

EXTENDING ERASMUS: A NEW IMPETUS FOR YOUTH MOBILITY IN EUROPE

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SUMMARY

Adopted on 15 June 1987 following a proposal from the European Commission led by Jacques Delors, the “Erasmus” programme has since become one of the most emblematic “brands” of the EU, a legacy that deserves to flourish.

1. 3244 pioneers received Erasmus grants in 1997-1998. Today almost 300000 young academics benefit every year. This spectacular increase was possible thanks to a significant rise in the Erasmus budget from 13 million euros in 1988 (or 0.03 % of the European budget) to 600 million euros in 2014 (more than 0.4% of the EU budget). Erasmus has expanded considerably since 1987 (adding, among other things, a global dimension, internship offers, an entrepreneurship component, intensive language courses, mobility of teaching and non-teaching staff) and has paved the way for the creation of other mobility programmes aimed at pupils in secondary education, those in vocational education and training, volunteers, etc. In 2014, the Commission brought together all European mobility programmes within the framework of new «Erasmus+» whose budget in 2014 represented approximately 1.4% of the total EU budget.

2. Erasmus should be perceived and promoted as part of a broader Europeanisation of academic curricula, which is increasingly reflected in the possibility of pursuing all of one’s education and training in another EU country (rather than in “exchanges”). Currently, 10 % of European graduates have a study period abroad. Each year, 650000 university students from EU countries are on the move, of which a little less than half are Erasmus students.

3. Further efforts are needed as member states have set themselves the target of 20 % of tertiary graduates completing part of their studies abroad by 2020. Above all, we must continue to increase the Erasmus budget to be able to award more scholarships (in 2014-2015, 30 % of Erasmus projects in higher education were refused) and deploy the loan guarantee scheme for students wishing to complete their Master’s degree abroad. Member states also have an important role to play in complementing European mobility funding and pushing for the “Europeanisation” of their national scholarships.

4. It is also necessary to ensure qualitative improvements, in particular in terms of the target audience. Only 1% of European apprentices (for a target of 6% by 2020) are currently opting for a stay abroad during their training. In 2017, the Commission is to launch a new programme of long-term mobility—6 to 12 months—for apprentices. This initiative is a step in the right direction, but the Commission must also help young people who wish to pursue all of their training in another member state, as the supply of apprenticeships today is very uneven across the EU. In 2015, the Jacques Delors Institute has proposed the launch of an “Erasmus Pro” programme. This would enhance the image of apprenticeships within the EU—thus supporting national reforms aimed at developing this type of training—and help reduce youth unemployment by providing new qualification opportunities for young people.

5. Encouraging young people’s mobility in Europe must be achieved through increased support for experiences outside the formal education system, which may be more attractive to their potential beneficiaries, not least because they are less “constraining” than a study period in another EU country. This includes many existing initiatives, particularly in the area of youth and sports. The Commission has just set up a European Solidarity Corps: if the goal of enlisting 100000 volunteers by the end of 2018 is reached, financial support for such an initiative should be bolstered so that all young people keen on a rewarding mobility experience are enabled to have one. The offer of language courses must also be developed. The same holds for leisure mobility (which facilitates the discovery of other countries, languages, cultures and European traditions), as exemplified by the recent initiative “Move2Learn, Learn2Move”.

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INTRODUCTION

Thirty years after it was launched by the European Commission led by President Jacques Delors in June 1987, the “Erasmus” programme has become, among younger generations and beyond, one of the most emblematic “brands” of the European Union. It is under this common brand that the EU has decided in 2014 to place its combined actions in favour of youth mobility. Similarly, the brand is also invoked by those who wish to widen access to mobility, for example by campaigning for the creation of an “Erasmus Pro”.¹

“THE “ERASMUS” PROGRAMME HAS BECOME ONE OF THE MOST EMBLEMATIC “BRANDS” OF THE EUROPEAN UNION”

While many technical and statistical assessments have already been carried out to evaluate Erasmus’ impact on the employability of its beneficiaries or their open-mindedness about European citizenship, it might be worthwhile, on the occasion of the programme’s 30th anniversary, to put into historical perspective its political repercussions and to outline its future.² Erasmus has to be welcomed and amplified over the coming decades as a key tool for supporting the European mobility of young people, but also as part of a broader movement, in accordance with the spirit, if not the letter of Erasmus.

We will therefore begin by presenting an overview of the quantitative and qualitative evolution of the Erasmus programme over the last three decades. Secondly, we will highlight the success of the “Erasmus spirit”, which is reflected in the Europeanisation of university courses and the development of non-academic mobility, an indispensable component to diversifying the profile of beneficiaries of the EU’s mobility programmes.

BOX 1 ► Declaration by Jacques Delors on Erasmus

Our first steps in the field of education, backed by Parliament, have proved promising, as demonstrated by the genuine success of our youth exchanges, thanks to cooperation between universities and firms under the Comett programme and inter-university exchanges under the Erasmus programme. What better guarantee could there be of this newly emerging European osmosis? How encouraging it is to see, as I have, the enthusiasm of students, teachers and businessmen who, as a result of the exchange schemes, have become active campaigners for a fifth freedom, perhaps the most important freedom of all, the freedom to exchange ideas and experience

Source: [Speech by Jacques Delors to the European Parliament, 17 January 1987.](#)

1. Jacques Delors et al., “Erasmus Pro : for a million “young European apprentices” by 2020”, Tribune, Jacques Delors Institute, 12 May 2015.
2. See for instance CHE Consult, *The Erasmus impact study*, 2014.

1. More Erasmus: the rise of university mobility programmes

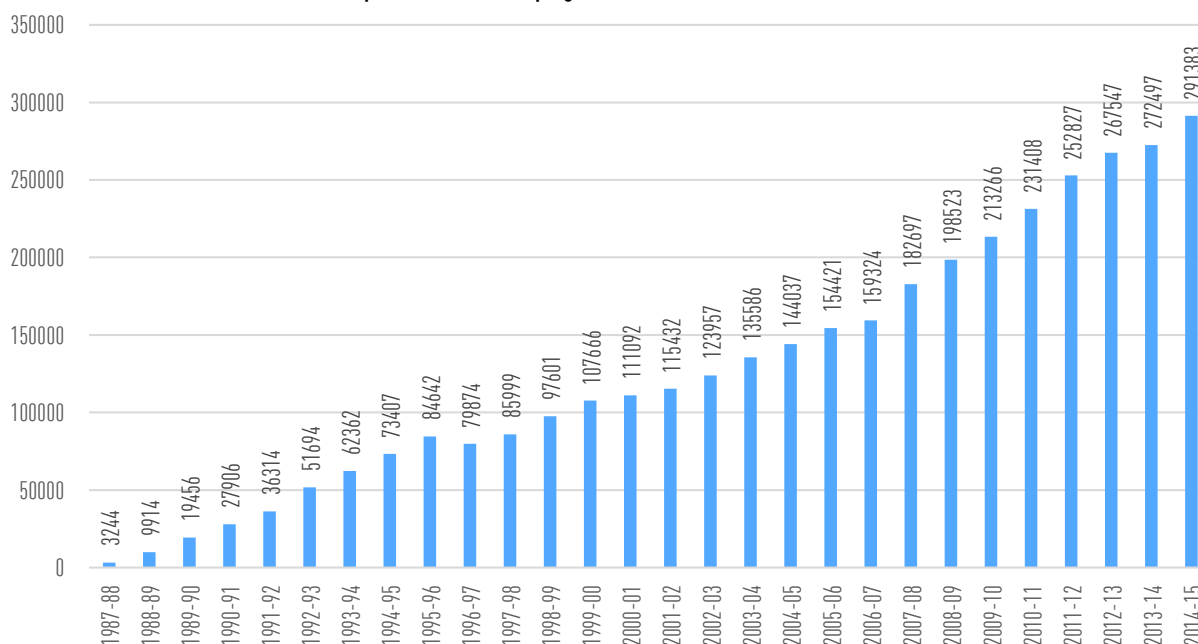
Since its launch in 1987, the number of beneficiaries of the Erasmus programme has steadily increased. To broaden the base of potential beneficiaries further, the expansion that has been achieved in demographic and financial terms needs to be intensified both qualitatively and quantitatively.³

1.1. A spectacular quantitative progression over the last 30 years

Over the past thirty years, Erasmus has enabled more than four million young European university students to benefit from a mobility grant.⁴ The growth of Erasmus student mobility has been steady, as illustrated in Figure 1. During the academic year 1987-88, just over 3000 pioneers received an Erasmus grant. Today, around 300000 young university students spend a year abroad thanks to this European programme.

The sharp rise in the number of Erasmus students was accompanied by an increase in the number of countries participating in the programme (11 in 1987 compared to 33 now, to which should be added the 169 partner countries).⁵ In 2014-2015, 3731 institutions of higher education participated in Erasmus exchanges.

FIGURE 1 ▶ Number of students abroad as part of the Erasmus programme (1988-2015)



Source: European Commission, *Erasmus – Facts, Figures and trends 2013-2014, 2015* (for the years 1988 to 2014) and European Commission, *Erasmus+ programme annual report 2015*, January 2017 (for 2014-2015).

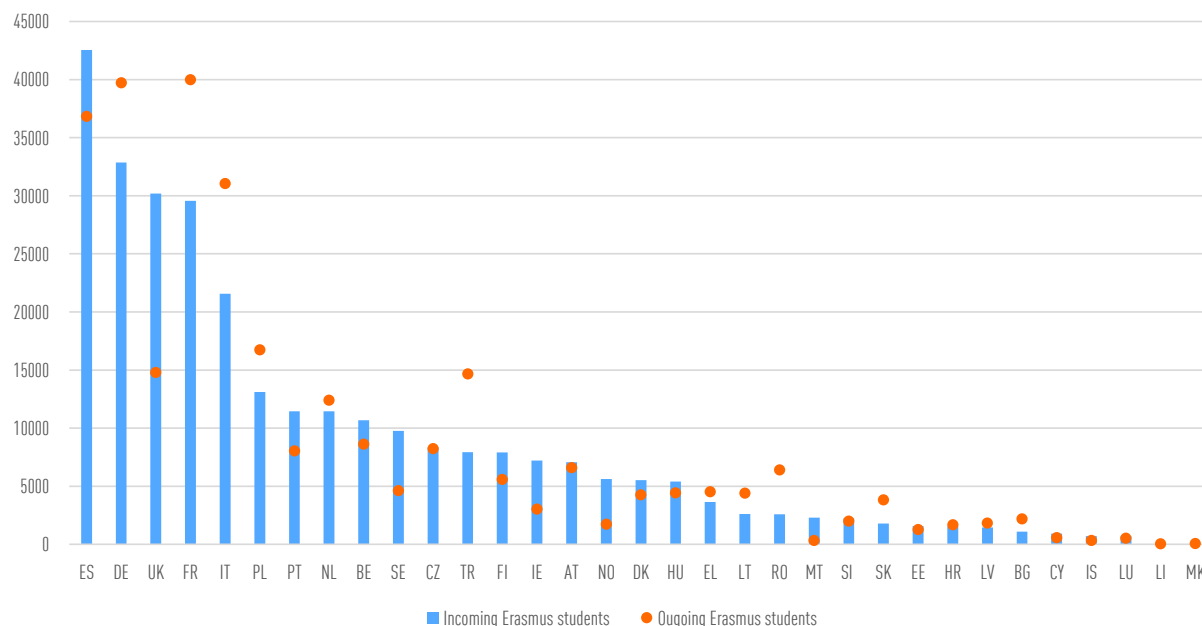
The countries that attract the most Erasmus students are Spain, Germany, the United Kingdom and France. Of the 291 383 students who received an Erasmus grant in 2013-2014, nearly one in two (46%) chose one of these four countries as their destination (see Figure 2). As for the students' country of origin, France, followed by Spain and Germany, are the three countries that send the biggest number of Erasmus student abroad. The United Kingdom (as well as Ireland, Sweden and Norway) has a strong asymmetry: it receives twice as many Erasmus students as it sends.

3. On these quantitative and qualitative registers, see Yves Bertoncini, "Encourager la mobilité des jeunes en Europe", *Rapports et documents* n° 15, Centre d'Analyse Stratégique, JuLy 2008 ; Assemblée nationale, "La démocratisation d'Erasmus : bilan et perspectives", *Rapport d'information* n° 1840, 4 March 2014.

4. The figure of 4 million young Erasmus scholars includes the more than 3.5 million young beneficiaries between 1987 and 2015 (see Figure 1) plus an estimated 500000 young people for the academic years 2015-16 and 2016-17.

5. The 11 countries that launched Erasmus are: Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom. They have since been joined by the remaining 17 EU member states and five other countries: Turkey, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein.

FIGURE 2 ▶ Number of Erasmus students by host country and home country (2014-2015)



Source: European Commission, *Erasmus+ programme annual report 2015*, January 2017, Annex 7B.

Despite this sharp increase in the number of Erasmus students since 1987, only a minority of university students currently benefits from this programme. While European leaders in 1985 committed themselves to the goal that 10 % of European university students should benefit from Erasmus, 30 years later less than 5 % of European university graduates have participated in the programme designed to facilitate a stay abroad.⁶ Underlying this European average are strikingly different national realities: the countries with the highest number of higher education graduates who have received an Erasmus grant are Luxembourg (over 25%) followed by Estonia, Latvia and Finland (about 10%). France is the country that in absolute terms sends the largest number of Erasmus students per year but as a proportion of the student body, its share corresponds to the European average (5%), with Germany hovering slightly above it (nearly 7%) and the United Kingdom the country with the smallest share (2.5%) of graduates who have benefited from the Erasmus programme.⁷

However, the success of Erasmus is not only measured by the sharp increase in the number of university students who participated in the programme over the past 30 years. Since 1987, Erasmus has expanded considerably in other ways, too. It now covers not only periods of study abroad but also internships (which account for 27% of Erasmus grants) and offers the possibility of taking intensive language courses in preparation for a stay abroad.⁸ Moreover, Erasmus has put in place university cooperation programmes with third countries (Tempus) and the wider world (Erasmus Mundus). It is not only students but also teachers and non-teaching staff who can benefit from mobility through this European programme. Erasmus has also paved the way for the creation of other mobility programmes for pupils (Comenius), those involved in vocational education and training (Leonardo), volunteers (European Voluntary Service) or adult education (Grundtvig).

Since 2014, in order to take advantage of the “Erasmus” label and to spotlight the various European mobility programmes, the Commission has brought together all the programmes in place under the umbrella of the new «Erasmus+», which also introduced a dedicated sports component. If one takes into account all the mobility opportunities gathered under this new label, the total number of Europeans to have studied, trained, volunteered or gained professional experience abroad under the auspices of “Erasmus+” is not four but nine million.

6. European Commission, *The history of European cooperation in education and training: Europe in the making – an example*, 2006, 120.

7. Data available from European Commission, *Erasmus – Facts, Figures and trends: the EU support for student and staff exchanges and university cooperation in 2013-2014*, 2015, 35.

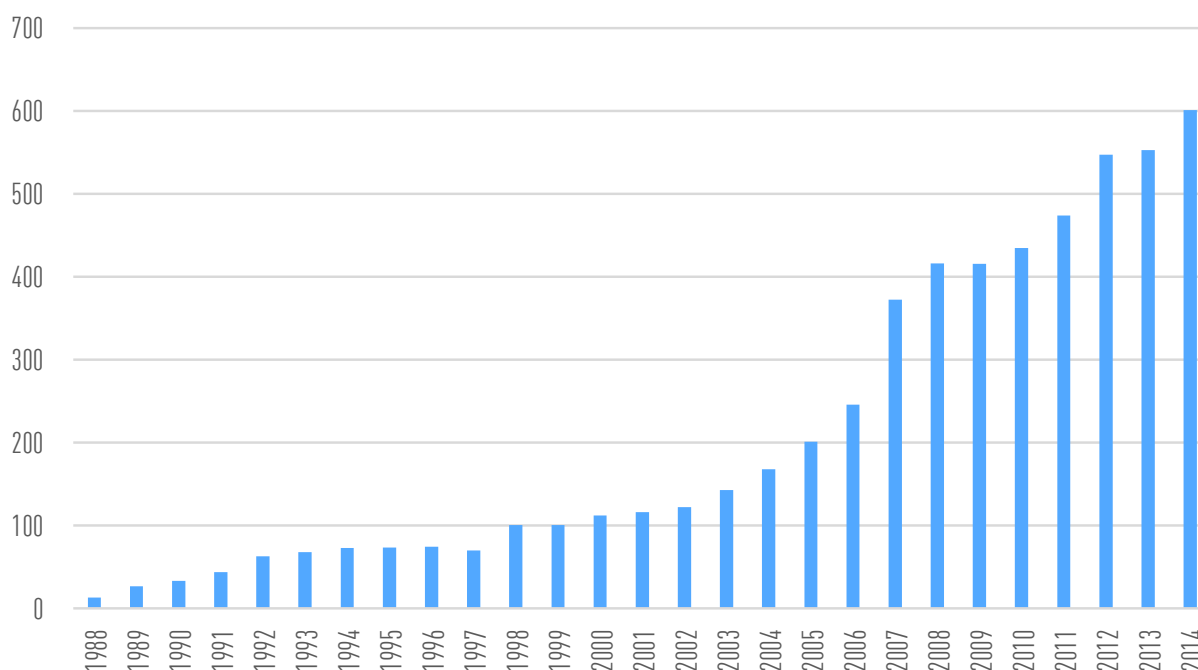
8. These intensive language courses cover only the least taught languages in the EU and therefore exclude English, French, German and Spanish.

1.2. A significant increase in European financial support

The Erasmus programme was launched in 1987 with a three-year budget of 85 million euros, less than half of what the Commission in its initial proposal had asked the Member States to contribute. As Jacques Delors reminds us, in 1988, “it took an endless battle to obtain derisory sums”.⁹ Despite these difficult beginnings, the Erasmus budget increased sharply during the first five years of the programme. Its share of the EC budget rose from 0.03 % in 1988 to 0.1 % in 1992. This upward trend has continued since: the Erasmus budget, which stood at 13 million euros in 1988, reached 600 million euros in 2014, representing 0.42% of the EU budget, a share 14 times higher than 30 years ago (see Figure 3).

The overall budget for the whole of Erasmus+ for the period 2014-2020 has seen a 40% increase over the previous multiannual financial framework, reaching 14.7 billion euros (representing around 1.4 % of the EU budget). The Erasmus+ budget was around two billion euros in 2014 and will increase every year until 2020. In the context of the mid-term review of the multiannual financial framework, the Commission has proposed to allocate 200 million euros additional funding to Erasmus+ by 2020.¹⁰ These facts illustrate the desire of European leaders to allow more and more young people to benefit from a mobility experience. Nevertheless, additional efforts are needed, for to this day, regardless of the increase in European funding, up to 30 % of mobility projects in higher education are rejected (the figure stands at 50 % for those in vocational education and training).¹¹

FIGURE 3 ▶ Erasmus budget in millions of euros (1988-2014)



Source: Authors' calculations based on data available in: European Commission, *Erasmus 2012-2013: the figures explained*, MEMO, Brussels, 10 July 2014 and European Commission, *Erasmus+ programme annual report 2014*, January 2015.

The desired expansion of the Erasmus budget must result not only in an increase in the overall number of scholarships awarded but also in the financial amount of each scholarship. Although the average amount of an Erasmus grant (studies and internships combined) more than doubled in ten years from an average of 125 euros per month in 2003/2004 to 275 euros in 2013/2014,¹² the lack of financial resources to cover the additional costs generated by mobility remains one of the main barriers to an Erasmus stay, according to an evaluation of the programme published in 2014.¹³ Similarly, according to a study commissioned by the European Parliament in 2010, 57 % of students who did not participate in the Erasmus programme said that it was too

9. Speech by Jacques Delors to the Regional Council of Loire Atlantique, 19 March 1988 (archives of Jacques Delors).

10. Communication of the European Commission, “Investing in Europe’s Youth”, 7 December 2016.

11. European Commission, *Erasmus+ programme annual report 2015*, January 2017.

12. The Erasmus scholarship for study periods abroad averaged 255 euros per month in 2013-2014, compared with 367 euros for internships.

13. CHE Consult, *The Erasmus Impact Study*, 14.

expensive to study abroad and 29 % discarded the possibility of participating in the programme after examining its financial provisions, as the grant is deemed insufficient to cover the costs.

In order to boost the number of Erasmus beneficiaries, since 2015 the Erasmus+ programme includes, in addition to the existing mobility grants, a loan guarantee scheme – managed by the European Investment Fund – for students considering a master’s degree abroad. The EU does not directly grant loans to students, but partially acts as a guarantor vis-à-vis banks that agree to offer loans on favourable terms (at below market rates, without any collateral to be provided by the family, repayable after the student’s return, with a possibility of deferring payment for one or two years). This initiative is welcome, since this additional tool does not hamper the increase in the number of mobility grants awarded each year under Erasmus+.

“EUROPEANISING”

THEIR NATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMMES”

While European programmes play a major role in financing youth mobility, the importance of national initiatives must not be overlooked. In addition to direct funding for mobility (such as the MobiPro EU programme launched in 2012 by Germany),¹⁴ member states can strengthen young people’s mobility across Europe by “europeanising” their national scholarship programmes.¹⁵ This would involve, on the one hand, that scholarships granted by a member state must be open to young Europeans studying in said member state and, on the other hand, that young nationals must be able to “take” their national scholarship with them when they decide to pursue part of their academic career in another member state.

1. 3. A gradual but unequal opening to different disciplines and various education levels

An analysis of the distribution of Erasmus students by discipline brings into relief the over-representation of certain sectors. Students in social sciences, business and law represent the largest share of Erasmus students. Next are students in humanities and arts, engineering, manufacturing and construction. As far as study visits are concerned, these courses make up more than 75% of Erasmus students.

By contrast, students in the health and well-being sector constitute only 6% of the total number of young people supported by an Erasmus grant. An analysis of the international exchanges of medical students highlights a number of difficulties that go some way towards explaining the low acceptance levels of students in this field, including problems with having classes taken abroad recognised (a course requirement in cardiology at the home university can only be fulfilled by taking a course in cardiology at the host university, whereas a certain degree of flexibility exists for courses in the social sciences or languages, to name but two examples). For students in these fields, a mobility stay is also less useful for their future professional career than would be the case for, say, business or language students.¹⁶

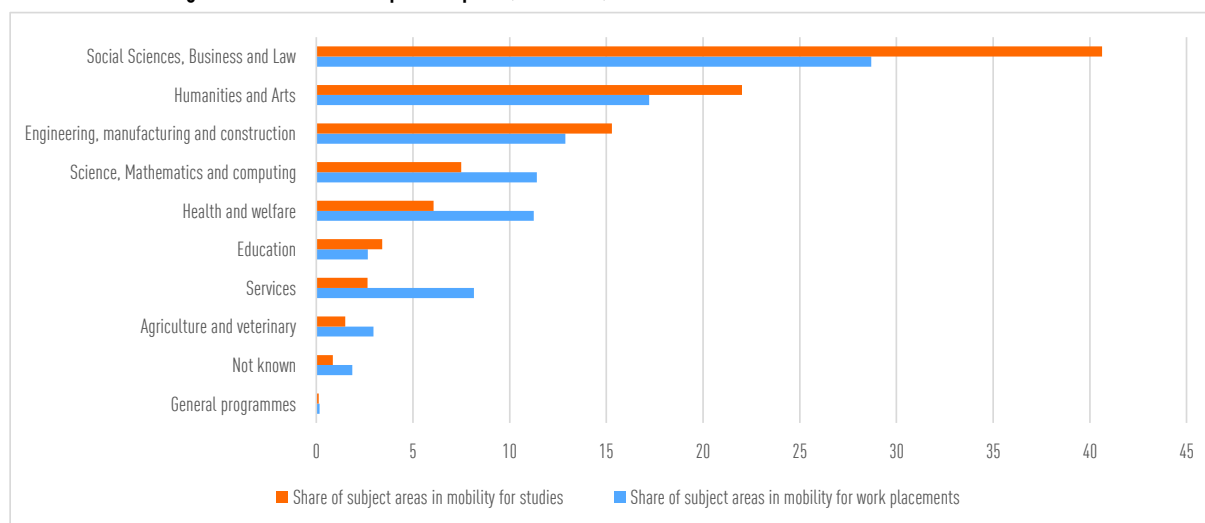
When in 2007 it became possible to use the Erasmus grant for an internship as well as studies abroad, the divergences between the various disciplines were reduced. In the science, mathematics, computing, health, well-being, services, agriculture and veterinary medicine, the number of young people obtaining an Erasmus scholarship to do an internship abroad considerably surpasses the number of students completing part of their study programme internationally. Still, national authorities should persistently strive to remove any remaining obstacles to the mobility of students in certain fields, while continuing to support alternative forms of training.

14. The MobiPro EU programme (also called «The job of my life») offered scholarships to several thousand young Europeans wishing to engage in vocational training in Germany in a certain number of sectors.

15. See Yves Bertoncini, Op. Cit, 32.

16. Wilmet, Arnaud et al., « Les échanges internationaux au cours des études de médecine. Qui part ? Qui reste ? Pourquoi ? Analyse des limites culturelles et pédagogiques aux échanges internationaux », Pédagogie médicale, Vol. 6, n°4, novembre 2005, p.205.

FIGURE 4 ▶ Percentage of Erasmus students per discipline (2013-2014)



Source: European Commission, [Erasmus - Facts, Figures and trends 2013-2014](#), 2015.

As for educational attainment, Erasmus is most successful with students enrolled in a bachelor's degree, who accounted for 70 % of awardees in 2013-2014. Doctoral students represent only 1 % and master's students 28 %. Thanks to the loan guarantee scheme for master's students, the share of higher education students receiving Erasmus+ should go up over the next years.

Last but not least, Erasmus+ aims to target more young people in vocational education and training. The mobility of apprentices has received increasing attention at European level in recent years, since only 1 % of apprentices in the EU (notwithstanding a European target of 6 % to be achieved by 2020) have a study period abroad (which lasts on average 30 days, compared to six months for university students). At the end of 2016, the Commission proposed setting up a pilot project on long-term apprenticeship mobility - 6 to 12 months - to be launched in 2017 and financed by non-allocated funds from the Erasmus+ budget. 50000 apprentices should be able to benefit by 2020. Their number needs to be added to the target of 650000 young Europeans in vocational education and training who, under the current Erasmus+ programme for the period 2014-2020, should be enabled to benefit from a mobility grant.

“ TO EVENTUALLY
OPERATE WITH A SINGLE
EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK FOR
APPRENTICESHIPS”

Nevertheless, while the consolidation of financial support for apprenticeships abroad is necessary, it will not be sufficient to ensure a significant increase in the mobility of apprentices in Europe, as many regulatory and administrative barriers still remain. It is of particular importance to speed up the convergence of national apprenticeship regulations and to facilitate the recognition of qualifications in order to eventually operate with a single European framework for apprenticeships.

2. More (than) Erasmus: encouraging the Europeanisation of curricula and non-university mobility

As a key tool to support European mobility for young people, Erasmus must also be seen and promoted as part of a broader Europeanisation movement that is to be intensified over the coming decades. In line with the spirit of Erasmus, this is both a matter of making it easier to spend the entire training and education period in another EU country rather than limiting mobility to “exchanges”, and of supporting more non-academic mobility to broaden the base of eligible young people.

2.1. From exchanges to academic curricula: the European education area

The launch of the Erasmus programme was part of a general trend towards the Europeanisation of education and training for young people, which must now be expanded.

“ THE INTRODUCTION OF EUROPEAN CURRICULA AND DOUBLE DIPLOMAS ”

In addition to the mobility it offered young Europeans, Erasmus has also encouraged and financed networking among training institutions, which has greatly contributed to the introduction of European curricula and double diplomas. It was in the same spirit that initiatives to facilitate equivalency between courses (via ECTS credits) and to devise curricula based on academic cycles of the same duration were launched, which led to the widespread adoption of the tripartite structure bachelor-master-doctorate. The Erasmus programme and the “Bologna process” are thus closely linked, for one of the objectives of the latter is also to increase student mobility in Europe.

The gradual emergence of a genuine European area of training and higher education has encouraged a growing number of young people to pursue academic trajectories that include an exchange semester (this is Erasmus’ contribution), but also to obtain a degree abroad or to pursue the entirety of their academic trajectory in another EU country. While there are approximately 300000 Erasmus students in the EU, this represents less than half of the EU students studying abroad (according to Unesco data for 2015, there are more than 650000, see table 1). Overall, 1.5 million foreign students are enrolled in EU universities. The United Kingdom is the country with the largest number of foreign students (more than 420000). In France, European students participating in an Erasmus programme (around 30000 per year) are a minority compared to the number of European students in the country (out of a total of about 235000 international students in France in 2015).¹⁷

17. Data from UNESCO research of global flows of students in higher education.

TABLE 1 ► Mobile students by host country and by home country in the EU in 2015

	MOBILE STUDENTS BY HOST COUNTRY	MOBILE STUDENTS BY HOME COUNTRY
EU-28	1567410	658115
BE	56453	13243
BG	11844	24965
CZ	41715	12335
DK	32264	5060
DE	228756	116328
EE	2859	4420
IE	15815	15628
EL*	27600	37387
ES*	56361	33225
FR*	235123	80714
HR	821	8770
IT	90419	56710
CY	6526	15617
LV	5255	6119
LT	4975	11951
LU*	2976	9981
HU	21707	10414
MT	821	1246
NL	86189	15095
AT	67691	17140
PL	39376	24050
PT	16888	12267
RO	23073	33409
SI*	2489	2709
SK	10876	31470
FI	23142	9309
SE	26672	17478
UK*	428724	31075

Source: Unesco data on the global flows of students in higher education (2013 data for Greece and Spain ; 2014 data for France, Luxembourg, Slovenia and United Kingdom)

Today, about 10 % of EU students pursue part or all of their studies abroad with support from the Erasmus programme, but also from other public or private sources of funding. These private sources (family, student loans, part-time work, etc.) reflect the emergence of a European market in education and training in certain fields. In order to deepen this development, the Bologna Mobility Strategy was adopted by the European Ministers of Higher Education in Bucharest in April 2012, which commits the signatories to the objective that, by 2020, at least 20% of those graduating should have had a study or training period abroad.

“THIS POSSIBILITY WILL ENHANCE THE IMAGE OF APPRENTICESHIP WITHIN THE EU”

To attain this goal, the intended increase in the number of young Europeans with mobility grants requires a further upsurge in semester-length academic exchanges as laid down by the classical Erasmus+ programme. It is also desirable to broaden European financial support to include funding for studies that are entirely pursued in another country, so as to accompany those wishing to make use of an educational offer which they consider more suited to their needs (the new loan guarantee scheme for master’s students goes in this direction). The possibility of pursuing all of one’s education and training abroad must also become a reality for European apprentices.

Beyond the individual benefits for young people, this possibility will enhance the image of apprenticeship

within the EU – thus supporting national reforms to develop this type of education – and help reduce youth unemployment by offering young people new opportunities for qualification (given the fact that countries with high levels of youth unemployment often suffer from weakly developed vocational education and training systems). It is in this spirit that the Jacques Delors Institute has proposed the launch of an “Erasmus Pro” programme for apprentices, one of the originalities of which is to extend support to those deciding to pursue all of their vocational training in another EU country. The “Erasmus Pro” pilot scheme proposed by the Commission at the end of 2016 supports long-term mobility of apprentices (6 to 12 months) but does not include support for people wishing to obtain their professional qualifications abroad.

BOX 2 ► Proposal of the Jacques Delors Institute for an “Erasmus Pro”

The Jacques Delors Institute proposed in 2015 a new professional mobility programme – Erasmus Pro – to allow one million young Europeans in five years to gain a professional qualification in a different European. Participating young people would be taken in by a training centre and a business in the host country for a period stretching from two to three years. This initiative would coincide with national reforms, which are crucial for developing quality professional education within each country – particularly in southern Europe. The Erasmus Pro programme should offer those young people interested in pursuing training in a different country access to all offers available throughout the EU and cover the costs of mobility and language learning. Support in the host country would be provided via organisations such as businesses or training centres, which would act as “project leader entities”. In order to encourage businesses to commit to this cross-border qualification scheme, the Erasmus Pro programme would also contribute to the wages paid to European apprentices.

The implementation of this scheme would cost the EU approximately 800 euros a month per participant (varying in accordance with the cost of living and the wage level for apprentices in various regions), including both the assistance offered to young people and the financial incentive for businesses. Thus, in order to allow 200,000 young people annually to earn new qualifications in a different member state, the EU would have to mobilise an annual budget of some €5bn (with an average cost of 20,000 to 30,000 euros per young person per year). The cost of the initiative must be offset against the cost of inaction: a recent study has revealed that the annual cost of young people in the EU who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) topped the 150bn euros mark in 2011. Furthermore, there is also the medium- to long-term cost of unemployment both to the economy and to society.

Erasmus Pro would bring benefits that would dovetail with one another: youth unemployment would decline, Europe’s human capital would be enhanced, and European integration would move forward. The Erasmus Pro programme should also make way for provisions that encourage participants to maintain ties with their countries of origin in order to increase their likelihood of returning at the end of their studies abroad. Each country would thus benefit from the return home of its Erasmus Pro youths who bring back with them new professional qualifications, fluency in a foreign language and a European cultural outlook.

Source: Jacques Delors et al., “Erasmus Pro : for a million “young European apprentices” by 2020”, Tribune, Jacques Delors Institute, 12 May 2015.

2.2. Promoting non-academic mobility: a key component for diversifying the profile of beneficiaries

While increasing the number of students having a study period abroad must remain a key priority, the prospect of making the acquisition of professional qualifications abroad a widespread reality seems remote or even beyond reach. Since initial training is the subject of a strategic investment in the eyes of young people and their families, European mobility can be seen as an enrichment, but also present the risk of discontinuous trajectory, which may also entail additional costs.¹⁸ The “desire for mobility” is unevenly distributed among young European. For minors, being able to go ahead with a mobility experience depends to a very large extent on a decision made by parents or teachers, who are often the de facto sponsors of such a project, and whose motivations vary widely.

Thus, encouraging the mobility of young people in Europe may hinge on increased support for experiences outside the formal education system (see Table 2) which might prove more attractive to potential beneficiaries, insofar as they are less “constraining” than a period of study in another EU country.

18. On this point, see Yves Bertoncini, Op. cit.

TABLE 2 ► Overview of European support for non-academic mobility

TYPE OF EUROPEAN SUPPORT	TYPE OF MOBILITY
European Voluntary Service	Volunteer project that can be done in various fields such as art and culture, social, environmental and heritage protection, media and youth information, the fight against exclusion, racism and xenophobia, health, solidarity economy, sports, cultural diversity, the future of Europe. For a period of two to 12 months. Those aged 17 to 30 are eligible.
Erasmus+ Sport	Grants for projects aiming to develop the European dimension of sport, including travel across Europe for events/ tournaments.
Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs	A cross-border exchange programme that offers young and prospective entrepreneurs the opportunity to receive training from experienced entrepreneurs running small businesses in the various participating countries.
Europe for Citizens	Financial support for setting up sister city arrangements (twinning) and establishing networks of towns.
European Solidarity Corps	International solidarity, development work or humanitarian emergency actions in the EU for 2 to 12 months. Those aged 18 to 30 are eligible.

“AS PART OF THE WINNING FORMULA, LANGUAGE TRAVEL SHOULD BE PRIORITISED”

As part of the winning formula, language travel should be prioritised: firstly because of their obvious added value compared to periods of training (language study vacations often take place during school holidays), secondly, because until now this form of mobility was often reserved for young people from socially privileged backgrounds, which is something that public financial support could change. Language travel is sometimes supported in a bilateral framework, for example by the Franco-German Youth Office, but not yet sufficiently incorporated into a EU framework, not least because they could lead to unbalanced mobility flows depending on the linguistic attractiveness of the various member states. Still, fully balanced mobility flows should not be considered a prerequisite for instituting European support for language travel.

The Youth in Action initiative, which is one of the non-academic components of the Erasmus+ programme, must also be given greater financial support to attract more young mobile workers. The European Voluntary Service in particular, which, over the past 20 years, has already helped more than 100000 young people to travel abroad to participate in volunteering projects, should receive stronger support since it appears to be an experience that boosts young people’s employability regardless of educational attainment. On a related note, it would also be welcome to allocate more funding to the Erasmus+ component that target young entrepreneurs (see Table 2), since a European mobility experience could turn out to be of immediate use for their future career (whereas the pay-off of academic mobility is more long term).

The recent launch of a European Solidarity Corps to assist EU countries facing natural or humanitarian disasters is also likely to offer a mobility formula adapted to young people who wish to make a difference without necessarily having the desire to stay away from home indefinitely.¹⁹ If the goal of recruiting 100000 volunteers by the end of 2018 is reached, financial support for such an initiative should be bolstered so that all young people keen on a rewarding mobility experience are enabled to have one.

19. For the 28 member states, the European Solidarity Corps constitutes a useful complement to the EU Aid Volunteers scheme, which enabled young people to provide practical support in third countries, while also kindling a sense of European citizenship the contours of which often appear more clearly the further away one is from our continent.

“A MOBILITY
EXPERIENCE – AND A
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DIMENSION”

Similarly, the EU programme “Europe for Citizens” allows for a mobility experience – and a discovery of Europe – without relying on an explicitly educational dimension: it brings together young (and not so young) citizens from twinned towns and fosters – temporary or lasting – connections with their fellow European citizens of other countries. In the eyes of many, such schemes are far more accessible than academic stays in another country and therefore need to be strengthened.

The desire to support forms of non-educational mobility animates Erasmus+ Sport, a programme that funds the participation of youth teams in international tournaments throughout the EU. It recently led the European Commission to launch the “Move 2 Learn, Learn 2 Move” initiative (see Box 3), which will initially allow at least 5000 young people aged 16 to 19 to travel to another country in order to raise awareness of their “European identity”. This new initiative is financed out of the budget of the Erasmus+ programme. In light of its development potential, it would be desirable to broaden and consolidate this measure on the occasion of the negotiations on the multi-annual financial framework post-2020, including by the provision specific funding.

BOX 3 ► The « Move2Learn, Learn2Move » initiative

Move2Learn, Learn2Move is a new initiative financed under the Erasmus+ programme which directly benefits young Europeans between the age of 16 and 19. A minimum of 5 000 young people (who participated in 2016/2017 in the eTwinning programme) will be selected and will receive an entitlement for the purchase of travel tickets for an amount between 350 EUR and 530 EUR. The objective is to allow them to travel to at least one other EU country to increase European consciousness and identity.

The students will either travel in group as a school trip or individually. They will be able to use their entitlement from 15 August 2017 until 31 December 2018, calling upon the Commission to book their trip.

In doing so, all modes, operators and lines can be selected. All public modes of transport can be used. Some operators have however decided to give the initiative an extra boost by granting the students a special rebate or special promotional prices.

CONCLUSION

The European mobility of young people has thrived since the launch of Erasmus. This is due to increases in leisure mobility thanks to the development of European transport services at much more accessible rates, greater cross-border mobility for professional and consumers, and heightened labour mobility, especially in crisis-hit countries such as Ireland, Greece and Portugal. Nevertheless, it remains imperative to further boost European youth mobility through a formal framework, i.e. support programmes that strengthen the employability of their beneficiaries while raising awareness of European citizenship. The simultaneous achievement of these two objectives seems more relevant and timely than ever.

“IT IS UP TO NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN DECISION-MAKERS TO BUILD ON THE HISTORY OF ERASMUS”

It is up to national and European decision-makers to build on the history of Erasmus by drawing all the lessons of its first 30 years of existence and by pledging to increase the number of those who are able to enjoy the benefits of mobility within the EU. By remaining faithful to the letter and the spirit of Erasmus, they can promote quantitative (in particular financial) and qualitative measures (in terms of the format of the proposed mobility, for example) and ensure that Erasmus continues to have a decisive impact and the legacy it deserves.

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