

**DELIVERABLE 4.3**  
**POLICY BRIEF**  
**FOR TUNISIAN AUTHORITIES**

WP4 – POLICY BRIEFS

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## POLICY BRIEF – TUNISIA

### How can the Tunisia benefit the most from Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility

#### 1. THE ICMED CAPACITY BUILDING PROJECT – INTERNATIONAL CREDIT MOBILITY: A NEW CHALLENGE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION

A current trend towards enhancing internationalisation in the Higher Education sector has been witnessed in the whole MENA region, including Tunisia, and the EU Erasmus+ Programme has added a valuable support instrument in this respect since 2015, with the introduction of the International Credit Mobility action (KA107-ICM). Internationally-oriented HEIs have included this scheme among the already ongoing programmes of scholarships for staff or students' mobility, based on strategies aimed at enhancing the university international dimension. KA107 provides opportunities which are perceived as useful and important as they provide a further chance for the institution as a whole to open up to the increased international environment of the Higher Education sector. Nevertheless, there seems to be major challenges and hindrances limiting its full potential as spur for growth and better Higher Education quality. The ICM Scheme is a new challenge for MENA governments and HEIs. After more than a decade of successful cooperation under the Erasmus Mundus (EM) programme, partner HEIs were quite abruptly led towards a totally new scheme, with new rules and procedures. Furthermore, while the demand for staff mobility opportunities is increasing, the available funding and number of scholarships remain limited.

In the light of the future follow up to the Erasmus+ programme, and the first results deriving from the recent introduction of ICM, this policy brief will focus on the current situation, challenges and input for potential improvement in Tunisia. This country, together with Algeria and Morocco, has been the recent target of the Erasmus+ ICMED capacity building project – International Credit Mobility: a New Challenge in the Mediterranean Region (<https://www.icmedproject.eu/>). Based on a thorough mapping and Consultation Process about the current ICM status at institutional and regional level, the ICMED project, led by the University of Padova in close cooperation with other 5 EU and 6 MENA HEIs as well as two university networks, has endeavoured to contribute towards an innovative, effective and efficient management of International Credit Mobility in the MENA region, by strengthening staff capacity, implementing a comprehensive Training Programme, fostering information and sharing best practices in this field. Notably, through desk research and questionnaires/local interviews with all the interested target groups, the ICMED project has also endeavoured to highlight key challenges/issues emerged during the project, in the light of their potential influence on future policy actions. A series of quality interviews were namely conducted in the two ICMED partner HEIs in Tunisia, with representatives of staff (7) and students (7) who participated in international mobility exchanges, following the analysis of questionnaires on the same topic. A representative of the Tunisian Education Ministry was also interviewed, as the local NEO staff was being renewed at that moment. This research in the field has led to a consultation summary report, training week's reports and a set of policy briefs bringing together research and local evidence to inform policy developments on ICM and Erasmus+ KA107 in particular.

The reason behind this policy brief is hence to draw relevant conclusions and provide useful input and recommendations, so as to enable Tunisian policy makers to take the measures needed to

finetune and streamline ICM, as well as Tunisian HEIs to benefit the most from ICM management and implementation.

## 2. HIGHER EDUCATION IN TUNISIA

Tunisia has registered one of the sharpest increases in university participation rate among the MENA and Middle-Eastern countries, together with Qatar and Saudi Arabia (Times Higher Education data). The share of graduate holders in Tunisia if compared to the whole population shifted from 5% in 2014 to more than 20% in 2018 (this latter percentage is even higher in other data sources, such as the World Bank). The reason behind such a steep rise might be the demographic change and the fall in fertility rates witnessed in the last few decades, combined with the increase in online degree programmes and with the high importance which has always been attached to Higher Education in Tunisian cultural tradition. Despite the percentage of young people is still significant in Tunisia (about 20.9% of the country's 11.4 million nationals were aged between 15 and 24 in 2017), Tunisia is namely experiencing a low fertility rate and a transitional shift in its age structure, unlike the neighbouring countries in the MENA region and in the Middle East.

The Strategic Reform Plan 2015-2025 reflects a national strategy which seeks to enhance the Higher Education sector. While the main national focus before 2010, in the light of the reforms carried out in the last decades to fully embrace the Bologna Process, was to integrate the significant number of students in Higher Education, since 2010, the decrease in the students' number has led to a shift in the strategy of policy makers, as the focus has been directed towards quality and competitiveness at national and international level. The recent national reform project prioritises the improvement of HE teachers and researchers' educational skills as well as the innovation of the whole system, whereby a strategy taking into account the crucial role of academic staff mobility is key. The Tunisian Higher Education system is hence paying greater attention to enhancing its quality provision, mainly through the establishment of a quality assurance and accreditation system, and to boosting internationalisation, especially by strategically attracting foreign students and staff and consolidating mobility.

With reference to the quality of teaching and research, Tunisia is investing in digital technology and ICT as a key goal of the current reform process. While there is still a significant need for improved quality assurance and accreditation processes, there may be opportunities to boost cross-border education in Tunisia in the form of distance, online and flexible learning. Other options may become more viable in the future, once national reforms are implemented. Tunisia's top five partners for research collaboration are France, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Italy and the United States and the country is endeavouring to promote research and innovation for a knowledge-based and innovation-driven economy. Key subjects for Tunisian development include STEM, agriculture, medicine and finance.

As far as internationalisation is concerned, Tunisian HEIs are highly committed to enhance their capacities to ensure best mobility offers to their students and staff, leading to numerous schemes which provide international mobility opportunities both funded at national level, as well as with the international support of the EU (both previous programmes and Erasmus+) and through bilateral projects. These initiatives have reinforced the exchange networks with the EU, and the 13 public Tunisian universities are hence very active and increasingly cooperating with Southern Europe, very

recently also with the UK, Africa, and other regions of the world. Yet, international mobility of administrative staff is still very low compared to that of academic staff and European projects are almost the only mobility opportunity for them.

Tunisian Higher Education policy has also been recently oriented to respond to the soaring needs of academic staff in the newly created HEIs in different Tunisian regions, which has led to intensive contractual recruitment. Improvement in teachers' ratios is essentially targeted by policy makers in fields where a shortage of human resources is evidenced.

To conclude, learning foreign languages is pivotal in the Tunisian educational system. Arabic and French are nevertheless the first two languages in the Tunisian society. French is still widely used in education, in the press and in business, as Tunisia was a former French colony, and the national HE system builds on the French model, with a small well-educated Tunisian elite studying in France.

## CHALLENGES AND REFORM PLANS

The recent shift in the Tunisian demographic structure, which will soon no longer be a "youth country", puts severe pressure on policymakers in the short to medium term with reference to adequate education and job creation. Furthermore, the pace of economic development is very slow, with GDP growth at 2.0% in 2017, far from the annual 5% foreseen by the National Development Plan 2016-2020. The Global Competitiveness Index has identified inefficient government bureaucracy as the main obstacle for doing business. In the light of all these factors, Tunisia is working to introduce a series of reforms as part of the Strategic Plan for the Education Sector 2016-20 (in Arabic only), so as to improve quality standards through improved teacher training, upgraded curricula and infrastructure, as well as an enhanced framework for private sector partnerships.

The issue of graduates' employability is the main challenge facing the Tunisian Higher Education system today. Youth (15 to 24-year olds) unemployment (reaching 36.3% in 2018, well above the regional average of 26.9%) is deemed to be a major risk to the stable democratic development of the country and is believed to be largely driven by a poor-quality education system, as proved by Tunisian performance in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) by the OECD in 2015/16, where it ranked 66<sup>th</sup> out of 70 countries. Moreover, in the Global Competitiveness Index 2017-2018, which ranks 137 countries, Tunisia only ranks 103<sup>rd</sup> in terms of HE quality, 106<sup>th</sup> in HE teacher training and 106<sup>th</sup> in R&D cooperation between universities and industry. If it is true that, according to the World Bank, unemployment in Tunisia has declined from its peak of 19 % in 2011 to 15.5 % in 2017, current unemployment rates are nevertheless still above pre-revolution levels (13% in 2010). A great mismatch is noticed between labour market needs and qualifications and skills acquired, which hinders the opportunity to use talent efficiently in the Tunisian labour market and still limits the capacity to retain and attract talent and female participation in the labour force. The low levels of English language proficiency and the lack of soft skills are frequently pointed out by Tunisian business leaders as a barrier to employment. Yet, Tunisia does not have enough teachers to cater to this demand and there is a shortage of university professors able to teach disciplines such as English language and literature. Finally, graduates tend to prefer careers in the public sector rather entrepreneurial activity or careers in the private sector.

Major restructuring is hence to be undertaken at all Higher Education levels: training, research, governance and management structures, as well as student life. In this respect, the National Dialogue On Education Reform in 2015, launched following the announcement of a 10-year tertiary educational development plan, known as the Strategic Plan for the Reform of Higher Education and Scientific Research 2015-25 (in French only), is crucial to gather all interested parties so as to address these four key issues: governance, university life, curriculum development and scientific research. Policy recommendations focus on employability among young graduates, with an emphasis on how North-South-South cooperation could help curb youth unemployment and foster sustainable development opportunities in Tunisia, while the government is looking to encourage more private sector employment and youth entrepreneurship.

## RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

As Higher Education has proved to have a substantial impact on employment prospects (OECD), best practices and new ideas for curbing unemployment among recent graduates and matching skills acquired with the labour market needs, can be advanced (AYGA International Conference on The Impact of Education on Employment, 2017). The most relevant for this policy brief are presented as follows:

1. Enhancing cooperation between academic institutions and the industry as well as promoting and facilitating the knowledge transfer between Tunisian HEIs and industry, society and policy-making.
2. Implementing general preparatory courses focussing on students' transferable skills beyond their disciplinary boundaries, to ease students' education-to-work transition and their flexibility. Innovative forms of learning addressing additional needs of the labour market, such as effective communicate and collaborative problem solving, should be adopted.
3. Promoting internship programmes and supporting a transfer of best-practice-knowledge should be supported by organizing workshops and conferences where representatives of universities and companies from the two shores of the Mediterranean sea build high-quality cooperation networks.
4. Boosting international short-term mobility in the field of education and training, in the light of its crucial role in lifelong learning as well as in the modernisation of training and education systems in general. Tunisian academic and administrative staff should benefit more from the opportunity of short-term exchanges in institutions where innovative educational methods are successfully used, to share good practices with their foreign colleagues and learn from each other. Such cross-border cooperation will create added value on both sides.
5. Enabling individuals to make well-informed career and learning choices, by supporting career choices which match national labour market opportunities through the establishment of high-quality instruments (i.e. services for professional orientation, psychological support and capacity building opportunities in career and life-management skills).

6. Supporting innovative business ideas and offering young entrepreneurs opportunities to network and pool their interests, by providing fast, non-bureaucratic grants for start-up projects in Tunisia. Students or graduates in the transition phase between studies and work should be able to apply, as individuals or teams, for government grants which would enable them to turn their innovative ideas into reality or are used for testing or developing new products or services.
7. Facilitating access to mobility statistics at university level and setting a central body in charge of the follow-up of mobility exchanges, so as to enhance the internationalisation and visibility of Tunisian HEIs.

As the above recommendations highlight, Higher Education, research and innovation play a key role for a cultural, socio-economic and environmentally sustainable development, especially considering that societies have become increasingly knowledge-based. Such recommendations are hence aimed at reducing educational disadvantages, increasing the capacities of emerging students and scholars, and improving HE systems. A very beneficial tool for the Tunisian Higher Education sector is, in this respect, the Erasmus+ ICM scheme, which hence deserves special attention.

### 3. ERASMUS+ ICM SCHEME: IMPACT ON, CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS FOR TUNISIAN HE

The Higher Education background in Tunisia has evidenced the essential role played by Higher Education to solve cross-cutting issues such as graduates' unemployment and shortage of relevant skills for the labour market. The recent demographic transition taking place in Tunisia, which sees a reduction in the share of young people, has inevitably led to a shift in the Higher Education policy of the country, which is now focussing more on enhancing its quality, as evidenced by ongoing reforms and strategies.

Internationalisation is beneficial to this end and the Erasmus+ ICM scheme, which takes up most mobility opportunities for Tunisian students and staff, could prove useful to further improve and streamline current management, teaching and practices at university level. In particular, the EU itself sees ICM as such a precious tool to increase the number of staff and students' exchanges between Tunisia and Europe, to even increase the budget by another 10 million Euros in 2017, which proves how Tunisia is considered a key actor and partner in the future international scenario. The additional assistance provided is also aimed at consolidating cooperation between EU and Tunisian HEIs through projects on HE modernisation and promotion of bilateral contacts. Proposals have therefore a high chance of success, yet the funding for the region is not always spent. Other countries are endeavouring to boost cooperation with Tunisia through targeted programmes, as the UK and Germany (see recent reports by UUKi – Universities UK international and AGYA – Arab-German Young Academy of Sciences and Humanities). All these trends further confirm the need to investigate on the state-of-the-art of ICM in Tunisia, detect and fix failures and build on best practices in place.



## MAJOR CHALLENGES IN ICM IMPLEMENTATION IN TUNISIA

The ICMED findings have evidenced that the ICM scheme is still not fully widespread and known, as is especially the case in one of the participating universities, where students were not familiar with the action at all. As a consequence, perceptions about KA107 can vary greatly according to the management structure adopted and the experience acquired by each participating Tunisian HEI. Unfortunately, the limited knowledge may also result in lack of students' mobility flows, which are instead converted into staff exchanges. The challenges presented as follows specifically concerns those realities where ICM is still underdeveloped, while appropriate and effective management and implementation procedures can be noticed where a solid unit dedicated to international mobility exists.

A major hindrance may be the lack of a dedicated promotional strategy for international mobility at university level. In certain cases, promotional efforts are mainly addressed to attract international (in particular African) degree seeking students, while mobility agreements among potential beneficiaries are deemed to be insufficient and finding new European partners to activate new mobility agreements is one of the main difficulties at central university level. This further hampers mobility exchanges, as few destinations are available, also in French-speaking countries, which could result more attractive for Tunisian students.

With reference to the official promotion of the initiative, HEIs often resort to massive emailing or word of mouth. Info days are also organised, but in most cases general information is provided, and notice boards or posters are used, yet they are often not fully visible or are published for a very short time, which limits the number of potential candidates.

Language proficiency is a further obstacle, not only in English but also in other EU languages such as Spanish, which are not commonly studied in Tunisia and obtaining proficiency certificates is hence difficult or not of interest for Tunisian students. This aspect may lead to the shortage or lack of sufficient/valid student applications and difficulties to attend classes and pass exams in the local language or in English for those students who are selected. Language proficiency may be one of the main obstacles for staff mobility too, since mobility opportunities for staff who do not master English are limited.

Top students are sometimes reluctant to perform mobility, for either academic (it may negatively influence their GPA) or personal reasons (they fear they are not prepared). Mobility exchanges are also sometimes difficult to organise, especially for students in their last year, because the Tunisian Higher Education system requests a professional project. Moreover, some courses are extremely intensive and no corresponding level of education exists in Europe (except in France, yet almost disappearing), making mobility not feasible. In these cases, Tunisian students prefer to pursue their studies directly abroad. It should also be recalled that many outgoing students undertake their mobility out of the Erasmus+ scheme (e.g. "bourse d'alternance" or PhD in "co-tutelle"). On the other hand, an imbalance has been noticed between incoming and outgoing mobility flows, as few EU students select Tunisian HEIs as their host institutions, and local staff consequently has little experience in/knowledge about how to manage such flows. The very few incoming mobilities are mainly due to the limited educational offer in English by Tunisian HEIs.

The financial support provided seem not always enough to cover all the costs incurred during mobility, such as travel costs, especially in some host countries, and personal savings are hence deemed to be a prerequisite for mobile students. Moreover, there are also practical problems related to the maximum amount of dinars that a Tunisian citizen can exchange per year (6.000 dinars/year = 2.000 euro).

Despite most of applicants are overall satisfied with the issuing of visas, the visa process can be very burdensome, in terms of costs, length and documents required, such as proof of housing which implies support from the host universities in finding accommodation in a short time. Obtaining a visa today may even take 3 months and there are no preferential channels for students who have already received approval for a mobility exchange. Furthermore, the procedures are now very complicated, as students currently need to apply via external agencies which offer a paid service. They also need to go to Tunis several times as Consulates/Embassies are located there. The whole process is then cost and time consuming (the cost for this trip is a problem for some students). On the contrary, academic and administrative staff do not seem to have major problems with visas, as they have different passports.

As far as the application process is concerned, the major hindrance in students' minds is the short period of time available to gather the documents required. It is nevertheless worth mentioning that this period is sufficient for the ICM unit to get a high number of applications, especially in the light of the very limited number of scholarships available. Information provided seems to be relevant, detailed and clear, yet lack of students' awareness was highlighted in terms of selection criteria, even if they were published on the website and on the notice board. The composition of the Evaluation Committee and appeal procedures are instead not fully evident features, especially if a student wishes to appeal an application rejection.

Lack of active involvement of Tunisian HEIs has been pointed out with reference to the drafting of the inter-institutional agreement or the identification of selection criteria for student/staff mobility, as European partners usually propose their models and procedures. This also regards the preparation of mobility documents such as Learning Agreements, which may take place upon arrival rather than before the departure.

Preparation to the mobility exchange is regarded insufficient, both in terms of language or cultural courses, which are frequently not provided by the home institutions, nor in some cases by the host institutions either. This frequently leads to cultural integration challenges (such as the differences in the Higher Education systems). In specific cases, especially where the ICM scheme is not fully developed, students also experience difficulties in terms of support provided, by the coordinators in both home and host institutions, to fill out mobility documents and find course equivalence. This again seems to be linked to the lack of dedicated staff and limited knowledge about the action, since where ICM is managed by a dedicated unit, students are informed on general and practical issues by the Erasmus contact person at central level, while academic issues (including the Learning Agreement) are managed by the department/faculty. Once the mobility has started, students are contacted regularly and they are well aware of the contact persons and know who they should refer to, according to the specific issue.

Challenges may also occur during the mobility period, such as cultural integration difficulties (especially during the first weeks), lack of dedicated support for international students and administrative/academic follow-up from the home institutions, late scholarship payments, heavy workload and higher academic requirements than initially expected.

Recognition of mobility activities upon return has proved to take a long time, with special reference to the conversion of grades. Despite most students are satisfied with their GPA at their home institutions following the grade conversion, some may experience difficulties as the conversion may be at their disadvantage, which may have a negative impact on future admission degree courses. Another concern is that the delay in the recognition procedure may postpone the graduation date and jeopardise applications for subsequent degree courses. Furthermore, language difficulties or lack of support in filling out the Learning Agreement may result in lack of validation of activities carried out abroad. All these hindrances linked to the recognition process seem to be due to the still rather limited understanding of Erasmus+ and International Credit Mobility (including processes, requirements, recognition) by the local academic community. On the other hand, students themselves might not fully understand the aim of an exchange mobility programme, as they clearly showed their intention to continue mobility and/or transform it into a permanent study abroad. The issue of recognition is also challenging in the case of staff and mechanisms to ensure recognition of their mobility experience should be further exploited.

With reference to teaching activities, a major complain regards the lack of support provided by home and host HEIs. Since academic staff may also attend Staff Weeks during the mobility exchange, this proves to limit the time available for teaching and it might hence be difficult to satisfy the 8-hour-teaching requirement per week. Such tight timing might also hinder the opportunity to meet representatives of departments or units with whom to discuss about the educational offer, so as to support local students in the choice of the study activities to be carried out abroad. Furthermore, the length of the staff mobility exchange might be an obstacle, especially if a substitute for teaching/administrative activities at the home university needs to be found.

A further hindrance is the lack of adequate training for local staff, who is hence not familiar with either the initiative itself or the procedures and mechanisms involved. No specific training activities on ICM for HEIs are planned by the National Erasmus+ Office either.

To conclude, the limited role of the Tunisian NEO, should be pointed out. It mainly performs information and coordination tasks, with no real control over ICM implementation at HE level and limited influence on university strategies and local management of mobility agreements. The NEO does not collect any information on inter-institutional agreements established by Tunisian HEIs nor does it provide HEIs with templates and seems to lack a global perspective on the development of ICM partnerships in the country. Participating HEIs autonomously manage applications, appeals and selection of candidates in their preferred fields and rely on systems adopted in other mobility programmes, which may not satisfy the specific requirements of ICM. Universities may thus manage the whole process in quite different ways.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE ACTIONS AND BEST PRACTICES IN PLACE

In the light of the challenging scenario depicted above, several actions can be recommended at both political as well as practical level, to enhance the effectiveness of procedures in place in Tunisian HEIs with reference to the Erasmus+ ICM scheme.

1. Higher cooperation between EU and Tunisian HEIs would be advisable for these latter to be more involved, for example by implementing a joint student selection process. A stronger involvement of academic staff in suggesting Tunisian HEIs as partners for EU universities, with which they already cooperate on various projects, would also be recommended.
2. At political level, raising awareness in the European Commission about the need to extend the duration of inter-institutional mobility agreements in the new Erasmus+ framework programme (e.g. 5/6 years instead of 2) is pivotal, in order ensure a better management of flows and procedures in a longer-term and stability perspective, as well as a more effective promotion of the agreements. The NEO/Ministry, and EU HEIs, should play a key role in this respect. Increasing the number of mobility agreements/destinations would also be helpful.
3. One of the principles of Erasmus+ ICM is clarity and transparency, as transparent and clear information is required in all the project stages. Adequate information (and support) should also be provided on the health insurance, as requirements are not always clear. To the same end, transparency is mandatory with reference to the composition of the evaluation committee and appeal procedures. Calls for application could be extended so as to enable more students and staff to apply and a clear identification of Erasmus+ contact persons at Tunisian HEIs would also ensure more transparency and a more effective student support. In terms of clarity and transparency, local HEIs should work in cooperation with EU partners to improve the credit recognition mechanism, for a faster and more efficient conversion of marks to take place.
4. As is already the case in one of the participating HEI, students who have benefitted from a mobility exchange could present their mobility experience in the framework of info-days, as success stories, and the info-days themselves could focus more on examples of good practices rather than on the general information about the Erasmus+ ICM scheme, which can instead easily be found online.
5. Negotiating an easier visa procedures and/or lower visa costs with the EU would be advisable, as visa issuing may be on of the main obstacles for staff and students' mobility. A centralised visa procedure could be beneficial, with the support of the EACEA and through a major coordination role played by the Tunisian NEO, which could cooperate with consulates and collect visa applications at central level. A preferential channel could hence be created for ICM visa applicants, instead of making applicants resort to external agencies. The NEO/Education Ministry should be strongly involved to this end.
6. Standardising procedures and documents and drafting templates would be required, and including such templates in the Toolbox for ICM developed by the ICMED project would be

very useful. The Toolbox itself is already considered a precious instrument by the local NEO and participating HEIs.

7. In this respect, the Ministry is planning to expand the NEO's influence in the next future, with special reference to the provision of guidelines to Tunisian HEIs so as to establish and ensure equal and standard procedures for evaluation and selection in all universities and to disseminate best practices, Toolbox and templates. Furthermore, the NEO/Ministry could contribute to drafting a complete list of KA107 agreements to be published on the European Commission website.
8. Training Tunisian HEI staff specifically on ICM features and requirements is also needed and should cover very practical (not only administrative but also academic) aspects, by presenting good practices or examples, such as housing, scholarship, insurance and educational offer. Management of incoming mobility flows should be covered during the training, especially considering the relative shortage of incoming students. Such training could also be delivered jointly through the innovative, carbon-neutral tools available, such as the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange model ([https://europa.eu/youth/erasmusvirtual\\_en](https://europa.eu/youth/erasmusvirtual_en)), which will enable staff to be trained online and share experience with international counterparts without leaving their own office, and thus saving precious working time, while also reflecting on crucial topics thanks to the input provided by trained facilitators.
9. Setting up a strategy to attract international students would also be precious, so as to boost incoming mobility flows, by also activating new courses in English.
10. Teaching staff should be more committed to Erasmus+ students and more involved, e.g. through follow-up actions during and after the mobility exchange, by providing support before the mobility, especially on the Learning Agreement, and afterwards on the credit recognition. By doing so, and thanks to dedicated presentations to promote mobility opportunities, they could play a key role in encouraging Tunisian students (also top ones) to participate in an ICM exchange, especially considering that Tunisian students are not very attracted by international mobility.
11. In terms of staff training, increasing the number of administrative staff with proficiency in English, especially within departments, who can manage international mobility, have contacts with foreign partners and international networks, would be essential, not only to support local students but also potential incoming students and staff and to be able to cooperate with EU partners more effectively. Such staff could also endeavour to put in contact students (even of different cycles) who go on mobility in the same host university at the same time.
12. Students' training is also essential for their mobility exchanges to be a successful experience. In this respect, (inter)cultural and language preparation courses should be offered before the mobility takes place by the home university in order to ease integration. The Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange model could be useful to combine language and intercultural preparation activities in a sort of eTandem project carried out by the local IROs or Language Centres in cooperation with the respective IROs or Language Centres in partner HEIs. Future outgoing students may participate in such a project prior to their departure, by

joining an online community, together with international students from the host destinations, who could in turn practice the target language and deepen their cultural understanding. Similar preparation activities would be useful to integrate the high potential of digital technologies with innovative educational methods, adopting a peer-led approach and enhancing students' transversal skills. Adequate preparation to the mobility exchange should be taken care of by both the sending and hosting institution. Moreover, such courses could enhance internationalisation at home, if they are offered to all university students and not only to those leaving for a mobility exchange, and would be very useful to boost short-term mobility exchanges, which is key in the Tunisian HE sector as evidenced in this paper.

In addition to the recommendations advanced, best practices and actions already undertaken to improve the management and implementation of ICM in Tunisia should also be mentioned. These are especially taking place where the KA107 scheme is already known at institutional level and include, among others: checklists for student application documents prepared by the local ICM dedicated unit; opportunity to download application document templates from the university website; templates for staff and students' reports to be filled out upon return; statistics on mobility used to implement support and services for outgoing staff/students; creation of Erasmus+ Facebook pages for those departments with high mobility flows; application for new agreements according to professors/students' requests and based on pre-existing relations with foreign universities; ranking lists published on the institutional website; agreements with halls of residences for incoming students to benefit from advantageous conditions at convenient prices; contact points to provide better support to all incoming students; an international promotion strategy ensuring better exposure of Tunisian HEIs on medias, with a catchier institutional website which includes an English version, and better positioning in international rankings.

#### 4. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS ON ICM IMPLEMENTATION IN TUNISIA

Analysing challenges and potential opportunities in the fields of Higher Education, research and innovation, with a special focus on KA107, has enabled to identify best practice examples and innovative educational techniques, as well as to recommend future actions to further enhance the very high potential of ICM to improve the quality and relevance of Higher Education for Tunisian students and staff. This is especially needed today, in the light of the high unemployment and demographic transition affecting Tunisia.

Despite the hindrances emerged, the ICM scheme is considered a positive experience as a whole, which greatly motivates participating staff to do a better job at their home universities, in terms of being more dedicated to support and encourage staff and students to undertake a mobility experience, and considerably contributes to the personal and professional developments of participating students.

Overcoming major challenges in the implementation and management of this Erasmus+ initiative requires urgent actions, such as to harmonise procedures and make them more transparent and equitable, to invest on staff and students' training, to increase the attractiveness of the educational offer, as well as to set forth institutional strategies aimed at boosting both incoming and outgoing mobility.

As research and findings prove, economic and social obstacles can only be solved with the great contribution of the Higher Education sector and solutions demand a deep knowledge and understanding of the region itself, for discussed opportunities, suggestions and best practices, also coming from different contexts and countries, to be beneficial for the Tunisian Higher Education sector as a whole.

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