

## ERASMUS PROGRAMME INSTRUMENTS FOR ENRICHING YOUNG PEOPLE'S HORIZON

Georgică Gheorghe<sup>1</sup>

Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania

### Abstract

*When economic crisis was raging through Europe, a social class was the most affected, in comparison with the others, that social class being represented by young people from all over Europe. That moment was the starting point in seeking for a solution to counteract the effects of this crisis among this social class. The solution found by the European Commission is represented by Erasmus + programme which has as main objectives: reduction of youth unemployment, increasing international experiences of young people, encouraging the cooperation between the research and educational institutions, encouraging volunteering, increasing the integration among the Member States of the European Union as well as with associated countries of the European Union. Erasmus will celebrate the 30 years' anniversary of its opening, being one of the most successful programs ever undertaken at European Union level. By 2020 it is estimated that over 6 million young students will have benefited from the financial support for carrying out an international mobility. In this context, the following problems arise: Erasmus program is perfect or needs improvements, it truly contributes to the personal development of the participants in the project and if the money are allocated efficiently. These were some of the issues that I had in mind when I started this research.*

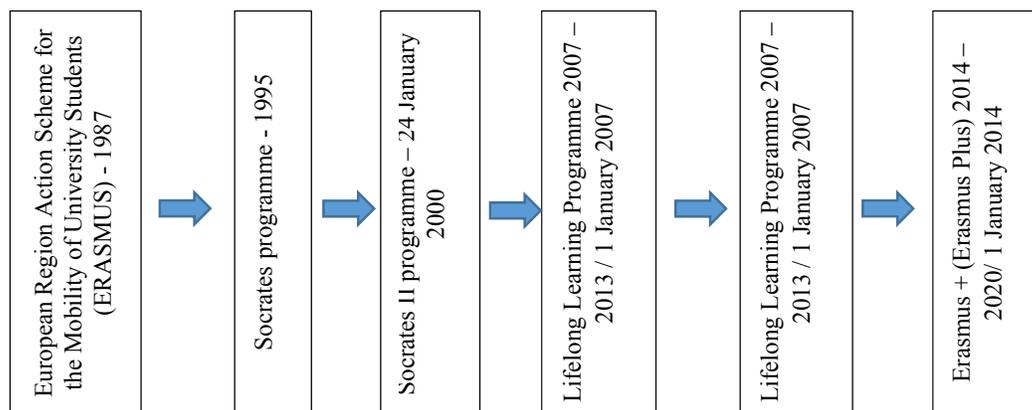
**Keywords:** Erasmus+, students, Erasmus+ buget

**Jel Classification:** I2, I28

### Introduction

Erasmus programs have been started unfolding since 1987 and it has been ever since the leading student exchange program at European level. In 2014 the program was renamed Erasmus+ and includes all programs at European level regarding education, training, youth and sport.

Over time there have been many important moments in which the program was included in different funding schemes. This evolution can be followed in Figure 1.



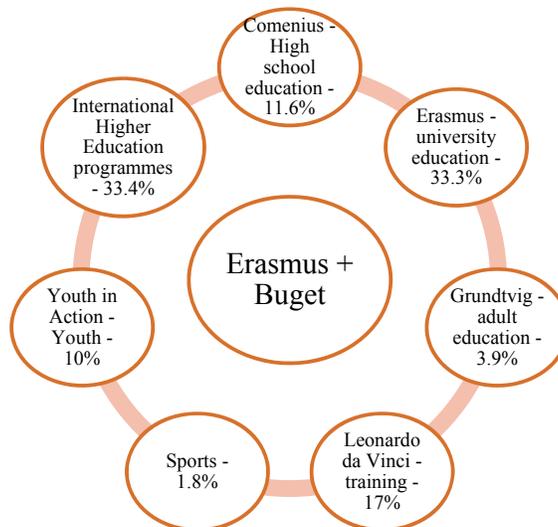
**Figure 1: Erasmus program evolution in time**

*Source:* made by author based on research

<sup>1</sup> georgica.gheorghe@stud.ase.ro

## 1. Erasmus + (Erasmus Plus) 2014-2020

The program started in 2014 and will be operational by 2020. It is part of the multi-annual EU funding and has a budget of 14.7 mil euros. It is one of most important project of the European Commission for the future (Agentia Nationala pentru Programe Comunitare in Domeniul Educatiei si Formarii Profesionale, 2015). Areas to be funded by the program through 14.7 mil euros are split as follows - Figure 2:



**Figure 2: Erasmus + Planned Budget**

Source: Made by author based on research

The projects are structured in three key actions as follows - Figure 3 (European Commission, 2015):



**Figure 3: Key Actions included in Erasmus plus program**

Source: Made by author based on research

According to official figures published by European Commission it is expected that in these 7 years – the duration of the approved budget (European Commission, 2015):

- 2 million of students will travel and study abroad;
- 0.5 million of young people will volunteer abroad;
- 0.8 million of teachers, staff and young employes will train abroad;
- 0.65 million young people will be involved in vocational studies abroad;
- 0.2 million students will benefit of loans to finance their master studies;
- 0.025 million scholarships for Joint Master degrees.

One of most important components of Erasmus + programme is represented by students' mobility. This involves mobility for all interested students who are enrolled in a higher education institution that has an Erasmus

University Charter and which has signed partnerships with others higher education institutions from countries that are included in Erasmus + program.

According to the program the students who will be enrolled in exchange motilities will:

- Improve their learning quality;
- Improve their language skills;
- Improve their employability after finishing studies;
- Improve their communication skills.

## 2. Key elements that motivate students to study in European Union

In Europe there are more than 4.000 universities, colleges and research centers that offer world class study opportunities. Each year there are more than 1.5 million students from all over the world who are studying in Europe. Among the benefits that European higher education offers we can find quality, diversity and diverse opportunities (European Commission, 2016).

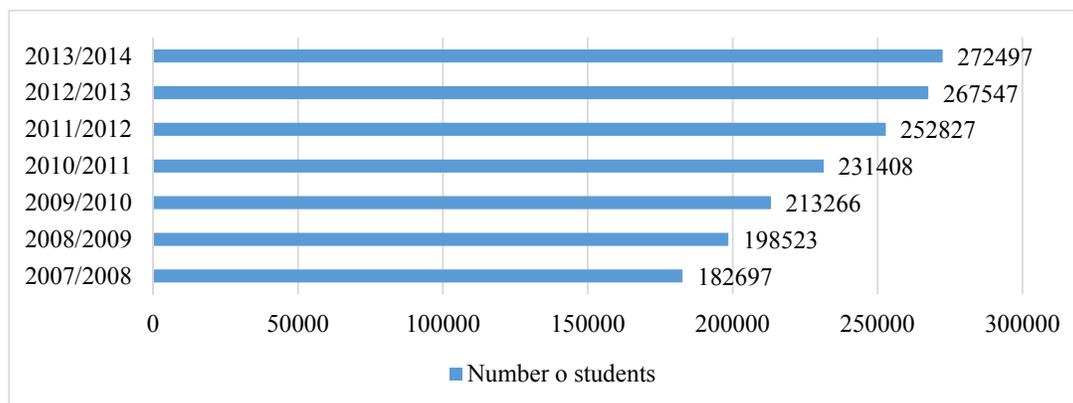
Another aspect that can motivate students to study abroad is the cultural diversity. Here students are able to travel very easily around Europe, with affordable costs. Also important is the European Credit Transfer System that is valid in almost all European educational centers. Appendices 2 I outline eight reason why students from all over the world should come and study in Europe.

## 3. Erasmus programme in numbers

Until 2014 approximately 3.3 million of students took part in international mobility's since 1987. If at the beginning, in 1987 only 3244 students from 11 countries took part in the program, in 2014 ~270000 students took part in the program from 34 countries - including Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In the same period of time there were 20.245,9 million students in European Union in 2012.

Comparing the number of students who took part in Erasmus mobility programs in 2012 (~250.000) with total number of students from that year we can say that only 1.23% of total number of students were involved in Erasmus + exchange programme (Commission, 2013) (EUROSTAT, 2016).

The evolution of the number of students who engaged in Erasmus exchange program, in the last 7 years, is presented in Figure 4.



**Figure 4: Evolution of number of Erasmus students between years 2007-2014**

*Source:* Adaptation from European Commission (2015)

If we analyze the numbers we can say that the number of students who enroll in Erasmus exchange program rises, within the analyzed period, with ~67%. For the financial budget of 2014-2020 it is expected that over 3 mil students will enroll in this exchange program, which means approximately 400.000 students each year.

For academic year 2013/2014, 272.494 students were involved in exchange programs. The country who sent the most students in mobility programs was Spain with 37.235 students. It was followed by France and Germany (European Commission, 2015). Turkey was situated on the 7<sup>th</sup> position with more than 15.000 students who were involved in this program. Romania was situated on 13<sup>th</sup> position with 5742 students – it could be much better if we take in consideration that Romania is situated on the 7<sup>th</sup> place in the hierarchy of number of inhabitants.

In my opinion, it is a surprise that the Nordic countries do not send more students on mobility's programs. Only Finland tries to do more on this aspect. These countries are at the bottom of the hierarchy. It appears that only southern Europe students want to benefit from the opportunities offered by this program.

From the group of countries who wants to join UE, Turkey is the one who tries to benefit the most, and the numbers are showing this.

The hierarchy for receiving countries is similar, with few exceptions, to the one with sending countries. On the first place is Spain with 39.277 incoming students (European Commission, 2015). On the second place it is situated Germany followed by France. On this hierarchy, the Nordic countries are situated much better, Sweden being placed on the 9<sup>th</sup> place. Romania is on 22<sup>nd</sup> place, and in my opinion it is way under the potential. Turkey is generating enough interest and is situated on the 13<sup>th</sup> place, with 6818 students who studied there.

From all students, 61% are women, 67 are studying at bachelor level, 29% at masters level and 1% at doctoral level. If we take in consideration "Degree subjects", 31% of students participating in the program were studying "Social Science, Business or law", 17% "Humanities and arts", 17% "Engineering", 11% "Health".

In average, from the last dates available, students are staying abroad 6 months, they are on average 23 years old and they receive 274 euro per month.

According to European Commission, students return from the mobility program with skills that will boost their employability. Among these skills we can mention:

-  Confidence;
-  Problem – solving;
-  Curiosity;
-  Adaptability.

#### **4. Erasmus + programme in Romania**

The academic year 2014/2015 was the first for Erasmus + programme that brings together several other programs that I mentioned earlier. Each country manages the budget allocated by the European commission through a national agency. For Romania, the Erasmus + programme is managed by ANPCDEFP (Agentia nationala pentru programe comunitare in domeniul educatiei si formarii profesionale). The web site where interested organizations from Romania may find information about Erasmus+ is: <http://www.anpcdefp.ro/>.

For year 2014, Romania had a budget of ~52 mil euro. This budget was allocated on three main directions:

- o Cooperation projects - ~12 mil euro;
- o Grants for studying - ~39 mil euro;
- o Other Erasmus Activities - ~1 mil euro.

There were financed 67 strategic partnerships that involved 387 organizations. There were 30 projects for school education, 16 projects for vocational education and training, 7 projects for higher education, 8 for adult education, and 6 youth projects. Cooperation projects' aim is to facilitate schools, public authorities, private sector and universities to work together in order to strengthen the education system and youth system (European Commission, 2016).

Regarding Grants offered for studying, training and volunteering, a budget of 39 mil euro was allocated. 5 types of people benefit from these projects (European Commission, 2016):

- School staff – 800 participants;
- Vocational education (including also students) – 4200 participants;
- Higher education (including staff) – 8713 participants;
- Adult education – 140 participants;
- Youth (including volunteering) – 7294 participants.

Among others activities that Erasmus+ provides support, we can find:

- Joint master's degree – at least 2 universities from 2 countries;
- Cooperation between business sector and education sector;
- Support for policy reforms – all that have connection with young people (education, training, sport and youth).

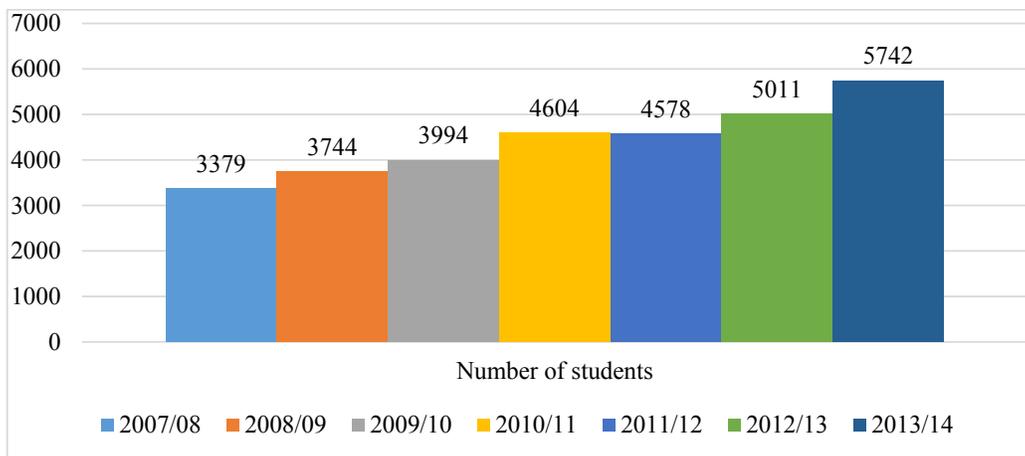
#### **5. Statistics for higher education in Romania**

The statistics are for the program "lifelong learning" and the data is from 2007 to 2014.

**a. Outgoing students:**

In the last seven academic years, the number of students who went in mobility exchange programs, almost doubled (increased with 85%) - Figure 5. When analyzing the host universities from where the Romanian students came from I found that the majority were from universities from outside Bucharest. In the top 5 of emitting universities we find the following hierarchy (European Commission, 2016):

- Universitatea “Alexandru Ioan Cuza”;
- Universitatea Babes-Bolyai;
- Universitatea din Bucuresti;
- Universitatea “Transilvania” din Brasov;
- Universitatea “Politehnica” din Timisoara.



**Figure 5: Number of outgoing students in the last seven academic years**

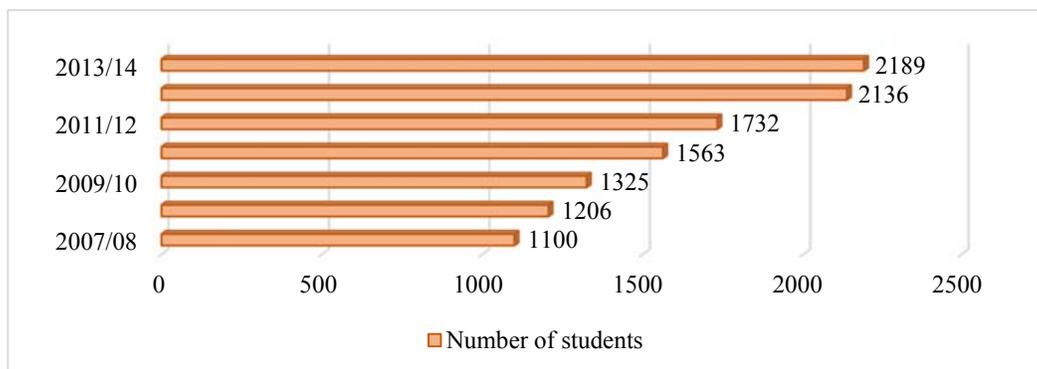
Source: Adaptation after European Commission (2016)

Romanian students prefer universities from southern Europe as the hierarchy for receiving countries shows (European Commission, 2016):

1. France
2. Spain
3. Italy
4. Germany
5. Hungary

**b. Incoming students**

In the last seven academic years, the number of foreign students who are coming to universities from Romania almost doubled (increased with 98%) - Figure 6.



**Figure 6: Number of incoming students in the last seven academic years**

Source: Adaptation after European Commission (2016)

The top for receiving universities is dominated by the sending universities. The hierarchy is dominated by “Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai (UBB)” from Cluj-Napoca. UBB is followed by “Universitatea din București” and “Universitatea Transilvania” from Brasov. The top 5 is completed by Universitatea Alexandru Ioan Cuza from Iasi and “Universitatea de Vest” from Timisoara.

The hierarchy for top countries that sent students to Romania is dominated by Turkey. It is followed by France, Spain, Italy and Portugal.

I remark that “Bucharest University of Economic Studies” is missing from these two hierarchies. This is due to the fact that being a specialized university, it is hard to have a high number of students who do their mobility here or abroad.

## 6. Erasmus exchange program at “Bucharest University of Economic Studies”

Each year our university tries to increase the number of exchange students both on emitting and receiving directions. For this, it annually tries to sign new collaboration agreements with universities from all Europe and candidate states or countries associated with European Union.

According to an official press release, a total budget of 686.825 euros for “The Bucharest University of Economic Studies” has been approved for year 2016, a budget smaller with almost 100.000 euro than last year. I remark that for all four categories of mobility programs we have a decrease of allocated funds.

**Table 1: Total budget allocated to “Bucharest University of Economic Studies” for the last 3 years**

Year	SMS	SMP	STA	STT	SOM	Total
2016	515.000	100.100	1.650	2.475	67.000	686.825
2015	525.000	157.850	7.680	4.800	76.000	771.330
2014	558.000	115.000	8.120	4.640	68.800	755.310

Source: (ANPCDEFP, 2016)

### Legend:

SMS – “Student mobility for study”;  
 SMP – “Student mobility for traineeship”;  
 STA – “Staff mobility for teaching”;  
 STT – “Staff mobility for training”;  
 SOM – “Organizational support”.

In table 1 we can observe a significant decrease of funds allocated to staff mobility for teaching, more than 450% reduction, also for traineeship programs with more than 55% reduction.

Regarding the number of students who go annually in Erasmus mobility we have the following situation (Table 2). On the analyzed period, for years 2014, 2015 and 2016, the number of students who participated/are going to participate registered a significant increase for the English mobility programs, while the French mobility program registered a significant decrease – table 2.

**Table 2: Bucharest University of Economic Studies outgoing students**

Year	2016	2015	2014
<b>English language</b>	159	128	108
<b>Spanish Language</b>	12	16	13
<b>Italian Language</b>	10	8	5
<b>German Language</b>	13	22	17
<b>French Language</b>	34	46	60
<b>Total</b>	228	220	203

Source: Based on data provided by ASE Bucuresti - Directia relatii internationale (2016)

On the same period of time we notice a total increase of 11% of the number of students for the analyzed period (2014-2016), mostly due to the increase of number of students for English languages mobility programs.

## 7. Past and future challenges for Erasmus + programme

According to a study published in 2011, one in five students who went in mobilities abroad with Erasmus exchange were forced to retake some exams after not all their credits obtained abroad were not fully recognized by their home universities (Grove, 2011).

The main problems that were underlined by a survey done in 2011 were as follows (survey that was done on 9000 students who participated in Erasmus exchange programs in 2010/2011) (Grove, 2011):

- Compatibility between courses;
- Lack of trust between partners;
- Different curricula between study programs;
- Learning agreements were not signed in time by both academic partners;
- Failure to comply for learning agreements between academic partners;
- Not the same amount of study hours for the same number of credits between partners;
- Different workloads for students;
- Different grading systems - that led to lack of accuracy when validating grades;
- Fear of students for harming grades obtained by going on exchange.

Haworth (2013) affirms that Erasmus exchange program reaches its limits. It is noticed that each year the number of students who go to exchange studies remains relatively constant, around the sum of 230.000 students. Even this program constitutes a model for United States and China, it has some downfalls among we can include huge administrative costs combined with lack of personnel (Haworth, 2013).

The new programme, Erasmus+ has the role to simplify the whole bureaucracy system, still there will be staff and curriculum management that will oppose to students' mobility. Another problem that the program must face each year is the infrastructure which is not appropriate in all countries.

Erasmus + program was designed so that almost 20% of people who graduate to have an international experience by 2020. Nowadays, this figure is around 9%. For Romania is even worse - 2%, well below the European Union average. In order to improve students' mobilities even governments should act - for example they should remove barriers to degree recognition.

## Conclusions

Erasmus program is one of the oldest ones, as it was introduced almost 30 years ago. This program represents a model for United States of America and China. In the course of the 30 years, this program changed a lot, but every change was designed to improve the overall program's characteristics. Now this program is seen by European Commission as a leading instrument in the fight against unemployment among young people from the member states of European Union and also for those from the partner countries.

The program was created in order to motivate students to study in countries from European Union so that they can improve their skills in order to easier find a job, in order to improve their knowledge about other cultures, and to improve their speaking capabilities in a foreign language.

In the exchange program, students from 34 countries are implicated, Spain being the leader in receiving and emitting for number of students.

Through this program, the number of students who will go on mobility will increase, fact that will put a lot of pressure on all universities that will participate, will put pressure on all teams who will manage the program and will put pressure on administrative costs.

All these elements will put pressure on the fulfilment of the goal of reaching a total of 20% of people who graduate to have an international experience until 2020.

## References

- Agentia Nationala pentru Programe Comunitare in Domeniul Educatiei si Formarii Profesionale, 2015. *Ce este Erasmus+?*. Available at: <http://www.anpcdefp.ro/anpcdefp.php?link=61> [Accessed 25 11 2016].
- ANPCDEFP, 2016. *Rezultate selectie*. Available at: <http://www.erasmusplus.ro/rezultate-selectie> [Accessed 25 11 2016].
- ASE Bucuresti – Directia relatii internationale, 2016. *SELECȚIA PENTRU MOBILITĂȚI DE STUDII*. Available at: <http://international.ase.ro/studenti/erasmus> [Accessed 25 11 2016].
- European Commission, 2015. *The EU programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport 2014-2020*, Bruxelles: European Commission - Education and culture.
- European Commission, 2016. *Erasmus+ Statistics – Romania 2014/2015*, Bruxelles: European Commission.
- Grove, J., 2011. *It's better to travel – but Erasmus credits can get lost in translation*. Available at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/its-better-to-travel-but-erasmus-credits-can-get-lost-in-translation/417775.article> [Accessed 25 11 2016].
- Haworth, D., 2013. *Erasmus faces demand and management problems – LERU*. Available at: <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20130613140106852> [Accessed 25 11 2016].