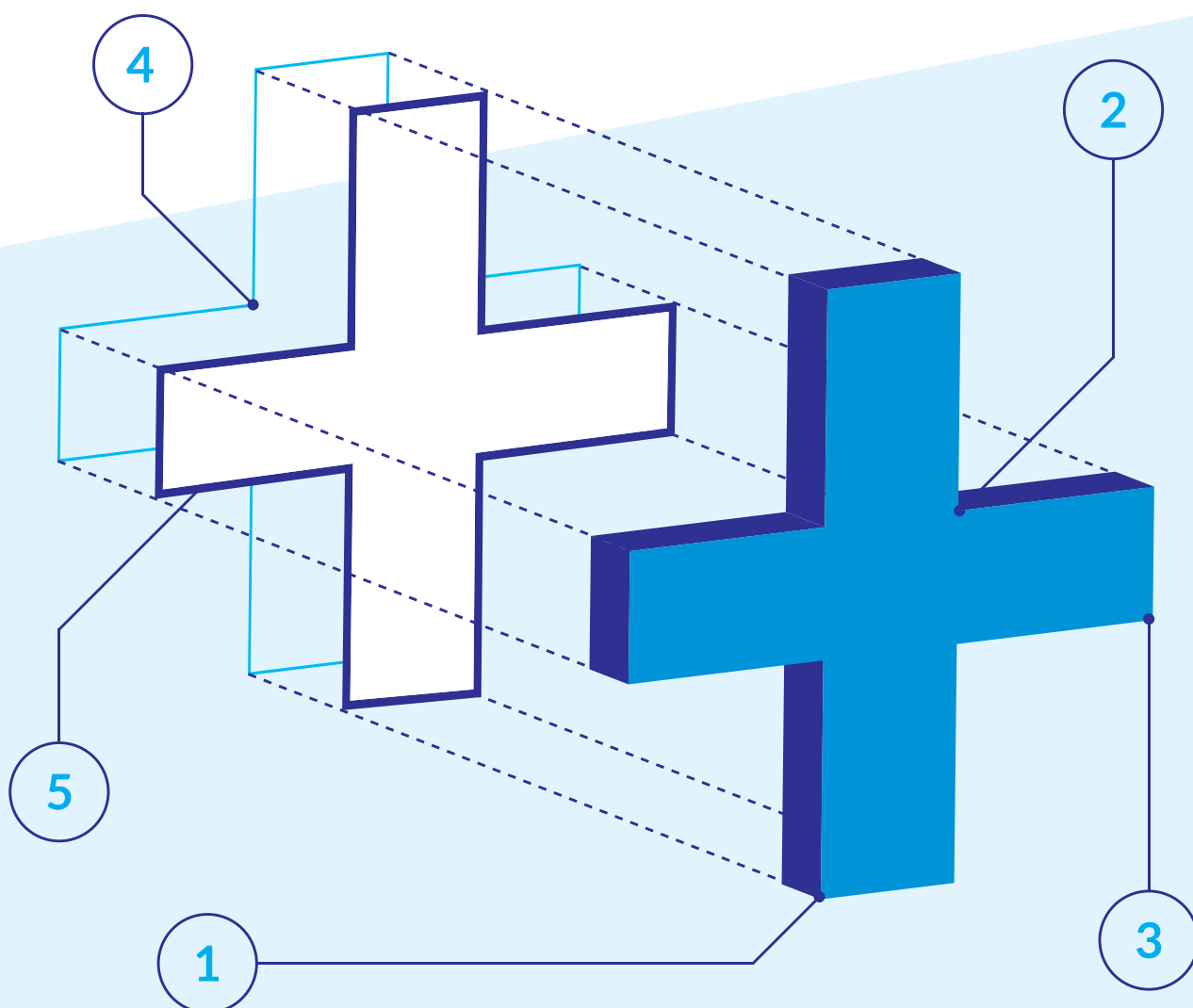


#ErasmusUpgrade Manifesto

A vision for the future of the Erasmus+ programme



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#ErasmusUpgrade Manifesto

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#ErasmusUpgrade

#ErasmusUpgrade is a Key-Action 3 Structured Dialogue Youth project funded by JINT, the Flemish National Agency for Youth.

The project started in March 2017 with an online questionnaire and face-to-face consultations where the results were then analysed by a team of volunteers. International Relations Offices also contributed with their perspective during a dedicated session held at ERACON 2017 in Maribor.

In October 2017, 70 participants from all over Europe gathered in Brussels, where they went through an intensive training and preparation to meet European decision-makers, following a structured dialogue process. The participants of both the consultation and training and conference were mostly young people with international mobility experience, being able to assess the programme's needs from the participants' perspective.

The combination of the consultation, the training and conference, and the structured dialogue was transformed into this manifesto. This document was only possible due to the combined organisational efforts of ESN International and its #ErasmusUpgrade team, and ESN Belgium, the coordinating organisation of the #ErasmusUpgrade project.

#ErasmusUpgrade Manifesto

*The vision of the
Erasmus Student Network
for the Erasmus+
successor programme*



The Erasmus+ programme is one of the most successful programmes created by the European Union (EU). Since 1987, 4,4 million higher education students, the focus of this paper, have profited from this funding scheme to learn in another country, to internationalise their contact networks, and to have a deeper understanding of Europe as a united continent¹. According to the ESNsurvey 2011², as well as the European Commission's Erasmus Impact Study (2014)³, Erasmus students increase their employability substantially. Furthermore, the ESNsurvey 2013⁴ and the Erasmus Voting Assessment (2014)⁵ have shown that Erasmus+ also contributes to making Erasmus students become more active citizens. In 2014, the programme received an increased budget of 40%⁶ and saw its scope expand to several other fields such as adult education and sports⁷. Despite being an EU programme, Erasmus is now a concept known worldwide.

In 2017, the EU instigated all interested parties to reflect on all of these achievements, while also encouraging them to discuss the future of Erasmus+. In this context, the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) carried out a European-wide consultation to gather the opinions of international students and ESN volunteers. The consultation consisted of an online questionnaire that reached around 1,100 students directly, and a series of face-to-face dialogues involving students and volunteers from across ESN's 40 member-countries. The preliminary results of the consultation were presented to the European Commission during

a preparatory meeting in August 2017 and publicly discussed during the #ErasmusUpgrade Training and Conference in Brussels in October 2017. This event was attended by representatives from 25 European countries, both EU and non-EU member-states, who analysed the results of the consultation and discussed them with decision-makers involved in the revision of the Erasmus+ programme. This process led to the creation of the recommendations presented in this document.

This manifesto sets out ESN's vision for the future of the Erasmus+ programme, having a particular focus on its higher education dimension. The recommendations are divided into chapters linking the results of the consultations, data from other publications, and the vision of the participants of the #ErasmusUpgrade Training and Conference.

This manifesto targets all involved in the implementation of the programme, specifically the European Institutions, National Authorities, and higher education institutions.

The Erasmus Generation counts on you to have a comprehensive, inclusive, and well-financed successor programme that can serve both its academic and social purposes.

The Erasmus Generation expects the next programme to live up to its potential and continue catering to the needs of young Europeans and Europe as a content by increasing its scope through increased funding with simplified procedures. We

count on you to have a comprehensive, inclusive, and well-financed successor programme that can serve both its academic and social purposes.

¹ For statistics on Erasmus+ check ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about/statistics_en.

² "ESNsurvey 2011: Exchange, employment and added value", available at esn.org/ESNsurvey/2011.

³ "The Erasmus Impact Study: effects of mobility on the skills and employability of students and the internationalisation of higher education institutions" (2014), available at ec.europa.eu/education/library/study/2014/erasmus-impact_en.pdf

⁴ "ESNsurvey 2013: Creating Ideas, Opportunities and Identity", available at esn.org/ESNsurvey/2013.

⁵ "EVA: Erasmus Voting Assessment" (2014), available at esn.org/eva.

⁶ "Erasmus+: the first year", available at europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-16-143_en.htm.

⁷ "What is Erasmus+?", available at ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about_en.

OUTREACH

1. Increased reach in Europe

Erasmus student mobility has proven its greatly positive impact. As a result, Erasmus mobility has been extended to a range of other fields, such as pupil mobility or youth mobility. To better include these groups in Erasmus+, the EU has developed several materials and many organisations at the European and national level make their best effort to have the information reaching all potential beneficiaries.

Examples are the Erasmus+ brochure for schools⁸ and the 2017 annual work programme for the implementation of Erasmus+: the Union Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport⁹.

Yet local institutions, such as high school teachers, youth associations, and city councils still face difficulties in knowing about all the Erasmus+ opportunities, thus reducing their opportunity to get involved in the programme. This is a particularly important aspect in order to better reach the youth from disadvantaged backgrounds¹⁰. The European Commission should reinforce its investment in building the capacity of National Agencies to reach the grassroots level, being it directly or through regional branches. An investment should be made in teams of trainers whose mission would be to empower local organisations in the field. The goal is to bring Erasmus+ and the idea of Europe to small organisations, democratising access to information, and enabling them to fully grasp the potential of the programme, themselves then becoming Erasmus+ ambassadors.

Erasmus is a unique tool to promote European values, foster intercultural dialogue, and build bridges between different people, all besides its central academic dimension.

2. Increased reach throughout the world

Erasmus+ has proven to be one of the most successful EU programmes. It is a unique tool to promote European values, foster intercultural dialogue, and build bridges between different people, all besides its central academic dimension. The success of the programme should now be reinforced in the European neighbourhood and in other parts of the world. Hence, the EU should reinforce the international dimension of

Erasmus+, better including partner countries in all facets of the programme. This expansion should be followed by negotiations with each member-state to eliminate all visa-related barriers for students as decided by the European Parliament¹¹. The high financial cost and long waiting period associated with obtaining a visa undermines the participation of non-EU/Schengen citizens in Erasmus+, as shown by ESN's research on visa regulations¹². Further liberalisation is essential to increase the impact Erasmus+ can have, both in education and in strengthening the links between the EU and the rest of the world¹³.

3. Increased reach with more tools

Overall, new outreach tools need to be explored, especially to reach out to people from disadvantaged backgrounds who are traditionally excluded from many communication channels. Support documents need to be simplified, using a much clearer language, with easy to read steps for all types of applicants from all EU languages. Television, radio, and newspapers could help to reach more people

⁸ "Erasmus+ for schools" (2017), available at

ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/sites/erasmusplus2/files/erasmus-plus-brochure-schools-en.pdf.

⁹ 2017 annual work programme for the implementation of 'Erasmus+: the Union Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport', available at ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents/2017-annual-work-programme-implementation-erasmus-union-programme-education_en.

¹⁰ According to the "Mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ Programme" (2018), including youth from disadvantaged backgrounds is still one of the major challenges for Erasmus+. More information available at ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents/evaluations_en.

¹¹ "New rules to attract non-EU students, researchers and interns to the EU" (2016), available at

europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20160504IPR25749/new-rules-to-attract-non-eu-students-researchers-and-interns-to-the-eu.

¹² "Research Study on Visas and Residence Permits" (2013), available at esn.org/visas-and-residence-permits

¹³ "The Erasmus+ Generation Declaration" (2017), available at

ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/sites/erasmusplus2/files/erasmus-generation-declaration_en.pdf.

SUPPORT SERVICES

and complement the already very active use of social media, as suggested by the recommendations of the DEEP-linking Youth project¹⁴.

Peer-to-peer approaches, such as Erasmus in Schools¹⁵, should be reinforced and expanded to other types of education. To fight euroscepticism and to highlight the value of the services provided by the EU, the next Erasmus+ programme should have an action completely dedicated to bringing Erasmus+ students closer to the local communities, particularly in the school environment. Erasmus students are among those who feel the most European¹⁶ and should therefore be part of the plan to bring Europe closer to all its citizens.

The rather elitist participation in the programme remains its Achilles' heel, as shown by the mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ Programme¹⁷. There are other EU programmes that focus particularly on disadvantaged youth, being the European Social Fund¹⁸ among the most important. However, as different entities deal with different funding programmes, it is often unknown how much has already been done in topics that remain challenges for Erasmus+. At the same time, Erasmus+ already offers some solutions to challenges faced in other programmes, such as ESF. More dialogue and synergy are needed across EU programmes to allow for the combination of tools and creation of joint strategies to reach common goals.

4. Reinforced and inclusive support services

National Agencies and Erasmus+ offices should expand their standard minimal support services, enlarging the scope of the Erasmus Charter under the monitoring of the EC. As shown by the results of the ESNsurvey 2016¹⁹, these services, which are needed before, during, and after mobility, should include support in mental health, academic and cultural integration (e.g. mentor/buddy system) and housing assistance²⁰ (e.g. legal advice), and should preferably be offered in partnership with local and national associations that already provide daily peer-to-peer support.

The European Commission should also encourage all higher education institutions who participate in the Erasmus+ programme to evaluate the accessibility of their university environment and support and make it available online to prospective students, using platforms such as MappED!²¹.

5. Support to face societal challenges and equip participants with skills for the 21st century

EU institutions, member-states, and national competent authorities should foster assistance to Erasmus+ students to increase the impact of their mobility and use the competencies gained through this period as a way of reducing youth unemployment. We suggest investing in trained staff to coach the students before, during, and after their mobility period by the hosting and sending institutions.

¹⁴ DEEP-linking Youth was a project which ran from 2015 to 2017 with ESN as a partner. One of the outcomes was a set of recommendations on learning mobility which are available at ecas.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Recommendations-to-policy-makers-on-learning-mobility.pdf.

¹⁵ Erasmus in Schools is an initiative of the Erasmus Student Network in which international students visit local schools and give lessons about their country, culture, language, and traditions to foster cultural awareness among local students and fight stereotypes. For more information visit socialerasmus.esn.org/?q=activity/erasmus-schools.

¹⁶ As shown by "EVA: Erasmus Voting Assessment" (2014), available at esn.org/eva.

¹⁷ "Mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ Programme" (2018), available at ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents/evaluations_en

¹⁸ "What is the ESF?", available at ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=35&langId=en.

¹⁹ "ESNsurvey 2016: The international-friendliness of universities", available at esn.org/ESNsurvey.

²⁰ According to the results of the HousErasmus+ project, accommodation is indirectly the biggest obstacle to mobility. More information at houserasmus.eu/research.

²¹ For more information about the MappED! platform check mapped.eu.

MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

6. Standard mobility process

Different cities and institutions offer different international mobility experiences and this is something which should remain. However, the quality of the experience must to be streamlined with a quality framework defined by the EC and accompanied by an accreditation or incentive system. This procedure should be implemented in cooperation with National Agencies and Erasmus+ Offices as a validation system for quality mobility. This framework should complement the Erasmus Charter and should aim to counter the current observed inequalities and differences concerning information provision, grade recognition, and overall requirements for mobility, as shown by the ESNsurvey 2015²².

7. Digital tools to counter bureaucracy

National Agencies and Erasmus+ Offices should encourage the implementation of digital tools to simplify bureaucratic procedures. The Erasmus Without Paper²³ initiative, together with concrete tools such as the Online Learning Agreement²⁴ and the Erasmus+ App, should be integrated into the programme to support higher education institutions in reducing fragmentation and unnecessary red tape. Ultimately, to cope with the growth and complexity of the Erasmus+ programme, the European Commission should initiate the development of a common digital platform, providing access to an updated programme catalogue.

The aim is to simplify the exchange process and ultimately ensure the scalability of the programme. The platform, which would target the needs of all involved, should at least include information regarding offered courses, language support, grading system and its conversion, and housing opportunities.

The aim is to simplify the exchange process and ultimately ensure the scalability of the programme.

²² "ESNsurvey 2015: Local Integration, Economic Impact and Accompanying Measures in International Mobility", available at esn.org/esnsurvey/2015.

²³ For more information on Erasmus Without Paper visit erasmuswithoutpaper.eu.

²⁴ For more information on the Online Learning Agreement visit learning-agreement.eu.

RECOGNITION OF MOBILITY OUTCOMES

8. Mobility windows to increase credit recognition

European and national authorities should encourage higher education institutions in both programme and partner countries to prepare easily accessible and up-to-date course catalogues for current and prospective mobility students. As part of the process, instructions should be provided with comprehensive guidelines and training on the creation of mobility-friendly curricula which are recognised and easily transferable. This could be done by implementing “mobility windows”, streamlining the responsibility for credit recognition with higher education institutions, and by prioritising the percentage of credit recognition as one of the main indicators of quality mobility public rankings of higher education institutions.

9. Better communication to achieve full credit recognition

According to the latest Erasmus+ Participants’ Report²⁵, the recognition of credits obtained abroad is at 85%. For this reason, the fear of non-recognition remains one of the main obstacles for international mobility. European and national authorities should encourage higher education institutions to have better communication between partner universities and countries to improve transparency and achieve full credit recognition. The above-mentioned common digital platform, which could be an evolution of the MobilityTool+, would have a key role in this process as it would gather all higher education institutions under the same conditions. Furthermore, the European Commission in cooperation with National Agencies, should increase its support to higher education institutions that have not yet achieved full credit recognition for their students. In case of continuous non-compliance, the European Commission

should not be afraid of withdrawing Erasmus Charters for higher education from those that do not take the necessary measures to provide full credit recognition.

10. Study and work: an “integrated Erasmus+ approach”

Erasmus students are half as likely to stay in long-term unemployment when compared to their non-mobile peers²⁶. However, and despite the philosophy behind lifelong learning, the link between the several chapters of the programme is not very clear. To better link studies and work activity, we recommend that all education providers, especially higher education institutions, ensure the feasibility of combining studies and traineeships during the same exchange period, while receiving credits in both situations. This “integrated Erasmus+ approach” could better prepare students for their entry into the labour market.

The fear of non-recognition remains one of the main obstacles for international mobility.

²⁵ “Boosting student mobility through better recognition”, available at ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/news/boosting-student-mobility-through-better-recognition_en.

²⁶ “The Erasmus Impact Study: effects of mobility on the skills and employability of students and the internationalisation of higher education institutions” (2014), available at ec.europa.eu/education/library/study/2014/erasmus-impact_en.pdf

INCREASED BUDGET FOR MORE QUALITY, OUTREACH, AND TRANSPARENCY

The current budget of the Erasmus+ programme does not allow for providing the same opportunities to all people, regardless of their background. Some of the issues have already been addressed but, at the end, the main point is that there is not enough funding to achieve all the goals ESN believes are essential for Erasmus+ to become what we believe it should become. Lately, there has been a movement to support an increase of the amount available for the programme both from political leaders and civil society organisations, which led to an overall movement to make this a reality. The Erasmusx10 campaign²⁷ collects some of the arguments why such an increase is important, and the respondents and participants of the #ErasmusUpgrade project highlighted some of them.

11. Economic background of the participants

The EU should increase the Erasmus+ grants through more accurate distribution of the funding. Distribution could be based on actual regional living costs, while also taking into consideration the extra funding for people coming from disadvantaged backgrounds²⁸. This would make the programme more accessible since it would provide the same opportunity independently of the socio-economic background of the student²⁹.

12. National support towards mobility

Although the funding from the Erasmus+ programme should be attributed to overcome the difference of the cost of living between the sending and host country, it is not enough to overcome all the expenses one faces when abroad. Therefore, on top of the funds available through the Erasmus+ programme, national governments should consider increasing the value of scholarships students receive from national resources. When it comes to disabilities, and as stated in the final

recommendations of the MappED! project³⁰, even though Erasmus+ already has several tools to include these participants, national governments also need to act, especially by allowing the transfer of grants between countries.

13. Monitoring and levelling incoming and outgoing students

National Agencies, Erasmus+ Offices, and the European Commission should put mechanisms in place to ensure better monitoring of the organisational support granted to universities by the successor of the Erasmus+ Programme. Furthermore, the system should better recognise the financial importance of incoming students since currently it is implied that it is more important to have outgoing students. Such a mechanism would ensure that the funding intended for improving the quality of an exchange period would be spent as expected since it would give equal importance to local and international students. Part of the support should be given to student organisations or other relevant parties offering support services as these enrich the students' experiences.

Distribution of Erasmus+ grants could be based on actual regional living costs, while also taking into consideration the extra funding for people coming from disadvantaged backgrounds.

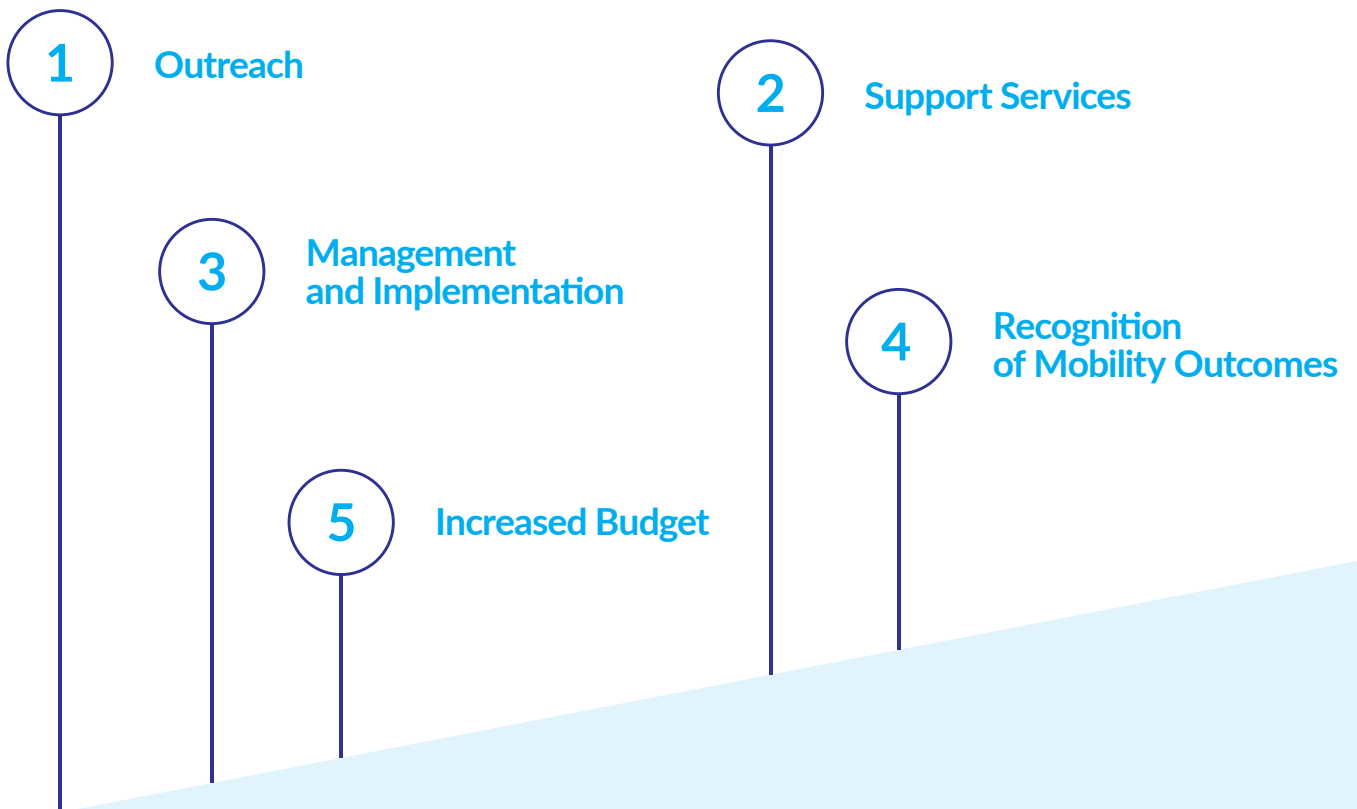
²⁷ For more information visit erasmusx10.eu.

²⁸ The Erasmus+ Programme guide (2017) defines "disadvantaged background" on pages 9 and 10. For more information visit ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/sites/erasmusplus2/files/2017-erasmus-plus-programme-guide-v2_en.pdf.

²⁹ esn.org/news/erasmusplusreview

³⁰ "MappED! recommendations", available at mapped.eu/sites/default/files/mapped_recommendations.pdf.





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