

Erasmus Student Network AISBL  
Rue Hydraulique 15  
B-1210 Brussels  
BELGIUM

# Erasmus Student Network AISBL

Rue Hydraulique 15, B-1210, Brussels, Belgium

Register ID: 45445593026-68



President of ESN AISBL

Tel. +32 (0) 22 567 427 | Skype! esn\_international  
[www.esn.org](http://www.esn.org) | [president@esn.org](mailto:president@esn.org)

No Enterprise (BE): 876.728.263

## ESN contribution to the Consultation on the future "EU 2020" strategy

### Introduction

Erasmus Student Network (ESN) is one of the biggest non-profit international student organizations. ESN is present in 321 Higher Education Institutions from 32 countries, counting approximately 12.000 active members working on the volunteer basis with 150.000 international and exchange students per year. ESN works for the creation of a more mobile and flexible education environment by supporting and developing the student exchange from different levels, and providing an intercultural experience also to those students who cannot access a period abroad ("internationalisation at home").

ESN's vision is the enrichment of society through international students. ESN believes that through the mobility of young people (and international students in particular), the whole society benefits – learning about different cultures and traditions, becoming more open-minded and tolerant and encouraging intercultural dialogue and understanding.

The main aims and goals of ESN and its members are:

- work in the interest of international students
- work to improve the social and practical integration of international students
- represent the needs and rights of international students on the local, national and international level
- provide relevant information about mobility programmes
- motivate students to study abroad
- work with the reintegration of homecoming students
- contribute to the improvement and accessibility of student mobility
- care about its members
- value volunteering and active citizenship

### ESN reaction to the future “EU 2020” strategy

ESN welcomes the **general direction of the strategy**, with its clear focus on education, research, innovation, creativity and mobility. The fact that knowledge is identified as one of the priority areas of EU 2020 is appreciated by ESN. “[G]iving all young people in Europe the possibility to spend part of their educational pathway in other Member States” (p. 5) is an ambitious objective that is welcomed and supported by ESN.


As an organization primarily concerned with **student mobility**, ESN is pleased that the strategy recognizes the importance of this. ESN shares the view that “[r]aising the quality of Europe's universities and of their research should go hand in hand with greater mobility of students” (p. 5) and is happy to see that the strategy explicitly mentions the Erasmus, Leonardo and Erasmus Mundus programmes.

However, the strategy paper does not mention the **Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP)** at all. As an umbrella for many of EU's education programmes, LLP is extremely important for European education in general and for European education mobility in particular. ESN would therefore like to see a clear connection between the educational goals pointed out in the paper and the LLP.

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ESN finds the use of the term “universities” in the consultation somewhat problematic and would prefer to have it replaced with the more inclusive term “**Higher Education Institutions**” (HEI), which has already been widely used by many stakeholders in the European higher education. There are many non-university Higher Education Institutions in various Member States that also contribute to growth, knowledge, innovation and other goals mentioned in the strategy. These institutions should also be included in the strategy.

Moreover, ESN would like to drive the attention to the clear lack of any link between the very ambitious goals (mainly in the field of education and research) and their **financing**. None of the objectives could be reached without a commitment of both the EU and member states to invest in these fields. It is crucial that the EU starts investing into education, research, innovation – i.e. into the European citizens and its future. Without this shift of focus, the EU will never be able to play the role in the world it envisages for itself in this strategy.

ESN would also like to point out that the **education, research or mobility** need to be of a **high quality**, otherwise, its impacts might be insignificant or even negative. ESN is aware of the fact that sufficient financing does not automatically bring higher quality, however, finances are a necessary prerequisite for a quality.

The strategy EU 2020 often mentions the link between the education, research and labour market and economy. ESN acknowledges this connections, however, underlines the **importance of education and research for civil society and active participation** of European citizens. It is important that the HEIs and research centres not only cooperate with each other and businesses, but also with other actors in the civil society.

ESN applies the same logic also to the research. ESN stresses that apart from research which is applied and innovation oriented, there is also research which is in its essence **curiosity driven** (and not necessarily less innovative) which is essential to both European higher education and European research area. Any research activity which contributes to a society which is more knowledge-intensive, regardless of its applicability, should be prioritised.

## Conclusions and follow-up

Erasmus Student Network, being an international non-governmental organisation involved in the higher education and mobility, focused in its reaction especially on the role of education, research and mobility in the future strategy 2020.

ESN welcomes the general direction, however, feels that a clearer commitment of all the stakeholders need to be reflected in the strategy in order to ensure its realisation. ESN is thus looking forward to the continuation of the discussion and debate, with all the actors concerned, in order to create a strong and viable strategy for the next 10 years of the EU.

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