

# **Position of the Republic of Slovenia on the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programs after 2027**

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

The Erasmus+ program is undoubtedly the most recognizable EU program today, encompassing activities in the fields of education, training, non-formal and informal learning, youth, and sport. In the current EU multiannual financial framework for the period 2021–2027, the program has been allocated almost twice as much funding as in the previous period 2014–2020, specifically €26.2 billion, along with an additional €2.2 billion from EU external instruments, totalling approximately €28.4 billion.

The program contributes to enriching educational policies across the EU as it opens borders, promotes learning mobility, cultural exchange, and language learning. It is a key support activity of the EU in achieving the objectives of the European Education Area – improving quality, equity, inclusion, and success in education and training, expanding lifelong learning and mobility, strengthening competences and motivation for education professions, enhancing European higher education, and supporting the green and digital transitions in education, training, and youth work.

The European Solidarity Corps (ESC) is a program based on over 25 years of implementing European programs in the fields of youth and solidarity, particularly the success of the European Voluntary Service, the EU Aid Volunteers initiative, and the previous European Solidarity Corps program (2018–2020). The program offers young people opportunities to engage in solidarity activities, allowing them to contribute to their communities and gain valuable experience and skills for personal, educational, social, civic, and professional development, thereby improving their employability. ESC unites young people in efforts for an inclusive society by supporting vulnerable groups and responding to social and humanitarian challenges while offering young people experiences that foster their growth, learning, and development. The program provides a single-entry point for solidarity activities across the Union and beyond, supporting the EU Youth Strategy goals for the period 2019–2027.

The "Europe on the Move" initiative expresses the ambitions of the European Commission and member states to promote European and international mobility and make "learning abroad [...]" a standard and accessible option for everyone in the European Education Area." The recommendation encourages providers of informal and non-formal learning to contribute significantly to achieving these goals. The development of competences and European values through informal and non-formal learning opportunities is a key contribution of the Erasmus+ and ESC programs to young people's lives, which is strongly supported by Slovenia.

Slovenia emphasizes that a key component of mobility is also balanced mobility and talent circulation. Programs that promote mobility must therefore also address undesirable consequences, such as brain drain.

In 2023, an evaluation was conducted on the effectiveness of the Erasmus+ program on education systems and the youth sector in Slovenia, as well as an evaluation of the ESC program. The evaluation showed a positive impact on strengthening intercultural understanding, improving language and digital skills, increasing self-confidence, and developing social skills.

The Erasmus+ program supports an inclusive approach and equality in education and training, with its effects being visible among students, pupils, university students, pedagogical and academic staff, professionals, adults, youth workers, and young people in general. In addition to encouraging international cooperation and partnerships, the program contributes to innovations and improvements in educational processes and enhances the international

recognition of participating organizations. The Erasmus+ program brings long-term effects that go beyond individual completed projects and shape the daily operations of participating organizations. The evaluation showed that the program is successful in most evaluation criteria.

The ESC program effectively embodies elements of solidarity and has a tangible impact on various levels – personal, organizational, and community. This impact serves as a visible manifestation of the program's goals and the European Youth Goals, as it encourages important organizational changes and influences ecosystems within the youth, voluntary, social, and educational sectors, particularly in smaller and remote communities.

As part of the evaluation of the effects of the Erasmus+ and ESC programs, the responsible ministries also organized events with key stakeholders, who confirmed or supplemented the results of the evaluation. A total of seven events were held with stakeholders from the fields of early childhood education, basic education, upper secondary education, higher education, and youth.

The draft of this position was published on the websites of the responsible ministries, providing key stakeholders with an additional opportunity to amend this document.

Both national agencies implementing the Erasmus+ program at the national level (Center of the Republic of Slovenia for Mobility and European Education and Training Programmes CMEPIUS and Institute for the Development of Youth Mobility MOVIT) actively participated in preparing the position of the Republic of Slovenia.

## 2 KEY PROPOSALS (SUMMARY)

The cooperation of EU Member States in the fields of education, training, youth, and sport is supported by funding from the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps (ESC) programs. In the future, we want these programs to be closely aligned with political goals. We specifically emphasize the importance of maintaining the distinctiveness of the Erasmus+ program across its separate sectors (education and training, youth, and sport), as each has its own specific political frameworks for cooperation within the EU.

Slovenia stresses the importance of aligning these programs with societal megatrends and highlights issues such as promoting European values and democracy, strengthening the resilience of young people in a rapidly changing world, and addressing mental health and well-being, especially among young people.

### 2.1 STRUCTURE OF THE ERASMUS+ AND EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS PROGRAMS

Slovenia supports the current structure of the Erasmus+ program, with separate key actions focusing on learning mobility and including specific chapters for youth and sport.

**Slovenia also proposes that the separation between the Erasmus+ and ESC programs be maintained in the future. This will allow the ESC program to strengthen solidarity and humanitarianism as values that should be particularly encouraged among young people.**

We support the continued inclusion of sport within the Erasmus+ program, as grassroots sport enables the inclusion of a broad population, including the mobility of sport staff. Therefore, Slovenia advocates for implementation at a decentralized level.

We also believe that the balance between centralized and decentralized actions should be preserved, with a focus on strengthening resources for decentralized actions. This will have a greater impact on individuals, organizations, and systems.

### 2.2 HORIZONTAL OBJECTIVES AND VALUES

Slovenia has connected the horizontal priorities of the programs with national priorities in the fields of education, training, youth, and sport, which enhances the relevance of the programs. The current four horizontal priorities are appropriate, and we propose maintaining them, with special emphasis on promoting common European values.

Inclusion should remain a key priority, and Slovenia proposes strengthening measures to encourage the inclusion of participants with fewer opportunities. It is also essential that financial support appropriately reflects the living standards in the countries where projects take place.

Furthermore, Slovenia believes that the programs should not include an overly broad range of objectives, as they are not intended to address all challenges in the fields of education, training, youth, and sport.

## 2.3 SUPPORTING SYSTEMS FOR PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

To achieve the desired effects of the programs, the development and support systems for the professional development of pedagogical and support staff at all levels are crucial. The program structure must ensure flexibility, as well as financial and administrative stability at both the European and national levels, which will enable national agencies to provide support to beneficiaries and effectively manage the programs.

To increase the efficiency of the Erasmus+ program, it is important to increase funding for Key Action 2 (KA2), which contributes to the development of education and training systems, youth, and sport, particularly through the development and introduction of new working methods, innovative ideas, the development of institutions, and interministerial cooperation, including through **alliances such as European Universities, Centres of Vocational Excellence, and Erasmus+ Teacher Academies**. In this context, Slovenia emphasizes that (especially) centralized actions should add value to transnational cooperation and not exclude those not involved in projects, thereby increasing gaps at the EU level.

## 2.4 REDUCING ADMINISTRATIVE BURDENS

Slovenia welcomes the European Commission's efforts to simplify administrative procedures in the programs but believes there is still room for further improvement. Due to issues with the functioning of the digital platform provided by the European Commission, Slovenia calls for the urgent upgrading and stabilization of the IT system, which would enhance the efficiency of the Erasmus+ and ESC programs.

## 2.5 FUNDING

The available financial resources are a key factor that enable the participation of a larger number of individuals and organizations in the programs. Research and practice confirm that increasing funding significantly contributes to achieving the programs' objectives and strengthening European integration. Therefore, Slovenia proposes an ambitious budget that would allow us to maintain (at least) the current scope of activities.

Slovenia points out that despite ensuring high-quality volunteer projects through the Quality Label, the ESC program, due to limited financial resources, is not achieving optimal efficiency. Therefore, Slovenia proposes giving additional attention to this area in the upcoming financial period.

### 3 KEY PROPOSALS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW PROGRAMS AFTER 2027 (BASED ON EVALUATION CRITERIA)

#### 3.1 PROGRAM SUCCESS

Slovenia proposes the further development of strategies that will increase inclusion and improve access to the programs for all target groups, especially for individuals with fewer opportunities. We want the programs to be more focused on the actual needs of participants, which is why we believe that **they should not include an overly broad range of objectives**. This would further support organizations in aligning their priorities with the program's priorities, which is particularly important for projects involving individuals with fewer opportunities.

**Slovenia believes that the definition of "individuals with fewer opportunities" is unnecessary**, as the current approach allows countries to adjust and address specific national situations, providing sufficient flexibility in the implementation of activities.

Slovenia identifies room for improvement in the **transfer of acquired knowledge and experiences into national frameworks and therefore supports strengthening activities currently co-financed under Key Action 3 (KA3)**.

A key factor for the program's success is also support for the **recognition of learning mobility** undertaken abroad, which remains one of the main barriers to increasing the number of internationally mobile students. Establishing a unified policy for the recognition of courses remains an important challenge that must be addressed in the next programming period.

Slovenia also believes that efforts should be strengthened to recognize and validate informally acquired knowledge gained by participants through project involvement, as well as connect this knowledge to the labour market.

In the field of higher education, Slovenia supports expanding opportunities that allow the combination of teaching mobility with research purposes, as academic teachers are often also researchers. Such a connection would foster academic collaboration, which is the foundation for innovative research projects and the development of new academic programs. By promoting this form of mobility, the Erasmus+ program could further contribute to improving the quality and international competitiveness of European tertiary education and research.

**Slovenia believes that physical mobility should remain a key form of learning mobility, but Erasmus+ should also enable and further develop other forms of mobility, including virtual mobility. Virtual and hybrid mobility allow for broader inclusion, complement physical mobility, and act as a springboard for international collaboration at the individual level.**

#### 3.2 PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

In terms of effectiveness, Slovenia identifies significant opportunities for progress, opening doors for further improvements by the European Commission and national agencies, especially in the following areas:

- Simplification of the European Commission's IT tools, integration, and upgrading of digital tools,
- Support for project preparation and implementation,

- Ensuring conditions for regular and systematic collection, analysis, and processing of quality, well-considered data, which would enable international analyses and provide a foundation for shaping national and European policies.
- Monitoring the impact of the Erasmus+ program (including European University Alliances, Centres of Vocational Excellence, and Erasmus+ Teacher Academies) and the ESC program at the individual, organizational, and systemic levels.

Slovenia welcomes the European Commission's efforts to simplify administrative procedures in current programs but believes the effectiveness of both programs can still be improved. Key points include:

- The introduction of lump sums has simplified administration for beneficiaries and national agencies. This model allows for more focused project management and more efficient monitoring of results, so we recommend maintaining the lump-sum model.
- The current lump sum system provides flexibility for beneficiaries to manage projects; however, there is a need to strengthen the focus on quality outcomes and ensuring the desired effects of projects, which should be considered during final evaluations.
- There should be an increase in flexibility regarding the use of funds, especially due to challenges related to rising costs caused by inflation.
- Slovenia welcomes the accreditation system within Erasmus+ and proposes that the European Commission ensures the quality reassessment of organizations after 2027, preventing organizations that do not meet standards from automatically transitioning into new programs.
- Funds under KA2 should support a wide range of target groups, from small organizations with limited administrative capacity to large, experienced organizations. At the same time, adequate (increased) funding should be provided for KA1 to implement mobility, ensuring that learning mobility remains the core of the program.

### 3.3 PROGRAM RELEVANCE

The Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programs play a vital role in the digital and sustainable transformation of education and training. Slovenia supports the continued integration of digital tools and activities that promote the green transition in education and training, including hybrid and virtual mobility.

Slovenia proposes a greater emphasis on education about climate change and sustainable development, as well as **more effective dissemination of best practices and project results from Erasmus+ and ESC, especially among institutions that have not yet participated in the programs.** We suggest developing better mechanisms for knowledge sharing and exchange among institutions and additional support for beneficiaries in promoting results. Effective dissemination of international experiences allows for their transfer into innovations in teaching, research, and management, enriching the learning environment and contributing to a broader understanding of global perspectives.

Slovenia also highlights the importance of connecting educational institutions with the labour market, especially in the context of vocational and professional education and training.

### 3.4 PROGRAM COHERENCE

Slovenia stresses the importance of fostering synergies between various EU financial mechanisms, which requires a strategic approach to overcoming administrative barriers and encouraging



cooperation among stakeholders. **Synergies should not only be seen as the use or combination of different financial mechanisms;** they should be clearly defined at the policy and program levels in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) to enhance the impact of investments in education, training, youth, and sport.

Although EU programs pursue different goals, the same applicants often use them, and they could complement each other meaningfully. Slovenia's Strategy for the Internationalization of Higher Education and Science by 2030 defines staff mobility at higher education institutions and the significance of mobility for all higher education actors as a shared area of science and education, which is important for increasing synergies and strengthened cooperation between the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the European Education Area (EEA), and the European Research Area (ERA).

### **3.5 EU ADDED VALUE**

The Erasmus+ and ESC programs go beyond local and national frameworks and provide numerous international benefits. These include improving the international visibility of participating organizations, strengthening cross-border collaborations, sharing best practices, updating educational methods, and contributing to European integration and intercultural understanding. The programs encourage active cooperation between EU Member States and third countries, thereby strengthening common values and a sense of European identity.

**Slovenia believes that the international dimension of the program – cooperation with third countries – should be further increased and expanded across all sectors of the Erasmus+ program (including general education and adult education).** The program should also contribute to enhancing the capacity of beneficiaries and ensuring more equitable partnerships, as well as promoting content that encourages peace and respect for human rights.

## 4 KEY PROPOSALS FOR NEW PROGRAMS AFTER 2027 (BY SECTOR AND FIELD)

### 4.1 ERASMUS+ PROGRAM

#### 4.1.1 GENERAL SCHOOL EDUCATION

Slovenia aims to strengthen internationalization and collaboration among schools both within Slovenia and abroad (both within and outside the EU) to contribute to higher quality of education and mobility. Slovenia proposes that Erasmus+ facilitate greater cooperation with third countries in the field of school education.

The elimination of simultaneous partnerships during the 2021–2027 period has led to the loss of opportunities for more enduring multinational partnerships, which have been replaced by bilateral (not necessarily reciprocal) mobilities. This change complicates the even connection of all regions, while lasting partnerships tend to bring more enduring impacts, better understanding of different systems, easier transfer of effective practices, and a reduction in the influence of profit-driven organizations.

It is essential to establish mechanisms that make it easier to connect with higher education pedagogical institutions, which would contribute to teacher training and better integration of education and practice.

#### 4.1.2 VOCATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Slovenia emphasizes the importance of cooperation between schools, businesses, and other organizations to foster practical skills, entrepreneurial competencies, and connections to the labour market. Special attention is given to the inclusion of work environments abroad, and Slovenia recommends strengthening collaboration between mentors in companies, which would contribute to better linking education to the labour market and greater popularization of vocational education.

To facilitate better connections with vocational education and training (VET) schools, Slovenia proposes the creation of a portal organized by professional fields, containing basic data on schools, which would help them connect. This portal would additionally simplify connections between mobility coordinators and could also include data on companies and mentors expressing interest in connecting at the EU level, thereby promoting practical training. The sharing best practices of companies could serve as a starting point for better integration of labour market needs, including up-to-date requirements, as well as the intercultural, linguistic, and professional skills of future employees.

#### 4.1.3 TERTIARY EDUCATION

Slovenia recognizes international mobility as a key driver of the internationalization of higher education institutions, with Erasmus+ playing one of the central roles.

However, issues remain regarding the recognition of courses completed abroad, and it is necessary to simplify and standardize the procedures at the EU level and to increase support for the internationalization of institutions.

Slovenia **emphasizes the specificities of short-cycle higher vocational education**, which Erasmus+ includes within the framework of tertiary education and stresses the need for its proper

placement within the program to ensure equal treatment in evaluation of applications and inclusion in strategic partnerships.

To enhance effectiveness, Slovenia proposes further simplification and greater flexibility in eligibility rules for various Erasmus+ activities (e.g., mobilities, BIP, etc.), as well as ensuring stable and faster digitalization of mobility processes (ESCI).

Further attention should be given to challenges related to providing accommodation for students and ensuring safety during practical training, along with the development of flexible programs for early-career academics.

Slovenia will also closely monitor the performance analysis of Jean Monnet institutions, as it is a signatory to a statement calling for the European Commission to assess the current functioning of Jean Monnet institutions, potentially expanding the list of such institutions.

Slovenia supports the accelerated implementation of the European Student Card and will establish the necessary legal framework at the national level to facilitate its rapid and simple implementation.

Additionally, Slovenia proposes **increasing funding for European Universities alliances and expanding their share within the Erasmus+ program**. European Universities are seen as key to the development of future universities, fostering European values and identity, and contributing to the enhanced quality, attractiveness, and global competitiveness of European higher education institutions. These universities will also strengthen higher education systems in partner countries and significantly contribute to a united and strong Europe, in line with European values. Slovenia also supports the continued development of the **European Diploma** initiative within the next Erasmus+ program.

#### 4.1.4 ADULT EDUCATION

Slovenia proposes a **more precise definition of criteria and target groups** for applications in Erasmus+ projects within the adult education sector, as currently, any legal entity can apply. This would ensure that the program better addresses inclusivity and encourages lifelong learning (including through micro-credentials). Furthermore, Slovenia believes that current mobility funding inadequately covers costs for adult learners – these should be comparable to those allocated for professional staff, not lower as in the current program.

We recommended the inclusion of national policymakers as potential beneficiaries in KA3 projects to better implement reforms in adult education.

#### 4.1.5 YOUTH

Erasmus+ (Youth) effectively supports inclusion and diversity. National agencies should maintain and strengthen the development of inclusion strategies and provide additional support for young people with fewer opportunities.

According to key findings from the RAY research, the program plays a central role in developing youth work at the local, regional, and national levels, which includes an important international dimension. The program offers youth workers and leaders of youth organizations across different countries and environments the most significant and accessible opportunity to enrich their projects and programs through international cooperation – especially by strengthening capacity building,

learning mobility, and strategic collaboration. Slovenia therefore believes that the future programme should promote the strategic development of youth work across Europe even more strongly and effectively, with a focus on recognising (international) youth work at policy level and strengthening links with other (education) sectors.

In neighbouring partner countries, the program is a unique tool for supporting the development of youth work and youth policies, enhancing the competencies of young people and youth workers, fostering their intercultural learning, raising awareness about Europe, and including young people with fewer opportunities. Dialogue and understanding between program and partner countries have become increasingly important in addressing the growing and diverse challenges in Europe and its vicinity. Cooperation with partner countries should therefore be maintained in the next generation of the program, with particular emphasis on supporting youth participation and the development of youth work.

#### **4.1.6 SPORT**

Erasmus+ plays a key role in fostering cross-border cooperation between sports organizations at the grassroots level. Slovenia believes that sport should remain one of the program's priorities with a separate budget allocation. Adequate financial resources for sport in the next program are essential for increasing the participation of young people and adults in sports and physical activities, as participation has been declining according to the 2022 Eurobarometer survey.

Regarding mobility in the sports sector, current mobility opportunities for sports staff, including coaches, represent a valuable advantage for optimal use of available resources. Further support should be considered for coaches and staff involved in mobility programs aimed at knowledge exchange and capacity building.

### **4.2 EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS PROGRAM**

**Slovenia opposes the merger of the Erasmus+ program with the European Solidarity Corps.** Slovenia advocates for the preservation of the European Solidarity Corps program, which promotes solidarity and humanitarianism at the EU level. The European Solidarity Corps should focus on strengthening civil society and cooperation with neighbouring countries.

## 5 CONCLUSION

In its proposals for improving the Erasmus+ program and the European Solidarity Corps, Slovenia has taken into account the priorities of the new European Commission, which focus on the European Pillar of Social Rights, the strengthening of knowledge and competencies, and the impact of digitalization on jobs and workers. Within this framework, Slovenia recognizes the Erasmus+ program as a crucial tool for achieving the vision of a European Education Area. This vision is vital for Slovenia as it facilitates the development of education that strengthens individuals in their active social roles, promotes the broader development of society, and responds to the needs of the labour market.

Slovenia views the European Solidarity Corps program as an indispensable tool for promoting European values, with an emphasis on solidarity. It is crucial to further strengthen opportunities for youth volunteering, including from the perspective of intergenerational collaboration and ensuring social justice.

Slovenia is aware that the central theme of the new political program of the European Commission will be training and skills development. In this light, Slovenia expects Erasmus+ to play an important role, but it also emphasizes that Erasmus+ should not become merely a broad-based tool for skills development. Erasmus+ must primarily focus on enhancing the quality of education, intercultural connections, international mobility, and access to opportunities for all. It is essential that the program complements other European programs and financial mechanisms, creating synergies with them.

For the incoming period, Slovenia stresses the importance of ensuring that Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps remain accessible, adaptable, and strategically directed, so that they can continue to successfully contribute to the development of high-quality educational and volunteer experiences, as well as to the strengthening of European identity and cooperation.