

[UK](#)[Europe](#)[USA](#)[Australia & N](#)[About Us](#)[Sign in](#)[Go back](#)

RESEARCH EUROPE

03 JUL 2025

Erasmus+ belongs at the heart of the EU's competitiveness drive

By Christian Gerhardt

Share



Next EU budget must tackle underfunding and governance issues undermining programme's success, says Christian Gerhardt

We live in challenging times, marked by climate change, growing international competition for raw materials and multiple armed conflicts, to name a few. The EU must reposition itself for this emerging world, becoming more resilient, but also more attractive to industry, top researchers and young talent.

The Competitiveness Fund is Europe's principal response to these challenges. From the beginning of its next funding period in 2028, the fund will work to strengthen the EU's global competitiveness through the targeted pooling of expertise and support in strategically important sectors, in the hope of securing and expanding Europe's industrial and economic position. The new EU Framework Programme for research and innovation, which will retain the name Horizon Europe, will be a vital part in this effort.

Alongside the challenges, the opportunities to increase Europe's attractiveness as a research location are greater than ever before. In an increasing number of countries around the world, scientific and academic freedoms are under threat.

Europe must uphold these freedoms. And people must always be at the centre of all efforts.

While programmes such as the European Social Fund offer targeted regional support for people, mainly outside the academic sector, the Erasmus+ programme has been the principal programme for connecting people in Europe. Higher education has a key role in this setting.

In recent years, however, several trends have made the programme increasingly unattractive. As things stand, the programme risks becoming a footnote to the Competitiveness Fund, whereas it should be the foundation.

Generation Erasmus

Erasmus+ is best known for the mobility programmes for individuals covered in its key action 1. But it has been a driver of wider international cooperation, especially in higher education, that goes far beyond joint master's degrees or double degrees.

Erasmus+ also offers cooperation opportunities for higher education institutions, some of them far beyond their own sector, through its key action 2. Such partnerships can lay the foundation for more far-reaching cooperation.

Erasmus+ also includes programmes such as the Alliances for Innovation, which focus on a specific industrial priority and are thus intended to make European higher education more targeted in the medium to long term. Erasmus+ also supports links between university education and research.

Its success speaks for itself—the exchange programmes alone have created a Generation Erasmus. However, the programme has also developed significant weaknesses over time.

Showing the strain

The European University Initiative, which creates international alliances of institutions using Erasmus+ funding, was hastily cobbled together and ties up considerable resources.

Elsewhere in the programme, scarce resources and rising prices have seen approval rates for collaborative projects fall. Some funding formats have been capped financially, making

their project funding unattractive—for example, in Cooperation Partnerships and Erasmus Mundus.

While the much-vaunted synergies with Horizon Europe are visible in select cases, they remain largely project-driven rather than the product of an overarching strategy—pointing to an opportunity for a more strategic and coordinated approach. Furthermore, the decentralisation of programme management in key action 2 has led to inconsistent procedures at European and national levels.

All this has created many problems, particularly in key action 2, on top of the challenges created by the need to respond effectively to a changing world.

Erasmus 2.0

The EU's next funding period must address these issues. In a recent [position paper](#), the Cesaer group of European science and technology universities has set out a number of concrete proposals to strengthen the programme's impact and structure. These include:

Focus on the programme's strengths: mobility; cooperation, especially between sectors; and innovative and forward-looking projects.

Provide funding equal to the programme's needs and capable of raising approval rates. That means tripling the programme's current €26 billion budget for 2021-27 in the 2028-34 funding period.

Create better framework conditions in the sub-programmes, in particular realistic budgets for projects.

Provide independent and more substantial funding for European University Alliances, without weakening the programme's other funding streams.

Create more effective opportunities for synergies with Horizon Europe, for example, by supporting the translation of research into teaching and mobility for early career researchers.

Build clear central governance structures for all key actions, simplifying the current decentralised structures.

Attention on the European Competitiveness Fund must not lead to a loss of focus on Erasmus+, which remains essential for fostering European identity and resilience. Only a well-funded programme with ambitious goals can continue its long success story and create a spirit of optimism.

Christian Gerhardt is the head of the European Project Center at TU Dresden, Germany, and the co-chair of the Cesaer taskforce for sustainable funding

[View this article on Research Professional](#)

Related news

OPINION

03 AUG 2023 

Universities initiative must not crowd out other networks

OPINION

23 APR 2020 

Europe needs Erasmus+ more than ever



[Visit *Research Professional website](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Advertise](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Terms & Conditions](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Manage cookie preferences](#)

[Jobs](#)

[Research Professional News](#)

[Research Fortnight](#)

[Research Europe](#)

[Research Africa](#)

[Cookie list](#)

Research Professional News is an editorially independent part of Clarivate. 2024 © Copyright - All Rights Reserved