

Action Fiche for a Special Measure for Tunisia in 2013

1. IDENTIFICATION

Title/Number	<i>Specific Tunisia Window under Erasmus Mundus and Tempus Tunisia CRIS N°ENPI/2013/024-639</i>		
Total cost	EUR 10,000,000 EU contribution: EUR 10,000,000 To be financed for an amount of EUR 10 million from the general budget of the European Union for 2013		
Aid method / Method of implementation	Project approach: <i>Centralised indirect management</i> Implementing body: Education, Audio-visual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA)		
DAC-code	11420	Sector	Higher Education

2. RATIONALE

The Joint Communication on “A new response to a changing Neighbourhood¹” outlines a new approach towards the European Union (EU)’s neighbours to the East and South, based on mutual accountability and a shared commitment to respecting universal values, international human rights standards, democracy and the rule of law. A strengthened engagement in the area of education is a crucial element of the new approach vis-à-vis the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) countries. Mobility and development of skills are also among the priorities of the new EU-Tunisia Action Plan (2013-2017).

The recent developments in Tunisia have shown that particular attention needs to be given to supporting actions in favour of young people since they play an important role in the current democratisation process of the country.

Furthermore, Tunisia continues to be on a transition towards establishing a fully-fledged market economy. In this context, partner country institutions, including higher education institutions, are under strong pressure to provide the skills required by these new economic conditions.

Support for partner country institutions in their reform efforts and in establishing people-to-people co-operation, especially in the field of higher education, is therefore needed and can contribute to mutual understanding between people, countries and cultures in the EU's neighbouring countries.

The Special Measure aims to reinforce the partnership between the European and Tunisian peoples enabling an increased mobility of Tunisian students who could go and study in the EU. Tunisia was critical of the EU concerning the proposal for the partnership for mobility, migration and security, considering that it emphasises too much the security and migration control aspects and does not offer enough on the

¹ COM(2011)303 dated 25/05/2011.

mobility side. The proposed action therefore corresponds to a political will to show that the EU borders are not closed to Tunisian people and that the EU is ready to encourage the mobility of students.

In addition, the Special Measure will strengthen the support provided through the Tempus programme to the modernisation of the Tunisian higher education system. It will in particular increase the capacity of higher education institutions, enhance their ability to cooperate internationally and improve the quality and relevance of their activities towards the world of work and society at large.

2.1. Sector context

Higher education has a key role in the economic, social and political development of any country as noted in the Interregional Strategy Paper and Indicative Programme 2007-2013 for the European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument (ENPI) region.

Globalisation and the move towards knowledge-based economies have been major drivers behind developments within the higher education sector worldwide over recent years. These have enhanced the level of internationalisation of higher education, and have had a strong influence on the on-going review of the role of the university as a key player in the development of the economy and society.

At the same time, co-operation between European and Tunisian academics and mobility among European and Tunisian students is becoming ever more important for the cross-fertilisation of ideas and for cultural understanding.

Higher education in Tunisia is under strong pressure to produce the skills required by the new economic conditions, to provide the expertise to plan and manage new growth and development in a sustainable and equitable way. Tunisia is therefore more and more aware of the need to improve the overall quality and relevance of its higher education systems, bringing them in line with Europe's Bologna Process.

2.2. Lessons learnt

An interim evaluation of the Erasmus Mundus 2009-2013 programme was conducted in 2011-2012. Results showed that the objectives of Erasmus Mundus 2009-2013 remain relevant to the key stakeholders and target groups of the programme and that it contributed significantly to the adoption of European and international credit and mobility recognition systems and of international quality assurance mechanisms in third countries. In addition, the participation in Action 2 allowed less privileged institutions to develop their management capacities and achieve a higher level of excellence.

The final evaluation of Tempus III (November 2009) confirms that the programme had contributed to the overall development of higher education systems in the partner countries, including the introduction of the Bologna principles. Academic and administrative staff and students benefited significantly from their involvement in Tempus III, notably through contacts with foreign colleagues, improved training, access to new learning materials/methods and mobility opportunities.

2.3. Complementary actions

The Erasmus Mundus 2009-2013 and Tempus IV programmes complement each other. Potential duplications are limited due to the fact that Tempus does not have major mobility components (the existing ones are rather instrumental, focusing on academic and administrative staff, being linked to the implementation of joint projects).

Another complementary programme is the European Commission's 7th Framework Programme, one of the key pillar for the European Research Area supporting the 'knowledge triangle' - research, education and innovation - and where Tunisia is in the list of International Co-operation partner countries and in particular the Marie Curie Actions that enhance transnational mobility of researchers.

Furthermore, a EUR 65 million budget support programme of support to the higher education, vocational training and employability of young graduates, currently under implementation aims to consolidate the bases of a knowledge economy and to make Tunisia more competitive in particular through more skilled and qualified human resources and through a better employability of students. The programme specifically aims to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the education, higher education and vocational training systems in Tunisia.

Finally, EU Member States' higher education exchange and co-operation agencies are also very active in Tunisia and provide for example, individual scholarships for students from Tunisia.

2.4. Donor co-ordination

In Tunisia, co-ordination of aid is driven by a number of working groups: EU Co-operation Counsellors (meeting twice per semester principally for information sharing), thematic working groups (the Delegation leads the working group on the water sector, on social and migration sectors, on the judiciary sector as well as civil society) and co-ordination meetings in the framework of Budget Support programmes (with the World Bank, the African Development Bank and Agence Française de Développement).

Last year, the EU Delegation with the United Nations took the lead in discussing with the Tunisian Government the setting-up of a formal aid co-ordination mechanism in Tunisia as a concerted attempt by development partners to co-ordinate assistance in such a way as to maximise the impact of support and to ensure that its strategic focus is fully in line with Tunisian needs.

The EU Delegation in Tunis and the Tunisia National Tempus Office also facilitate networking between the different Tempus and Erasmus Mundus projects and co-ordination with other donors active in the area of higher education.

3. DESCRIPTION

3.1. Objectives

The general objective of this action is to create one separate window for Tunisia under two on-going EU co-operation programmes as follows:

- under Action 1 (EUR 1 million) and Action 2 (EUR 4 million) of the Erasmus Mundus programme.
- under Component 1 (Joint Projects) and Component 2 (Structural Measures) of the Tempus IV Programme (EUR 5 million).

in order to contribute to the development of human resources and the international co-operation capacity of higher education institutions in Tunisia by increasing mobility between the European Union and Tunisia and to contribute to the modernisation of higher education in Tunisia.

More specifically the Specific Tunisia Window aims to:

- increase the degree of internationalisation of higher education institutions from Tunisia and improve their capacities to manage mobility actions and international co-operation projects.
- allow students from Tunisia to improve their educational and career perspectives by attending programmes in the EU universities.
- contribute to improved quality, relevance, capacity and governance of higher education in Tunisia and to the international opening of its universities.

3.2. Expected results and main activities

The expected results are:

- Enhanced skills and capacities of students from the involved higher education institutions from Tunisia as a result of the availability of better undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and acquired international experience.
- Increased number of innovative academic programmes as a result of co-operation.
- Enhanced skills and capacities of researchers and staff from the involved higher education institutions from Tunisia as a result of international exposure and exchange of best practices with EU institutions.
- Enhanced capacities of Tunisian institutions in terms of international co-operation, undergraduate and postgraduate programme development (including curricula and work placement development) through sharing of best practices.
- Increased intercultural dialogue and understanding between participants from Tunisia and from the EU Member States.
- An increased access of students from Tunisia to higher education opportunities in the European Union.
- New curricula developed, promoted and disseminated.
- Curricula improved and adapted in line with labour market needs.
- Teaching methods improved.

- Learning materials improved.
- Human resources developed.
- Qualification systems improved.
- Quality assurance systems introduced and developed.
- Inter-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary activities between university faculties enhanced.
- Links with research and between research and industry strengthened.
- Transparency, recognition, and comparability of higher education institution qualifications increased.

The main activities which are expected to contribute to the above-mentioned results are:

- Awarding scholarships to students and doctoral candidates from Tunisia to participate in Erasmus Mundus joint programmes (Action 1).
- Setting up partnerships between Tunisia and European Union higher education institutions as a basis for structured co-operation (Action 2).
- Setting up individual mobility schemes at all levels of higher education, including a scholarship scheme for students (undergraduate, master, doctoral) and for academic staff (for teaching, training and research), and administrative staff (Action 2).
- Joint Projects and Structural Measures (Tempus IV) will be based on multilateral partnerships between higher education institutions in the EU and Tunisia, contributing to knowledge transfer.
- Studies and research on specific issues, producing reform/policy recommendations, organisation of national, regional and thematic conferences and seminars, provision of training and dissemination and information activities.

3.3. Risks and assumptions

Four main risks are often mentioned in relation to the programmes: possible brain drain effects, possible incompliance with the minimum mobility flow per country of the lot, a bias towards already advantaged groups, and practical problems with providing visas.

The partnerships have to identify the ways in which individual mobility activities foreseen in the project increase knowledge rather than favour brain drain, for instance by encouraging more reciprocal relationships between participants from the EU and the third country.

In the Guidelines for applicants of the call for proposals, the partnerships will be given more flexibility with regard to the requirements related to the percentage of distribution for the different types of mobility.

The issue of bias to already advantaged groups (higher education institutions in capitals; candidates in the capital and in some other large cities) can be overcome by repeated information and communication efforts.

On the issue of visas, partnerships are encouraged to liaise with EU Delegations in partner countries and EU Member States embassies in these countries in order to ease the visa application process.

3.4. Cross-cutting Issues

The Erasmus Mundus and Tempus programmes promote equality between men and women and contribute to combating all forms of discrimination. They include provisions for students with special needs, and in particular help to promote their integration into mainstream higher education.

In this context, a transparent selection process that respects the minimum objective criteria (academic merit, economic situation, gender balance and favourable treatment of disabled students, participation of partner country institutions physically located in remote or less developed regions) will remain in place in order to guarantee a fair selection of candidates.

3.5. Stakeholders

The main stakeholders are universities from Tunisia and from the European Union, and higher education students, doctoral candidates and academic staff benefiting from mobility grants.

The direct beneficiaries of the programme are students, doctoral candidates, academics and other university staff from Tunisia. Higher education institutions in the EU will also benefit indirectly from greater international contacts and profile at institutional and individual level and the closer co-operation this generates.

4. IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

4.1. Method of implementation

The programme will be implemented under indirect centralised management mode. The implementing body is the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA)².

The change of management mode constitutes a substantial change except where the Commission "re-centralises" or reduces the level of tasks previously delegated to the beneficiary country, international organisation or delegate body under, respectively, decentralised, joint or indirect centralised management.

² The Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency is a public body created by the Decision 2005/56/EC of the European Commission adopted on 14/01/2005. The Agency's mission is to implement a number of strands of more than 15 EU funded programmes and actions in the fields of education and training, active citizenship, youth, audiovisual and culture.

4.2. Procurement and grant award procedures

All contracts implementing the action must be awarded and implemented in accordance with the procedures and standard documents laid down and published by the Commission for the implementation of external operations, in force at the time of the launch of the procedure in question.

The essential selection criteria are the financial and operational capacity of the applicant. The essential award criteria are relevance of the proposed action to the objectives of the call; design, effectiveness, feasibility, sustainability and cost-effectiveness of the action.

The maximum possible rate of co-financing may be up to 100 % in accordance with Article 192 of the Financial Regulation if full funding is essential for the action to be carried out. The essentiality of full funding will be justified by the responsible authorising officer in the award decision, in respect of the principles of equal treatment and sound financial management. This is justified by the fact that experiences from Erasmus Mundus External Co-operation Window has shown that full EU financing is a condition to successfully fulfil the programme objectives by also including participation of educational institutions in partner countries with limited financial resources.

EACEA is responsible for the management of all actions of Erasmus Mundus 2013 and Tempus 2013, under the supervision of relevant Directorate-Generals of the Commission. As contracting authority, the EACEA will be responsible for the selection/evaluation/award procedure.

Under Erasmus Mundus: for Action 1 (Joint Programmes), the consortia of higher education institutions will select scholarship recipients directly, following a fair and transparent procedure respecting the Erasmus Mundus Action 1 requirements. The selection of partnerships (Action 2) will be a competitive process organised by the Agency and based on the assessment of the quality of the proposal from the academic and organisational points of view. All applications will undergo assessments by external independent experts according to the award criteria established in the calls for proposals.

Commission representatives will participate as voting members and observers in the selection/evaluation committee chaired by the EACEA, and EU Delegations will be consulted on the eligibility of partner country institutions and relevance of the proposals to the country needs, when justified.

4.3. Indicative Budget and calendar

The maximum EU contribution of this action is EUR 10 million, allocated as follows:

Under Erasmus Mundus (grants):

- Action 1 (allowing Tunisian students to follow joint master and doctoral programmes): EUR 1 million,
- Action 2 (Partnerships) Strand 1 (ENPI countries): the allocation of EUR 4 million for Tunisia from budget heading 19 08 01 01 will be a top up to the

Erasmus Mundus ENP budget and will be included in the regular annual call for proposals.

The planned duration of a project is specifically reported in the individual geographical lot and cannot exceed in principle 48 months. Extensions to the eligibility period may be exceptionally granted in duly justified cases. This geographical lot is open to mobility in all fields of study. The minimum number of mobility flows under this window is expected to be around 80. Eligible activities, including preparatory activities, are expected to start as of 15 July 2013. The Agency plans to announce the award decision by July 2013.

Under Tempus IV (grants):

The allocation of EUR 5 million for Tunisia from budget heading 19 08 01 01 will be a top-up to the Tempus ENP budget and will be included in the regular annual call for proposals for Joint Projects and Structural Projects. The operational duration of the projects will be of a maximum of 36 months. Extensions to the eligibility period may be exceptionally granted in duly justified cases.

4.4. Performance monitoring

EACEA will regularly report to the Commission on the use of committed funds and programme implementation and provide ad hoc information for both Action 1 and Action 2 of the Erasmus Mundus programme. The report on programme implementation shall also focus on project results, obstacles, lessons learnt and any useful information for improving the programming and identification.

4.5. Evaluation and audit

Evaluations (mid-term, final, ex post) and audit arrangements are integral part of the contractual arrangements with the selected grantee. External evaluations and audits might also be carried out by independent consultants recruited by the Commission in accordance with EU rules and procedures and specifically established terms of reference. EACEA will financially audit the projects financed under this programme according to its procedures.

4.6. Communication and visibility

The EU's international programmes to support education account for a large part of the success of its public diplomacy abroad. Bringing together students and academics from the EU and the wider world broadens the understanding of the EU, and forms lasting partnerships and networks that sustain support for European values. Special attention will be paid to increasing visibility, dissemination and exploitation of results.

The EACEA promotes the programme and its call for proposals on its website. Information on yearly Calls for Proposals is broadly disseminated. Information sessions are organised by Erasmus Mundus National Structures in the Member States and National Tempus Offices in the partner countries.

The National Tempus Office in co-operation with the EU Delegation in Tunis acts as a relay in Tunisia. Therefore, the National Tempus Office in co-operation with the EU Delegation disseminates the information about the Erasmus Mundus and Tempus

programmes, the calls for proposals and the projects on higher education institutions of Tunisia.

The Commission services and the Executive Agency will assure the visibility of the actions, in compliance with the Communication and Visibility Manual for EU External Actions (http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/work/visibility/index_en.htm).

Budget for the Action Fiche for the Special Measure for Tunisia in 2013

Budget

Categories³	EU contribution	Government contribution	<Other>⁴	Total
	EUR (million)	EUR (million)	EUR (million)	EUR (million)
Erasmus Mundus Tunisia (grants)	5			5
Action 1 grants	1			1
Action 2 grants	4			4
Tempus Tunisia (grants)	5			5
TOTAL	10			10

The evaluation and audit costs are already covered under the budgets of the Erasmus Mundus and Tempus programmes.

³ This model proposes a breakdown by activities, following the description of the action (cf. section 1.3 above); the type of contract (services, supplies, works, grants, etc) will be specified under each category. The categories can be broken down by type of contract linked to activities.

⁴ For instance, by the project's own resources or other donors in case of co-financing.