**“The Lifelong Learning Programm 2007-2013. A socio-economic analysis of Erasmus programme’s influence on youth mobility, skill-development and employability of Italian students.”**

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Introduction

The Lifelong Learning Programme 2007- 2013: origin and development

The Programme for EU Action in the Field of Lifelong Learning (abbreviated into Life Learning Programme or LLP) has been established on 15th November 2006 by the Decision No 1720/2006/EC of the European Parliament and the Council, regarding the necessity “…*to foster interchange, co-operation and mobility between education and training institutions and systems within the EU so that they may become a world quality reference*”.[[1]](#footnote-1) In fact, the Article 1.2 of the programme Decision represents a clear statement of the general overview of this mission pursued by the European Union: “ *to contribute through lifelong learning to the development of the European Union as an advanced knowledge-based society, with sustainable economic development, more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, while ensuring good protection of the environment for future generations*”.[[2]](#footnote-2)

This policy was specifically adressed to all the institutional players in the sectors of education, training and the world of work. Synergies amongst these fields have been encouraged in order to effectively adapt the Lifelong Learning Programme to the specific needs of each Member State. Officially, the LLP 2007 -2013 replaced three previous programmes sponsored by the European Union: Leonardo da Vinci, Socrates and eLearning . In fact, all of them expired at the end of 2006.

Through the activities supported by the LLP, the establishment of new networks and cultural exchange between institution, people and countries within the EU economic area, has gained a prominent position as a crucial priority for the political agenda set by the Europe 2020 strategy. [[3]](#footnote-3)

Over seven years of activity, the Lifelong Learning programme supported and reinforced the process of implementation of European policies in the education and training fields, coordinating the actions undertaken by each Member State.

The specific objectives set by the programme aimed at:

1. Promoting learning mobility of all learners, teachers and trainers across Europe in order to create and develop new and flexible pathways of future careers and innovative professional backgrounds.
2. Enhancing the quality and efficiency of education and training in EU contries by deeply enabling the population to acquire basic skills and competencies required for their employability.
3. Making lifelong learning and mobility tanglible opportunities to strenghten the concepts of equity, social cohesion and active citizenship.
4. Supporting creativity and innovation as key factors of success at all levels of education and training. Moreover, transversal competencies are promoted by the establishment of partnerships across different angles of the European job market: economic, educational and cultural institutions are strongly encouraged to cooperate together, analyzing the population’s needs for a better labour market.

To achieve these goals, a budget of EUR 6970 million has been set up for all the activites promoted from 2007 to 2013. This budget has been allocated according to the different programmes contained in the LLP strategic plan: four specific sectoral programmes focusing on school education (Comenius), higher education (Erasmus), vocational training (Leonardo da Vinci) and adult learning (Grundtvig). Moreover, two other programmes have been developed to sustain this project: a programme aimed at developing teaching, research and reflection on European integration supporting key European institutions and associations (Jean Monnet Programme) and a Transversal Programme embracing cross-sectoral areas regarding policy cooperation issues and innovation in lifelong learning, languages and development of innovative ICT procedures and technology.

The following chart illustrates the allocation of the total budget amongst the four main branches of LLP:

The Erasmus Programme: a unified European mobility system since 1987

The European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (ERASMUS programme) was launched in June 1987 by the European Economic Community, with the aim of enabling every citizen to reach and strenghten the highest possible level of necessary vocational training for his professional life. This programme was also focused on broadening vocational training to meet the arising international requirements from the European continent, which was beginning to be more and more interconnected and influenced by the activity of each State.

The European interest regarding the educational field was rooted in each country since the birth of the European Union and it has found different ways to express itself over the time. In fact, the Erasmus programme was inspired and built on pilot student exchanges from 1981-1987, 6 years before the European Commision could approve this flagship programme in education and training. In the following years, it has been incorporeted with a number of other projects into the Socrates programme, which was born in 1995 and replaced with Socrates II programme five years after, in January 2000. In 2007 Socrates II was absorbed by the Lifelong Learning Programme (2007-2013).

As subproject of the Lifelong Learning Programme, the Erasmus programme found its specific mission: enhancing cultural exchanges of students in higher education as well as promoting cooperation between universities and the world of work.

Nowadays the Erasmus Programme has found new life under the name of Erasmus+ programme, a EU project for education, training, youth and sport. With a budget of 450 million euros, the Erasmus+ programme remains the biggest project promoting youth mobility across Europe.

Furthermore, between 1987 and 2013, almost three million of European university students took part to this programme, spending one or two semester to study at a higher education institution abroad, obtaining full recognition of the academic credits earned there. Their experience in different institutions across Europe did not compromise or delay the timely award of their degree or diploma by their universities.

The Erasmus Programme: an Italian perspective

Even though the Erasmus programme has been named after the well-known philosopher, humanist and theologian Erasmus of Rotterdam (1465 – 1536) who became a mobility precursor studying and working in several parts of Europe, a key role has been played in more recent history by an Italian professor, Sofia Corradi. Born in 1934, Sofia Corradi is worlwide known as “Mamma Erasmus (the mother of Erasmus)”[[4]](#footnote-4) for her unceasing commitment and contribution to the process of European integration on youth mobility.

Her interest in promoting educational experiences abroad draws inspiration from her personal life and student career as one of the first Italian student to spend an entire year studying abroad at Columbia University after being awarded a Fulbright scholarship. The negative feedback received once she came back in Italy – she couldn’t convert her study period at Columbia University according to Italian Educational System at that time – gave her the force and patience to iniatiate a national campaign which raised awereness on this topic in 1963, 25 years before the European commision could sign the Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (the ERASMUS programme). Moreover, the same year in Europe two fundamental texts were published: in The United Kingdom, the Robbins Report, and in Italy, the Ermini Report. [[5]](#footnote-5) Both have been decisive for the evolution of the university system of their respective countries and both confirmed Corradi’s idea: the urgent need for international shared principles like university autonomy, a strong consideration of the university networks as key players in international cultural relations, education as fundamental promoter of critical thinking and above all, the access to national and international education as fundamental human right. We shall admit that one general problem which was affecting the Italian educational system at that time, was the pathological inactivity of the university system on the whole and the administrative difficulties inccured by students who were trying to change the extremely rigid university curriculum. In 1969, an individual student’s university curriculum was completely composed of pre-set courses, which are undoubtedly inadequate for a flexible job market.

In the following years, as Scientific Director of the Rome office of the Standing Conference of Rectors of Italian Universities (CRUI), Sofia Corradi could confront her ideas with other preminent Italian scholars and politicians who supported her campaign in internationalizing the Italian educational system. In 1969, the Ministry of Italian Education, Mario Ferrari Aggradi, publicly stated that Corradi’s work was inspirational for the Education Bill 612/1969.

In 1976, Corradi received an international confirmation of her commitment to this cause, when the Council of the European Communities and the Ministers of Education signed a resolution regarding the urgent necessity to implement mutual understanding of the different educational systems in the Community, ensuring a continuos comparison of policies, experiences and ideas related to educational field. [[6]](#footnote-6)

The work of Sofia Corradi has been clearly essential for the Italian system to develop national information and advisory services to promote the mobility and interchange of pupils and teachers within the European Community.

Her memorandum [[7]](#footnote-7), which was entitled “*Equivalence of years of university studies carried out by Italian students in foreign universities*”*,* clearly sums up what today are the essential characteristics and futures of the Erasmus Programme and which are the main goals to achieve.

Another essential event to consider in order to analyze the effect of the Erasmus programme from 2007 to 2013 and its overall impact on Italy, is the official meeting organized by the Italian and German Conferences of Rectors which took place in Villa Vigoni in June 1989. This action, which was initially aimed at promoting Erasmus exchanges between the two countries, revealed its incredible potential as a milestone for the correct application of Erasmus programme principles in Italy during the next 28 years, solving delicate problems for professors and students.

It was agreed that the overall identity of education, courses and evaluation process should be taken into accounts in designing not general and abstract evaluations of equivalence but flexible patterns based on the diversity of each university programme. The starting point of this analysis shall be the reciprocal trust and esteem between the institutions of higher education, which are directly involved in avoiding any delay in the acquisition of the final degree by the student. Moreover, the right application of this principle is based on the responsabilities and duties of the professor in charge of coordinating the student project during all the phases: preliminary phase, conclusion and recognition. These ideas are still valid suggestion in the assesment process of Italian students partecipating in the Erasmus programme.

Eventually, the Italian commitment and participation towards the creation and the implementation of the Erasmus programme has been more than satisfactory. Italy ranks as one of the top European contributors in the mobility system, and this couldn’t be fully comprehensible if we didn’t draw a detailed history of why and how the Erasmus idea was born in the Italian peninsula.

The following table summarizes the main features of the LLP-Erasmus programme:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ERASMUS Mobility Programme (LLP-Erasmus 2007-2013) | |
| Target of the policy | The policy targets several stakeholders related to tertiary education institutions in the countries which make part of the EHEA (European Higher Education Area):  - Students (From Undergraduate to Post-Doctorate)  - University teachers and professors  - Staff of higher education institutions  - Trainers and professionals in enterprise |
| Programme start | 1987\* |
| Countries involved | Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherland, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Croatia, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, FYROM\*\* |
| Who created the programme | The LLP program was created in November 2006 with a decision by the European Parliament and by the Council of the European Union. Along with the implementation of LLP in the participating countries, national agencies were set up to monitor, evaluate and help higher education institutions to make the right steps towards the adoptions of this EU policy. |
| Main aims and objectives of ERASMUS | - Improve and increase the mobility of students and staff across the European Union.  - Enhance and increase school partnerships across the European Union.  - Foster foreign language learning, technology for education, and better teaching techniques  - Enrich the quality and number of teacher training in the European dimension.  - Improve methods of teaching and school management.  - Supporting creativity and innovation as key factors of success at all levels of education and training |
| Motivation for Italy to join ERASMUS | Italy shares the aims and objectives listed by the European Union. Also, the decision of the European Parliament being binding for every member state, Italy must join ERASMUS and undertake all the actions needed for its successful implementation. In addition, the Italian commitment towards a profitable impact of the LLP program can be traced to the origins of the Erasmus program, initiated by an Italian woman, Sofia Corradi. Statistics and figures about the Italian participation to LLP-Erasmus clearly demonstrate the high motivation Italy had in the programme. |
| # of students involved (EU) from 2007 to 2013 | ~ 3.333.000 |
| # of students involved (Italy) from 2007 to 2013 | ~ 254.000  This number rapresents the 7,62% of the total student population involved in the programme. |

*\* The ERASMUS programme was created in 1987. In our research we will analyze the programme in the years from 2007 to 2013, when its name was changed into LLP (Lifelong Learning Programme).*

*\*\* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is participating under the preparatory measures phase.*

Data & Statistical descriptive analysis

Clarification about data sources

Database design and data collection are widely recognised as the starting point for any statistical and socio-economic analysis that is commited to effectively disantangle the complex reality of a phenomenon. Efforts at this stage are always towards achieving the objectives that we have previously set: compiling and supplying a data set which fulfils the requirements of size, volume and traceability and investigating the potential correlations we want to assess. As we truly believe these steps are fundamental for anyone who is beginning to explore not only the specific objects of our analysis but any other issue related to this European policy, we have segmented our database and research process into different sections according to a precise timeline:

* Erasmus programme (1987-1995)
* Socrate I programme (1995-1999)
* Socrates II programme (2000 – 2006)
* Lifelong Learning Programme (2007 – 2013)
* Erasmus Plus programme (2014-2020)

According to this logical structure, we have examined each period focusing our main attention on how the youth mobility program has been overall designed by the European Union, how it has been implemented regionally and how official national data and feedbacks have been collected. The results of this analysis and researches, which have been conducted in accordance with these criteria, led us to choose the Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-2013 as the most representative stage of Erasmus programme’s growth in Italy.

In fact, during the LLP term, the Erasmus programme has benefited from a deep evaluation process conducted by national agencies and international observatories, which helped the national Government in identifying innovative and constructive strategies to apply this educational policy in the Italian peninsula. Moreover, different research istitutions in the educational field have collaborated over the chosen time in monitoring the Italian performance and realizing reports; among these we can recall AlmaLaurea – a national university consortium – and Fondazione Agnelli – a private research institute on culture and education-.

This intense activity differs from the one of previous periods as the youth mobility system has reached not only a wide interest amongst the European policy’s target but also amongst extra-european policy makers who are fascinated by this successful project. Furthermore, starting from 1st January 2014, the Eramus programme has been replaced by Erasmus+, which integrates policies and features regarding new missions to pursue[[8]](#footnote-8). After 25 years, especially with the replacement of the LLP, the Erasmus programme has found new horizons to reach.

In order to gain a complete knowledge about the impact of the LLP-Erasmus Programme on the Italian student population, we gathered data from “The Erasmus Impact Study”. This broad research offers a unique opportunity to compare the Erasmus student’s perceived development with the real development of European non-erasmus students through their academic careers. These data have been cross-checked with those obtained by the Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR) to obtain specific data regarding the Italian situation. Moreover, the activities promoted by ISTAT (Italian National Institute for Statistics), which drafts every three years a “*Survey on the education and work patterns of secondary-school graduates*[[9]](#footnote-9)*”*, have been a fundamental tool of research.

Eventually, we shall underline the fact that we have chosen to analyze only the impact of the LLP-Erasmus programme on youth mobility, not taking into account other types of mobility (staff) and short opportunity. Our interest lies in the former type of mobility, as it involves by far the greatest share of participants. [[10]](#footnote-10)

In the following pages, we will try to evaluate the outcome and consistency of the policy’s aims through the assessment of qualitative and quantative data regarding two issues:

1. The decrease of unemployment before and after the Erasmus programme. This mobility system might help to improve the skills required and needed by the labour market, as of point 2, therefore increasing the employability and reducing the unemployement’s rate amongst young professionals.
2. A comparison between the perceived importance of individual personal characteristics before and after the Erasmus experience, related to the ones of non-mobility students. In fact, the LLP-Erasmus programme aims at providing mobility opportunities to strengthen several personal and general values, especially those based on equality, social cohesion, tolerance and active citizenship.

Assessing objective 1: Mobility tends to influence the youth unemployment rate.

Student mobility has grown in scale and significance alongside the development of the Erasmus programme over the last decades. From its start in 1987 to the academic year 2012-2013, more than 4 000 high education institutions have joined the network promoting exchange opportunities to more than 3 million students who partecipated to the programme. This gradual development has been directly correlated to the growing needs of the European society, especially of the labour market.

In fact, international study or work experiences have gained increasing significance and are widely recognized as vital asset[[11]](#footnote-11) and powerful source of competitive advantage for successfull candidates who aspire to work in multinational companies or start a brilliant career. Moreover, as the entire world keeps being more and more interconnected, experiences abroad, especially out of one’s confort zone, are evaluated as positive qualifications to look for in a potential candidate[[12]](#footnote-12).

As this process intensifies, the European job market is faced with constant mismatches and skills gaps between what employers require from candidates and what candidates can offer to employers. In 2013-2014, there were more than 5.7 million of European citizens unemployed and only one third of employers could find employees with the right skills required by the labour market at that time[[13]](#footnote-13). Since the LLP-Erasmus programme enhances the improvement and efficiency of education and training in EU contries, by fostering the population to acquire basic competencies and skills required for their employability, it clearly represents a prompt emergency response measure also to this urgent issue.

We will qualitatively and quantitatively prove it in the following facts and figures.

*Figure 1*

*Figure 1*, which is represented above, depicts the increasing number of participants to the Erasmus Programme. Both European and Italian students have raised their interest’s level regarding the project in the 6 years of analysis.

From the Italian side, this upward trend is confirmed by the growing allocation budget which is annualy set up by the European Union. In fact, the European funds for the Erasmus programme in Italy have sharply increased: from 2007-2008 ( EUR 32 246 164, 25) to 2012-2013 (EUR 42 179 296,83) the total budget allocated to the Italian peninsula has almost increased of EUR 10 million. This positive growth proves the ability of the Italian educational system to mantain a high level of efficiency on youth mobility, following the aims set by the European Union and its expectations. It can be assumed that in the years to come, this rising rate will continue to grow. Indeed, the Italian participation to the Erasmus Programme has always been stable and continuos and it has not been deeply affected by exogenous and endogenous shocks caused by recent political and economic events.

Although the share of Italian mobility, compared to the European one, could seem stuck to around ten percent – *table 1*- , its educational system has been able to ensure an almost constant rate of partecipation since 1989, while the countries involved were increasing in number. In fact, as new Member States have joined the EU, the mobility network has enlarged its borders offering new study and placement opportunities.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Academic Year** | **Erasmus student (Europe)** | **Erasmus student (Italy)** | **Share of Italian mobility on European's one** |
| 1987-1988 | 3244 | 220 | 7% |
| 1988-1989 | 9914 | 1365 | 14% |
| 1989-1990 | 19456 | 2295 | 12% |
| 1990-1991 | 27906 | 3355 | 12% |
| 1991-1992 | 36314 | 4202 | 12% |
| 1992-1993 | 51694 | 5308 | 10% |
| 1993-1994 | 62262 | 6808 | 11% |
| 1994-1995 | 73407 | 7217 | 11% |
| 1995-1996 | 84642 | 8969 | 11% |
| 1996-1997 | 79874 | 8907 | 11% |
| 1997-1998 | 85999 | 9271 | 12% |
| 1998-1999 | 97601 | 10875 | 12% |
| 1999-2000 | 107666 | 12421 | 12% |
| 2000-2001 | 111092 | 13236 | 12% |
| 2001-2002 | 115432 | 13940 | 12% |
| 2002-2003 | 123600 | 15216 | 11% |
| 2003-2004 | 135586 | 16810 | 11% |
| 2004-2005 | 144037 | 16419 | 11% |
| 2005-2006 | 154421 | 16341 | 10% |
| 2006-2007 | 159308 | 17179 | 10% |
| 2007-2008 | 182697 | 18364 | 10% |
| 2008-2009 | 198523 | 19414 | 10% |
| 2009-2010 | 213266 | 21039 | 10% |
| 2010-2011 | 231408 | 22031 | 10% |
| 2011-2012 | 249764 | 23377 | 10% |
| 2012-2013 | 268143 | 25244 | 10% |

*Table b1*

The rising number of Italian students involved in the Erasmus Programme shows that the policy-makers’ aim to foster youth mobility has been positevely achieved despite negative phenomenons which could have partially influenced the overall performance, such as the growing unemployement rate in Italy.[[14]](#footnote-14) In fact, even if the unemployment rate has dramatically risen along the years in which the LLP was running, since the unemployement rate moved from 14,10 % in 2007 to 29,50 % in 2013 - *Figure 2* -, the Italian partecipation has not been affected.

*Figure 2\_ The unemployement rate refers to youngs between 19 -29 years old.*

Nevertheless, we shall point out that the Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR) has reported that in challenging and difficult times more and more students have started to drop liberal arts and education studies, choosing majors that are perceived as more useful for their future and for the labour market as business and engineering.

Considering the high unemployment rate, we found interesting to see how it is related to young students both after 12 months from the graduation day and five to ten years after it.

*Figue 3* and *Figure 4* showthe impact of unemployment on Erasmus and Non Mobile student in the long-term and five to ten yeard after the graduation day.

This impact is significantly different: Erasmus students are less affected by unemployment.

*Figure 3[[15]](#footnote-15)*

*Figure 5[[16]](#footnote-16)*

The unemployment rate for Erasmus student in the long- term is three percent lower than the Non Mobile one and less than half of Non Mobile student after five to ten years from the graduation cerimony. This outcome assesses the importance and influence of study exchange and placement opportunities offered by the European Union through the LLP-Erasmus programme. Students do not only benefit from an educational and cultural point of view: they tend to perform better in the labour market and to better fit in the employers’ requirements (e.g. assesment 1). Students who had the chance to train or study abroad have gained knowledge in specific disciplines from another cultural perspective and have also strengthen skills highly valued by High Education Institute and recruiters.

For this reason we can conclude that the policy outcome is, on this matter, consistent with the objectives set out by the European Commision.

Assessing objective 2: Mobility influences specific personal characteristics.

As the labour market becomes more and more competitive in each Member State and in the overall European environment, employers and recruiters tend to focus their attention in finding the right set of hard and soft skills in potential candidates. Nevertheless, while hard skills – such as proficiency in a foreign language or computer programming – are fundamental for specific position, soft skills have also increased their importance as it’s common belief that hard skills are easier to train rather than soft skills. [[17]](#footnote-17)

In this first assessment, we will demonstrate how study and / or placement opportunities abroad improve selected characteristics in students and young professionals.

In order to evaluate the outcome generated by the Erasmus programmes, we have chosen to use the same personal traits analyzed by the European Commission in detecting the typical student profile[[18]](#footnote-18):

* Curiosity: personal tendency to actively seek new experiences.
* Confidence: strong conviction regarding one’s own ability.
* Decisiveness: active, critical and decive attitude towards others.
* Tolerance of Ambiguity: ability to tolerate and understand the behaviour and values of other individuals.
* Serenity: knowledge of one’own strenghts and weaknesses.
* Vigour: this value reflects a “problem solver” attitude.

We will qualitatively and quantitatively prove the effected of the LLP-Erasmus programme in the following facts and figures.

As *Figure 6* shows, Italian students strongly distinguish themselves from European ones for their perception of how important these six skills are in potential candidates. Infact, Italian students’ radar chart register an impressive low level of Confidence, 83 points out of 100 compared to the European avarage of 94 points. Furthermore, lower scores have been assigned to other skills: Italian students consider Decisiveness and Serenity less important than other students across the continent. Only one skill is ranked higher than the European average: vigour (89 for Italian students compared to 87 for European students). This skill seems to better fit to the Italian labour market as it is also considered more important by Italian employers, compared to the European ones.

*Figure 6*

Overall, Italian students seem to underestimate the importance of most of the characteristics in assessment, both compared to their European peers, both confronted with the expectation by employers.

If we look at *figure 7*, it is clear at a first sight that the importance given to the characteristics by employers does not differ strongly under a European or Italian perspective, and that generally all of the traits selected are regarded as rather fundamental by the peninsula’s employers.

*Figure 7*

Another important consideration can be drawn from a cross-comparison between European students and employers and Italian ones. On one side, the european perpective on these skills’ importance is rather homogeneous: students evaluate the given characteristics in almost the same way employers do. On the other side, the comparison between the two Italian points of view denotes a strong difference: the italian youth doesn’t look to be aware of what the demands are from their very same labor market.

Hence, we can conclude from the last findings that students of Italian universities are in urgent need of a more conscious self-awareness and evaluation of the given values to better fit in both their internal and international job market. And as this kind of features are enhanced by the participation to the LLP- Erasmus programme, we must make the point that the participation to this European exchange program is of extreme benefit and importance for the Italian students in order to increase their chances of employability and contribute to the hard-to-tackle problem of youth unemployment.

The participation to Erasmus being a good remedy is illustrated in *Figure 8*, which shows the improvement in the perception of the six above-mentioned values by italian students who participated in an Erasmus mobility experience (study and /or placement).

In all of the characteristics, the international experience and the contribution of Erasmus on the perceptions of them is of extreme relevance. Italian students witness an improvement in all of the qualities which are needed by italian and European employers, now better fitting in the ideal type requested by them.

Confidence and decisiveness, the two qualities that students lacked the most, after the completion of a study/work semester abroad, gain eight points and six points respectively. Tolerance of ambiguity, something in which Italian students were not particularly skilled, experience the most improvement passing from 73 to a whole 89 points.

*Figure 8*

Summing up, we can assert that, consistently with some of the main objectives of the Erasmus programme, the participation to an exchange abroad fosters some type of skills and personal characeristics that are relavant to the job market. This type of skill-learning is especially relevant for the Italian youth, which, compared to the European one, starts from a point of disadvantage, both because of a high demand by the employers and because of a wrong evaluation of the values which are important to them.

Conclusion

Policy results and consistency to expectations

The need for effective procedures and policies regarding the education and training field has never been more urgent as it is today. This necessity is mainly driven by current changes to the labour market’s legislation and regulation, European social and economic development and generally speaking youth’s approach to life and the society.

Monitoring and assessing the efficiency of policies – also indeed their effectiveness –, represents a fundamental part of the activities carried out by a policy maker who is really interested in promoting a better quality environment for future generations.

This purpose has been broadly confirmed by the way the Longlife Learning Programme, especially the Erasmus Programme, have been designed, implemented and improved by the European Commission and all the Member States over the time.

Regarding the Italian situation, the Erasmus Programme has achieved successful goals in promoting not only tanglible opportunities to broaden students’ cultural and academic background but also spreading the message of a more united continent where learning programmes are cordinated towards a single objective: creating a system that could be *a world quality reference[[19]](#footnote-19)*.

We do believe the The Longlife Learning programme has positively reached its overall purposes in Italy, especially these regarding the Erasmus Programme :

* Improve and increase the mobility of students across the European Union. In fact, in 7 years (from 2007 to 2013) 129 469 Italian students took part to any activity (exchange or placement) offerted by the programme. Italy shares the ten percent of the total programme’s participants
* Enhance and increase school partnerships across the European Union. More than 200 Italian High Education Institutes have joined the European network. 4000 institution have been involved since the birth of the programme. The Italian participation is aligned to the European avarage.
* Support creativity and innovation as key factors of success at all levels of education and training. Italian students, who participated to the Erasmus programme, reported to have gained higher level of Curiosity and Vigour. (e.g assessment 2)

For what concerns the specific points of the LLP-Erasmus programme analyzed beforehand, the consistency evaluation confirms what we have previously proved:

* **The Mobility System promoted by the LLP-Erasmus programme tends to influences the unemployment rate**. Mobility experiences (study or placement opportunities) have a more than positive effect on long-term unemployment rate, reducing its share. (Assesment 1)
* **The Mobility System promoted by the LLP**-**Erasmus programme influences specific personal characteristics**. Erasmus students perceive positive increase of specific skills required by the Italian labour market. (Assesment 2)

Literature review

The purpose of this brief literature review is to provide a range of academic papers, think-tank researches or private company evaluation reports, to our readers or whoelse interested in deepening his own knowledge regarding the positive effect of the LLP-Erasmus Programme on the Italian student population. Nevertheless, we shall precise that most of the literature review available has been produced by National Agencies and European Institutions, which are specifically aimed at collecting and analyzing data regarding the impact of this policy.

A shortly list of the most active abovementioned Italian institution is provided below:

1. INDIRE (National Institute for Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research**).** It is the Italian Ministry of Education’s oldest research organization in Italy. Its main activities are prompted at evaluating and investigating educational trends in Italy and in the European landscape.
2. INAPP (National Institute for Public Policy Analysis). Public institution that monitors the impact of national policies related to the labour market and the educational system in Italy.
3. Agenzia Nazionale Giovani: (National Youth Agency). Public agency directly coordinated by the Italian Presidency of the Council of Ministry.

All these institutions have produced reliable and interesting reports and analysis, which have been our starting point in assessing the impact of the LLP-Erasmus programme in Italy.

For what regards published papers and researches on this topic, the existing literature in Italian language is little and limited to articles, as the main duty to evaluate the programme is entrusted to the analysis by the above-listed agencies.

By the way, we would like to underline the interesting document written by Luca Raffini from the Department of Political and Social Sciences of the University of Florence. In his paper “*When the Eramus generation meets the precarious generation. The transnational mobility of italian and spanish youth*”, mobility is investigated “*as an obligation, more than a choice, and as a form of brain drain from Southern to Central and Northern European countries, more that a carrier of horizontal europeanization*”.

Moreover, his precise analysis supports our assessment on the impact of the LLP-Erasmus programme on the Italian youth both regarding the unemployment rate and the increase of job-related skills.

Further reports have been published by a well-known Italian newspaper, “Il Sole 24 ore” on its online section dedicated to university and research. The “*Erasmus programme impact on life choices”* report emphasizes how taking part to this programme could strongly influence personal choices regarding one’s own future, career and even private life.

The policy we have chosen entails so many aspects that it is actually impossible to cover all of them in a single evaluation. Concluding this report we hope to have given, on one side, a comprehensive overview of the part of the policy we have analyzed; on the other, we wish and suggest that further research will be conducted on the other numerous aspects of the Erasmus impact on the Italian student population.

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1. Decision No 1720/2006/Ec [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Extracted by “*Communication from the Commission: Europe 2020 - A Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth*”. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Sofia Corradi is the tenth person, and the second woman, to receive the Carlos V European Award from the European Academy of Yuste Foundation for her research and activity regarding the youth mobility system in Europe. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. During the fourth Fanfani government (1962-1963) an intense debate regarding the Italian educational system and situation led to the establishment of a Commission of Inquiry named Ermini Commission after its Chairman. This Commision proposed a final report submitted to the Ministry of Public Education in July 1963, which has been considered as a public policy proposal and instrument for the subsequent university reform. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. e.g Directive 97/7/ec of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 1997. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Its objective was immediately stated: “ To give Italian students the possibility, out of total four yeard, for instance, to carry out three at an Italian and one at a foreign university. The proposed text (...) guarantees the student (who has received previous assurance that his examinations will be recognized if he passes them, and therefore, pledges himself to study abroad, investing his time and money) and also guarantees the quality of his studies, because these will not be validated until the student has provided documentary proof that the programme, proposed and approved, has actually been completed, and that he has passed the exams at the foreign university. In addition, parents who can afford the expense actually send their children abroad. The objective is now to provide the same possibility to young people whose families cannot afford this luxury (and these certainly comprise the vast majority). Besides the fact that allowing the student this possibility does not involve any expenditure on the part of the State, it is evident that from the point of view of the students and their families, a period of life abroad is not such a significant additional expense, providing that the foreign studies be recognized toward the acquisition of the final degree: in fact, there is no great difference between the cost of a child studying for four years in Italy and studying three years in Italy and one abroad. Instead, because of the present regulations, one year of study abroad is a luxury reserved to those students whose families can afford to support them for one year more than those normally required. The risk that a student may go abroad to have fun rather than study, does not exist, because, if he fails to study enough to pass the exams, he will receive no recognition. (...)The fact is that the pre-existing norms regarding this issue, which are unfortunately still in force, are based on a nationalistic attitude whereby Italian students should not study abroad, except for very particular family reasons, and cultural exchanges are not looked upon favourably. Today’s attitude is completely the opposite: countless recommendations by the United Nations, UNESCO, the Council of Europe, and preliminary considerations of international treaties express the wish to increase cultural exchange, considering it one of the best means by which to promote understanding and friendship between populations, and, consequently, peace. In this sense, Article 11 of the Italian Constitution also states, “Italy repudiates war as a means of offence against the liberty of other populations and as an instrument of resolution of international controversies; it concedes, in conditions of parity with other States, those limitations of sovereignity considered necessary for ensuring peace and justice among nations; it promotes and favours international organizations aimed at this objective”. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Erasmus+ was launched by the European Commission on January 1st 2014 and will expire in 2020, after having accomplished its objectives according to the “Europe 2020 Vision”. This programme is not only an improvement of its predecessor but it can be seen as part of a more integrated strategy in which other projects – as the “Youth in Action programme”- are merged into. Consequently, Erasmus + offers new opportunities to applicants who can undertake several erasmus experiences related to work and study (now more than one, as it was before) and apply to job offer and exchanges even out of the European Union. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. It’s a cross-sectional sample interview of 500.000 secondary-school graduates of a given year. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. All the data used have been mainly originated by five online survey launched in 2013 by the European Commission, which has been supported by national agencies in each Member State. This study comprises 78 891 individual responses, 56 733 students who participated, 18 618 alumni, 964 higher education institutions and 652 employers across 34 countries participating in the programme. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Carpenter, Sanders, & Gregersen, 2001; Sambharya, 1996. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. “Companies are operating over so many international boundaries, so the more languages and experience with different cultures you can bring to a company, the more you can help expand its global reach.”, Oliver Watson, managing director for UK, North America and the Middle East at Michael Page, Financial Times. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Statistics provided by the European Commision for the year 2013-2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. “High rates of youth unemployment represent both widespread personal misfortune for individuals and a lost opportunity for critical national and global economic development. Unemployment in youth has been shown to have lifelong effects on income and employment stability, because affected young people start out with weaker early-career credentials, and show lower confidence and resilience in dealing with labor market opportunities and setbacks over the course of their working lives; (…) the perception of an increasing unemployement rate can influence study and training choices”. Youth unemployment challenge and solution, Manpower Group. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Data displayed in this chart have been extracted by a European commission report “The Erasmus Study” which was edited in 2014. In this analysis, Italian trends and rates have been aggregated to the ones of other countries characterized by the same impacts that have been generated by the Erasmus programme. Italy has been associated to Spain, Portugal, Greece, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro,Turkey in a cluster that is named “Southern Europe”. This choice is justified by the low registered feedback variances amongst these countries on specific issues. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See footnote 15 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. We shall clarify that soft skills are harder to quantify since they are subjective skills. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. These six factors are deeply linked to general employability skills required by the labour market in Europe according to several researches conducted by the European Commission. Moreover these personality straits are usually affected by experiences undertaken during the individual student life, in this way they have been used to compare mobile and non-mobile groups of respondents. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Decision No 1720/2006/EC of the European Parliament and the Council [↑](#footnote-ref-19)