

# The Green Erasmus

## Petition

*A revamped green  
travel top-up for a  
more sustainable  
Erasmus exchange*



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**Green Erasmus**

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# 1. Background

Green Erasmus is an Erasmus+ KA2 project that strives to improve the environmental sustainability of the Erasmus+ Programme and raise awareness across the European Higher Education sector about the importance of sustainable internationalisation. To achieve this, a set of activities was carefully planned and implemented to ensure the maximum impact possible. Among them, the Green Erasmus consortium ran a **petition to ask for higher financial support for students travelling sustainably**.

It's been estimated that between 2014-2020, the Erasmus+ programme generated between 414,000 and 672,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> (or equivalent), and with the intention to increase participation, the footprint is likely to increase further unless significant action is taken. It is then important to boost sustainable travel choices, still a minority of the students' travel patterns. In fact, the **findings of the research on Erasmus students' habits**<sup>1</sup> show that:

*The plane seems to prevail as the preferred means of transport among Erasmus students, both when they are going to (73.1%) and when they are leaving from (69.8%) the mobility destination. Its use is, by a large margin, the most prevalent among all other transport options (coach/bus, train, ship/ boat, other).*

*Although most of the students seem concerned about climate change (nine out of ten) and consider themselves informed (nine out of ten), they seem hesitant to adopt certain sustainable habits. Factors like price/cost and distance constitute substantial barriers in the adoption of more sustainable behaviours.*

In addition to the so-called **attitude-behavior gap** - the inconsistent relationship between consumer attitudes and actions - barriers to sustainable travel are mainly linked to the expensive costs of trains & land/water transportation and their longer duration.

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<sup>1</sup> Diekmann A., Karaiskos G., *Research on the habits of Erasmus students: consumer, daily life, and travel habits of Erasmus students from the perspective of their environmental attitudes and beliefs*, Green Erasmus project, 2022. Retrieved at <https://project.greenerasmus.org/documents/GE-report.pdf>

To address this, the Erasmus+ programme defined environmental sustainability as one of its priorities for the 2021-2027 period and envisaged the **top-up for green travel**<sup>2</sup>, commonly referred to as the green top-up, a 50 euros financial contribution for those who travel sustainably. **As this measure is clearly insufficient to face the added costs of travelling through sustainable means of transport, the Green Erasmus petition was launched on the 29th of June 2022 to drive immediate change by revamping the existing green top-up tool.** Flying is, in fact, the most climate-damaging form of travel: planes emit massive amounts of damaging CO<sub>2</sub>, nitrogen oxides, aerosols and water vapour. For example, a flight from Barcelona (Spain) to Cologne (Germany) would emit 0.16 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>, whereas a train ride would only emit 0.01 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>.

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<sup>2</sup> The Top up amount to individual support for green travel is a contribution from the Erasmus+ programme that is attributed in the following conditions: “Students and recent graduates who do not receive the travel support budget category can also opt for green travel. In this case, they will receive a single contribution of 50 EUR as a top-up amount to the individual support and up to 4 days of additional individual support to cover travel days for a return trip, if relevant.” (Retrieved from the Erasmus+ programme guide, version 2 (2023) 21-12-2022 at [https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-01/ErasmusplusProgramme-Guide2023-v2\\_en.pdf](https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-01/ErasmusplusProgramme-Guide2023-v2_en.pdf))

## 2. The Green Erasmus petition's demand

To encourage a positive change in the mobility patterns of university students going on Erasmus+ exchange, the Green Erasmus petition called for:

- Increasing the current €50 to a universal top up to individual support of **up to €250 for green travel**, proportionate to distance covered;
- And increasing the current 4 days **up to 7 days of additional individual support** covering additional subsistence costs and/or accommodation needs linked to green travel - for the round trip.

The revamped green top-up would allow a wider range of students to travel sustainably to and from their host country and explore Europe during their journey.

While backing this proposal, the Green Erasmus project consortium recognised that in the long term, **systemic change of infrastructures is needed** to decrease air travel and therefore carbon emissions across Europe including:

- Cheaper train, bus, sea travel instead of subsidies on plane travel;
- Better high-speed train connections across Europe;
- More integrated train and bus networks throughout Europe including an integrated booking platform and ticketing;
- More accessible network fit for purpose for **disabled** travellers.

### 3. Petition's dissemination, duration and results

The petition was launched on the 29th of June 2022 on <https://actionnetwork.org/>, a platform that empowers individuals and groups to organize for progressive causes, and featured also on the [Green Erasmus portal](#), which provides students with tips and tricks to act sustainably before, during and after their Erasmus experience. Thanks to an extensive dissemination effort that involved all the partners, the petition **collected 5257 signatures** over a year and was officially closed on the 6th of July 2023. Most of the signatories are students (3999) and come from Germany, Italy, Belgium, France, and Spain.

Table 1   Petition signatories by stakeholder type	
Stakeholder	Number of signatories
Student	3999
Working in the higher education sector	724
Other	389
Working elsewhere in the education sector	155

Table 2   Petition signatories by country (all countries with 100+ signatories)	
Country	Number of signatories
Germany	822
Italy	524
Belgium	434
France	381
Spain	361
Czechia	276
Netherlands	268
Portugal	212
Poland	187
Greece	166

Hungary	146
Austria	143
Romania	136
Turkey	106

## 4. The way forward

While the petition stayed online for a whole year, its demand and related reflections will keep feeding the policy agenda in the period ahead. To work towards this direction, the project consortium held a **conference in Brussels** in June 2023 to discuss issues related to the asks of the petition. This was attended by 70 stakeholders including representatives of EU institutions, such as the Directorate General for Education and Culture and the Joint Research Center, NGOs, HEIs, and student organisations volunteers.

Moreover, a **policy recommendations report** was published to be sent to policymakers at DG EAC - European Commission, European Parliament, and the Council of European Union.

The petition's demand was also included in the **ESN's contribution** with some of the key observations after **2 academic years of implementation of the Erasmus+ programme.**

This document seeks to support Members of the European Parliament in the preparation of the implementation report, as well as to contribute to the broader mid-term review process of the programme.