

Kastamonu University

Erasmus Policy Statement (2021-2027)

What would KU like to achieve by participating in the Erasmus Programme? How does our participation in the Erasmus Programme fit into our institutional internationalisation and modernisation strategy?

Kastamonu University (KU), established in 2006, is one of the public universities in Turkey. Currently, KU carries out its education and research activities within its 13 faculties, 16 schools of vocational education, 3 graduate institutes and more than 20 research centres with around 30000 students and 810 teaching staff members. KU offers about 200 undergraduate and graduate programmes, in the fields of education, forestry, tourism, engineering, architecture, health sciences, sports, economy, communication, humanities, aviation, theology and fine arts. As is highlighted in its strategic plan, KU aims to promote scientific and critical thinking, problem solving and creativity and to raise awareness of individual differences (disabilities and cultural diversities). KU also shares its expertise and the knowledge it produces and the workforce it cultivates, primarily in the fields forestry and nature tourism, to the service of humanity for regional, national and international sustainable development. KU aims at becoming an innovative and respected university at national and international level, playing a pioneering role in the development of the region by conducting qualified research and collaborations. To this end, KU focuses on internationalisation and inter-institutional cooperation in its institutional strategic plans since 2010, and sets realistic and fruitful goals for its future. In its new strategic plan (2020-2024), KU underlines the importance of its existing international relations with other institutions abroad and aims to build new collaborations by adopting Erasmus as an essential part of its strategy for modernisation and internationalisation.

In line with its overall internationalisation and modernisation strategy, KU has been a member of the Caucasus University Association and International Universities Council. With its green campus area surrounded by forests, KU works ambitiously to produce sustainable development both within and outside Turkey, with projects ranging from cultural integration to ecotourism. KU has established 22 research centres focusing especially on science, technology, child, youth, women, career development, culture, arts, history and society. In addition to previous and current EU-funded and international projects conducted with other institutions mainly in Europe and Asia, KU envisages further project activities with institutions from all around the world. To this end, the number and quality of projects has been increasing steadily in recent years.

Currently, KU has signed 81 agreements within Erasmus+ programme, 50 agreements within Mevlana programme (an exchange programme similar to Erasmus only with countries other than European ones), and around 90 other bilateral agreements signed with other institutions outside Turkey for exchange and scientific collaboration. Moreover, the University, with 3888 degree-seeking international students from 58 countries, is an international institution in many aspects, paying close attention to international standards of quality as well as principles and practices of accreditation.

The main internationalisation goals of KU under Research (#2.2) and Teaching and Learning (#1.5) domains specified in the University's 2020-2024 Strategic Plan are to increase the numbers and quality of both international projects and beneficiaries (students and staff members) in all programmes. In fact, KU embraces strong and close relations with the universities from a variety of countries as an essential vehicle to reach the above mentioned internationalisation goals.

KU, during the 2021-2027 ECHE period, aims to put more effort into progressive and sustainable development in teaching, research and community service in accordance with its internationalisation

and modernisation strategy. The students and staff members of KU have already benefitted from the Erasmus projects carried out under Key Action 1 and the University aims to get more involved in Key Action 2 and Key Action 3 during the new ECHE period. Since its first participation to the programme, KU has placed a special emphasis on the involvement of students and staff in Erasmus by showing a steady increase in the numbers of partner institutions through mobility of individuals. The primary focus of KU has been on realising quality assurance in each stage for student and staff exchanges, starting from transparent, fair and coherent selection procedures to planning and implementation of activities as well as to give recognition for the activities undertaken during the projects in every cycle.

In addition to the partnerships with the institutions in Erasmus programme countries, KU also focuses on running projects with the institutions in partner countries under Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility (ICM). Indeed, since 2015 KU has undertaken ICM projects with Azerbaijan and Philippines, and as of 2020, KU has submitted 8 new ICM project applications with partners from Uzbekistan, China, Philippines, Malesia, Thailand, Algeria, Iran and Pakistan. KU has been a coordinator of an Erasmus+ Internship Consortium with an NGO and 2 other universities in Turkey for traineeship mobility. Through the current and future projects, the University promotes increasing exchange destinations, increase the quality of education and research and become a university that can compete globally.

In 2020, the University re-structured the units related to external affair and established Office for Internationalisation and Bologna Process and Office for Bilateral Agreements and Protocols. Furthermore, KU has brought these two offices and the related offices (Erasmus and Mevlana) together under the General Office for External Affairs, which facilitates the adoption of the principles, priorities and key goals of the Bologna process and the European Education Area. Thanks to this organisation scheme, a coherent and efficient management regarding the internationalisation process and all the projects including Erasmus is also expected to be achieved.

KU is using ECTS as the credit system and develops learning outcomes for each course by paying attention to the student workload in line with the European Qualification Framework. With regard to the changing paradigms and needs of higher education, as also experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, KU has proven its capability to adapt its programmes in the form of distance education via its technological infrastructure. The University is also committed to language teaching for the purposes of quality in higher education with School of Foreign Language and Turkish Language Research Centre. Within its friendly campus environment, KU is devoted to promoting values, inclusive education and multicultural education with partners across Europe and other parts of the world. In order to further cultivate European identity and culture by celebrating diversities, KU implements high quality mobility activities. As an indispensable principle guiding its overall strategy, KU ensures that there is no discrimination against any individual or group of individuals on the basis of age, colour, disability, gender, ethnicity, race, language, and religion in line with the universal principles and norms of human rights and liberties. KU guarantees that it will contribute to the EU's agenda in higher education during the new phase of the Programme (2021-2027) by becoming signatory of Erasmus Charter for Higher Education. To this end, KU will focus on key competences for lifelong learning, digital skills, common values and inclusive education emphasized under European Education Area.

After the award of the ECHE, KU will continue to participate in international mobility and collaboration opportunities for both students and staff members under Key Action 1. KU will also develop and share innovative practices in education, research and training between the partner institutions under Key Action 2. Moreover, in the new ECHE period, under Key Action 3, KU will seek for participating in activities supporting policy reform across EU regarding education, training and youth. In

order to develop and implement projects, KU Erasmus Office and Project Support Office will work collaboratively to foster awareness of and promote calls of the Erasmus programme to all university staff. Both offices have already had experiences in providing support in the process of preparing applications and implementing the funded projects.

How KU's participation in the Erasmus actions will contribute to achieving the objectives of our institutional strategy.

As is mentioned before, along with KA1 mobility projects (student and staff mobility with Erasmus programme and partner countries and youth projects), KU aims at taking part in relevant KA2 (Partnerships for Cooperation and exchanges of practices; Partnerships for Excellence; Partnerships for Innovation) and KA3 projects (Support to Policy Development and Cooperation), either as a partner or coordinator in the new ECHE period. Possible projects in the future will cover a wide range of interdisciplinary thematic fields such as forestry, tourism, distance/online education, sustainability, capacity-building, multicultural and inclusive education and/or future of areas within the new Erasmus+ programme. KU will also follow the project opportunities that could be realized by the Kastamonu Technology Transfer Office and related research and application centres.

KU students and staff members have been involved in a variety of projects. After the award of the ECHE, with a more coordinated effort of the General Office for External Affairs, Technology Transfer Project Office and Erasmus Office, KU envisages a number of Erasmus Project applications across its Faculties and Schools.

KU's involvement in the projects will help boost the objectives of excellence both in education and research. Research is a significant part in the University's three-fold mission of education, research and entrepreneurship. The Programme offers invaluable opportunities for KU to realize and implement its research strategy during the new ECHE period.

With the help of the projects, fruitful interaction between the University's academic members, policymakers, civil society actors, and international community at local, national, regional and international levels will be accomplished. The projects developed by KU members include major issues encountered in Turkey and across the world. For instance, the objectives of such projects involve integration of individuals with diversities (culture, language, religion, disability, gender, giftedness), and developing curricula focusing on soft skills.

The mobility projects will include three main phases: (1) selection of beneficiaries, (2) mobility activities and (3) recognition of credits and activities. The announcement and selection criteria including some specific points (e.g. language proficiency, academic background, previous mobility experience, disability status) will be conducted by KU Erasmus office in the light of the National Agency standards. In addition, transparency and equal opportunities will be aimed through open and effective communication throughout the process.

What is the envisaged impact of KU's participation in the Erasmus+ Programme on our institution?

In the Erasmus programme, KU's primary aim is to sustain high quality education, to support critical, creative and reflective thinking within its curricula, and to focus on the integration of an international dimension into educational activities. In order to reach its aim, the University declares that it will implement its activities in accordance with the principles of the ECHE and devoted to increase the number and quality of international agreements. To this end, the objectives and indicators planned to be accomplished between 2022 and 2025 include (1) increasing student mobility for learning to 10% people per year; (2) increasing staff mobility for training purposes and for teaching purposes to 10%

persons per year; (3) increasing the number of students and staff arriving from partner universities to 10% per semester; and (4) greater involvement in cooperation projects with partner countries up to 1-2 projects per year. KU will also ensure that both its academic and administrative units fulfil the University's objective of balance between incoming and outgoing students and staff in exchange programmes. In addition, KU will build infrastructure capacity for digitisation processes including Erasmus without papers, Erasmus+ Mobile Application and European Student Card during the new ECHE period and support the participants based on key competences for lifelong learning, digital skills, common values and inclusive education emphasized under European Education Area.

During the new ECHE period, the University also expects to initiate strategic partnerships with research oriented universities through KA2 activities. The partnership is to be in line with the University's internationalisation priorities and contribute to mutual benefit of partners. As for the partner selection, the fields of study and opportunities provided for the students and staff come to the fore.

The indicative timetable to accomplish the objectives can be divided into several phases, which involve the introduction of activation measures to contribute to the fulfilment of indicators, the support of participants before, during and after mobility and project impact.

As for the activation measures phase, KU will organise an Orientation Week at the beginning of each semester for students arriving under the Programme; initiate the Study Buddy Programme for students coming under the Programme; update the "Students' Survival Guide" with the most recent information; organise Erasmus Days for the beneficiaries and International Students Day for all students and promote the events via websites, social media. KU, in order to support the participants during all phases of the mobility, will undertake the required responsibilities and measures to contribute to the fulfilment of indicators as it has been carrying out since the first participation to the Programme.

The positive impact of the Programme activities is expected to be observed both on the University itself and on entities outside the institution. The primary impacts on the students, staff and other stakeholders include but not limited to:

- broadening horizons,
- establishing contacts with colleagues from other countries,
- learning to work collaboratively in an international environment,
- exchanging experience with individuals from other countries,
- conducting classes for culturally diverse students,
- having a well-developed network of partner institutions from abroad,
- acquiring new competencies to use a foreign language and to consider diverse cultures and habits;
- gaining new or improving digital competences;
- acquiring new skills and increasing opportunities for professional and career development in line with the needs and expectations of the labour market.

The results of the Programme activities will be communicated, among others, the University's web site and social media. Through the activities, KU also aims at creating a positive impact on people from outside the institution, in the form of an increased level of awareness.