



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EDUCATION, YOUTH, SPORT AND CULTURE

The Director-General

Brussels  
EAC-RTD/TC/GS-SMS

Dear Secretary General,

Thank you for your support for the measures adopted by the Commission in response to COVID-19 pandemic and your suggestions presented in the note of 14 April. I also want to express my appreciation to all YERUN members for your commitment in providing the best possible solutions to students, staff and the wider higher education community in these challenging times.

Regarding **Erasmus+** and your call for pragmatic flexibility, I would like to assure you that the Commission is taking all possible steps to mitigate the negative impact of the crisis on the study progression of Erasmus+ students. We have already provided guidance on a flexible approach to the application of the force majeure rules. This is in line with what was called for by your and other networks. You may find more detailed information for the beneficiary organisations on the [Erasmus+ website](#).

We have notably encouraged higher education institutions to be as flexible and pragmatic as possible to help Erasmus+ students achieve the learning outcomes indicated in their learning agreements, e.g. through remote studying arrangements using digital tools. This flexibility will help those mobile students who have had to return to their home countries by allowing them to finish their courses at the host institution and to have the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credits obtained fully recognised. The Commission has announced that students will retain their Erasmus+ student status while completing their mobilities remotely in order to keep their Erasmus+ grant. The Commission is also enabling a combination of virtual learning and physical mobility, while safeguarding high quality and the strong reputation of the Erasmus+ programme. We will continue to assess the need for any further measures as the situation develops.

Similar flexibility is applied for our beneficiaries with the implementation of the **Horizon 2020** ongoing grants to researchers. FAQs have been issued to further guide and support beneficiaries and researchers (see the Funding and Tender Portal [here](#)).

For a response to your specific suggestions, I invite you to see the Annex to this letter.

I hope you can count on our continued collaboration and support, to overcome this crisis together and for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Themis CHRISTOPHIDOU

## Annex

1. As regards the first call for the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE) under the new Erasmus Programme, please note that the Commission has already planned a simplified procedure for existing ECHE holders who have been active in the last three years of the Programme. In practice, this means that the vast majority of ECHE holders are eligible for this simplified application procedure. In addition, we have prolonged the initial deadline until 26 May 2020.
2. On your suggestion to simplify the procedure for ongoing Horizon 2020 projects by removing the obligation of beneficiaries to formally notify without delay that the COVID-19 crisis represents a 'force majeure' situation. The obligation to formally notify the force majeure is clearly set out in Article 51 of the model grant agreement. The main reason is that the notification represents the only means for the Commission to ensure that all cases where the force majeure impacts beneficiaries are treated in a swift and coherent manner. Moreover, the notification is a prerequisite for good management on both sides:
  - for beneficiaries because they must also keep the documented trail proving that they took all diligent measures to limit the damage caused by force majeure,
  - for the Commission because the risk of abuse is limited and the money goes to those beneficiaries that need it.

Formal notification process is fully IT-supported. This means that, in practice, this functionality in the IT-system allows offering relatively simple and fast process for beneficiaries vis-à-vis the Commission's services managing the grant. Given the circumstances, very minimum information and explanations from beneficiaries have to be provided when notifying that their project implementation is impacted by the pandemic situation. Nevertheless, we will explore how to further simplify and speed up the process in order to make it as lean and light as possible for our beneficiaries.

3. On your suggestion to introduce an automatic no-cost extension of up to 6 months for Horizon 2020 projects that are due to end in 2020/2021 instead of passing through a formal amendment procedure. Due to the uncertainty on the precise impact for each different research project with regards to the pandemic situation (e.g. due to different confinement measures taken in different countries; due to the exact completion level reached by each project etc.), we have privileged an approach based on a voluntary amendment request of an extension duration coming from beneficiaries.

If the project duration is extended, all the costs incurred during extension fulfilling the general and specific eligibility conditions set out in Article 6 of the grant agreement may be eligible and therefore claimed by the beneficiaries (and reimbursed if the maximum grant amount was not reached). If beneficiaries cannot perform any work under the action, than they may request to suspend the action in line with Article 49 of the agreement (no amendment is necessary). However, costs incurred during suspension are not eligible and cannot be charged to the action.

The amendment procedure is fully IT-supported. Our IT system offers to beneficiaries a simple way to prepare such an amendment request while allowing keeping appropriate track of it. This is in particular the case for requests for extension of action duration. Be reassured that amendment request for granting project duration extension of up-to-six-months will be treated favourably and in a speedy manner. Any request for extension beyond six months will be handled on a case-by-case basis.