

## 1. ERASMUS POLICY STATEMENT (EPS)

### 1.1 Erasmus activities included in your EPS

In this section, you need to tick the Erasmus activities covered by your Erasmus Policy Statement. Please select those activities that your HEI intends to implement during the entire duration of the Programme.

#### Erasmus Key Action 1 (KA1) - Learning mobility:

The mobility of higher education students and staff

#### Erasmus Key Action 2 (KA2) - Cooperation among organisations and institutions:

Partnerships for Cooperation and exchanges of practices

Partnerships for Excellence – European Universities

Partnerships for Excellence - Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees

Partnerships for Innovation

#### Erasmus Key Action 3 (KA3):

Erasmus Key Action 3 (KA3) - Support to policy development and cooperation:

### 1.2 Erasmus Policy statement (EPS): your strategy

Your Erasmus Policy Statement should reflect how you intended to implement Erasmus after the award of the ECHE. Should you wish to add additional activities in the future, you will need to amend your Erasmus Policy Statement and inform your Erasmus National Agency.

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

(Please reflect on the objectives of your participation. Please explain how you expect the participation in Erasmus to contribute towards modernising your institution, as well as on the goal of building a European Education Area<sup>1</sup> and explain the policy objectives you intend to pursue).

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the priorities of the European Education Area, such as recognition, digital skills, common values and inclusive education, please consult the following website: [https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area_en)

Original language (and translation into EN, FR or DE if the EPS is not in one of these languages)

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, the largest comprehensive University in Greece, is widely recognized as a vibrant centre of learning which draws its inspiration from a long tradition of academic achievements. This can be underpinned, among others, by the fact that, so in science, as in arts, medicine and technology, it prides itself in its international outlook. Most of its academic personnel have been trained in reputable Universities in Europe, the US, Australia and Japan. It has been actively participating in the Erasmus Programme, since 1987, accounting about 1/4 of the Erasmus mobility in Greece. Still, mindful of rapid change, we aim to improve our strategy, policies and everyday practices in order to meet contemporary local and global demands. Assessing our experience, we have been able to determine our strengths and weaknesses, and we have adopted a holistic internationalization strategy, whose main objectives can be briefly described as follows:

- Strengthen our role in the European and international knowledge community by building on collective and personal academic achievements.
- Enhance visibility among traditionally prestigious academic institutions through establishing long-term cooperation schemes at research and educational level.
- Reinforce our traditional presence as leading educational and research institution in SE Europe and Eastern Mediterranean by building focused strategic partnerships in the area.
- Play a decisive role in academic exchange, good practices dissemination, and knowledge diffusion.
- Support multicultural co-existence, social and cultural cohesion, and sustainable regional development.
- Make multilateral rather than unilateral approach a core aspect of our work -at educational, research and administrative level.
- Enhance and reinforce our relation with Greek society.
- Make our graduates able to think and act across traditional academic boundaries and across national borders. Properly equip them so that they may benefit from international knowledge and experience, and support national and local dynamic development.

The Erasmus programme is deemed by Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH) as one of the most effective tools to achieve the abovementioned internationalisation and modernisation strategic objectives, and, moreover, to contribute in the building of the common European Education Area through its active participation and involvement in the formation of a European Higher Education Area. Therefore, AUTH's main aim is to capitalize on Erasmus' framework and its many tools and principles, and, through a constantly reviewing process of its organisation and function, to:

- Integrate international dimension within curriculum, promoting attractive, innovative and competitive study programmes that can meet contemporary social needs. Take measures so that, while enhancing the international dimension, subject areas closely related to Greek culture will be highlighted.
- Draw on its experience from the inter-departmental study programmes and increase the number of Joint degrees corresponding to contemporary, state of the art interdisciplinary approaches. Especially, its participation in the EPICUR European Universities Alliance will allow AUTH to offer student-centred curricula jointly delivered across inter-university campuses, while also promoting European values and identity.
- Encourage mobility among our students and stimulate their interest in achieving the highest academic standards and qualifications. Better prepare outgoing students for the study period abroad, simplify and streamline the administrative procedures, help them cope with academic and psychological difficulties, and morally and practically support students from vulnerable social groups.
- Pursue social inclusiveness in higher education and the adoption of measures that will enable all students to access high-quality educational programmes, irrespective of their socio-economic background.
- Promote the digital transformation of Higher Education in general, and management of the Erasmus+ programme in particular, in alignment with the Digital Education Action Plan, through its strategic participation in relevant European and world-wide initiatives and the early adoption of ICT solutions and tools
- Take measures to attract the best students worldwide. Provide easily accessible information online and simplify the necessary procedures. Support them before, during and after their study period at AUTH. Increase the number of courses taught in other than Greek language.
- Establish permanent relations with its graduates when they decide to continue their studies and research abroad. Provide them motivation to keep contact with their home country and institution, and prevent further brain-drain phenomena.
- Enhance international focus and awareness in all faculty and staff members, embed internationalisation into its core activities, and encourage faculty and staff members' mobility. Establish measurable criteria, in our internal regulation and evaluation systems, for the support and recognition of relevant activities.
- Establish a quality assurance system—at personal, faculty and institution level- respecting the diversity and the particularities of academic disciplines, while putting internationalization in the forefront.

- Encourage research networking within and across the main academic areas. Build upon its membership in numerous University associations and networks, and make essential use of the participation. Attract world-renowned academics by disseminating our activities and achievements.
- Evaluate its rich and long experience in the field of bi- and multi-lateral agreements, and establish a monitoring and assessment system, that takes into consideration quantitative and qualitative data.
- Choose its future partners based on (a) already established inter-personal and inter-institutional links, (b) academic excellence, (c) reciprocity, so that through co-operation, we will not only gain from the “powerful” institutions, but also help young and/or “weaker” institutions or institutions from countries with serious economic, political and social problems, (d) compatible study programmes, (e) common educational goals, (f) mutuality in exchanges, ensuring balanced incoming and outgoing flows, and (g) a wide geographical field both within and outside Europe especially building upon our Erasmus KA107 and Erasmus Mundus experience, while focusing on the neighbouring countries.

Please reflect on the Erasmus actions you would like to take part in and explain how they will be implemented in practice at your institution. Please explain how your institution’s participation in these actions will contribute to achieving the objectives of your institutional strategy.

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Aristotle University of Thessaloniki plans to take advantage of all activities provided in the context of the Erasmus programme Key Actions, ie mobility of individuals and participation in partnerships that aim at sharing of good practices, knowledge transfer and capacity building, excellence in teaching and learning, innovation and policy reform. This strategic decision derives from its past experience in all these activities and the considerable impact they have at personal, institutional, national and European level.

More specifically, participation of our students and faculty members in KA1 activities will contribute to the upgrade of the educational process and the curricula, as well as the promotion of educational and teaching excellence. Students’ mobility for traineeships abroad offered through the programme will help AUTH achieve one other major strategic goal, which is the enhancement of students’ employability at all levels and the development of their digital competences. In this context, we wish to highlight our willingness to promote blended mobility activities for both studies and traineeships, in order to increase the inclusiveness of the programme for our students and increase the percentages of participation amongst them. Additionally, staff members’ participation in these activities will also have a significant impact on the modernisation of organization and operation of AUTH’s administrative services through knowledge transfer and sharing of best practices, and will result in upgrading the quality of student services.

Moreover, active participation in KA2 projects, either as a partner or as a coordinator, is deemed of high importance by AUTH. Through these projects our institution will be able to improve educational and learning activities, align with European-wide good educational practices and contribute to building a European Education Area through innovative proposals in areas like curricula development, digital skills and common values and inclusive education. More specifically, our participation in the EPICUR European Universities Alliance is a core strategic priority as it will allow us to propose our vision for a European Higher Education Area and offer student-centred curricula jointly delivered across inter-university campuses, along with promoting European values and identity.

AUTH also is a keen supporter of the digital transformation of Higher Education in general, and management of the Erasmus+ programme in particular, in alignment the Digital Education Action Plan. Therefore, it pursues actively its involvement in KA2 projects that aim to propose innovative digital solutions like Online Learning Agreement 3.0 and it is an early adopter of initiatives like the Erasmus Without Papers, being one of the first universities in Europe that has connected its own mobility software to the EWP network. A very useful means of accomplishing this goal are various European-wide networks, which AUTH is member of, that have such a focus like the European University Foundation, initiator and coordinator of projects like OLA, Erasmus+ App, EWP, MyAcademicID, etc.

One other policy objective that AUTH intends to pursue is social inclusiveness and the adoption of measures that will enable all students to access high-quality education, irrespective of their socio-economic background. Therefore, it closely monitors initiatives that put forward proposals to this end, once more mainly through its participation in networking activities and KA2 projects. Moreover, AUTH has an excellent communication and cooperation with its local ESN branch, in order to plan and implement joint activities in this direction.

What is the envisaged impact of your participation in the Erasmus+ Programme on your institution?

Please reflect on targets, as well as qualitative and quantitative indicators in monitoring this impact (such as mobility targets for student/staff mobility, quality of the implementation, support for participants on mobility, increased involvement in cooperation projects (under the KA2 action), sustainability/long-term impact of projects etc.) You are encouraged to offer an

indicative timeline for achieving the targets related to the Erasmus+ actions.

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As highlighted above, AUTH highly values the Erasmus programme and the opportunities it provides to Higher Education Institutions to achieve their internationalization and modernization strategic objectives in the broader context of the European Education Area, and thus provide high-quality education, research and services to both its members and society at large. Consequently, the impact of the Institution's participation in the Erasmus programme is quite meaningful at institutional and regional level.

In particular, AUTH expects that, through its participation in Key Action 1 of the Erasmus Programme, its students will continue to benefit by access to high-quality learning activities at partner universities and subsequently form a comprehensive view of the European higher education landscape. Moreover, traineeship schemes will keep on equipping them with skills and competences that will enhance their employability and the prospect of easier and faster integration in the labor market, as recent Erasmus+ impact studies reveal. Additionally, an exchange period abroad, either for studies or traineeship, will armor them with essential soft skills and the social grace and dexterity to cope with whatever challenges they may face and any ambitions they may harbor in the European environment. Mobility of faculty members will be highly beneficial for students, as well, as the former could enrich their teaching skills and upgrade the quality of home institution curricula through the exchange of best educational practices. Of course, this kind of activities will gravely contribute in the professional development of AUTH's faculty members as they will have the opportunity to exchange experiences and best practices and participate in networking activities that might lead to high-quality educational and research projects.

The envisaged impact at institutional level is expected to continue to be multidimensional and affect all areas of activity of the institution. More specifically, the Erasmus programme functions as a driving force in terms of curricula development, innovation, quality assurance and academic excellence, because it provides the framework and the tools to align with EU standards in education, learning and training. Valuable tools of the Erasmus programme towards this direction are KA2 and KA3 projects, which allow HEIs to join forces with partner organizations and produce deliverables of high added-value for European Higher Education area but, first and foremost, for the participating institutions themselves. As a consequence, AUTH's participation in this kind of projects has led to its institutional strategic modernization, the adoption of innovative digital tools both in teaching and administration, the development of educational components and degrees of excellence and the introduction of methods of continuous, rigorous internal and external assessment of progress at all levels of endeavor in the educational, research, mobility, administrative and cultural fields.

Furthermore, the Erasmus program is considered by AUTH to be a significant mean of promoting cooperation with local authorities and other relevant bodies in Greece and in Europe, and developing cooperative activities with regional businesses and local authority administrations, of proven quality and commendable record of performance. This way, a meaningful socioeconomic impact has been already achieved, and can be further sustained, at the regional level, through Erasmus projects that aim, for example, to boost employability and entrepreneurship, to provide toolboxes for integrating refugees in higher education or equip socially and economically disadvantaged groups with digital skills.

Due to the multi-level impact of the Erasmus programme, AUTH aims at an increased participation rate of students and faculty/staff members in KA1 activities and, mainly, at enhancing the quality of these mobilities. In this context, a major target will be to achieve a 100% rate of recognition of all learning outcomes for all outgoing students in the next 3 years and to support Faculties and Schools to set up those mechanisms that will facilitate the realization of this goal. Therefore, AUTH already has a monitoring mechanism in place, which is ran by the Department of European Educational Programmes and provides for the recognition rates at each School and therefore allows for targeted interventions. Additionally, AUTH intends to further simplify and streamline its administrative procedures regarding the implementation of the Erasmus programme by introducing and adopting more digital solutions during the next 3 years, besides Erasmus Without Paper to which it is already connected.

Another important target for AUTH would be an accretive number of KA2 and KA3 projects, in which AUTH will either participate as a member or be the coordinator of the project. In order to achieve this goal, AUTH will continue to promote these opportunities among its faculty members and its educational and administrative units, and to support their active engagement in this kind of projects through proper guidance and knowledge transfer. AUTH will also focus more on the sustainability of the projects it will be involved by trying to incorporate their results at the institutional level, where possible, and supporting them administratively and financially.