

CONTRIBUTION ON THE MID-TERM EVALUATION OF ERASMUS+ WITH FOCUS ON SCHOOL STUDENTS' MOBILITY

In the framework of the mid-term evaluation of Erasmus+, we would like to provide our contribution, with particular reference to school students' mobility.

With the previous "Comenius Programme" being integrated in the broader Erasmus+ framework, individual pupil mobility is now a less visible and certainly not prominent possibility offered as part of KA2 Strategic Partnerships. In fact, individual pupil mobility cannot be applied for directly to National agencies as in the previous programme. Pupils' mobility can only be included in a KA2 project if it provides added value to the strategic partnership between schools, and much less funding has been dedicated to pupil mobility compared to the previous programme. This new framework for pupils' mobility within Erasmus+ has resulted in an increased burden for schools willing to submit project applications, which lack the resources, support, and enabling measures necessary to provide quality, accessible, and inclusive pupil exchanges. Moreover, given the limited amount of funding available under KA2, schools tend not to re-apply after they have been rejected once.

On the other side, we commend the remarkable intention of KA2 Strategic Partnership to foster cooperation among schools and aim at a systemic impact, which we hope will remain as an important feature in the future.

In particular, we would like to call your attention on the following points, hoping that they can be taken into consideration during the ongoing process of assessing strengths and weaknesses of Erasmus+, and shaping its way forward.

Invest more on pupil learning mobility for a united Europe

Under the calls 2014-2015, "Strategic Partnerships for Schools Only" were granted 169,02 million euros, representing only 24% of the total grants under KA2 and, most worryingly, **only 4,5% of the overall Erasmus+ budget**.¹ It should also be noted that not all that school students' mobility represents a portion of the "Strategic Partnerships for Schools Only"; therefore the total budget dedicated to these specific projects is even lower.

We assisted to a **54% decrease in the number of mobile school students**, in comparison with the Individual Pupil Mobility strand of Comenius Program. While 1739 pupil mobility were realised in the school-years 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 (under Comenius),² only 797 were realised in the school years 2014-2015 and 2015-2016.³

Moreover, the success rate of KA2 "Strategic Partnerships for Schools Only" over the period 2014-2015 has been only 19%:⁴ this **low success rate** does not encourage schools to invest time (often volunteer time of committed teachers) in drafting project applications.

The mid-term evaluation of Erasmus+ Programme represents a unique **opportunity to invert the current trend and foster school students' exchanges** and their key role for European integration. In fact, investing in the development of the young individual and in the acquisition of key competences that are vital in our interdependent and interconnected world is crucial for a united Europe.

¹ Erasmus+ Programme Annual Report 2015.

² Comenius in figures: EU support to schools, 2012 Edition.

³ Data provided by DG EAC.

⁴ Erasmus+ Programme Annual Report 2015.

Moreover, **schools are the most inclusive environment** since studying is compulsory until 18 years old in most EU countries. Therefore when mobility opportunities are offered at a young age there are higher chances that all people, despite any potential exclusion factor, have the opportunity to benefit from them. With a view to make learning mobility inclusive, support mechanisms for disadvantaged school students need to be put in place.

The European Parliament *Resolution on the role of intercultural dialogue, cultural diversity and education in promoting EU fundamental values* recognises that exposing children to other cultures at a young age helps them obtain basic life skills and transversal competences, such as problem-solving, creativity and initiative, necessary for their personal development, future employment and active EU citizenship. Moreover, promoting school students' mobility would enhance the exchange between school systems in Europe, contributing to the development of competence-based curricula and a stronger European and multiple perspectives in the way subjects are taught.

We therefore call for more investments in school students' mobility. In order to double the numbers of the previous Comenius Programme, **the funds for school students' mobility in Erasmus+ need to be multiplied at least by four times.**

Build on the lessons learnt and open-up to partnership with non-formal education providers

Beyond just expanding the current Comenius strand, it is important to structure it in a way to ensure learning and safety standards to students and schools and cost efficiency. These solutions need to be based on a sound evaluation of the individual pupil mobility scheme run between 2010 and 2013 and between 2014 and 2016 under KA2 of Erasmus+.

With a view to build on lessons learnt, it is crucial to **take into consideration the expertise and outreach of non-profit organisations** which have been running secondary school exchanges for a long time (providing exchange opportunities in Europe to roughly 10 000 pupils a year) and who offered their expertise in setting up the Individual Pupil Mobility action in 2008 through the pilot project, run by the European Federation for Intercultural Learning.

In the current Erasmus+ scheme, mobility of school students can be promoted only through partnerships among schools, which are the only actors involved in the organisation of the exchange programme. This provision does not reflect the most recent policy developments and directions: **partnerships between non-formal education and formal education sector** are called upon in all the latest Council recommendations, and stressed also in the European Parliament *Report on the implementation of the Erasmus+ Programme (2017)*, which calls on the Commission to foster cross-sectoral cooperation, with a view to encouraging non-formal education providers to become involved with partnerships with schools.

These partnerships would allow formal and non-formal education providers to work in synergy and benefit from each other's competences. Moreover, **non-profit organisations can be crucial partners in supporting a variety of schools** in applying for projects and managing administrative, risk management and organisational aspects of exchanges, as well as in providing quality educational support. In fact, from our knowledge, schools are informed about opportunities within Erasmus+, but they do not have the human resources and capacity to apply for funding and managing an EU-funded project from an administrative perspective. Therefore, cooperation with non-formal education providers for submitting and managing Erasmus+ projects on school students' mobility would **provide support to schools in their process of internationalisation**, thus making **quality mobility programmes accessible to more school students** and not only to those enrolled in schools which have the capacity to engage in complex EU-funded projects.

Who we are:



EEE-YFU is the umbrella organisation for national YFU organisations in Europe and currently has 29 member organisations. Youth For Understanding is a non-profit youth exchange organisation, providing exchange programmes for 15 to 18 year old students in more than 50 countries worldwide. EEE-YFU works to support its member organisations to grow as quality and sustainable organisations.



EFIL is the umbrella of 30 national organisations running AFS Intercultural programmes in Europe, providing intercultural learning opportunities for school pupils, schools and volunteers. With its experience of over one century in pupil exchanges, reaching 12.000 pupils and 40.000 volunteers worldwide, AFS is a non-profit world-class intercultural education organisation which has given a significant contribution to help the world learn to live together.



The Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions is the platform for cooperation between the national school student unions active in general secondary and secondary vocational education in Europe.



The European School Heads Association, is a professional organization for European School Heads. Members of ESHA are national organisations for school heads and deputy school heads within (pre-) primary, secondary and vocational education. Nearly all European countries are represented within ESHA by one or more organisations.



The Association for Teacher Education in Europe (ATEE) aims at enhancing the quality of Teacher Education in Europe and supporting the professional development of teachers and teacher educators at all levels. Its members are individuals and institutions involved in the research and practice of teacher education, both within and outside higher education.