Frequently Asked Questions
Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange

General

Q: What is Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange?
A: Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange is part of the Erasmus+ programme, providing an accessible, ground-breaking way for young people to engage in intercultural learning. Working with youth organisations and universities, the programme is open to any young person aged 18-30 residing in Europe or the Southern Mediterranean. Through a range of activities, Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange aims to expand the reach and scope of the Erasmus+ programme through virtual exchanges, which are technology-enabled people-to-people dialogues sustained over a period of time. Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange offers a safe online community to participate in facilitated discussions, increasing intercultural awareness and building 21st century skills through Virtual Exchange. This flagship programme is established under a contract with the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, financed by the European Union’s budget, and it is implemented by a consortium composed of Search for Common Ground, Anna Lindh Foundation, UNIMED, Sharing Perspectives Foundation, Soliya, UNICollaboration, Kiron Open Higher Education, and Migration Matters.

Q: What is Virtual Exchange?
A: Virtual Exchange is technology-enabled, people-to-people education programmes sustained over a period of time in which sustained communication and interaction takes place between individuals or groups who are geographically separated, with the support of facilitators and/or educators. [Read more about Virtual Exchange >>]

Q: How can I apply to take part in the activities?
A: Once you have decided which activity suits you or your organisation/institution best, you can express your interest by filling the forms available for each activity in the activities’ section. You will then be contacted by the activity organisers regarding the registration process.

Q: What activities are taking place as part of Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange?
A: There are four main Virtual Exchange activities taking place as part of this project, including Online Facilitated Discussions, Advocacy Trainings, Interactive Trainings to Develop Virtual Exchange Projects, and Interactive Open Online Courses. In addition, Facilitation trainings are offered for those who want to become Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange facilitators. [Find out more about the activities >>]

Q: Which countries can participate in Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange?
A: The eligible countries in this pilot phase are the 33 Erasmus+ Programme Countries (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom) and the 10 Southern Mediterranean region countries as defined in the European Neighbourhood Policy (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine\(^1\), Syria, Tunisia).

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\(^1\) This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the EU Member States on this issue.
Q: What is the age limit to participate in the activities?
A: Participants should be aged between 18 and 30. In case a small proportion of persons in an overall group from a higher education institution or youth organisation are above the age of 30, they might be accepted on a case-by-case basis. Participants under the age of 18 will not be accepted under any circumstance. Read more about who can participate >>

Q: How can individuals get involved if they are not part of an organisation?
A: Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange activities are mostly offered through institutional partnerships with youth organisations and higher education institutions. However, as an individual you can take part in the Youth Dialogue offered as part of Online Facilitated Dialogue activities or take part in any of the iOOCs. Find out more about the Youth Dialogue programme >>

Q: How much does it cost to get involved in Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange?
A: Participation in the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange activities is free.

Q: Can I get funding from Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange?
A: No, you cannot receive funding as part of the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange project. However, the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange activities are open and free for youth organisations or institutions to offer to their members/students.

Q: Are there any calls for proposals as part of the project?
A: No, there are no calls for proposals as part of the project. Participation in the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange activities is free of charge, and may be offered by youth organisations or higher education institutions (HEI) to their members/students. While youth organisations/HEI are asked to submit proposals to participate in the Training to Develop Virtual Exchange Projects, there are no calls for proposals associated with funding.

Q: What languages is the project available in? Are the project activities available in languages other than English?
A: During this year’s pilot phase, the project activities will be available mainly in English. Activities in French and Arabic will gradually be introduced in the near future. Facilitation trainings in French and Arabic are already available. Depending on demand, some Virtual Exchange activities may be conducted in French and Arabic in the autumn.

Q: Is there a user guide for the project?
A: No, but information sheets specifying how universities and youth organisations can get involved will be published on this site soon.

Q: Will I have to possess advanced IT knowledge to participate in the activities?
A: No, you do not need advanced IT knowledge, but you do need to have basic computer and internet skills. You will receive clear instructions on how to join the Virtual Exchange platforms.

Q: Can I access the activities from any computer?
A: Yes, you can access from any computer. All you need is a good internet connection. Activities include video dialogues and therefore access to a webcam, headphones and microphone is also important.

Q: My university/youth organisation already has e-learning programmes, why should we get into Virtual Exchange?
Virtual Exchange can complement and enhance e-learning and mobility programmes. You can read how Virtual Exchange distinguishes itself from other forms of online learning here >>
Q: What is the difference between Virtual Exchange and Virtual mobility?
A: Virtual mobility is often used to apply to more traditional distance learning courses, for example students studying one course and taking an exam at another university without actually going there, and having these international credits recognised through a learning agreement between universities. Virtual mobility does not necessarily include student to student dialogue. Virtual mobility programmes could be enhanced with an Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange component. Read more about Virtual Exchange >

Q: Where does Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange take place?
A: The project is open to young persons, youth organisations and higher education institutions from the eligible countries. The exchange in which they participate is Virtual, and as such they do not leave their home countries. Participants take part in the exchange from a computer, either in a facility made available by their higher education institution or youth organisation, or inside their homes. Read more about who can take part >>

Q: Will Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange replace physical mobility?
A: No, Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange aims to complement the traditional physical mobility programme by expanding the scope and reach of the programme to young people who would otherwise not have the opportunity for such an intercultural learning experience. Virtual Exchange brings the Erasmus+ experience to all youth. Synergies between Virtual and physical mobility are also foreseen. Virtual exchanges can prepare, deepen, and extend physical exchanges, and, by reaching new populations and larger numbers, fuel new demand for physical exchange.

Q: Do I get recognition for taking part in Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange activities?
A: Upon completion of activities and meeting the criteria, participants receive a mail indicating how they can claim and display their Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange Open Badge. Open Badges have been developed to recognise young people, educators and youth workers' participation in Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange activities.

Q: How can universities recognise badges?
Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange badges are awarded to students, and belong to those who earn them. If universities decide they want to recognise this activity, they should endorse the badge ecology and recognise their worth. A university could decide, for example, that students applying for Erasmus mobility, or to become an Erasmus buddy, get extra points for having an Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange badge.

Q: Can students get ECTS credits for participation in Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange activities?
A: It is up to universities to decide how they will recognise the different activities. Some universities already award students ECTS credits for participation in activities which have been integrated into curricular courses which students get ECTS credits for. Some universities offer some of the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange activities as electives for 3 or 6 ECTS credits.

Q: How do you measure impact? What do you assess in your evaluations?
A: Questions around attitudes, perceptions, skills and behaviour are collected from participants through surveys, both before and after the activities. The survey answers are then analysed in combination with surveys collected through participating professors/coordinators and the dialogue facilitators around the impact of the programme on the participants.
Survey questions have been developed in coordination with Dr. Emile Bruneau of the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania and formerly of the Saxelab Social Cognitive Neuroscience Laboratory at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Questions assess student development in four key areas: 1) Skills, 2) Attitudes, 3) Awareness, 4) Activation. A subset of the attitudinal impact assessment was developed by the Sharing Perspectives Foundation measuring impact
on skills such as confidence. Furthermore, a set of questions is added in the survey that is taken after the programme measuring the impact on digital and intercultural competences, social awareness, and language skills.

Q: What is the role for Erasmus+ National Agencies and Offices in the promotion of the project?  
A: Erasmus+ National Agencies and Offices can play an important role in disseminating information about the project within their networks in higher education and youth organisations. This will allow the project to reach the broadest possible audience.

Q: What do I gain as a participant in the project?  
A: As a participant, you will be engaged in meaningful cross-cultural experiences with other peers across the world, you will gain new employability skills for contemporary jobs, in an increasingly globalised job market where employers are asking for global competencies, such as communication, teamwork and problem solving in diverse teams, as well as global perspectives as their top needs.  
You will gain new perspectives from peers around the world, get your voice heard across boundaries and cultures. You will gain access to the Exchange Portal and join a vibrant exclusive community of active youth around the globe.  
With the successful completion of the programme, you will receive an Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange badge and a certificate of completion.

Online Facilitated Dialogue

Q: Are Online Facilitated Dialogue programmes open for individuals or institutions?  
A: Both. Institutions can apply to the Connect Programme, and individuals can apply to the Youth Dialogue Programme.

Q: How do I get my institution involved?  
A: If you are a teacher or a representative of a civil society organisation serving youth between the ages of 18-30 in the eligible countries, we invite you to submit your expressions of interest by clicking here >>

Q: What kind of time commitment is required by the participants?  
A: For the Connect Programme, time commitment varies by programme module. Participants should expect to spend 15 to 25 hours in total for the duration of the programme, including time spent in online live dialogue sessions, as well as on some additional small assignments.  
Read more >>

Q: What languages are Online Facilitated Dialogue programmes offered in?  
A: Currently we offer Online Facilitated Dialogue programmes in English only. We are working on developing a programme in French and potentially other languages too in the future. Stay up to date by expressing your interest here >>

Q: What level English is expected for participation?  
A: Intermediate level fluency in spoken English, or B1 competence on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), is required in order to participate fully in conversations on a variety of topics.

Q: Where do the participants meet?  
A: Participants meet online through the Exchange Portal, custom-designed cutting edge technology, based on best practices in conflict resolution to optimise cross-cultural communication among
participants. The platform includes video conferencing rooms for online dialogue sessions, a stream section for participants to engage asynchronously and an extensive resources section on all programmatic and technical elements of participation.

Q: Are there any in-person activities or meetings entailed by the programme?
A: The programme is conducted entirely online, and can be conducted from the comfort of your location. It does not include any physical interactions.

Q: What are the technical requirements for participation?
A: A computer, a webcam, and headset with a microphone and a stable internet connection with at least 200kbps download and 100 kbps upload ability. The platform is web-based and does not require any software to be downloaded, or special hardware set-up.

Q: Can participants attend their sessions from home or at an internet café?
A: We advise against it. We try our best to ensure a stable and consistent access to technical requirement for quality participation. This is most effectively guaranteed when participants attend the sessions in their universities’ computer labs or organisations’ facilities, where a technical coordinator can be sought if support is needed. In some cases, if session times take place outside of regular university hours, or if strong home internet connections can be verified, participation from home is allowed, after all technical requirements are tested.

Q: Can participants use their smartphones or tablet devices to attend their sessions?
A: The current platform functions best on computers. Participants can use tablets (other than iPads) to connect to their sessions, and smartphones are not yet supported.

Q: How do you select the meetings times since participants come from different time zones?
A: Connect Programme sessions take place in participants’ free time and outside of set class times. Participants are assigned to their online sessions based on their time availabilities.

Q: Can the professor/coordinator attend or observe the sessions? How can the professor/coordinator assess participation?
A: We are committed to creating a safe environment for free expression for all participants, and therefore, only participants, facilitators and members of the programme team are allowed to attend or observe dialogue sessions. Regular reporting however will be provided to the implementing professor/coordinator. They receive weekly updates on their participants’ attendance and performance, as well as an end of programme report on each participant and all the assignments he or she completed in the programme.

Q: What kind of time commitment is required by the professor/coordinator?
A: As a professor/coordinator, you spend an average of one hour per week to coordinate and ensure youth participation in the Connect Programme.

Q: What happens if a participant misses a session?
A: In the Connect Programme, participants must attend all online sessions: full attendance, being on time and staying for the entire duration of the two-hour sessions are critical for the success of the programme. Absences or poor attendance is disruptive to the dialogue process. However, there may be national or religious holidays, emergencies, etc. In that case, participants should notify their facilitator in advance. If the participants miss more than two sessions, they may not be qualified to receive their certificates and badges, and may run the risk of being dropped out of the programme.
Q: Are there any fees I have to pay for participation?
A: No, participation in the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange activities is free.

Training to Develop Virtual Exchange Projects

Q: What are the prerequisites to participate in the Training to Develop Transnational Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange Projects (TEPs)?
A: There are no prerequisites for Basic Training.

Q: Can you help us find a partner?
A: Yes, we can support you in this if you express this need in your application for training. Several educators have found partners for their projects through the Basic Training.

Q: What is the customised training for youth organisations?
A: The training for youth organisations includes support and mentoring from trained facilitators who accompany the youth organisations during the training in the design of their Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange.

Q: Is there funding available for youth organisations who want to develop projects?
A: There is no funding available, but youth organisations will receive training and mentoring in the design of small-scale pilot projects.

Q: Where does the training take place?
A: The training is online and combines both asynchronous activity on a Moodle platform, and one or two synchronous sessions on a video-conferencing platform.

Q: What kind of time commitment is required by the participants?
A: The training programmes require 2-3 hours of active engagement of participants. Implementing TEPs does place an additional workload on educators and youth organisations and may also require the support of technical and administrative staff. It is important that participants are aware of this time commitment before committing to design and implement a TEP.

Q: Can students get ECTS credits for participation in TEPs?
A: Usually TEPs are integrated into already existing university courses, hence students should automatically get ECTS credits for course participation.

Q: Can the TEPs be in languages other than English, French or Arabic?
The official languages of the pilot projects are English, French and Arabic. The use of other languages is assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Q: We are a youth organisation and have young people aged 16 and 17 who would like to take part in a Virtual Exchange project that we organise.
A: This is not possible because all participants should be above the age of 18.

Q: Do you provide technology?
A: For the implementation of your TEP we provide our learning management system Moodle and support from our Moodle administrators.
Q: I would like to implement a TEP in 2019, is this possible?
A: We will be offering training in autumn 2018 for educators who intend to implement TEPs in 2019. Fill out the expression of interest here to stay up to date about future opportunities.

Q: How can universities support educators working on TEPs?
A: Virtual Exchange can strengthen universities’ internationalisation strategies as they internationalise the curricula of lecturers who engage in this activity. However, it requires a heavy commitment and workload on the part of the lecturers. Institutions across the globe that are particularly engaged in this type of activity offer administrative and technical support, incentives such as mobility and teaching hours’ reduction, in-situ training programmes, and recognition of the professional development.

Q: I already do Virtual Exchange with my students, how can I have it recognised as an Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange?
A: We ask experienced Virtual Exchange practitioners to participate in a short training course where they will understand the specific requirements of Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange, such as the aims of Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange, the integration of synchronous dialogue sessions into pre-existing programmes, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and its implications for Virtual Exchange, monitoring and evaluation, badges and recognition. Completion of this training is a requirement, and after implementation of an Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange project and fulfilling of the Monitoring and Evaluation requirements, you will be entitled to an Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange TEP Advanced+ badge. Your students who complete the project will be able to claim Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange TEP participant badges.

Q: How long does an Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange last?
A: Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange TEP projects have to last at least 6 weeks as this will allow participants to get to know one another and engage in the exchange. They should have at least 2 or 3 synchronous dialogue sessions with Erasmus+ facilitators, as well as asynchronous communication.

Q: How can universities attract students to participate in these projects?
A: It is important for universities to promote this activity, making it visible on campus through media campaigns. Offering ‘rewards’ to students and lecturers for participation is also a good incentive. For example, extra points for Erasmus mobility applicants.

Q: What role can university Erasmus coordinators play?
Erasmus coordinators can play several important roles. They can make information about TEP training available to course directors and lecturers at their institution, in particular those involved in Joint Programmes (where partners could more easily be found and where Virtual Exchange could increase student mobility). They can support lecturers in finding international partners for their TEPs. They can also work with the university on getting recognition for student participation in this activity (for example extra points for Erasmus mobility applicants).

Q. I have partners in the US and Mozambique, can we do an Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange?
A: At this stage the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange activities and trainings are open for partnerships between organisations based in the eligible countries only. Find out who can take part here >>

Q: How can I disseminate information about Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange opportunities to colleagues at my institution?
A: We suggest you follow the Basic Training to get a better understanding of Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange, and then you could organise a workshop. We can put you in touch with trainers who could do workshops or training for your institution but this is not currently funded by the project, so it would have to be funded by your institution.
Advocacy Training

Q: What are the prerequisites to participate in the Advocacy Training?
A: To be willing and committed to take part in the debate training and attend the online debate. You do not need to have any experience in debating.

Q: How many debates each person will take part in?
A: In this pilot phase, each person will take part in one debate.

Q: What is the role of debate facilitator?
A: The debate facilitator’s role is to recruit a debate club, train debate club members and ensure the commitment of the whole team.

Q: What is the criteria for selecting debate facilitators?
A: Facilitators need to be energetic people with good communication and leadership skills. They do not need to have any experience in facilitation as they will receive online training for both debating skills and facilitating dialogue. Debate facilitators should be committed with all debate club members in training them, follow the debates schedule and moderate the online debates where members are taking part.

Interactive Open Online Courses (iOOCs)

Q: What courses are offered through the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange project?
A: At this stage we are selecting the courses. We will offer a number of courses, both produced by the project and in collaboration with European and Southern Mediterranean universities. These courses will cover different topics and will all have a Virtual Exchange component.

Q: What do you mean by Virtual Exchange component?
A: All courses offered through the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange project will include online facilitated collaboration activities by employing a wide variety of technologies and educational pedagogy, making it possible for learners to have meaningful, transnational and intercultural exchanges online.

Q: Could you give an example of Virtual Exchange activities that can be added to a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC)?
A: As Virtual Exchange activities, we can offer three different formats: Synchronous exchanges, asynchronous exchanges, blended synchronous and asynchronous exchanges. Read more about this >>

Q: I am leading an Open Online course. Can I add a Virtual Exchange component to it?
A: Indeed we are looking for courses to setup collaborations. Please get in contact with us through this form >>

Q: I am a professor and I would like to use the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange with my students, is this possible?
A: Yes, it is. Once you have identified a course that suits you, please get in touch with us through the this form >>

Q: I am a youth trainer and I would like to use the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange with my members, is this possible?
A: Yes, it is. Once you have identified a course that suits you, please get in touch with us and let's
discuss how to engage your members in the activity. You can contact us through this form >>

Q: How can I know when new courses will be made available through Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange?
A: Please express your interest in the iOOCs through this form. As soon as a new course will be available you will be notified.

Q: What are the prerequisites to participate in the Interactive Open Online Courses?
A: None in particular. Any young person between 18-30 living in one of the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange eligible countries. All the courses offered are open and free of charge, so you will just need a computer and an internet connection.

Facilitation Training

Q: What is the role of a facilitator?
A: The facilitator guides the dialogue between a group of participants, and helps them have a constructive, respectful and authentic dialogue on various topics of (mutual) interest. The facilitator is a multipartial process leader who triggers self-group awareness and understanding. Read more about dialogue facilitation and how to become a facilitator with Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange >>

Q: Are there criteria for selecting facilitators?
A: In order to become a facilitator, one has to have a certain level of knowledge about current events and the general context of the groups and identities represented in dialogue, as well as a certain level of cross-cultural sensitivity. Potential facilitators also need to be good listeners, multi-taskers and team workers.

Q: How can I become a facilitator with Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange?
A: To become a facilitator, you can apply to join a facilitation training. There is an Introductory level training as well as an Advanced Facilitation training. You may indicate your training level preference in your application; however, we will also be assessing your application to ensure you are placed in the most suitable level for a successful training experience.

Q: What is the difference between the training levels and formats?
A: Throughout the year, we offer 3 main trainings: Introduction to Facilitation, Advanced Facilitation, and Intensive Advanced Facilitation. Read more about the different trainings and how to apply >>

Q: When is the next training?
A: Trainings run throughout the year. Please see the facilitation training calendar >>

Q: What is the application deadline?
A: We process applications on a rolling basis; however, the application deadline for a specific training cycle is typically 3-4 weeks before the start date. Please see the facilitation training calendar for details >>

Q: How does the training schedule work? What can I do if I have a conflict with my session time?
A: All facilitation trainings are held on our online live video conferencing platform. Attendance is mandatory and session are not recorded for later viewing. During the registration phase we ask trainees to sign up for as many time slots as could possibly work for
them during the week and we use those times to match them up with a training group and trainer. However, given that we work within a wide range of time zones we are limited to offering slots Sundays through Thursdays 11am-6pm Coordinated Universal Time (UTC). If during a training you have a conflict with your session time for one or two weeks we can accommodate that through offering makeup session times; however, missing more than 4 hours of session time or requesting too many makeup session could be cause for a recommendation that you discontinue the training cycle and join at a later cycle that better aligns with your personal schedule.

Q: What is the process for facilitation after training?
A: After completing the Advanced Facilitation Training successfully and being recommended by your trainer to begin facilitation, the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange team will reach out to you for schedule availabilities for the next available opportunity for facilitation. Typically the facilitation opportunities run on a semester basis; Spring semester starts in March and Autumn semester starts in October. The Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange activities typically run for 3-10 weeks with weekly 2 hour long facilitation sessions. If you are not available for a certain opportunity, we can add you to the invite list for the following activities instead.

Q: What are the technical requirements for joining?
A: To participate successfully as a trainee and facilitator you must have consistent access to a high-speed internet connection as well as a computer with a webcam and headset. During each registration process we will ask you to complete a quick technical test to ensure your equipment meets the requirements and will provide technical support to address any concerns. Currently we also prefer for you to have access to Google Chrome as your browser and Skype for live communication outside our platform. Both are free to download.

Q: How can an organisation benefit from the facilitation training programme?
A: An organisation can reach out to form a partnership around the facilitation training programme. In the facilitation trainings, trainees learn and practice conflict resolution skills that have a wide variety of application possibilities in helping people to collaborate better and work past differences. Trainees also gain experience working in an international online context, a skill that is becoming increasingly essential in today’s work environment. Trainees develop their cultural sensitivity, active listening skills, and how to ask the right questions to gain a better understanding of others, which can help ensure more successful international partnerships and communications.

Q: Do I receive a certificate for training?
A: Yes, you will receive an Introduction to Facilitation Training certificate after completing that training successfully. After successful completion of the Advanced Training and one semester of Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange activity facilitation, you will receive an Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange facilitator badge. Certificates are sent to you via email as secure PDF files.

Q: Will the training add value to my resume?
A: Completing the facilitation training will absolutely add value to your resume. You will receive certification, which to any employer shows active pursuit of professional development and skill building, as well as passion for the field of conflict resolution. Trainees from the past have spoken openly about the benefits of this training and how they were able to transfer the skills gained to their different professions. Facilitation and conflict resolution skills have wide application possibilities in helping people to collaborate better and work past differences.

Q: Can I receive school or internship credit for the training?
A: In the past trainees have requested and done this successfully. Please check the possibilities with your educational institution.