

## **MFF - an EU budget that empowers its citizens through learning and cooperation**

On 2 May, the European Commission released its proposal for the 2021-2027 EU Multiannual Financial Framework. The Lifelong Learning Platform welcomes the steps towards a rational adjustment of spending in areas such as agriculture and the commitment to double the budget of Erasmus+ - a commendable first step to boost the inclusiveness and accessibility of this iconic EU programme in the field of education, training and lifelong learning. However, instead of an even more ambitious vision for the future of Europe, where investing in people and their opportunities for personal growth is the guiding principle, the proposal limits itself to a fearful vision where the narrative of 'security and defence' wins the day. LLLP, on the contrary, calls the EU leaders to focus on empowering citizens. Such empowerment can only be achieved if citizens rights - being them human, social and economic - are fulfilled through an EU budget that puts learning at its heart; learning about and with the EU, learning from others, learning as a means to support personal development and well-being of citizens, as well as reskilling and upskilling.

We call upon the EU to base its future financial framework on the following principles:

- Education, research and innovation as the only viable long-term solutions for the EU to ensure both economic competitiveness and social cohesion.
- Well-coordinated cooperation and peer learning between Member States and all relevant stakeholders so they can learn from each other, exploring and upscaling innovative practices in education, training, lifelong learning, research and innovation.
- Quality learning mobility and culture awareness for learners of all ages and backgrounds as paramount to the future of EU given its potential to foster a sense of European identity and enhance citizens' personal and professional development.
- Adequate funding for pan-European civil society organisations in order to support their valuable work with and outreach to citizens, helping to build trust in European cooperation, promote awareness of EU programmes, and channel people's concerns into the EU policy-making process in an effective, well-targeted way.

The arguments on which the above principles are based are outlined hereafter:

Investments in education, research and innovation are at the heart of the proposal and this is fully in line with our beliefs that these should be the cornerstone of EU added value with long-term impact. Making Europe competitive, cohesive and resilient in the future means investing in its people now: in their education and training, skills, creativity, entrepreneurial and innovative spirit, health and well-being. We are pleased that such acknowledgement is part of the proposal, especially following the proclamation of

the European Pillar of Social Rights with its first principle being access to education and lifelong learning.

At the same time, the [2018 European Semester monitoring](#) calculated that only 7% of the EC Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs) in the field of Education and Training have been followed and implemented by the Member States between 2011 and 2017 while the average regarding the implementation of the CSRs in areas such as, economic policy, labour market reforms etc. is above 80%. It clearly shows the limited impact of the EU on Member States' education systems which, in many respects, can be attributed to the limited resources available at EU level in that field (less than 2% of the current EU budget). This is why, a doubling of Erasmus+ - of which one of the aim is explicitly to support Member States' reforms - is not ambitious enough if we expect to really make a step forward high-quality, efficient and inclusive education in the EU.

**The doubling of Erasmus+ was indeed the least we could expect EU leaders to agree on.** A successful flagship programme that has been spreading EU values for over 30 years and fostering a sense of European spirit through education and lifelong learning deserves a more ambitious budget to make it truly inclusive. Moreover, through a doubling in the budget, the European Commission has foreseen that the programme will be able to triple the number of participants: such an ambitious target should be matched with adequate funding, or the Erasmus+ risks to grow in an even more elitist direction.

We call upon the **EU leaders and EU institutions to carefully consider the synergies between different programmes** and how key EU priorities and ways to achieve them are mainstreamed and enhanced through different programmes: Erasmus+, Rights and Values Fund, Digital Europe, ESF, Creative Europe, Horizon Europe etc.

Most importantly, **the EU should show its commitment to the SDGs** by mainstreaming them across all programmes. Every year Erasmus+ programme finances hundreds of projects addressing SDGs education but little is done to use the results and upscale them.

While **migration issues** are often considered a justice and home affairs or external policy area, the solutions lie often on the shoulders of education institutions and civil society organisations - the integration of migrants in the labour market often requires a first integration to education, training and lifelong learning systems and also civil society organisations that are at the forefront in facilitating this. Therefore, both formal educational establishments and civil society should be provided with the necessary support and resources to include and address the specific needs of learners from migrant or refugee backgrounds.

Addressing the challenges and opportunities of digitalisation will also be an important aspect of future EU spending. **We stress the need for the future generation of EU programmes, including the newly, proposed Digital Europe programme, to strike a balance between economic drivers and social concerns**, seeking to support opportunities to educators and learners of all types to gain and update digital skills and competences. Moreover, while we agree that the drive to support advanced

digital skills development, such as in the area of artificial intelligence and cybersecurity, should be supported with due attention to ethical and data privacy concerns, it is equally necessary for the EU budget to continue supporting the development of basic digital, numeracy and literacy skills, areas where there continues to be gaps and challenges that limit many citizens from reaching their full learning and professional potential.

In conclusion, we feel that **breaking down the silos between different DGs and fostering genuine synergies between the various EU programmes and policy areas will be key to delivering an EU budget that truly supports and empowers its citizens.** The next MFF should seek to put people first and high quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning, backed up by robust investment, will be essential to make that a reality and reduce social inequalities.

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The **Lifelong Learning Platform (European Civil Society for Education)** is an umbrella that gathers more than 40 European organisations active in the field of education, training and youth. Currently these networks represent more than 50 000 educational institutions and associations covering all sectors of formal, non-formal and informal learning. Their members reach out to several millions of beneficiaries.

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