

Policy context

Key policy statements that highlight importance of digitalization of Erasmus administration

In January 2022 the European Commission published 2 key EU policy statements that highlight the importance of and cement the direction of digitalization of administrative processes of Erasmus+ mobility:

- The [Commission Communication on a European strategy for universities](#) includes four flagships to boost the European dimension in higher education and research, one of which is ESCI! the Commission urges a wide use of ESCI for all mobile students across Europe in order to facilitate their access to transnational mobility at all levels. ESCI is presented as a key element for a more efficient, easier and greener Erasmus+. The communication further explains the importance of the European Student identifier that will allow to students to be identified across borders and across digital tools. The importance of the roll out of the European Student Card is mentioned as essential to enable the complete digitalisation of the management of Erasmus+ student mobilities from application to issuing of study credentials (page 5). In this communication the Commission commits to "Scale up the European Student Card initiative by deploying a unique [European Student Identifier](#) available to all mobile students in 2022 and to all students in universities in Europe by mid-2024". This concrete timeline provides a big boost to the initiative, signaling that HEIs need to quickly get on board and issue ESI together with connecting to EWP and adopting the European Student Card.
- The Commission has published today a [Proposal for a Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation](#). The European Student Card initiative here is recognized as a key enabler of transnational collaboration of European universities, making it easier for students to study and train in several institutions (page 2). It is recognized that "mainstreaming flexible and inclusive mobility through more coherent mobility frameworks and upscaling the use of the European Student Card initiative increases opportunities for learners, academics, researchers and staff." (page 10). The Commission invites the EU Member States to adopt ESCI via the following specific recommendation: "Foster the digitalisation of mobility management within multilateral partnerships of higher education institutions by upscaling the use of the European Student Card Initiative, in particular the standardisation and digitalisation of business processes around the signing of multilateral interinstitutional agreements (page 12)." The Commission itself commits to "support the roll out of the European Student Card initiative, in particular the digitalisation of business processes that involve multiple signatories and data exchanges in order to reduce the administrative burden of managing students and staff mobility and exchanges embedded within transnational partnerships of higher education institutions" (page 15)

Online administrative procedures in European policy documents

The different digitalisation initiatives in this knowledge base are part of an effort to modernise European Higher Education by digitalising processes. At the European level these efforts are grouped under the [European Student Card Initiative](#) aiming to improve authentication and registration for students who aim to study abroad. The European Student Card Initiative is one of the core initiatives in the vision to create a [European Education Area](#) by 2025.

The European Student Card Initiative and its underlying projects are mentioned in several key European policy documents that came out during the last couple of years:

- Report about the [European Approach to Micro Credentials](#) (December 2020) see p.19, p.28
- Communication about the [European Education Area](#), (September 2020) see p. 21-22;
- Communication about the renewed [Digital Education Action Plan](#) (September 2020), see p. 17;
- Communication about the [Digital Education Action](#) plan (January 2018)
- Communication about the [renewed EU agenda for higher education](#) (May 2017), see p. 11;

It goes without saying that Higher Education Institutions throughout Europe have not only helped drive these efforts and they are expected to remain active actors in supporting the digitalisation processes.

Digital management of student mobility in the new Erasmus Programme

Digitalisation of the administrative procedures is one of the priorities of the new Erasmus Programme.

The programme guide makes clear that all HEI participating in Erasmus Mobilities should implement the digital:

The mobility project should implement the European Student Card Initiative to facilitate the online management of the mobility cycle and other more environmentally friendly and inclusive approaches in line with the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE) and the ECHE guidelines.

As announced in 2019 and confirmed with the new Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE) 2021-2027 and its associated implementation guidelines, accredited higher education institutions commit to implement digital management of their student mobility in line with the standards of the European Student Card Initiative. In line with the objectives of the European Student Card Initiative, the **Erasmus Without Paper** (EWP) Network ensures that any higher education institution can connect to the network and seamlessly share data with their partners to facilitate digital Erasmus+ administrative processes.

Higher Education Institutions are expected to be connected to the EWP Network and to start exchanging digital Erasmus+ agreements (Online Learning Agreements and Inter Institutional Agreements) with their partners through the network **from June 2021 onward**. In order to achieve a fully digital management of Erasmus+ student mobility, all higher education institutions need to be connected as soon as possible. In order to make sure that no one is left behind, the Commission will consider the 2021/2022 academic year as a transitional year. This means that at the very latest before the start of the academic year 2022/2023, all higher education institutions participating in the Erasmus+ programme must be connected to the EWP Network. Alternatively, they may lose their accreditation for the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education.

The Once Only Principle in Connecting Europe Facility

The [Once Only Principle](#) is an important policy goal in reducing administrative burdens under the Connecting Europe Facility programme. For Higher Education it means that students and staff will be able to authenticate themselves with a single login, allowing them to access many services and information available and relevant for student mobility. This will happen regardless of their geographical location therefore strengthening inclusiveness and contributing to delivering the European Education Area (EEA).

In order to ensure the Once Only Principle in HE, it is paramount that systems can uniquely **identify students and authenticate its users**. Therefore the European Student Identifier (ESI) was created and embedded in the eduGAIN infrastructure and the student-facing components of Erasmus Without Paper.

The European Commission strongly encourages higher education institutions to join their National Research and Education Network (NREN) as soon as possible to allow their students to benefit from using their home university credentials and their ESI to identify themselves. An alternative solution for HEIs that are not able to join a NREN is being made available in close cooperation with National Agencies.

Further reading

[Policy Background - Digitisation in Erasmus+ mobility management](#) by Valère Meus (March 2019)

[Digitising Erasmus: no more paperwork](#) by Stefan Jahnke et al. (Linkedin) (August 2018)