
Erasmus Plus: The Next Stage of Europe's Erasmus Programme

Erasmus Plus: The Next Stage of Europe's Erasmus Programme

2014 will see the birth of the next stage in the European Union's Erasmus programme, one that is the most comprehensive and ambitious yet. Succeeding the Lifelong Learning Programme, which ran from 2007 to 2014, will be the [Erasmus Plus programme](#), and like all previous Erasmus programmes, will last 7 years ending in 2020.



Erasmus Plus could not have come at a more critical time for the youth population in Europe. Though the European economy has rebounded in the last couple of years, employment rates (particularly for people under the age of 25) have remained largely stagnant. In January 2013, youth unemployment in the EU was 23.7%, with levels as high as 50% and above in Spain and Greece. January 2014 has seen the overall figure lower to 23.4% (Eurostat 2014). Although youth unemployment levels are declining, it still remains one of the biggest issues Europe is facing today. With an estimated 2 million job vacancies available, a big problem highlighted by a third of employers is the difficulty in recruiting staff with the skills they require for such positions; this identifies a skills gap that is preventing young people from gaining employment.

The need to address this issue is clearly reflected in the Erasmus Plus programme. The budget for Erasmus Plus has increased 40% compared to the Lifelong Learning Project's budget, with an operating budget of €14.7 billion over the programme's seven year duration. Erasmus Plus is clearly intended to provide opportunities for many more people under the age of 25 than any previous stage of Erasmus has and could provide; it is stated that Erasmus Plus aims to fund and support the study and training of 4 million Europeans. Of this 4 million, the aim is to support 2 million students doing the traditional Erasmus exchange, 650,000 under-25s in vocational education and training, 500,000 in volunteer and youth exchange schemes and 250,000 Master's students. Erasmus Plus has a significantly larger scope than its predecessors, aiming to benefit the youth population on a much larger scale, and equip this population with the knowledge, skills and experience needed to gain employment and become a valuable member of the European community.

Unlike its predecessors, Erasmus Plus will for the first time include support for sport, as well as partnerships with organisations and enterprises designed to nurture a generation of students and young people with industry and business skills to aid in the growing struggle for employment across the European Union.

Of the €14.7 billion budget, €275 million has been allocated, over the 7 year period, for the contribution to the programme's new sport dimension, which will support grassroots projects and combat cross border challenges, such as match-fixing, doping, violence and racism. As well as sport, this new stage of Erasmus will also provide financial support for students wishing to undertake their entire Masters degree in another country, by creating a new loan guarantee scheme, which has been established in cooperation with the European Investment Bank Group, that will allow students to obtain loans from financial institutions with affordable interest rates, without discrimination on grounds of study choice, require no collateral from students and provides the option to defer repayments for up to two years. So for students wishing to undertake their Master's studies in England for example, where study and living costs are one of the highest in Europe, this new scheme makes the option far more affordable and accessible.

The aims and hopes of the Erasmus Plus programme and what it will bring over the next 7 years can be summed up by Androulla Vassiliou, Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth, "[Erasmus Plus] is crucial if we are to equip our young generation with the qualifications and skills they need to succeed in life", and I'm sure the youth population of Europe hopes it will succeed.

Morgan Brooks is a second year student of a BA in Politics at the University of Nottingham in the UK. At present, he is studying Political Science for 1 semester at the Faculty of Social Science in Charles University, Prague. He is interested in political economy, international politics and digital media and technology. He joined iForum to gain experience in journalism and the opportunity to gain work experience in another country.