The Netherlands' position on the next Erasmus+ programme 2028 - 2034

Key messages:

Continuation and consolidation of thefocus and priorities of the programme.

Strengthening the VET sector within the future Erasmus+ programme.

Strengthening competitiveness and preparedness of the EU without neglecting the benefits for personal development and European citizenship.

Further simplification and streamlining of administrative procedures and IT structure.

Focus as much as possible on learning elements (such as democratic, social and intercultural competences), youth participation and inclusion within the future Erasmus+ programmes regarding youth and sport.

Disclaimer

With this position paper, the Netherlands explicitly does not want to anticipate the position of the Netherlands on the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) from 2028. It says nothing about the continuation of specific funds or budgets in Europe or the Netherlands, nor about the governance concerning the deployment of future funds in the Netherlands. The overarching MFF position is leading in the event of conflicting formulations.

The world is changing rapidly as we are facing new societal and global challenges. In order to tackle these challenges it is necessary to strengthen our knowledge base, EU competitiveness and resilience as a society. But we cannot do this only in the national context, we need European cooperation. Including in education, training and participation of youth through the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps (ESC) programme. This is also underlined in the **reports by Draghi, Letta** and **Niinistö** as well as the recently published **Union of Skills**, which emphasize the importance of a highly skilled workforce, learning mobility, and cross-border cooperation—areas where Erasmus+ excels. Erasmus+ strongly contributes to implementing the reports' visions for a more competitive, integrated, and resilient Europe. This is also underlined by Von der Leyen's Political Guidelines mentioning that Europe's future in a fractured world depends on having a strong democracy and on defending the values that give us the freedoms and rights that we cherish. These are areas where programmes such as Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps excel.

The Netherlands recognises the **positive impact and added value of the Erasmus+ programme** on education and training, sports and youth, as well as international cooperation. Because of this positive impact, the Erasmus+ programme has become one of the flagship programs of the European Union. Building on this success, the Netherlands thinks a strong and robust Erasmus+ programme is essential.

The **Dutch interim evaluation** of the current programme highlights Erasmus+ as a key driver in fostering intercultural and personal skills and competencies, as well as language learning, for both individuals and institutions.[1] Additionally, the programme promotes learning mobility, democratic and social participation, and the acquisition of specialised knowledge. These objectives remain highly relevant. The outcomes of the Dutch interim evaluation have been taken into account in this position paper.

[1] https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2025/02/03/bijlage-1-national-evaluation-of-erasmus-plus-in-the-netherlands

This position paper highlights the main priorities for the Netherlands for a successful Erasmus+ programme beyond 2027.

1. Structure

The next Erasmus+ programme should focus on **continuity and stability**, both in terms of funding and structure. Focus should be on **qualitative improvements** of the programme, instead of a restructuring. The Erasmus+ programme should not be overcomplicated by adding new layers as the current structure is functioning well and continuity between successive programmes prevents beneficiaries from having to adapt their policies and practices to new (administrative) requirements. Furthermore, the Netherlands wants to emphasise the importance of a broad Erasmus+ programme that covers all educational sectors and enhances the learning elements which youth and sports projects within Erasmus+ offer.

The current distribution between **centralised vs. decentralised actions** works well, and the Netherlands discourages the reallocation of budget from decentralised to centralised actions. The next Erasmus+ programme should continue to be largely decentralised in order to optimally connect to the national context of each member state which subsequently increases the programme's relevance and efficiency. Specifically, that means keeping the decentralised key actions in KA1 and KA2 as they are. Centralised actions should stimulate or drive initiatives and policy development related to the agreed Erasmus+ priorities, but also in the broader context of the European Education Area (EEA) and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Also the training and cooperation activities (TCA) can be seen as important international knowledge component in the youth sector. Member states and agencies should be more closely involved in the development process concerning centralised actions during the programme period and should receive more information and data about centralised actions.

Furthermore, we welcome flexibility within the Erasmus+ programme itself. The possibility of **flexibility** within decentralised actions should be increased in order to create a better connection to the national context and to create more impact. Therefore, the option to reallocate budgets between Key Actions and sectors is considered to be positive and should be further developed and simplified. This would make the programme more responsive to changing needs and developments.

International dimension of Erasmus+. The Netherlands acknowledges the potential of Erasmus+ in fostering educational cooperation beyond Europe. The ongoing capacity building efforts and mobility opportunities aim to modernize, ensure quality, and enhance access to education in partner countries not associated with the programme. Expanding the international dimension of the Erasmus+ programme enhances the EU's global competitiveness by fostering innovation, knowledge exchange, and talent mobility through strong international cooperation. This strengthens the EU's position as a leader in education and research and builds strategic partnerships that drive economic growth and global influence. The resulting international relationship is reciprocal as the Netherlands benefits from the gained and shared experiences as learned elsewhere. This also counts for the youth and sports part of the programme.

2. Focus and horizontal priorities

While the challenges we face now and in the future are unlikely to diminish, we emphasise that Erasmus+ cannot and should not address every issue. The priorities for the future programme should align closely with its overarching goals, recognising its primary focus on education and training, sport and youth, especially mobility. Consequently, **it is important to avoid overburdening the programme with new priorities**.

The four horizontal priorities have provided the programme with a clear sense of direction and they remain relevant. In the Netherlands, there is a strong alignment between the priorities of Erasmus+ and national goals in education and training. This synergy enhances the programme's broad applicability and impact. **Therefore, we support maintaining these priorities in the next programme period.**

- The Netherlands recognizes that participation in Erasmus+ programme promotes European **citizenship, democratic values and participation**. Especially at a time when fundamental rights are under pressure in certain parts of the EU, democracy, citizenship, participation and equality remain important European values. The Erasmus+ programme

should thus continue to address the importance of democracy and fundamental rights in all sectors as the EU is also a union of values. This is also in line with Von der Leyen's Political Guidelines stating that it is important to continue a strong focus with respect to (inclusive) youth participation, democratic and social citizenship, intergenerational fairness and EU values. Furthermore, the development of critical thinking, media literacy and mental health should be further prioritised within the youth and sports sector.

- **Inclusion and diversity of the Erasmus+ programme**. It is important that Erasmus+ is also accessible for learners with fewer opportunities, such as those from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, migrant backgrounds, rural areas, or with disabilities or special needs. Specifically for youth and sport and the ESC the programmes are perceived as successful in reaching out to young people with fewer opportunities. However, there are still challenges in reaching out to all types of organisations and individual participants in each sector. The inclusion top-up on top of the regular grant for learning mobility in higher education is particularly valued and should be expanded to VET (EQF 3 and 4), school education, adult education and the Youth sector. It provides an incentive for people with specific health issues or people with economic barriers. The possibility of including accompanying persons, providing extra staff for target groups that are especially hard to reach and preparatory visits should be further developed. This is particularly relevant in the case of mobility activities that involve participants with special support needs. Furthermore, the Netherlands would like to see the possibility of blended mobility and virtual exchanges expanded in the next programme as these options also allow more people with fewer opportunities (or less time for travelling abroad) to gain international and intercultural skills.
- **Environment and fight against climate change.** The Netherlands supports the continued effort to strengthen the green transition by continuing to invest in sustainable mobility. In order to achieve carbon neutrality by promoting sustainable transport modes, clear agreements and cost-covering financing are crucial. There is an increasing interest in (KA2) projects related to climate change and environment but sustainable transport modes and environmentally responsible behaviour amongst participants requires more attention within the next programme. In this regard, synergies with DG MOVE concerning policies about green travel should be further developed.
- **Digital transformation.** The Netherlands supports efforts towards advancing the digitalisation process of the Erasmus+ programme that includes projects such as Erasmus Without Papers (EWP) and the European Student Identifier (ESI). The Commission should support their continuity and further development, also based on a stronger link to other European initiatives on enrolment and student data such as eIDAS and digital identity wallets. All digital services under the Erasmus+ programme should be safe, accessible and well-functioning. Moreover, synergy with other EU policy initiatives and programmes, such as the Digital Education Action Plan (DEAP), Horizon Europe and Digital Europe, are important. Therefore, the Erasmus+ mid-term review should also be aligned with the mid-term evaluation of the DEAP and the development of the new programme beyond 2027. Continuity of DEAP actions regarding AI and digital learning models such as blended mobility and Blended Intensive Programmes are another important factor. To reduce and prevent gaps in the future workforce it is also relevant to direct efforts at integrating the Erasmus+ actions on digitalization with the Union of Skills initiative and actions to further stimulate students choosing STE(A)M disciplines.

Ultimately, it is crucial that the impact of the programme, and its projects, is at the core of the design of the new programme. Synergies between the different priorities could be further explored and developed in the future programme period.

3. Administrative processes and IT structure

Minimising administrative burden and **streamlining the application process** are essential to making the programme accessible to all target groups. This includes for example the simplification of the application processes, grant agreements and project documentation so that the effort put into an application is in balance with the awarded funding. Particularly the school education sector, SMEs, and smaller educational, youth, and sports institutions struggle with administrative obstacles and application processes that often are difficult to access for certain beneficiaries.

Beneficiaries of the programme should receive timely information about rules and reporting requirements, calls and application requirements. Application forms and reporting formats in

general should be more compact and simplified. Moreover, it is important to ensure that digital and IT systems are **reliable, well-functioning and efficient**. This not only enhances the accessibility of the programme but also its attractiveness. Stability of systems is another factor that needs to be addressed so that institutions can organise the work and communicate with participants of the programme adequately. Especially smaller educational institutions suffer from inaccessible, complex IT-systems that do not always function properly. For many institutions this is a big obstacle to partake in the possibilities that the Erasmus+ programme offers.

Better data collection and reporting is another issue that should be addressed within the next programme period, as is the access to this data in order to improve programme implementation and measuring the impact of the programme.

4. Key messages per education sector, sport and youth

Vocational education
The persisting labour and skills shortages, alongside evolving labour markets, across the EU need to be collaboratively tackled by investing in the VET sector, boosting the attractiveness for students and encouraging lifelong learning pathways, as can be seen in the recently published Union of Skills. The possibilities within the Erasmus+ programme provide valuable opportunities to VET students for individual growth and cultural exchange. Moreover, the vocational education sector is increasingly important to meet challenges in matching current and future **skills needs** by providing education that is close to the needs of the employers and society as a whole, and adaptable to people in need of upskilling and reskilling.

Increasing mobility of VET students is a priority for the Netherlands. The form of internationalisation and the support required differs in VET compared to other educational sectors where internationalisation is more established. Promoting mobility therefore requires a lot of support from vocational education institutions. We also see that there is constant overdemand within the VET sector for individual mobility which indicates a clear rise in popularity of the Erasmus+ programme. Therefore, the Netherlands recognizes the need for **capacity building of the VET sector** within the next Erasmus+ programme. The National VET team, introduced as a new element in the current programme period, should be further expanded.

The **Centres of Vocational Excellence** (CoVE's) have been a valuable addition to the programme, enhancing cross-sector participation and fostering partnerships in the field of VET. CoVE's should have the same (strategic) position as the European Universities Initiative (EUI). For example, the Community of Practice of the EUI is financed directly by Erasmus+ budget, while CoP's of CoVE's are not directly financed by dedicated Erasmus+ budget (although they can apply for funding via calls, for example forward looking projects). The Netherlands calls for dedicated and consistent funding for the CoVE's as well as their Community of PracticesZ, as we see a significant (over)demand for CoVE's.

Higher education
Erasmus+ serves as the main facilitator of transnational cooperation within the higher education sector and plays an important role in the development of the EEA and EHEA, and therefore in the quality of European higher education. **Learning mobility** as a corner stone of Erasmus+ has proven to be essential for the acquisition of international and intercultural skills, relevant subject knowledge and consequently to contributing to an increasingly globalised world. This added value should be continued and consolidated in the next programme. With regards to higher education, quality, accessibility and efficiency are essential to take into account.

For the Netherlands, balance is also of importance to take into account in regards to student mobility in higher education. Currently, the Netherlands experiences that incoming and outgoing degree mobility is significantly out of balance. For every Dutch student that studies a full degree abroad, seven international students study a full degree in the Netherlands. The ratio of incoming and outgoing learning mobility in higher education through Erasmus+, which mainly concerns credit mobility, is more in balance.[2]

[2] Erasmus+ Public Dashboard - Learning Mobility | Werkblad - Qlik Sense

In the context of learning mobility, the Netherlands would like to stress that **mobility should be seen as a means and not an end goal in itself**. International and intercultural skills can be achieved in more ways than only physical mobility, for example through blended mobility, virtual exchange and internationalisation at home. This broader view and its translation into Erasmus+ would make internationalisation experiences more accessible and inclusive.

The **European Universities initiative,** is an important initiative in facilitating both inclusion and excellence in the higher education sector. Alliances from this initiative, with 573 higher education institutions involved as full partner, play an important role in the development of both the EEA and the EHEA and in responding to current challenges in a quickly changing world. The importance of this initiative for European competitiveness is also addressed in the reports by Draghi and Letta[3]. Alliances are testbeds for innovation and renewal in higher education. The higher education sector as a whole should benefit from this initiative. It is also important to address that the alliances are created with long-term strategies, from a bottom-up approach. At the same time, some of the 65 alliances have only recently started, while others exist since 2019. Alliances therefore are in different stages of development. These aspects should be taken into account regarding the future of the initiative.

School education

A school mobility project is an opportunity to strengthen the European dimension and interdisciplinary approach of teaching and learning, increase the quality of teaching and learning in school education, and contribute to the attractiveness of the teaching profession. School mobility and cooperation projects are an opportunity to strengthen the teaching of shared European values and can make a lasting impact on not only pupils but also teachers. Increasing the number of participating primary schools and schools for specialised education is a priority for the Netherlands. The introduction of the Erasmus+ accreditation in the current programme allows organisations to fully integrate internationalisation into their curriculum and has led to simplification of the application process for the school sector. Continuing the Erasmus+ Accreditation for School Education in the new programme will support organisations to maintain and strengthen their international ambitions.

However, we have seen that the administrative burden on the school education sector is especially high, since many teachers take on Erasmus+ related tasks in their free time. Malfunctioning IT-tools and cumbersome administrative processes increase these administrative burdens.

The development of **Erasmus+ Teacher Academies** should be continued, as a contribution to the efforts of recruiting and retaining teachers nationally and across Europe, especially in light of the shortage of teachers in the Netherlands.

Adult learning

The adult learning sector contributes to lifelong learning, language skills and employability of less-skilled and adults with fewer opportunities. This continues to be a priority for the Netherlands. Enhanced skills education and training is becoming increasingly important and is expected to play an even greater role in the next programme, as highlighted by the plans of the current Commission, such as the Union of Skills. A key focus within skills development in the adult education (AE) sector is the promotion of microcredentials. The Netherlands would like to explore how this and other elements—such as sustainability and digital skills—can be effectively connected to the target group of AE. When addressing the development of skills within AE, it is essential to ensure that this priority is not solely approached from a labour market perspective but also considers the **importance of personal development and educational growth**.

The adult education sector in the Netherlands is organised in a different way than other educational sectors due to a diversity of entities (reaching from official education institutions to grassroots movements) which are often facilitated by volunteers. This difference is reflected in the fact that the cooperation projects are highly over-demanded while funds for mobility are used less (although increasing over the years). The lack of funding for project management and job replacement is the main challenge for increasing mobility within the AE sector. Therefore, flexibility in transferring

[3] The Draghi report on EU competitiveness (September 2024) and Enrico Letta - Much more than a market (April 2024)

funds between KA1 and KA2 is important for the adult education sector in the Netherlands to have since it provides them with the possibility to adjust to the needs of the sector.

Youth and sport

Erasmus+ Youth and Sport and the European Solidarity Corps are programmes that are especially successful in reaching out to young people with fewer opportunities and strengthening skills and competences of young people and stimulating youth participation and youth activation in the EU. The programmes are important tools to teach young people the importance of being engaged and work on themes as democracy, intergenerational fairness, active citizenship and EU values which represent important learning components that can be gained within the possibilities that Erasmus+ youth and sports actives as well as the European Solidarity Corps represent.

Moreover, the programme should continue its special focus on youth work. These non-formal learning opportunities that can be gained through youth, sports, volunteering and solidarity projects empower young people to become active citizens.

In order to increase the impact of both youth programmes the following topics are of importance for the Netherlands:

- The future programme should keep the focus as much as possible on learning elements and inclusion (enabling participation for *all* young people) of youth and sports projects.
- The youth programmes should remain closely linked to the European Youth Strategy and the European Youth Work Agenda, with its own dedicated budget.
- The programmes should maintain their focus on development of competences through non-formal learning in the youth sector and the empowerment of youth work as catalysts in the development process of young people. Given the current challenges Europe faces, the component of active citizenship - both democratically and social - should be further strengthened.
- The programme should be easily adaptable to current trends and developments, it is important to strengthen the link to local youth work within Erasmus+ Youth and to safeguard the emphasis on non-formal learning within youth projects and the concept of long-term volunteering within European Volunteering.
- Simplification of the programme is needed. When the programme aims to attract youth work organisations and new comer organisations, the application processes and implementation criteria need to change and fit the target group.

Lastly, in order to provide sport mobilities in the future programme, it is important to maintain adequately funded Erasmus+ Sports linked to the European Sports plan