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## Joint Statement by the Association Européenne des Conservatoires (AEC) and European Performing Arts Students' Association (EPASA)

### **SHAPING A MORE INCLUSIVE, EFFICIENT, AND FUTURE-PROOF ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME**

As key stakeholders in European Higher Music and Performing Arts Education, AEC and EPASA welcome the opportunity to contribute to the development of the 2028 Erasmus+ Work Programme. While Erasmus+ remains one of Europe's most impactful initiatives, structural challenges continue to limit its accessibility, efficiency, and long-term sustainability.

We highlight four urgent priorities:

#### **1. Addressing Inequality: Making Erasmus+ Truly Inclusive**

Despite budget increases, Erasmus+ remains structurally elitist. Current grant levels are insufficient to support real participation, particularly for students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. A traditional semester abroad often remains accessible only to those with family financial support or additional national or regional funding.

To address this, we call for a substantial increase in individual grants, especially for long-term mobility, alongside targeted top-up funding for disadvantaged students.

#### **2. Strengthening Administrative Capacity**

The success of Erasmus+ depends on the people who implement it. However, Organisational Support funding does not reflect the real administrative workload, which has increased significantly with new formats such as Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs). In many institutions - particularly small and specialised ones - international offices operate with minimal staff, creating unsustainable pressure.

We therefore call for increased and ring-fenced funding for administrative staff, as well as formal recognition of administration as a core pillar of programme quality. In addition, specific support mechanisms are needed for small and medium-sized institutions, where capacity constraints are most acute.

#### **3. Fixing Erasmus+ Digitalisation: Interoperability, Stability, Usability**

The digital transformation of Erasmus+ has not delivered on its promise. Key tools such as the Digital Learning Agreement (DLA) remain unreliable and inconsistently implemented, forcing institutions to rely on fragmented systems and even paper-based processes.

A fundamental reset is needed. This should focus on achieving true interoperability through seamless data exchange between platforms and institutional systems, ensuring stability by resolving existing bugs before introducing new tools, and improving usability through flexible, user-friendly interfaces adapted to real workflows. At the same time, clear guidance and sustained training must be provided, and dedicated funding should support the digital transition in international offices.

#### **4. Reducing Administrative Burden and Increasing Flexibility**

Erasmus+ must be more responsive to a rapidly changing global context. Current administrative structures - particularly for international mobility such as KA171 - are overly complex and disproportionate to the scale of activities. At the same time, greater flexibility is urgently needed to respond to geopolitical challenges and humanitarian crises.

We therefore call for simplified administration for non-EU mobility, treating it as a mobility tool rather than as a project. Greater differentiation between regional contexts is also needed to avoid one-size-fits-all approaches. Furthermore, the use of KA131 funds should be expanded and made more flexible, including for both incoming and outgoing non-EU mobility. Finally, administrative requirements must be reduced to allow institutions to act quickly in crisis situations and support at-risk students.

#### **Conclusion**

Erasmus+ stands at a critical juncture. Its future success will depend not only on its scale, but on its ability to deliver equitable access, sustainable implementation, functional digital systems, and the flexibility to respond to a changing world.

Beyond its operational dimension, Erasmus+ is a cornerstone of the European project itself: it fosters intercultural understanding, strengthens shared European values, and nurtures the next generation of creative, open-minded citizens. At the same time, it plays a vital role in enhancing Europe's global competitiveness by developing talent, innovation, and cross-border collaboration.

If these ambitions are to be taken seriously, the programme must be equipped to deliver in practice. AEC and EPASA stand ready to support the European Commission in shaping an Erasmus+ programme that fully lives up to its promise - as a driver of inclusion, a platform for cultural exchange, and a strategic investment in Europe's future.

**The Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Académies de Musique et Musikhochschulen** (AEC) is a European cultural and educational network with over 300 member institutions for professional music training in 57 countries.

[www.aec-music.eu](http://www.aec-music.eu) | EU Transparency register ID: 858164297224-59

**EPASA** is an association which represents conservatoire students and recent alumni across Europe.

[www.epasa.eu](http://www.epasa.eu)