



# Erasmus for all

## A **Manifesto** for equity and inclusion in student mobility

There is hardly any student in European Higher Education nowadays who has not heard about Erasmus. This programme has offered millions of students the opportunity to study abroad since its creation in 1987, representing a success in fostering closer international cooperation in Higher Education and providing these students with a chance to study in another country, with all that it entails.

The achievements of Erasmus+ are nevertheless rooted in inequalities. The programme has been deemed as elitist - its opportunities are not accessible to all students, but only to the few that have the financial means or receive additional support to go on mobility (such as the top-up for students with fewer opportunities). This is because the grant is only supposed to be a contribution to the extra costs students have during mobility. Still, there is no certainty on the percentage of costs actually covered. The gap that students would need to cover to partake in this opportunity is, therefore, an unpredictability that is difficult to consider or even plan for.

The existing inclusion top-up is a considerable advancement that opens up the chance to go on mobility to more students. However, it only reaches around 12% of mobile students<sup>1</sup>. There is currently no way of knowing if this percentage corresponds to the representation of these students in the overall student population. Still, the expectation is that this number should be much higher.

This translates into a plethora of Higher Education students who automatically assume a mobility experience is not for them. In this group, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are disproportionately over-represented, which is not only a concern but a genuine wasted opportunity, as this experience would be even more beneficial to them. As a result, the gap for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds increases further and further, systematically removing them from a mobility opportunity that is considered an important factor for employability and multicultural awareness.

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, (2023). *Erasmus+ annual report 2022*, Publications Office of the European Union. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/211791>

The way the grants are designed affects not only the attractiveness and affordability for students considering the possibility of joining the mobility programme, but also the experience of students already on mobility. The lack of clarity on what the contribution of costs actually entails, coupled with the rising cost of living throughout Europe, renders the choice of mobility destination more of a financial decision than one based on the quality of learning and teaching and correspondence of courses. Moreover, the way the grant is currently designed, which only considers the country-level differences, fails to address the differences that students going to the same country might face if they are going to two different cities, with different cost of living realities<sup>2</sup>.

### There can be another way

The Erasmus+ programme is always evolving and reevaluating its practices, and there is a chance to update the processes in the next funding framework of the programme. This is why the whole community needs to look into the issues affecting the number and experience of mobility students and understand how these issues could be addressed.

Erasmus for All has brought together scholars from disciplines ranging from economics and statistics to sociology and psychology, who have worked out a concrete proposal on how to make student mobility in Europe systemically inclusive, opening the chance of studying abroad to a broader student population. Moreover, it advocates that the grants need to account for the city-level cost of living, instead of country-level. Enacting such changes would positively impact the perception of cost coverage and the interest and consideration of an Erasmus+ mobility opportunity.

### Let us all contribute to a better Erasmus+ programme

Did your students face the same issues? Are students dropping out of a mobility opportunity due to financial constraints? Do you have issues recruiting students from lower socio-economic backgrounds?

Share your experience and help us advocate for a more inclusive and equitable Erasmus+.

Get in touch with us [via email!](#)

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<sup>2</sup> According to [Numbeo](#), the cost of living in Madrid (including rent) is 36,7% higher than in Alicante. However, as per the current grant system, students travelling to either city receive the same grant, which creates considerable discrepancies in their experiences.

Cost of living data retrieved on 28/08/2024