For success, it needed 1 million signatures by 1 November 2013. It eventually collects only 71 057 signatures from citizens across the EU.

1.2 Development of the program



(Source of information: http://www.erasmusprogramme.com/the_erasmus.php)

1.3 The Cultural Phenomenon “Erasmus”

For many European students, the Erasmus program is their first chance to live and study in a foreign country. Therefore, it has become a cultural phenomenon and it is very popular among European students. It has also become the subject of films like the French film “L'Auberge espagnole”, the

³ <http://mu-sofia.bg/system/files/File/obuchenie/ErasmusMundus.pdf/> “Programa Erasmus MUNDUS” (Bulgarian)

documentary “Erasmus 24/7” and guidebook “Erasmus, here we come!”. The program helps not only learning and understanding of the host country, but also for the sense of community among students from different countries. The Erasmus experience is seen as a time for learning, as well as a chance to socialize.

Educators often want students who major in politics or international relations to participate in Erasmus. It is seen as a great opportunity to study abroad, while at the same time the students cannot afford to study outside the European Union, as Erasmus grants are not available for those who prefer to emigrate from the continent to study.⁴

Some scholars have speculated that former Erasmus students will be a powerful force in the creation of a pan-European identity. Political scientist Stefan Wolff, for example, argues that "Somewhere around 15, 20 or 25 years, Europe will be run by leaders with a completely different socialization of these today," referring to the so-called "Erasmus generation".⁵

1.4 Period of residence for students abroad

Students can go abroad for 3 to 12 months (including additional time for internship, if planned). That same student could receive a grant for study or training programs abroad, covering a maximum of 12 months in each cycle:

- In the first cycle of study (bachelor or equivalent), including short cycle
- In the second cycle of studies (Master) and
- During the third cycle as a PhD (Doctorate)

The period for internship of recent graduates counts towards the maximum of 12 months of the cycle in which they are applying for the internship.

1.5 Participation in Erasmus

Students must be enrolled in a higher education institution (HEI), or enrolled in programs leading to a recognized degree or other recognized qualification after post-secondary education (up to and including the level of doctorate).

2. ERASMUS SCHOLARSHIPS

Erasmus is accompanied by a number of opportunities for scholarships, which are designed to assist students in obtaining their accommodation wishes. Students are divided into categories for consideration as Grant-Candidates. Any student of any nationality, enrolled in a university, awarded the Charter Erasmus Higher Education, may apply. Mobility is performed by preliminary "inter-institutional agreements" between home and host institutions.

Therefore, the decision on where a student can go, is a subject for discussion with the sending university, and the first step for students is to contact the international office and / or Erasmus+ office of their home university, in order to obtain information about opportunities for studying or internship abroad, as well as terms and conditions for applying and receiving grant funds from Erasmus + . Scholarships are also available for EU students with the requirement to finance their stay abroad partly themselves. Students can receive grants from Erasmus +, that help covering some of the costs related to their stay abroad, such as airline tickets and daily living expenses.

Erasmus+ students - does not matter if they receive Erasmus + grant or not - are freed from the payment of annual or semester fees, registration, examinations and access to laboratory and library areas in the guest institution. The payment of any state scholarship or loan must be made during the student's stay abroad.

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erasmus_Programme , “The Erasmus experience”

⁵ Bennhold, Katrin (26 April 2005). "Quietly sprouting: A European identity". International Herald Tribune. (retrieved from en.wikipedia.org)

2.1. *Application process*

Interested students must apply through the international office and / or Erasmus + office of his / her home institution. The office will inform students about the possibilities of studying abroad, and the terms and conditions for applying for and receiving grants from Erasmus + of the European Union. Each student participating in the Erasmus exchange, is eligible for an Erasmus scholarship. This includes students who are in their master and doctoral programs, and not only bachelor's degrees.

About where a student can go with a scholarship is a matter of decision of the student after researching the Erasmus partner institutions, as well as compatibility of subjects offered with the essence of their specialty. Also depends on where the student wants to go, whereas more scholarships are being offered for countries like Britain, Spain and France. There are over a thousand institutions which are partners in Erasmus exchanges located around the whole world. It is best to decide which partner institution meets the needs of the student, before exploring scholarships.

A limited number of scholarships are available, but often there are some scholarships that remain unallocated due to lack of candidates. It is recommended that students apply for each scholarship they are suitable for, in some cases it may happen that they are the best candidate, without even expecting it.

If the institution, desired by the student, is not listed as an official partner of Erasmus, he can still apply for a place there, but it limits the number of scholarships that are available to him.

For starters, it is recommended for students to create a list of at least 10 desirable institutions and then prioritise them.⁶

3. ERASMUS STUDENT NETWORK (ESN)

Erasmus Student Network (ESN) is the largest student association in Europe. It was created on October 16, 1989 and is legally registered in 1990 for supporting and developing student exchange. ESN is present in more than 430 universities from 37 countries. The network is constantly evolving and expanding. There are about 13,500 active members who are supported in many sections by the so-called "buddies", which is expressed mainly in the care of international students. Thus, ESN includes about 29,000 young people who offer assistance to about 180,000 international students each year. ESN is active in the field of higher education and is acts essentially on a voluntary basis. Since 2005, the average annual growth of ESN is 12% and it operates on local, national and international level. The ESN works for the creation of a more mobile and flexible education environment by supporting and developing student exchanges at different levels, as well as providing intercultural experience for those students who can not afford to go abroad ("internationalization at home").

3.1 *Objectives and Principles*

In synthesis, ESN:

- works in the interest of foreign students;
- works to improve the social and practical integration of foreign students;
- represents the needs and rights of foreign students at local, national and international level;
- provides relevant information about programs mobility;
- motivates students to study abroad;
- deals with the reintegration of returning students
- contributes to the improvement and availability of student mobility;
- cares for its members;

⁶ "Erasmus Scholarships" available at: http://www.erasmusprogramme.com/erasmus_scholarships.php

- encourages volunteering and active citizenship.

3.2 Help for returning students

Students who come home from exchange are supported in the process of reintegration in their home countries, while maintaining contact with an international environment. Many local sectors were created by former Erasmus students, often because they had a good experience from their stay abroad or because they felt a lack of support during their exchange. They also have a better understanding of the problems and challenges in a foreign environment.

3.3 Current students in exchange

However, the main focus of the ESN is placed on current exchange students, who often face problems (and feel abandoned) in their new environment. Therefore, ESN offers help in academic, social and practical integration processes. This is done mainly through activities in local sections, including cultural and social events, such as trips to various places in the country, film evenings, language projects, international food festivals and last but not least, parties. In addition, many sections have introduced mentor systems that help foreign students mainly in academic and practical integration. The ESN also provides useful information and encourages future exchange students to gain international experience and gain relevant insight about different cultures. Vision and mission of ESN were discussed and approved at the annual General Meeting in Utrecht in March 2009.

3.4 Vision - Enriching society by foreign students

3.5 Mission - The ESN is a key volunteer student organization in the field of international higher education in Europe. They provide opportunities for cultural understanding and self-development under the principle of Students Helping Students (SPS).⁷

4. ERASMUS IMPACT STUDY (EIS)

The study was launched in May 2013 in all European countries and is aimed at current, former, mobile and non-mobile students from all over Europe.

The EIS aims to answer two basic questions. First, it analyzes the effects of the Erasmus student mobility in relation to education and individual training, employability and institutional development. Secondly, it examines the effects of Erasmus teaching / training staff on individual competencies, personality traits and attitudes, as well as the impact of the program on the internationalization of higher education.⁸

4.1 Method and participants

To answer the questions, qualitative and quantitative studies were conducted. To produce sufficient quantitative data, the research team launched five online surveys in 2013, leading to the participation of 56,733 students (including mobile students with and without Erasmus experience and non-mobile students), 18,618 students (83% mobile with and without Erasmus), 4986 employees (academic and non-academic, mobile and non-mobile), 964 universities and 652 employers (55% of which are small and medium-sized enterprises) in all 34 countries participating in the study. In general, the sample consisted of 78,891 individual responses.

To measure the actual trends in the skills of students and staff after their stay abroad, the EIS used six factors that are most closely related to employment: **Tolerance in ambiguity** (adoption of the culture of other people and their attitudes and adaptability), **Curiosity** (openness to new experiences), **Trust** (trust in their competence), **Serenity** (awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses), **Determination** (ability to make decisions) and **Initiative** (ability to solve problems). These six factors are characteristics of the personality traits. In addition, the development from the perspective of students, staff, universities and employers were also analyzed.

⁷ "Erasmus Student Network" available at: <https://esn.org/about>

⁸ "Erasmus Impact Study" available at: <http://esn.org/erasmus-impact-study>

4.2 Students' desire to participate in Erasmus

Over 90% of the mobile students wished to experience life abroad, develop skills such as adaptability and improve their language skills. Then comes the desire to improve the employability abroad, which applies to more than 85% of Erasmus students. Only 14% of non-mobile students do not go abroad because they were not selected for assistance under the program; in other words, Erasmus program is rather non-selective. For more than 50% of the non-mobile students, the reasons for not going abroad were uncertainty about additional costs, lack of financial resources and personal relationships. 62% of non-mobile students were from non-academic family environment, while this applies to 46% of the Erasmus students.

4.3 Erasmus program increasing employment

The proportion of employers who see experience abroad as relevant to the job has nearly doubled between 2006 and 2013, from 37% to 64%. In addition, 92% of the employers surveyed confirmed the importance of the six personality traits in terms of employability: tolerance in ambiguity, curiosity, confidence, serenity, determination and problem solving.

After confirming the importance of skills related to employment, EIS analyzes the impact of mobility on these skills. Erasmus students showed higher values for the six personality traits than non-mobile students - even before they go abroad. After returning from the Erasmus experience, they increased their advantage over non-mobile students by 42%. Previous studies have shown that personality traits are generally quite stable and are subject to slow and small change. The observed absolute changes in students, part of the program, have been with the same intensity as other important events in their lives, such as separation from parents, and in line with the changes observed in comparable studies.

However, more important than absolute values, the most significant conclusions from this analysis relate to trends observed when comparing groups before and after mobility. After their stay abroad, the average student showed higher values than 70% of all students.

Furthermore, 51% of all mobile students and 52% of students in the program increased their skills according to the factors needed to find a job. On the other hand, 81% of Erasmus students thought they had improvement in these factors. It also shows the value of comparative perceptions with real measurements when analyzing the impact of mobility.

The study also monitored the impact of mobility on the other skills related to employment that can be analyzed, based only on the answers of respondents. More than 90% of students reported an improvement in their soft skills, such as knowledge of other countries, their ability to communicate and work with people from different cultures, adaptability, foreign language and communication skills. In addition, 99% of universities reported a significant improvement in confidence and adaptability of students after the period of their stay abroad.

4.4 Impact of Erasmus on future career and social life of the student

In addition to skills, EIS analyzes the impact of mobility on the work and career. More than one in three students who had an internship as part of the Erasmus, received a job offer from the host company. Experience seems to encourage entrepreneurship: almost 1 in 10 students on work experience, started their own company and more than 3 out of 4 people plan to do it, or may envision this. Mobility also affects employment statistics.

The likelihood of long-term unemployment showed to be twice lower in former mobile students compared to those who did not go abroad. Even five years after graduation, the unemployment rate of mobile students is 23% lower than non-mobile students. Out of the employers interviewed, 64% indicated that graduates with international origin are entrusted with greater professional responsibility more often, a proportion that has increased by 51% since 2006. Of the surveyed graduates of Erasmus, 77% held positions with managerial components 10 years after their graduation and Erasmus students were 44% more likely to hold managerial positions than non-mobile students.

Student mobility also encourages labor mobility in the future. Of the mobile students, 40% moved at least once after graduation compared with 23% of the non-mobile students. In addition, 93%

(compared with 73% of the non-mobile students) could easily imagine moving abroad. With former Erasmus students it is also more than twice as likely to change employer, compared to non-mobile students. More than 80% of Erasmus students feel a strong connection with Europe.

4.5 Impact of Erasmus on staff and higher education institutions

Overall, the majority of universities believe that Erasmus is the most appropriate strategic asset of any educational program offered to students. Among the different Erasmus actions, "Mobility" is considered the most important in terms of internationalization by 83% of higher education institutions and for own international image - 80% of the universities.

As regards to the impact of mobility on staff, the mobile staff showed statistically significantly higher values for five of the six personality traits than the non-mobile staff. More than 70% of the staff agreed that the most important aspect of their mobility is to increase the knowledge and experience and skills for the benefit of their "home" university. 81% of the academic staff experienced a positive effect on the quality of teaching and on the multidisciplinary and cross-organizational collaboration in teaching.⁹

5. ABOUT ERASMUS+

Erasmus + is a European Union program for education, training, youth and sport. It runs for seven years, 2014-2020, where organizations are invited to apply for funding each year to support creative and fruitful activities.

Erasmus + aims to modernize education, training and work with young people across Europe. It is open to organizations in the field of education, training, youth and sport in all sectors of lifelong learning, including school education, adult education and youth sector. Designed for students, apprentices, trainees, students, adult learners, young people, volunteers, educators, teachers, educators, youth workers and professionals from organizations working in the field of education, training and youth.

5.1 Participating countries

There are 27 countries in the EU + United Kingdom, including their overseas countries and territories, as well as five non-EU countries (Iceland, Norway, Turkey, Liechtenstein and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), where a student can go during the Erasmus + Project. It may also be possible to go further to additional "partner countries".

The following countries, including overseas countries and territories of the EU Member States can fully participate in all activities of Erasmus +: European Union Member States: Belgium, Greece, Lithuania, Portugal, Bulgaria, Spain, Luxembourg, Romania, Czech Republic, France Hungary, Slovenia, Denmark, Croatia, Malta, Slovakia, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Finland, Estonia, Cyprus, Austria, Sweden, Ireland, Latvia, Poland, the United Kingdom.

Countries outside the EU: Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein, Turkey;

Partner countries neighbouring the EU: Western Balkans: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia;

Eastern Partnership countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, the territory of Ukraine, as recognized by international law;

Southern Mediterranean countries: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia;

Russia: territory of Russia, as recognized by international law.

⁹ "Erasmus Impact Study: Key findings", Brussels, 22.09.2014, available at: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-14-534_en.htm

5.2 *Management of Erasmus +*

Erasmus + is being managed and controlled at European level by the European Commission. In each country, participating in the program, the national authority oversees the program. Some parts of the program are managed directly from Brussels by the Executive Agency of the European Commission, where these are known as centralized activities. Other parts of the program are implemented in each participating country by a national agency, and are known as decentralized activities.¹⁰

5.3 *Equality and Inclusion*

Erasmus + is aimed at promoting equality and social inclusion by facilitating the access of students with disabilities and fewer opportunities than their peers. These people have a disadvantage because of personal difficulties and obstacles that limit or do not allow them to participate in international projects.

Obstacles or difficulties that these individuals may face are categorized below:

- disability (i.e participants with special needs): people with mental (intellectual, cognitive), physical, sensory or other disabilities;
- educational difficulties: young people with learning difficulties; early school leavers; low-skilled persons; young people with poor school performance;
- economic obstacles: people with a low standard of living, low income, dependence on social welfare system; young people in long-term unemployment or poverty; people who are homeless, people in debt or with financial problems;
- cultural differences: immigrants or refugees, descendants from immigrant or refugee families; persons belonging to national or ethnic minority; people with difficulties in the linguistic and cultural adaptation.
- health problems, people with chronic health problems, severe illnesses or psychiatric conditions;
- social obstacles: people facing discrimination because of gender, age, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, disability, etc.; people with limited social skills or anti-social people, people with risky behavior; disadvantaged people; (former) criminals (former) alcohol and drugs abusers; young and / or single parents; orphans;
- geographical obstacles: people from remote or rural areas; people living on small islands or remote regions; people from deprived urban areas; people from less serviced areas (limited public transport, poor conditions).

In the field of youth, Strategy for Integration and Diversity has been developed as a common framework to support the participation and involvement of young people in disadvantaged situations in Erasmus +. The Strategy is available on the website of the European Commission.¹¹

6. ERASMUS MUNDUS - MASTER'S PROGRAMME

Master's programs "Erasmus Mundus" are organized jointly by the Universities of at least three different European countries. Universities apply to the European Commission, which approves the programs themselves and publishes the accepted programs in the electronic catalog on the website of the Commission. The program includes a mandatory period of study in at least two of the countries, represented in the consortium, and may also contain internship.

¹⁰ "Erasmus plus: Europas beliebtes Bildungsprogramm" (German), available at: <http://www.bmbf.de/de/23124.php>

¹¹ "Erasmus+ Programme Guide", available at: http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/documents/erasmus-plus-programme-guide_en.pdf

6.1 Erasmus MUNDUS features:

- Each student, who has completed the first stage of his /her studies, can participate.
- Full scholarships for students from European and so-called. third-world countries.
- Joint, double or multiple degrees, recognized or accredited by the relevant parties.
- Opportunity to learn at least two European languages spoken in the Member States where the universities involved are located.
- Application - students can apply for scholarships to the Consortium coordinator university.¹²

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