

Towards a truly  
**European**  
Erasmus grant

**#Erasmus500**

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In the last few months, we have witnessed an unprecedented disruption of our student exchange programmes<sup>1</sup>. And yet, universities are safe in the knowledge that such challenges will be vanquished in the months ahead, while present times afford us the opportunity to reflect how future cooperation can be planned and enhanced.

The Erasmus programme provides an invaluable framework through which our universities create joint educational initiatives, promote innovation in teaching and learning and carry out peer-learning activities. The programme is a harbinger of the European Higher Education Area and of the European Education Area and has been expanded to support the European Universities Alliances. These three initiatives are bound to have a transformative impact on European Higher Education. But the beating heart of Erasmus has always been – and it will always be – the academic exchange opportunities it affords to millions of students. Student mobility cements not only inter-university cooperation, but also the European project as a whole<sup>2</sup>.

If Erasmus is a central catalyst to bring about European citizens who are open-minded, civically engaged and resilient to populism<sup>3</sup>, it is essential that the next programme involves a greater number of participants and is more inclusive than is currently the case. For many years, financial obstacles have been proven to be the single biggest deterrent to participation in mobility programmes<sup>4</sup>. That is why we call for a reformulation of the Erasmus grants into a simpler scheme comprising a universal baseline of 500€/month, for the following reasons:

Approximately half of all European students work while they study<sup>5</sup> and those who rely on that income to meet their living expenses find themselves structurally excluded from participating in Erasmus, as the financial support they would receive is too low. A grant of 500€/month would offer a realistic possibility to compensate for the loss of such income, allowing a much larger number of students to participate in the programme.

1 Gabriels, W., Benke-Aberg, R. (2020) Student Exchanges in Times of Crisis - Research report on the impact of COVID-19 on student exchanges in Europe [Online]. Erasmus Student Network AISBL. Retrieved at <https://esn.org/covidimpact-report>

2 European Commission (2018) Mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme (2014-2020) [Online]. Retrieved at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52018DC0050&from=FR>

3 Banet, R., Pinto, J., Japiashvili, N., Rousou, K., Katava, T. K. (2019) ESNsurvey 2019 - Active citizenship and student exchange in light of the European elections [Online]. Erasmus Student Network AISBL. Retrieved at <https://esn.org/ESNsurvey>

4 Sundberg, C., Koppel, K., Schwitters, H., Patricolo, C., Gajek, A., Susnjar, A., Prihoda, F., Hovhannisyanyan, G. (2018) Bologna with Student Eyes 2018 [Online]. European Students' Union. Retrieved at [https://www.esu-online.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/BWSE-2018\\_web\\_Pages.pdf](https://www.esu-online.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/BWSE-2018_web_Pages.pdf)

5 Hauschildt, K., Vögtle, E. M., Gwosc, C. (2018) Social and Economic Conditions of Student life in Europe, EUROSTUDENT VI 2016–2018 I Synopsis of Indicators [Online]. EUROSTUDENT. Retrieved at [https://www.eurostudent.eu/download\\_files/documents/EUROSTUDENT\\_VI\\_Synopsis\\_of\\_Indicators.pdf](https://www.eurostudent.eu/download_files/documents/EUROSTUDENT_VI_Synopsis_of_Indicators.pdf)

Erasmus is the quintessential European experience but its resource allocation strategies are everything but. Grant levels are currently scattered across 18 categories that are often applied inconsistently between countries<sup>6</sup>. A simpler grant system would allow to better promote the programme to future participants and enhance transparency for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds<sup>7</sup>.

In 2018, the average Erasmus grant was 336€/month<sup>8</sup>, which is manifestly insufficient to cover even accommodation costs in many European cities<sup>9</sup>. According to research involving 24,000 students, 70% of respondents indicated that the Erasmus grant covers half or less of their total expenses<sup>10</sup>. A 500€/month grant would provide all Erasmus students a far more reasonable choice of mobility destinations that they can afford.

In the current system, a significant amount of grants cannot be allocated every year. By setting a minimum grant with the option of top-ups, it could be possible to reallocate these remaining funds and provide the necessary support to those who need it.

The radical simplicity of this proposal is aligned with the European Pillar of Social Rights<sup>11</sup> and builds on successful experiments carried out by a National Agency (NA) in 2018 and 2019. By streamlining the management of the grants, we can reduce their administrative burden<sup>12</sup> and cost, allocating more of the programme's budget directly to the beneficiaries: the students. According to our calculations, a universal baseline of 500€/month is perfectly within reach of the forthcoming EU multiannual financial framework.

Making Erasmus simpler and more inclusive can also lead to reducing the carbon footprint of our exchange and cooperation activities if Erasmus students would be able to access low cost week-long train (and/or bus/ferry) tickets to reach (and return from) their host cities and universities<sup>13</sup>. This would ensure that their academic exchange is also a journey of discovery through the history and culture of Europe.

We call upon the European Institutions and Member States to consider and adopt these proposals.

6. Grants vary per type of mobility and according to a table where countries are grouped in three cost categories. However, such clusters hide enormous differences among countries (e.g. Group 2, which accounts for nearly 70% of all outgoing students, includes countries with economic characteristics as diverse as the Netherlands and Greece) and their existence has proven ineffective to ensure a rational resource allocation; e.g. German students on the Erasmus programme in Portugal have a higher Erasmus grant than Portuguese students on the Erasmus programme in Germany. The fact that top-ups meant for students from disadvantaged backgrounds is also applied inconsistently compounds complexity and makes it nearly impossible to ensure equal treatment of students.

7. Vossensteyn, J. J. H. (2005) Perceptions of student price-responsiveness: A behavioural economics exploration of the relationships between socio-economic status, perceptions of financial incentives and student choice. Enschede: Center for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS).

8. European Commission (2020) Erasmus+ Programme - Annual Report 2018, Infographic package [Online]. Retrieved at [https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about/statistics\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about/statistics_en)

9. Hauschildt, K., Vögtle, E. M., Gwosc, C. (2018) Social and Economic Conditions of Student life in Europe, EUROSTUDENT VI 2016–2018 I Synopsis of Indicators [Online]. EUROSTUDENT. Retrieved at [https://www.eurostudent.eu/download\\_files/documents/EUROSTUDENT\\_VI\\_Synopsis\\_of\\_Indicators.pdf](https://www.eurostudent.eu/download_files/documents/EUROSTUDENT_VI_Synopsis_of_Indicators.pdf)

10. Josek, M. (ed.), Fernández, J., Perez-Encinas, A., Zimonjic, B., De Vocht, L. and Falisse, M. (2017) The International Friendliness of Universities. Research Report of the ESNsurvey 2016 [Online]. Erasmus Student Network AISBL. Retrieved at <https://esn.org/esnsurvey/2016>

11. In particular principles 6, 14 and 20, found at [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en) (2017)

12. As per the NA experiment and original proposal, semesters (or trimesters) would be treated on a unit cost basis, thus simplifying payment, reporting and auditing of SMS mobilities

13. Exceptions to this rule would obviously continue to apply as necessary, notably as far as mobilities to/from outermost countries and regions are concerned and students with special needs.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## **1. What about COVID-19? Will student mobility still matter once things go back to normal?**

Very much so — Erasmus is not just an academic exchange programme, but also a powerful vaccine against the kind of populism that threatens to tear the European project apart. Having more mobility, and more inclusive mobility, has never been more essential for Europe.

It is also worth bearing in mind that economic crisis always impact students hard, thus we need to boost the financial capacity of the programme to be able to upkeep and expand participation.

## **2. Practically speaking, what would be the impact of #Erasmus500?**

First and foremost, a higher grant for more than 98% of Erasmus participants studying abroad.

Changing the grant calculation from daily rates into unit costs would also be beneficial for universities, enabling simpler administration, reporting and auditing requirements. A mobility will be the triggering event for funding, meaning a single documental proof will be required; confirmation of stay with detailed information about the mobility period will no longer be necessary.

## **3. What happens to the existing Erasmus top-ups?**

Only around 7% of students receive top-ups, so they are not a replacement for a higher grant, which aims to increase the overall inclusiveness and attractiveness of the programme. We support the notion that top-ups should continue to be available for reasons connected either to special needs, socio-economic background or travel to/from outermost regions/countries, and the European Commission has already carried out valuable preparatory work on such aspects. Furthermore, the additional grant that students doing a placement receive could also be considered a top-up as of the next programme.

## **4. Where will the money for #Erasmus500 come from?**

Great question! As of 2018, Erasmus student exchanges lasted on average 5.1 months and their average monthly grant was of 336€ — this is considerably less than what we are proposing. However, this landscape will be substantially altered with the introduction of short mobilities; while they may cost proportionally more than longer ones, their grants will be smaller in absolute terms. A scenario where 15% of the students take shorter mobilities would automatically make funds available to strengthen existing grants, and this alone could raise the current average grant of 336€/month to more than 400€/month.

The remaining funding required to reach 500€/month could come either from budget lines that are being discontinued after the end of the current programme or from the increase of the budget allocated to the Erasmus programme, as per the discussions for the new multiannual financial framework. And while the current crisis induced by the COVID-19 pandemic might reshuffle the proposals, we call on the European Parliament, the European Commission and the 27 Member States to make the Erasmus programme more equal and attractive, in times where simplification and accessibility become more relevant than ever to support student mobility.

**5. What about national funding?**

Several countries and regions complement the Erasmus grants with their own resources and it's essential that this continues to happen. #Erasmus500 is narrowly scoped to the usage of the next EU budget.

**6. Can a student consider 500€ too much and request a smaller grant?**

Students should be able to request a grant that actually meets their needs and in return allow higher education institutions to re-allocate the funding to other students who actually require the grant to study abroad.

**7. Why make this proposal now?**

The rules of the programme are reviewed every seven years, and the next window of opportunity to affect positive change is now.

**8. The proposed grant is a suspiciously round number... is this a political statement?**

Yes! It's meant to signal that the flagship European programme is coming of age after 33 years and finally being given the capacity and the resources it requires to truly make mobility the norm, rather than the exception. It also manifests the kind of ambition we have seen of late with initiatives like the European Universities, and which should be patent also at the core of the programme.

**9. The Erasmus programme works fine. Why fix something that is not broken?**

It does not work fine, in that participation is skewed towards students from higher income brackets — that's why the support it affords to participants needs to be strengthened.

**10. Is this the perfect system for providing support for mobile students?**

We don't claim that #Erasmus500 is perfect, just that it is a lot better than what we currently have. Efforts to ensure broader participation of all students, including those from any underrepresented group, will not be abandoned after 2021; if anything we plead for the issue of inclusiveness to remain at the heart of the European policy agenda throughout the next seven years.

**11. Can my endorsement really help improve the Erasmus programme?**

Absolutely. Erasmus is an incredible community, and we need to collectively take responsibility for its further development. All universities and stakeholders are welcome to join forces and support the #Erasmus500 declaration, so if this proposal is something you feel strongly about, consider bringing up the issue with your colleagues and get in contact with us here: <https://erasmus500.eu/>.

**JOIN US**

<https://erasmus500.eu>



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