

June 2026

FEEDBACK FROM THE AUSTRIAN NATIONAL STUDENT UNION (ÖH) AND LOCAL STUDENT UNIONS ON THE EU'S NEXT MULTIANNUAL FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK (MFF)

The Austrian National Union of Students (ÖH) and the local student unions of Fachhochschule Kärnten, Technischen Universität Graz, University of Applied Sciences St. Pölten, Universität für Weiterbildung Krams, Fachhochschule Wiener Neustadt, Katholischen Privat-Universität Linz, Kirchlich Pädagogischen Hochschule, Technischen Universität Wien, Johannes Kepler Universität Linz, Universität Salzburg, Veterinärmedizinischen Universität Wien, Fachhochschule Wien; Hochschule für Agrar- und Umweltpädagogik, Hochschule für Angewandte Wissenschaften Campus Wien, Universität Innsbruck and Universität für Bodenkultur Wien, representing all students in Austria, welcome the Commission's recognition of cross-border education, civic participation and solidarity as the core European public goods. However, we remain deeply concerned about the proposed structure and funding levels in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) in our opinion the MFF falls short of the ambitions the Union has set for itself in education, youth, culture and civil society.

The proposal's presentation of a "50% budget increase" for Erasmus+ is misleading. When adjusted for inflation and the merger with the European Solidarity Corps (ESC), the reality is that the increase is significantly lower. This narrative risks obscuring the fact that the programmes continue to be underfunded compared to their political objectives. We, the Austrian Students Union, strongly criticise the merging of Erasmus+ and ESC budgets. Both programmes serve distinct purposes—educational mobility and volunteering—and each deserves a clearly defined, separately allocated budget line. The merger threatens visibility, political priority and long-term stability, especially for volunteering structures.

Instead, we call for a five-fold increase of the Erasmus+ budget. Only a five-fold increase of the budget would enable the European Union to be accessible, support new initiatives, address the real cost of living for mobile students, and meaningfully include learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. The current Erasmus+ scholarship levels remain insufficient, creating substantial barriers to participation and limiting the inclusiveness of mobility opportunities.

Furthermore, we also oppose the Union's increasing shift toward labor-market-driven logic, particularly the overemphasis on "competitiveness" and the prioritisation of STEM and VET fields. Though these areas are important, education must not be reduced to economic utilitarianism. A socially just, democratic, and inclusive education system must remain rooted in academic freedom, critical thinking, equality, and anti-fascism. The MFF must support the comprehensive purpose of higher education, and not reinforce market-oriented trends.

In addition, the proposed introduction of scholarships for unspecified "strategic fields" is highly problematic. Without transparency and democratic oversight, such an approach risks diverting resources from core Erasmus+ mobility and deepening inequalities within the education sector. We also want to warn against removing earmarked

budget lines for different education sectors. While flexibility may be desirable for the Commission, unpredictability undermines the stability of student organisations, higher education institutions and civil society actors that depend on these funds.

We call for strengthened support for civil society organisations at European level, including the preservation and reinforcement of operating grants. These organisations play a crucial role in democratic participation, youth engagement, anti-discrimination, and the defense of European values. Budgetary insecurity directly threatens pluralism and democratic resilience.

Additionally, we stress the importance of ensuring inclusivity and accessibility within Erasmus+, including dedicated support for students from third countries and targeted funding within a European “Students At Risk” programme. The EU must ensure that students fleeing conflict, persecution, or humanitarian crises have accessible pathways into higher education and academic mobility.

Finally, we urge the Commission to embed education policy in principles of social justice, equality and democracy. The MFF must acknowledge that education is a public good—not a luxury—and should therefore prioritise solidarity, accessibility and civic empowerment over narrow economic metrics.

