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Transnational Cooperation Activity Erasmus+ aiming higher:

*Mediterranean bridges across Africa
and Europe for shared academic pathways*

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS BY

AGENZIA NAZIONALE
ERASMUS+ INDIRE



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Glossary

CBHE Capacity Building for Higher Education

DG EAC Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture

E+ Erasmus+

EC European Commission

EMDM Erasmus Mundus Design Measures

EMJM Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters

ENFP Erasmus+ National Focal Point

ESN Erasmus Students Network

HEI Higher Education Institution

INDIRE Italian National Institute for Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research

KA171 Key Action 171 - International Credit Mobility (ICM)

KA220 Key Action 220 - Cooperation Partnerships

MedNet Mediterranean Network (of E+ National Agencies)

NA National Agency Erasmus+

NEO National Erasmus+ Office

TCA Transnational Cooperation Activity

UNIMED Mediterranean Universities Union

Executive Summary

The TCA "**Erasmus+ Aiming Higher: Mediterranean Bridges Across Africa and Europe for Shared Academic Pathways**" was organised in Tunisia by the Italian National Erasmus+ Agency INDIRE, in cooperation with UNIMED, the National Erasmus Office in Tunisia, and the MedNet network of Erasmus+ National Agencies. The event convened approximately 170 representatives across 16 African and 12 European countries, among which Higher Education Institutions, Erasmus+ National Agencies, National Erasmus+ Offices, and Erasmus+ National Focal Points, as well as key stakeholders such as the Erasmus Students Network and garagErasmus.

The **main objectives** of the TCA were twofold:



- 1) **to relaunch and enhance international academic cooperation between European and African universities:** a core focus of the TCA was empowering African universities to take a proactive role, seek new and strengthen existing partnerships ahead of Call 2027;
- 2) **to discuss and provide constructive feedback to the European Commission on the future Erasmus+ programme (2028–2034)** which is currently being shaped at EU level: the event offered a mix of content presentations and networking opportunities, aiming at providing a comprehensive overview of the various possibilities for funding under the E+ programme as well as collect feedback on the programme's successful initiatives, outstanding structural challenges, and gather ideas and recommendations for the future E+ programme.

Key Takeaways

Importance of African HEIs: For the 2021–2027 funding period, the EC allocated €333 million to the South-Mediterranean region and €584 million to the Sub-Saharan Africa region. The size of these regional funding envelopes demonstrates that investing in African universities is regarded as a key EU geopolitical priority.

Role of African countries in the future Erasmus+ programme: Discussions to allow non-EU countries to fully or partially associate with the E+ programme are underway at EU level, underscoring the role of non-EU HEIs for in a more inclusive future E+ programme.

Continuous hurdles for African HEIs: top four hurdles facing African HEIs in sustainable development remain lack of funding, lack of staff, lack of training opportunities, and lack of institutional cooperation. The importance of the implementation of the African Development Agenda 2063 was emphasized.

Key challenges for the implementation of the Erasmus+ projects in Africa: Severe visa delays, lan-

guage and cultural barriers, high travel and accommodation costs, opening bank accounts, recognition of certificates after the mobility, among other issues, remain key challenges.

Main suggestions put forward during the event: Erasmus+ visa, Erasmus without paper for KA171 projects, digital tools used by all universities and countries, clear auditing guide, better support for study programmes and accommodation, among others.

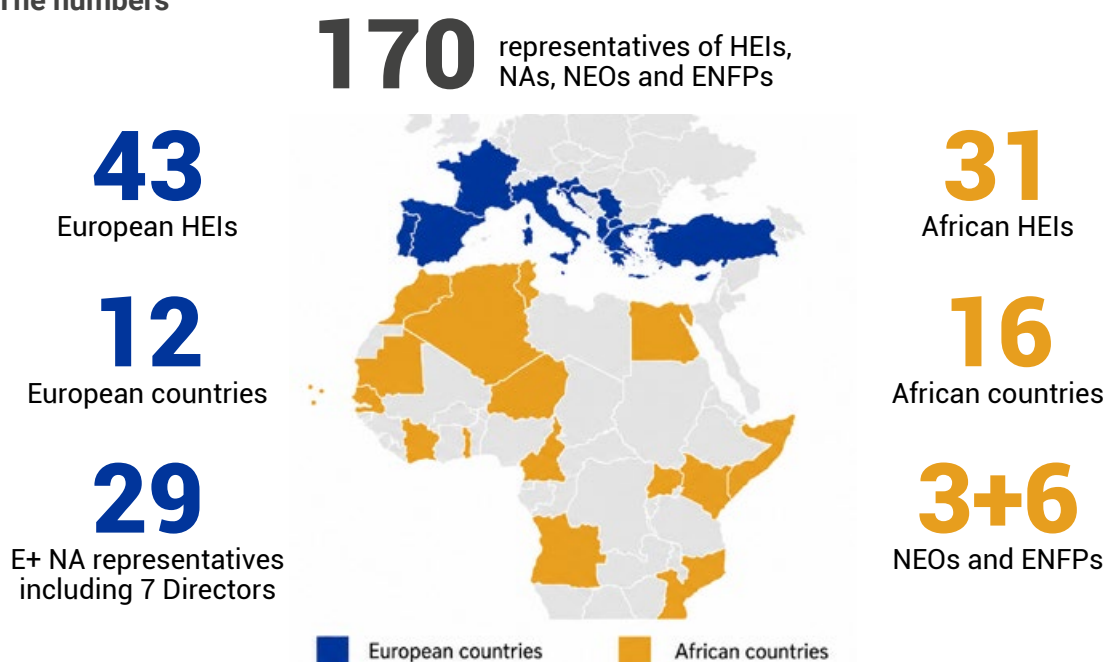
Cooperation between NAs, NEOs and ENFPs: NAs, NEOs and ENFPs were given the opportunity to establish closer relationships, discuss future cooperation and possible projects.

Role of NEOs and ENFPs networks: a broad consensus among EC, NA, NEO and ENFP representatives was reached on the importance of those networks in promoting and disseminating Erasmus+ opportunities in their respective countries.

1. Introduction

The TCA in Tunisia *“Erasmus+ Aiming Higher. Mediterranean Bridges Across Africa and Europe for Shared Academic Pathways”* was organised by the Italian National Erasmus+ Agency INDIRE, with the cooperation of UNIMED, NEO Tunisia and the MedNet network of Erasmus+ NAs: Italy, Croatia, Cyprus, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey, Greece, North Macedonia, Serbia and France.

1.1. The numbers



The event brought together around 170 representatives of HEIs, Erasmus+ NAs, NEOs and ENFPs, coming from 16 African and 12 European countries. The event also saw the participation of stakeholders such as UNIMED, ESN and garagErasmus.

43 European HEIs coming from 12 European countries – Italy, Croatia, Cyprus, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey, Greece, North Macedonia, Serbia and France – were present.

Representatives from **16 African countries** – Tunisia, Algeria, Angola, Cape Verde, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Egypt, Kenya, Mauritania, Morocco, Mozambique, Niger, Senegal, Somalia, Togo, Uganda - representing **31 African HEIs** attended the event.

3 NEOs were present: Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco

6 ENFPs were present: Angola, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Mozambique and Togo

29 representatives of E+ NAs were present, including 7 Directors of NAs



2. The objectives of the TCA

2.1. Overall context

The event was aimed at playing an important role in relaunching international cooperation in the future Erasmus+ programme (2028-2034) that is currently being shaped, fostering dialogue between Europe and Africa on key challenges, best practices, and opportunities for improvement in the field of international academic cooperation. The TCA was designed to enhance participants' international cooperation, expanding existing partnerships to different areas and to different partner HEIs, and to encourage participants to engage in new forms of cooperation. The event aimed at providing a unique opportunity to network, find new partners and share best practices in the context of decentralised (KA171-International Credit Mobility Projects for Higher Education Students and Staff) and centralised (Capacity building for Higher Education, Erasmus Mundus) actions of the Erasmus+ programme.

2.2. More active participation of African HEIs

The TCA in Tunisia was one of those events aiming at strengthening partnerships and encouraging more African HEIs to look for more partners in Europe, to take advantage of the many opportunities the Erasmus+ programme offers. The TCA provided an opportunity to engage with African ENFPs and NEOs, who are essential for promoting and disseminating E+ funding possibilities and ensuring African HEIs can effectively take advantage and capitalise on these opportunities. Through those networks that were created and strengthened, the event aimed at empowering more African HEIs to be proactive and apply for funding when Call 2027 is published. **The TCA also emphasised that not being an EU HEI does not mean automatic exclusion from designing and coordinating E+ projects, demonstrating (through presentations and other informal exchanges) that many non-EU HEIs successfully do so already.** The fact that the African continent receives a big chunk of the annual funding for regional envelopes shows that **African HEIs have proven their value and importance for the EU and its geopolitical priorities.**

3. The outcome

3.1. Sessions - The TCA was a mixture of content and networking sessions.



3.1.1. Institutional opening

The event began with an institutional opening, which saw the participation of H.E. Mr Giuseppe Perrone - Ambassador of the EU to Tunisia, H. E. Mr Alessandro Prunas - Ambassador of Italy to Tunisia, Lavinia Monti - Director of Internationalization of Higher Education of the Italian Ministry of University and Research (online), H. E. Mr Mondher Belaid - Tunisian Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Letizia Cingano - Board Member of INDIRE, Sara Pagliai - Director of the Erasmus+ National Agency INDIRE, Nesrine Baklouti - Coordinator of the National Erasmus+ Office Tunisia

and Marcello Scalisi - Director of UNIMED. The speakers outlined a strategic framework for Europe–Africa cooperation in the field of higher education, emphasising the E+ programme's role in shaping a lasting academic partnership.

3.1.2. European Commission input

The second session saw the presentation of Filip Van Depoele, Head of International Cooperation Unit of DG EAC at the European Commission, who delivered the EC's views on the current E+ programme (2021 - 2027) and reflected on the latest developments of the future E+ programme for the funding period 2028-2034.

DG EAC shared some statistics on the South-Mediterranean and Sub-Saharan Africa Regions, with the former attributed €333 million and the latter €584 million for the current programme period 2021-2027.



On the future programme notable changes include the merge of KA131 and KA171, the possibility for non-EU countries to fully or partially associate to the programme, a commitment to inject funding from "Global Europe", and potential re-designing of Erasmus Mundus, Mediterranean University (Under Pillar I of the Pact for the Mediterranean).



Data for South Med Region

International Credit Mobility
33.000
mobilities

Erasmus Mundus
807
scholarships
and 6 full partners

Capacity Building
Higher Education
64
projects

Capacity Building VET
48
projects

Jean Monnet
9
projects
and 7 networks



Data for Sub-Saharan Africa region

International Credit Mobility
43.000
mobilities

Erasmus Mundus
1.600
scholarships
and 5 full partners

Capacity Building
Higher Education
173
projects

Capacity Building VET
87
projects

Jean Monnet
10
projects
and 4 networks



3.1.3. Networking in "Speed date" form

The "speed date" networking session, facilitated by garagErasmus, aimed at providing the first opportunity for European and African HEI representatives to meet and exchange views on expectations from taking part in the TCA, motivations to engage internationally and to look for more partners, current experience with the E+ programme and aspirations for future projects and collaborations. Staff members of the NAs had the opportunity to establish closer relationships with representatives of the NEOs and ENFPs and discuss future cooperation and possible joint projects, and exchange views on examples of good practice with representatives of HEIs, while also identifying potential partnership opportunities in their respective countries.



3.1.4. E+ projects: students' and institutions' perspectives

The second day began with the session on students' and institutions' perspectives on E+ practices and impact, focusing on a number of E+ projects.

Prof. Hassene Mnif, Vice President of the University of Sfax, Tunisia, gave a presentation on the internationalisation of the University of Sfax through its participation in a number of European and Mediterranean projects through which a strong expertise in terms of academic exchanges has been developed. The University has 118 KA171, 34 CBHE, 2 Jean Monnet ongoing projects.

Anne-Laurence Pastorini, Nathalie Clauter and Silvia Marchionne, Senior Project Managers at UNIMED presented 4 Erasmus+ projects, demonstrating the programme's reach across the Southern Mediterranean and Africa: [RAQMYAT](#), [DIRE-MED](#), [CULTIVAR](#), and [CVEinAI](#). Each project, in a different thematic area and institutional context, demonstrated how Erasmus+ cooperation frameworks can translate into durable academic partnerships and more inclusive pathways between the two continents.

The session concluded with the contributions of **Simone Lepore, ESN International President**, and **Moses Osabutey, E+ alumnus and Communications Manager ESN Iceland**, who focused on the key role of student volunteers in ensuring the Erasmus+ values continue to be applied post-mobility by providing outreach and continuous support to students.



3.1.5. Poster session

During the poster session that followed, **10 posters on different E+ actions** were presented: from CBHE projects and its different Strands, Erasmus Mundus, KA171 and KA220 projects, to double degrees and project proposals.

The poster session aimed at demonstrating the variety of E+ funding possibilities to be taken advantage of and the possibility of continuity: the end of the project does not mean the benefi-



ciary HEI cannot apply for another project – be it for the same action or a different one. Capacity building projects for instance aim at strengthening, facilitating, encouraging institutions' capacities for successful participation in other E+ actions.



3.1.6. Participants' voices: feedback networking session I

This session focused on the active participation of all participants, aiming at gathering their feedback on a number of topics such as success stories of E+ projects, challenges to overcome, and suggestions for a better a smoother future E+ programme. The participants were organised in groups, and each group submitted their input through a platform. To preserve the accuracy and authenticity of the participants' input, the following suggestions submitted through the platform are reported here (mostly)¹ unedited.

A) Success stories

- University of Malta: there are a few successful stories with academics with Tunisia and Kenya based on the engagement of professors
- University of Almeria, Spain: a lot of collaboration with universities in North Africa
- University of Kragujevac, Serbia: first university (in Serbia) to receive the coordination of Erasmus Mundus joint master programme for the master project on engineering. The partnership is between Serbia, Greece and Romania. A lot of work was invested in letting others know about the project and the best way to manage the project. The satisfaction of the students is the ultimate reward for the hard work done
- University of Sousse, Tunisia: new Horizon Europe project "LAB Wise" coordinated with 8 partners. Prep work (networking and contacting new partners) took 5 months (before the opening of the call)
- University of Singidunum, Serbia: cooperation with University of Zanzibar: a whole cycle was spent to guide them and teach them how to manage the Erasmus programme. It was a great achievement to see that they could then implement their own strategy and develop their work
- University of Belgrade, Serbia: 1) hosting students from Syria, Russia and Ukraine during the conflicts, providing support with study and accommodation finding. 2) Double degree implementation with other countries which sometimes can be difficult for the differences in respective methodologies and structure, but it is worth to work on it
- University of Cape Verde: a lot of projects on sustainability, climate change, computer science, health, but at the same time need to improve in the area of management and humanities. A successful story is the project Cultivar which was presented at the TCA, a cooperation between EU and Africa
- garagErasmus: garagErasmus City is a success story, a social regeneration housing project happening in Milan starting in summer 2026. Ready to host the first international students from autumn 2028
- Focusing on Sub-Saharan Africa through KA2 projects. Coordination of a big consortium of African mobilities
- Erasmus+ funding together with additional co-funding at national level (this focuses on strategic fields)
- Refugee program
- Physically disabled student went on Erasmus and went on to do PhD
- Awareness of importance of internationalization (structuring international relations office, discovery of what others are doing, discovering special centers)
- Implemented Capacity Building Projects, not only with Erasmus+ but with Innovation Europe, between Africa and European Universities and Institutions

¹ Typos, stylistic inaccuracies and other minor errors have been edited out.



B) Challenges

- Language barrier
- Economic barriers: buying tickets in advance, covering other costs of insurance and visa fees
- Visa issues: long visa processes
- Opening bank accounts for international students
- Cultural clash
- Few inter-Africa Mobility Programs, especially with Sub-Saharan Universities
- Certificate recognition after the Mobility
- Digital process: a lot of paperwork: systems should be digitalised to facilitate the work and speed up the process
- Mauritania: the biggest difficulty it is to welcome doctoral students, as they have challenges in finding labs to host them

C) What didn't work and should be stopped

- 2-day mobilities
- No possibility of transfer from one region to another in case of difficulty (force majeure)
- Platform for learning language should be stopped because students don't use it
- The strand process of Capacity Building Projects did not work well
- Limitation for Bachelor and Master students to apply for mobility programs from Europe to Africa
- Excessive bureaucracy in order to apply for mobility/capacity building programs
- Giving opportunities for KA171 only to PhD students, opportunities also for undergraduate students (also because PhD students sometimes work and cannot go on mobility for long term periods) should be given

D) What should be continued

- ICM, but how will it work with no quality assessment?
- EMDM
- The philosophy of the programme should be continued
- Mobility Programs are successful and create an opportunity for African and European students for cultural exchange
- Blended Intensive Programs were a success and could be expanded for African Universities.
- Erasmus without paper
- Cooperation partnerships KA2

E) What should be introduced in the new Erasmus+ programme

- Support with study and accommodation programme (currently existing only in some countries and some universities use it/apply it)
- More budget for more mobilities
- More support for visa processes
- More Training opportunities
- Evaluation process, clear auditing guide
- Increasing budget
- Erasmus+ visa
- New approach for funding travel costs
- Increase the follow up for the Project's Results and Impact
- Easy dealing with bureaucracy both for incoming and outgoing international students
- Erasmus without papers for KA171 projects
- The Erasmus+ programme should finance the European Laboratory to host Erasmus+ students
- Digital tools equal for all universities and countries



3.1.7. Africa meets Europe: networking session II

This networking session gave opportunity to African HEIs to network freely with their European counterparts, ESN, UNIMED and garagErasmus, hence providing the possibility for a more in-depth discussion on common interests, projects and possibilities to further explore the many options for obtaining E+ funding.



3.1.8. Restricted meeting NAs-NEOs-ENFPs

The meeting focused on the future of the NEOs and ENFPs networks: there was broad consensus about the relevance of those networks in promoting and informing on E+ opportunities in a coordinated and up-to-date way, ensuring official communication to HEIs in the different countries and continents. More structured cooperation among the networks is needed.



3.1.9. Keynote speech

The event was closed with a keynote speech by **Prof. Jouhaina Gherib, Vice President of the International Association of Universities**, who delivered a presentation on Africa–Europe Academic Cooperation: Pathways towards a Sustainable and Inclusive World, focusing on strengthening the strategic dialogue between Europe and Africa and sharing data and facts from Africa. The importance of the African Development Agenda 2063 as a strategic framework was emphasised, along with the need for more effective use of reliable data, the development of critical thinking, and the strengthening of trust within an increasingly interconnected global academic space. Among the top 4 challenges faced by African HEIs in implementing sustainable development, data showed lack of funding, lack of staff, lack of training opportunities and lack of cooperation with other institutions.



4. What participants said about the event

"Great environment and organisation"

"The event was full of networking opportunities and the selection of participants from both Europe and Africa was excellent. The topics were excellently picked and also the program was excellently planned"

"Plenty of possibilities for networking - e.g. organised meals are a great idea for meeting new people"

"I loved the presentations on the different projects that Erasmus+ supports and their impact in different institutions"

"This kind of events must be promoted once a year with different envelopes of countries all over the world"

"Thank you for the great opportunity and congratulations to the whole team"



5. Official event communication activities

The conference received extensive visibility through the organisers' social media channels, including the official [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [Instagram](#) accounts of the Erasmus+ Italian NA INDIRE, as well as the [Facebook page](#) of the Italian Embassy in Tunisia.

You can find the official news of the TCA published by the Italian E+ NA INDIRE in Italian and in English [here](#). The full press review is available [here](#).

The event also received a considerable media coverage in the Italian press and in international news magazines:

Al-fanar Media

Erasmus+ Conference on Euro-African Collaboration in Education Ends;

UniversityWorld News

"African institutions push for 'shared academic pathways'"



6. Sources

Italian E+ NA background documents

Presentations of: Filip Van Depoele, Simone Lepore, Moses Osabutey, Hassene Mnif, UNIMED, Jouhaina Gherib

Participants' contributions from *Networking session: sharing experiences and shaping the future Erasmus+ international cooperation actions*

Participants' feedback from Satisfaction survey

