

Investing in strategic drivers of Europe's prosperity, resilience and global competitiveness

EUA reaction to the European Commission's proposal for the next multiannual financial framework (2028-2034)

July 2025

On 16 July 2025, the European Commission published its [proposal for the next multiannual financial framework \(MFF\)](#), setting out political priorities and funding allocations for the 2028–2034 period. This framework will define the future shape and scope of key EU programmes that are central to the university sector, notably Horizon Europe and Erasmus+.

The European University Association (EUA) welcomes the clear recognition of education, research and innovation as strategic drivers of Europe's prosperity, resilience and global competitiveness. The decision to maintain Horizon Europe and Erasmus+ as stand-alone programmes, each with a reinforced budget, demonstrates the Commission's intention to safeguard and strengthen two of the EU's most successful and high-impact initiatives.

In this document, EUA shares its first observations on the MFF proposal, as well as accompanying texts, and highlights several key points for further reflection and dialogue with policy makers. These are structured around the two central programmes for universities: Horizon Europe and Erasmus+.

Horizon Europe

EUA welcomes the proposal to double the budget of Horizon Europe, a crucial step toward positioning the EU as a global leader in research and innovation. This significant financial commitment reflects the strategic value of R&I for Europe's future and responds to long-standing calls from EUA and the university sector for a more ambitious Framework Programme.

It is also encouraging to see that there are no major structural overhauls, and that Horizon Europe will remain [a stand-alone programme with its own legal base](#), as consistently advocated for by EUA. Preserving the programme's autonomy will ensure continuity and reinforce its identity as a pillar of scientific excellence and cross-border collaboration.

At the same time, the proposed implementation model, tightly connecting Horizon Europe to the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF), raises concerns about whether this autonomy will be fully safeguarded in practice. The foreseen use of joint work programmes, a single rulebook, and shared governance risks undermining the programme's independence. Horizon Europe must remain centred on excellent, collaborative research, not a tool to deliver on industrial or short-term political objectives.

While questions remain about the programme's governance, EUA welcomes several elements that preserve Horizon Europe's core strengths.

In particular, EUA strongly welcomes the continued protection of the bottom-up nature of key programme components such as the European Research Council (ERC) and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA). However, it also expresses concern about the possible introduction of a top-down thematic focus – or ‘directionality’ – in MSCA. The bottom-up approach is essential for enabling curiosity-driven research and remains one of the distinctive strengths of the Framework Programme. Any shift towards increased top-down direction would risk diminishing the unique value these instruments bring to the EU R&I ecosystem.

EUA is pleased to see that the role of collaborative research in Pillar II will be preserved. Collaboration across borders and disciplines is a defining strength of Horizon Europe, and EUA has consistently called for greater support for early-stage, precompetitive projects. It is crucial that excellent research at lower technology readiness levels (TRLs) is not deprioritised in favour of near-market activities. A well-balanced approach should guide the design of the new ‘Society’ and ‘Competitiveness’ components within the pillar.

Finally, EUA appreciates the Commission’s ongoing efforts to simplify participation, a longstanding priority for the Association and the university community. The proposed reduced length of the work programme, combined with less prescriptive planning and a shift toward open topics by default, is a positive evolution and could help reduce administrative barriers for beneficiaries.

However, EUA reiterates its concerns regarding the proposed use of lump sum funding as the default model. While lump sums may be effective for short-term, task-specific projects, they can complicate the planning and delivery of long-term, high-risk research and large-scale collaboration. EUA therefore urges the Commission to adopt a more flexible funding model that accounts for the diverse types of research and institutional realities across Europe.

Erasmus+

Similarly, EUA welcomes the proposed continuation of Erasmus+ as a stand-alone, comprehensive programme, combining European and international mobility and cooperation, and including the European Universities Initiative.

The Commission proposal includes a €40.8 billion budget for Erasmus+, compared to €26 million under the current MFF. However, it is unclear how much of an increase – if any – this represents in real terms for the higher education sector, as [the proposal to establish Erasmus+ for the period 2028-2034](#) does not differentiate between education and training sectors.

Despite the welcome increase in the proposed allocation for Erasmus+, questions remain about the programme’s ability to fund longstanding activities and new policy priorities, in light of current and future inflationary pressures. In addition, the Erasmus+ budget, as proposed, will now need to cover the European Solidarity Corps, which was not previously part of the programme, as well as outgoing international mobility, previously paid by the ‘Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument’ funds. Other notable additions include dedicated student mobilities for joint programmes and more ‘directional funding’ for

scholarships in strategic educational fields. EUA calls for clarity on how these priority areas will be identified and how higher education institutions will be consulted.

EUA wholeheartedly agrees with the Erasmus+ proposal's assertion that "Education and training as well as youth and sport are the EU's strongest investment in human capital, nurturing skills, building bonds across Europe, thereby laying the foundation for a resilient European Union". To enable the programme to indeed boost Europe's resilience and competitiveness, the Association calls on policy makers to further increase the budget for Erasmus+.

In this regard, EUA welcomes the proposed exploration of funding synergies with the Global Europe Fund and other Union programmes, such as the European Competitiveness Fund, and looks forward to further details on how these will be established.

Moreover, EUA welcomes the continued integration of European Universities alliances, one of the most ambitious forms of transnational university cooperation, within the Erasmus+ programme. The alliances cover a large number of topics, many of which correspond to the pre-eminent challenges that face Europe.

However, it is important that the alliances have the freedom to develop their own academic mission without excessive top-down direction. If alliances, and the universities that form them, have the leeway to focus on their academic mission, that is, to shape their own education, research and innovation priorities, then their contribution to achieving wider societal goals and systemic impact will naturally follow. On the other hand, *ex ante* overloading with policy objectives will put this, as well as the academic community's ownership of and support for the alliances, at risk.

Finally, the proposal that Erasmus+ would remain open for full, but now also partial association, is also welcome. The participation of third countries contributes to Europe's international connectivity and ability to address European and global challenges.

The European University Association looks forward to engaging with the European Commission, the Council of the EU and European Parliament as discussions on the MFF proposal, as well as proposed regulations on the future of Horizon Europe and Erasmus+, evolve. In the coming months, EUA will conduct in-depth assessment and analysis of each proposal.

Relevant publications and resources:

- [The EU's next long-term budget must support ambitious and independent programmes for education, research and innovation, May 2025](#)
- [Use and impact of the Erasmus+ programme \(2021-27\) at higher education institutions, May 2025](#)
- [Skills and education for Europe's competitiveness, April 2025](#)

- [EUA response to the call for evidence on the implementation of the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform \(STEP\), April 2025](#)
- [A research, education and innovation partnership for Europe's competitiveness, March 2025](#)
- [Universities welcome member states' and European Parliament's united call for a stand-alone FP10, March 2025](#)
- [Paving the way for impactful European R&I – EUA's vision for FP10, April 2024](#)
- [EUA Research & Innovation Agenda 2027, December 2023](#)

- **Joint statements**
 - o [Research organisations call for EU to preserve early-stage collaborative R&I in the next framework programme, July 2025](#)
 - o [Research community urges the EU to preserve MSCA's bottom-up approach, June 2025](#)
 - o [Research and innovation sector calls for key actions to strengthen Europe's R&I leadership, February 2025](#)
 - o [Universities welcome European framework to attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talents, November 2023](#)

- [Research Matters campaign](#)

With more than 900 members and affiliates in 48 countries, the European University Association (EUA) is the largest representative organisation of universities and national rectors' conferences in Europe. EUA is a recognised stakeholder in the development of EU programmes for research, education and innovation. The Association will actively contribute to all major European-level dialogues as the next MFF takes shape. By engaging with policy makers and stakeholders, EUA seeks to place research, education and innovation at the forefront of Europe's competitiveness and prosperity.