

CONTRIBUTION to the final and mid-term evaluations of the Erasmus+: Youth and European Solidarity Corps programmes

Network of National Agencies
in the field of Youth



EUROPEAN UNION

Erasmus+
Enriching lives, opening minds.



**EUROPEAN
SOLIDARITY
CORPS**

THE POWER OF TOGETHER.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

In a nutshell	2
Introduction	3
A. BEFORE WE START	4
A.1. An enabling European policy framework for the youth field	4
A.2. The Youth field makes a difference.....	5
B. A COHERENT INTERVENTION LOGIC	6
B.1. Youth Programmes and societal trends	6
B.2. European values, transnational mobility and (intercultural) learning.....	7
B.3. Youth Programmes and the EU Youth Strategy	8
B.4. Inclusion and diversity	8
B.5. Youth Work Development and Quality	10
B.6. Volunteering, engagement and solidarity	11
B.7. Youth Programmes and participation.....	12
B.8. Youth programmes and neighbouring countries	12
C. PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT DRIVEN BY OBJECTIVES AND KNOWLEDGE	13
C.1. Overcoming administrative obstacles	13
C.2. Financing of the programmes.....	13
C.3. Knowledge, research and monitoring	14
C.4. Management and operational aspects.....	14

IN A NUTSHELL

This contribution reflects the discussions from three consecutive Business Meetings of the network of National Agencies (NA's) in the youth field held in Malmö, Sweden (April 2023), Madrid, Spain (October 2023), and Brussels, Belgium (March 2024). It highlights the current EU Youth Strategy, Recommendations on mobility and the European Youth Work Agenda as an enabling policy framework for advancing youth policy and youth work development in Europe.

The document is based on various inputs, including analysis of societal megatrends, the intervention logic of Erasmus+: Youth and European Solidarity Corps, quantitative data on programmes contributions to European mobility, recommendations from conferences and thematic evaluations, policy frameworks, and ongoing research.

The text underscores the substantial impact of EU Youth programmes on young people's attitudes and values, as demonstrated both by the quantitative data collected via the dashboards as well as the qualitative insights from RAY research.

The key messages highlight the importance of aligning programmes with societal megatrends, and to focus on areas such as promoting European values and democracy, enhancing resilience in a rapidly changing world and supporting mental wellbeing. They emphasize the significant role of youth work in non-formal learning mobility, as evidenced by E+: Youth and ESC activities, and also stress the need to ensure responsiveness for evolving needs of young people.

The intervention logic, resulting from the discussions, outlines strategic priorities including creating opportunities and providing tools for young people to act themselves, building capacity of youth workers, enriching and supporting youth policy development. It calls for a closer alignment among the programmes objectives and the EU Youth Strategy focusing on enhancing transnational mobility, fostering a more inclusive and resilient European youth community, on robust youth work development, on meaningful and effective youth participation and policy dialogue, on cross-border volunteering and cooperation with neighbouring countries.

The final part focus on persistent administrative obstacles, financial challenges, and issues related to knowledge and operational management. Administrative complexities, such as complicated application processes and overwhelming procedures, hinder participation, prompting calls for adapted actions and formats, to address evolving youth sector dynamics.

Financial constraints pose barriers to participation in and effectiveness of the programmes, especially in the field of social inclusion and diversity. Stakeholders advocate for increased funding to accommodate growing demand and support quality projects. A lack of reliable data hampers evaluation and monitoring of the programmes, emphasizing the need for improved IT infrastructure and enhanced research mechanisms. Additionally, discussions on the financial capacity of National Agencies and their management fees, underscore the necessity for a equilibrated balance between responsibilities and resources to ensure effective implementation of the programmes.

INTRODUCTION

This contribution to the evaluation of Erasmus+: Youth and the European Solidarity Corps is based on the discussions in 3 consecutive Business Meetings of the network of NA's in the youth field (Malmö, Sweden, April 2023/Madrid, Spain, October 2023/Brussels, Belgium, March 2024). We took into account:

- Our analysis of prevailing megatrends in society. Key recommendations have been formulated to align with these, ensuring that the programmes remain responsive and relevant to the needs of young Europeans.
- The intervention logic of the two programmes and how the achievement of their objectives is supported by the different actions, tools and strategies of the programmes.
- Quantitative elements and figures revealing and showcasing the contribution of the two programmes in the overall architecture/landscape of European and international mobility.
- Recommendations from discussions and thematic evaluations in and with the field, in several European level conferences in the framework of Strategic National Agencies Cooperations (SNACs)
- Policy frameworks, reports and opinions from policy makers, be it in the Council, the EP and from the Commission, in the field of youth policy and youth work.
- Common visions and concerns, stemming from discussions with our colleagues from NA's in the fields of Education and Training (Erasmus+ in the next era) and with the Directors-general for Youth of the Member States (Report from the Round Table Multi-Stakeholders Discussions)
- Contributions resulting from ongoing research in the RAY network and evaluation exercises on European level, a.o. by the SALTO Resource Centre on Inclusion and Diversity.

This document reflects discussion outcomes that were shared unanimously or with a very large consensus among the NA's in the field of youth. It does not necessarily reflect the opinion of each National Agency in all aspects.

A. BEFORE WE START...

Before elaborating on the outcomes of the 3 Business Meetings, we'd like to give a short description of the state of play of the EU programmes in the Youth field.

A.1. AN ENABLING EUROPEAN POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR THE YOUTH FIELD

Since the White Paper on Youth (2001), a continuing development has been going on to develop youth policy and youth work in Europe, be it on European or on national and local level.

The EU Youth Strategy is the main instrument to shape EU Youth Policy. The Commission report on the mid-term evaluation of the EUYS 2019-2027 states:

- *“This underlines the importance of the dual approach of the EUYS, i.e. to pursue youth mainstreaming across policy areas, (...) and to mobilize and enhance the specific instruments and initiatives in the youth sector.” (Page 11)*
- *“The implementation of the EUYS is supported by instruments, which are funded by the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes (e.g. the EU Youth Dialogue, the European Youth Portal and the European Youth Work Agenda)”.(Page 4)*

The Recommendation on cross-border volunteering and the proposal for a Recommendation “Europe on the move”, express ongoing ambitions of the European Commission in the field of European and international mobility of young people.

Both the EUYS and the Recommendations provide a strong policy framework for the EU Youth Programmes and call for a close link between programme and policy objectives.

In its recent Resolutions on the implementation of the Erasmus+ Programme (2021-2027) and of the European Solidarity Corps (2021-2027), the European Parliament states: *“to keep Erasmus+ close to the people and ensure it remains a bottom-up ‘citizens’ programme’ offering quality education and mobility opportunities for young people and learners of all ages”* and *“the ESC has great potential to develop a common European sense of belonging by providing learning opportunities for volunteers to become active citizens, thus contributing to building better societies, fostering cohesion, advancing peace and preventing violence.”*

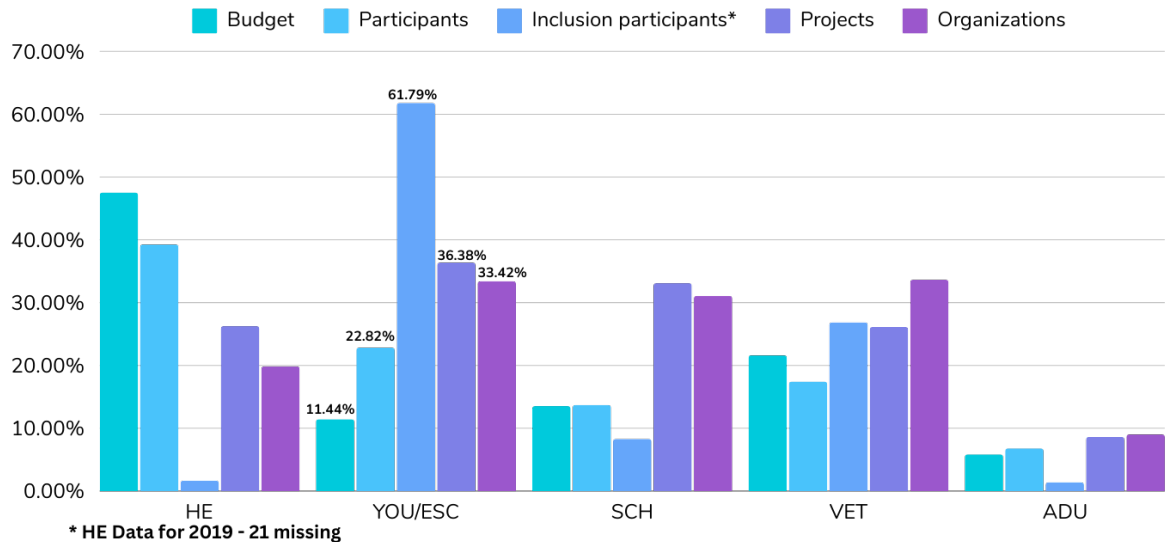
Also many Council resolutions have been referring to youth policy and youth work as a self-standing sector. Council Resolutions and Conclusions have been approved on: Youth Work (BE, 2010), Quality of Youth Work (IRE, 2013), Smart Youth Work (EE, 2017), Digital Youth Work (FI, 2019), Training of Youth Workers (FI, 2019), European Youth Work Agenda (DE, 2020). Under the Belgian Presidency a “Resolution on youth work policy in an empowering Europe” has been adopted by the Council in May 2024.

The European Youth Work Agenda has become an integral part of the Commission’s annual workplans and is the backbone for the development of youth work in Europe, with the EU Youth programmes as its main instrument.

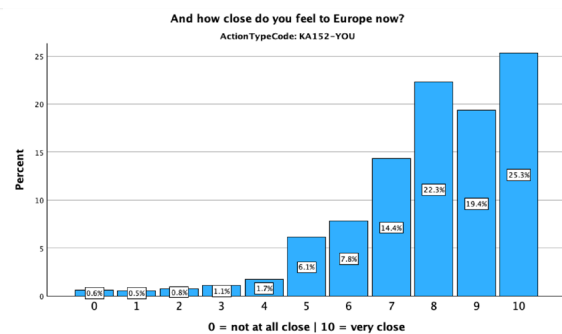
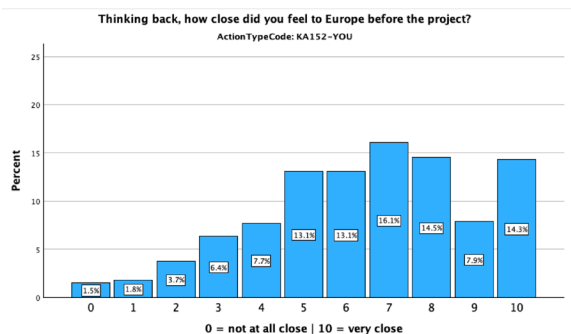
A.2. THE YOUTH FIELD MAKES A DIFFERENCE...

Youth work is the main provider of non-formal learning mobility for young people of all backgrounds, without pre-conditions to be a student, a pupil or in vocational training. Results from both the previous programme period 2014-2020 and the current period 2021-2027, consistently show that the E+:Youth and the ESC activities represent between 27 and 34 % of all granted projects, between 22 and 25 % of all participants and over 60% of all participants with fewer opportunities. (See graph, source: EC Dashboards)

Comparative data 2019 - 23

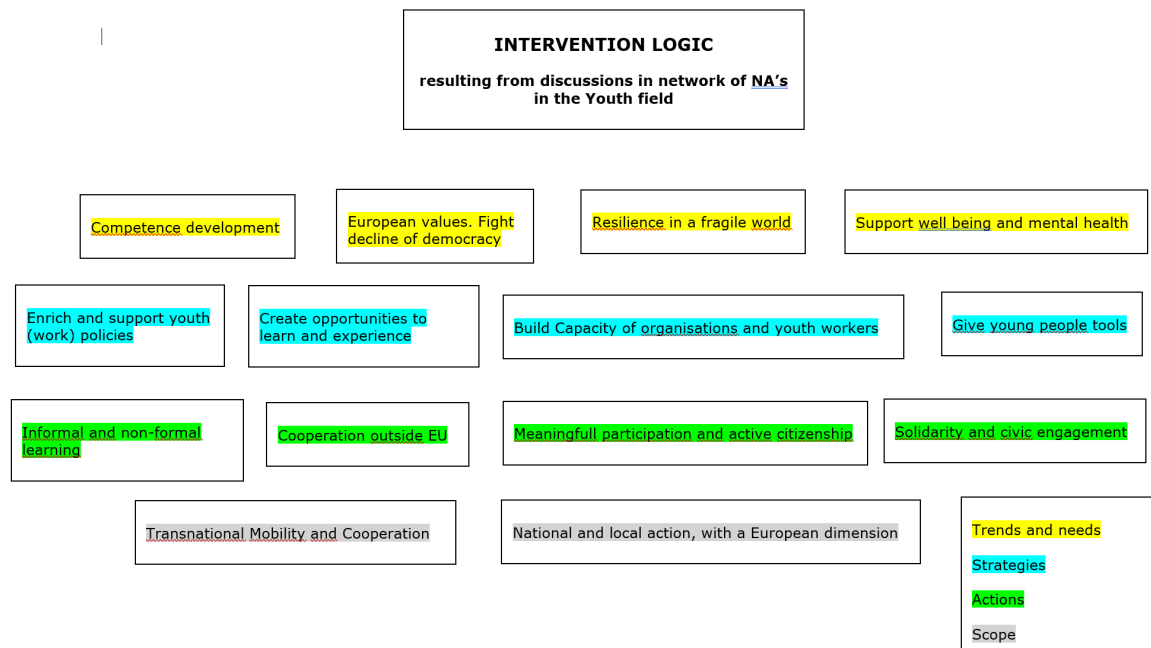


Looking at qualitative aspects of the programmes, RAY-insights revealed that participation in projects of the EU Youth programmes has considerable impact on young people’s attitudes and values. As one illustration, the graph below shows how young participants in group exchanges felt about their belonging to Europe, before and after taking part in their project. It makes clear how strong the impact of EU programmes is and how European integration is boosted through the programmes.



B. A COHERENT INTERVENTION LOGIC

The discussions brought forward a number of recommendations, suggestions and proposal that showed an intrinsic coherence and can be presented in the following intervention logic:



B.1. YOUTH PROGRAMMES AND SOCIETAL TRENDS

When addressing the future of EU Youth Programmes, the recommendation is to align with prevailing megatrends to remain responsive and relevant to the dynamic needs of young Europeans. Programmes should focus on areas crucial for adapting to societal shifts and emerging challenges, ensuring their positive contribution to young people's development and societal engagement.

The megatrends we identified:

- **Civic Engagement and Democracy:** Support and promote understanding of and commitment to European values. Address decline of democracy. Support direct civic engagement.
- **Resilience in a rapidly changing world:** Enhance young people's resilience and participation in a world characterised by migration, climate change, and technological disruptions.
- **Mental wellbeing:** The importance of addressing mental health in the post-COVID era should still be considered. But we should develop a holistic approach, encompassing both mental health and social aspects.

The unique contribution to young people's personal development and learning, in a combined effort with the education and training field, makes the programmes powerful tools. The direct involvement of civil society and young people is crucial as well to address these issues.

The current 4 transversal priorities of the programmes (Inclusion & Diversity; Digital Transformation; Environment and fight against climate change; Participation in democratic life) remain perceived as well-chosen.

They connect the programmes to broader societal challenges and further increase their relevance. They should however not overshadow the general and specific objectives of the programmes.

The priority of "digital transformation" needs to be further elaborated. While physical mobility should remain the core of the programmes, virtual and blended activities need clear rules and funding structures, to allow effective communication and implementation. A focus on enhancing human skills (like emotional intelligence), to complement advancements in artificial intelligence, should be strengthened.

The priority of "environment and fight against climate change" should be approached through genuine understanding of the value of nature. Integrate nature's intrinsic value into programmes, linking it to climate change learning and action.

B.2. EUROPEAN VALUES, TRANSNATIONAL MOBILITY AND (INTERCULTURAL) LEARNING

The Proposal for the Recommendation "Europe on the move" clearly expresses the ambitions of the EC to boost European and international mobility and make a "learning period abroad (...) a standard and accessible option for everyone in the European Education Area" The Recommendation counts on the providers of informal and non-formal learning to actively and considerably contribute to the achievement of its goals and targets, as they will be decided.

The network of NA's in the field of Youth, welcomes these ambitions with great enthusiasm and fully supports the future implementation of the Recommendation. They confirm that the current programmes contribute significantly and more than ever to the competence development of young people and advocate the recognition and promotion of the empowering impact of transnational mobility experiences.

The development of competences and European values, through informal and non-formal learning activities, is an essential contribution of the programmes to young people's lives and should remain an integral part of the programmes. *"Retain values as the core of the programmes. Explore and discuss them more, using accessible and understandable language"* (Report Multi-Stakeholder Discussions)

Key findings from research by the RAY network confirm that *"the European youth programmes are intercultural learning at its best: safe spaces to encounter differences with positive curiosity and explore them through constructive discourse and exchange. They strengthen the appreciation of cultural diversity among project participants, facilitate participation, and promote active citizenship, social inclusion and solidarity within and beyond Europe..."*

And that *"the European youth programmes provide equalizing learning environments for young people, who develop and strengthen empathy through their participation. The programmes successfully draw on and promote the principles of non-formal learning, such as participatory learning approaches and peer learning settings, to empower young people and youth professionals. The programmes are crucial safe spaces for youth leaders, youth trainers and youth workers to practice and live participatory democracy."*

The programmes should address declining democracy by equipping young people with tools to promote European values and counteract non-democratic developments. Projects involving partners from the neighboring regions (i.e., third countries not associated to the Programmes) are particularly relevant in fostering intercultural learning, awareness and respect of pluralism and diversity, critical thinking as well as a stronger interest in democratic citizenship and human rights issues among project leaders and participants from Europe.

B.3. YOUTH PROGRAMMES AND THE EU YOUTH STRATEGY

In view of the identified societal trends and of evolving needs of young people, the EU Youth Strategy needs to “tackle more visibly the impact on young people of new/resurging challenges” (EC-Mid-term evaluation of EUYS). However, the strategy should remain high-level and broad. The EU Youth Strategy should also have a focus outside the EU, connecting with other regions of the world.

The programmes should be designed to achieve the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy and, in general, they are aligned with it. However, *a more systemic impact of the programmes should be strived for. They need “to get better and more consistent at shaping youth policies, and at organizing meaningful policy dialogue. While the programme has several policy-related objectives, and invests strategically into structured dialogues, policy aspects remain a weakness of project formats across the board. There is no clear strategy, and too few successful practices, of influencing policies and involving policy makers in ways that are meaningful for projects as well as policy.”* (RAY – Key Insights). The programmes should have *“response mechanisms (...), to deal with changing situations and unforeseen crises”*. (Report Multi-Stakeholder Discussions)

As a result, there is a need to revise the translation of the EU Youth Strategy, and its Youth Goals, into the programme guide to ensure more effective alignment. EU values, such as democracy and active citizenship, or priorities as the wellbeing of young people, are not adequately addressed and need stronger emphasis in the programmes

There is also a need for improving accessibility and understanding of the policy dimensions of the programmes. To better demonstrate the connections between the Youth Strategy and the programmes, effective communication to highlight the positive impact of the EUYS is needed, also in view of social recognition alongside political recognition.

The SALTO Resource Centres and the LTA’s for cooperation between National Agencies (in the Youth field usually called SNAC’s) are perceived to support the connection between the policy priorities and the programmes. The network expressed a strong sense of satisfaction with the outcomes of their work, recognizing the considerable effort, expertise, and valuable results they have contributed.

B.4. INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY

Since 2021, Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps have significantly enhanced inclusion and diversity within the youth sector. Both programmes saw an increase in inclusion projects, with Erasmus+ showing a substantial one. Actions have been taken to enhance accessibility, including the creation of new actions and project formats for YPWFOs, as well as budget adjustments for inclusion support. The development of inclusion and diversity strategies by National Agencies and the provision of additional support for those with fewer opportunities have been supportive in the development of more inclusive projects. These strategies should be maintained and enhanced.

However, several challenges remain. *“National Agencies are facing the pressure to secure additional budgets for these projects without reducing the overall number of funded projects. This issue should be addressed at the source, involving a revision of the budgets allocated to NA’s and adjustments to the limited lump sums and maximum grants for organizations”* (Evaluation report Strategic Partnership on Inclusion)

“The European youth programmes need to get better at strengthening, and reproducing, the diversity of European societies. While both programmes work very well for those young people that they manage to involve independent of their socioeconomic status, they remain over proportionately attractive for highly educated young people. Moreover, project teams leaders tend to overestimate how many young people with fewer opportunities are involved – and tend to underestimate their needs”. (RAY-Summary Key Insights)

An overall “inclusive design” of the programmes and specific efforts to attract underrepresented groups in the programmes, should go hand in hand. There should be a stronger focus on diversity and on a programme that is open and accessible to all, while avoiding to label specific target groups which can be stigmatizing.

In view of enhancing the inclusiveness of the programmes, several recommendations have been formulated:

- Keep programmes open to all types of organizations and groups of relevance for the youth field, avoiding strict definitions and focusing on the impact of projects.
- Support newcomers in their journey to become beneficiaries.
- Adopt a more risk-friendly approach, accepting failures without severe consequences for beneficiaries.
- Consider micro-grants as a new format, to create a low threshold entry point
- Cooperation with relevant organizations and stakeholders working with YPFWO can enhance programme adaptation.
- Inclusion strategies need long-term approaches and capacity building measures for organizations and youth workers.

The Strategic Partnership on Inclusion formulated additional recommendations:

- Put a greater emphasis on developing and supporting inclusive initiatives and projects, rather than solely focusing on the number of YPWFOs involved.
- The emphasis should be on developing inclusive, diversity-sensitive structures that remove barriers from the beginning, rather than solely concentrating on ‘individual integration’ or participation.
- A deeper understanding is required regarding organizations' reluctance to use 'inclusion labels' or label participants as 'YPWFOs' for ethical and moral concerns” (Evaluation Report Strategic Partnership on Inclusion)

Special attention should be given to the further development of Discover EU-Inclusion (DEUI). Although National Agencies and organizations support the concept of this action, they advocate for greater diversity and easier access for a broader and older range of young people. The challenges in the implementation of DEUI, can be summarized in three elements:

- Age limit restrictions: the age limit for participation, particularly for young people under 18 or those turning 18 at the start of a project, is too restrictive and does not align with the needs of the inclusion target groups, especially YPWFOs.
- Complex procedures: the DEUI process is seen as complex and time-consuming, generating an additional burden on NAs and organizations. Among the issues mentioned, we find complications in the design, application, and implementation processes, as well as practical and technical challenges with the Rail pass difficulties when booking group tickets.

- A possibly stigmatizing title: the title "Discover EU Inclusion Action" is perceived as stigmatizing and inconsistent with KA1 project types. The title, with its focus on inclusion groups, is also seen as potentially limiting the diversity within groups and reducing the opportunities for mutual learning." (Evaluation report Strategic Partnership on Inclusion)

B.5. YOUTH WORK DEVELOPMENT AND QUALITY

According to the key findings of RAY research, "the European youth programmes are the most important European powerhouses for enhancing youth work at local, regional and national level with an international dimension. The programmes, across countries and contexts, are the most significant and most accessible opportunity for youth workers and youth leaders at local, regional or national level to bring an international dimension to their projects and programmes, in particular through capacity building, learning mobility, and strategic cooperation."

Formats within the programmes, targeting youth workers, have demonstrated quality and systemic impact, including youth work mobilities, accreditations, and TCA's:

- Youth Worker Mobilities support professionals and others working with young people. They empower youth work as agents of change and support organizations to integrate international youth work into their activities. They also have a positive impact on local youth work.
- Accreditations have the potential to enhance the overall quality of youth work and strengthen organizational capacity. With a more stable access to funding, organizations can focus on their long-term goals and use the mobility activities to gradually raise the quality of their work to a new level.
- TCA/NET plays a vital role in transnational cooperation and youth work development. Both actions have been improved significantly and ensure tangible impact on project level and on the level of participating organizations. They also attract and allow engagement of inexperienced organizations and improve the quality and quantity of project applications.

So, the programmes should "continue to ensure training, professional development and international practice sharing between youth workers through the Training and Cooperation Activities budget" (Report Multi-Stakeholder Discussions). This should also be continued through the NET budget under the ESC.

However, it has been observed that "*many organizations active in the European youth programmes lack a clear organizational strategy. Where such a strategy exists, it rarely contains an expressive strategy regarding European youth work*". Furthermore, "*strategic partnerships (KA2) are an instrument of Erasmus+ Youth with enormous potential, but youth sector organizations struggle to use them consistently.*" (RAY – Summary of key findings). There is also a need to "*improve harvesting and dissemination of good practice from projects, especially outputs from Key Action 2 - Cooperation Partnerships*" (Report Multi-Stakeholder Discussions)

Community impact is a core element of the programmes, but these should "*support (...) quality projects that impact both individuals and communities. Provide funding for project formats to link projects and their outcomes more sustainably to a wider stakeholder group on the level of local or regional communities.*" (Report Multi-Stakeholder Discussions)

Erasmus+ Youth has strengthened application strands and procedures that depend on a certain size, stability and professionalism of applying organizations, such as strategic partnerships and accreditations. "*Many youth sector organizations struggle to successfully apply in these*

strands – and can neither benefit more from nor contribute more to the programme.”(RAY – Summary of key findings).

Therefore, European youth programmes need to forcefully stimulate more and better the strategic development of youth work across Europe. *“Improve recognition of youth work and international youth work through the Programmes on policy level and foster stronger connection with other education sectors. Define the criteria of quality projects”, to push “on the local level for quality youth work”.* (Report Multi-Stakeholder Discussions)

B.6. VOLUNTEERING, ENGAGEMENT AND SOLIDARITY

The network is strongly committed to continuing a solidarity-based programme that is value-based, focuses on solidarity, strengthens civil society and includes a perspective for neighbouring countries. The European Solidarity Corps, its actions and dedicated budget should be maintained within the scope of the youth field, have strong links with youth work and adhere to ways of working in youth work.

“The European Solidarity Corps empowers young people to pursue volunteering in a variety of successful formats”. Although the core of the current ESC-programme is based on volunteering over a long term of several months to one year, the ESC “through its solidarity projects, has established a format that allows young people to share and receive solidarity in their local communities. The European Solidarity Corps provides a framework to live and experience solidarity in an intercultural context. The programme has also successfully introduced team volunteering (...), providing another way for young people across Europe to volunteer, broadening access, and strengthening the diversity of possibilities for young people to get engaged in tackling societal challenges – which young people continue to do after their programme experience.” (RAY-Summary of Key Findings)

“The consistency in quality has been a long-standing area of interest for the European Solidarity Corps (and the Youth and Youth in Action Programmes prior to that). Most recently, the 2022 “Council Recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers across the European Union” included ten consolidated recommendations to enhance the quality of volunteering opportunities. The European Solidarity Corps needs to get better at ensuring consistent quality across its volunteering projects.” (RAY – Summary of Key Findings)

While the Quality Label, as an essential part of the European Solidarity Corps programme, includes some practical guidelines on ensuring quality in the programme, a more holistic quality charter for volunteering in general provided by the European institutions is currently lacking. Such a quality charter should complement the Quality Label for organizations, and be a blueprint for high quality standards in the field of transnational volunteering.

It should include minimum standards and guidelines to focus on solidarity, ensure inclusivity, ensure health, safety and security of participants (including measures for mental health), avoid job substitution, include digital forms and environmental aspects, providing recognition of acquired skills.

Capacity building resources are needed to systematically strengthen the cooperation in the civic engagement sector. Funding instruments, like NET within the European Solidarity Corps, should be ensured and further developed to foster networking, knowledge sharing and exploring themes like community involvement and impact or online volunteering.

B.7. YOUTH PROGRAMMES AND PARTICIPATION

More than ever before, the current programmes are perceived to focus on engagement and youth participation. “The programme offers a variety of formats to build the capacity of youth leaders, youth trainers and youth workers to develop and implement participatory youth projects with an intercultural and international dimension.” (RAY – Summary of Key Findings)

However, systemic impact in terms of participation can be further improved. Participation projects lack the policy impact compared to the previous KA3 projects.”(...) *Many participants, beneficiaries and stakeholders think about them first and foremost as personal learning experiences – and to a much lesser extent as practices that support democratic citizenship and participation in civil society and democratic life.*” (RAY – Summary of Key Findings).

Suggestions for further development of participation actions of the programmes are:

- Support community building among current and former participants, fostering a sense of belonging to a community.
- Support the growing trend of rapid and direct civic engagement with financial opportunities and suitable formats.
- The projects should enable young people to become change-makers and address major issues (like Brexit or climate change). Encourage participants to transition from being mere participants to leaders.

The development of a youth participation strategy is an important tool in the development of more participatory projects. This strategy should be enhanced and more integrated in the programme implementation.

B.8. YOUTH PROGRAMMES AND NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES

In the neighbouring partner countries, the programmes represent unique tools to support the development of youth work and youth policy, to build young people’s and youth workers’ competencies, foster their intercultural learning, increase their level of awareness about Europe and include youth with fewer opportunities into their work. Building dialogue, understanding, resilience and stability is ever more relevant in coping with the increasing and manifold challenges in Europe and its direct neighbourhood.

Therefore, the dimension of cooperation with neighbouring partner countries should be kept in the next generation of Programmes. The essential opportunities for cooperation offered by the current programmes should be maintained and certain features should be broadened and enhanced.

In particular, the current Programmes are missing a clear framework for youth cooperation between programme and neighbouring partner countries, including specific aims and objectives, and potentially also priorities and budget. Establishing such a framework that is adapted to this specific geographical context of this cooperation with its particular challenges and benefits would strengthen its identity, foster a more effective and meaningful approach and enhance its impact.

In the current global context, strengthening cooperation with neighbouring countries is a strategic investment in the future of European youth. It is a crucial step toward building a more inclusive, diverse, resilient, and united Europe.

C. PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT DRIVEN BY OBJECTIVES AND KNOWLEDGE

C.1. OVERCOMING ADMINISTRATIVE OBSTACLES

There still are obstacles that hinder or block young people and organizations from applying and participating in the programs.

Complicated application processes should be addressed. “Rules and regulations remain complex, and there are serious concerns regarding the proportionality of contracts and supporting documents”. (Erasmus+ in the next era) “The current procedures and formats are overwhelming for newcomers and smaller organizations.” (Evaluation Report Strategic Partnership on Inclusion)

“The European youth programmes need to courageously rethink how application procedures are conceptualized and managed. The current application procedures rely heavily on long texts, to be written in technically fragile and largely inaccessible web-based pdfs. For most project formats, the necessary investment into the application is too high. The potential of smaller project formats to trial different application approaches has so far not been used.” (RAY – Summary of Key Findings).

“It would be advisable to have a multilayered approach, with procedures and documents appropriate to the size and complexity of Erasmus+ actions, projects and grants in different sectors and on different levels, from informal groups on grass root level to highly institutionalized levels.” (Erasmus+ in the next era) There is a clear demand to “ensure proportionality of administration to grant size” (Report Multi-Stakeholder discussions)

Alternative models for applying or contracting should be developed, especially for small scale projects (e.g. Solidarity Projects under ECS). Consider “not only text based” applications (Report Multi-Stakeholder Discussions). The Programme Guide should use accessible language for the young people it wants to reach. This language should be developed with their involvement.

In the context of shaping the future of EU Youth programmes, a focus on actions and formats is essential to address the evolving needs and dynamics of the youth sector:

- Consider lowering the age limit for participation in the European Solidarity Corps, especially for national activities and team projects.
- Ensure actions and formats are simple, as the most straightforward formats tend to be the most successful. Reduce complexity of the programmes’ offer and of the IT architecture.
- Ensure that denomination of actions and formats convey a clear, adaptable and non-abstract message (e.g., solidarity projects vs. KA2 projects).
- Explore implementing special visa categories for European volunteers and participants in short term projects.

C.2. FINANCING OF THE PROGRAMMES

Financial issues are another blocking factor for smooth participation in the programmes. The impact and effects of the programmes, as documented by many evidence from research and practice, make it clear that more funding for young people and the actions in the youth field is

a crucial step towards strengthening European integration. All stakeholders “recognise that the programmes work. There should be more funding, more projects, more people positively impacted. Respond to the need and existing demand of the youth sector: increase the (...) success rates for project approvals” (Report Multi-Stakeholder discussions)

“National I&D strategies have contributed to supporting more inclusion projects and attracted new organizations, with different profiles. However, financial, and human resource limitations can hinder these efforts.” (Evaluation Report Strategic Partnership on Inclusion)

More funding is also needed in order not to lose all those quality projects that cannot be granted because of lack of funds. The efforts to revise lump sums and flat rates and adapt them to real costs and inflation, should be continued. To maximize outreach and impact, resources should be allocated towards a higher number of smaller projects rather than a few large-scale projects.

“National Agencies stress the importance of a balance between the ambitions for the future Erasmus+ and European Solidarity programmes and their funding. A doubling of the total budget would be a minimum requirement. This, however, would not take into account any increases in the scope of the programme. As demand is already now clearly higher than the available budget, and grant rates have not always kept up with inflation, this might call for another scenario. A tripling of the total budget would allow for some growth over the years 2028–2034, but would still require a choice between a further focus on target groups with fewer opportunities, supporting green travel and facilitating the potential for broad participation. To adequately address the multitude of needs, identified and highlighted in the Commission’s recent proposal for a recommendation on learning mobility in Europe ‘Europe on the Move’, a total budget that is five times the budget of today would be required.” (Erasmus+ in the next era)


C.3. KNOWLEDGE, RESEARCH AND MONITORING

“Due to the underperformance of the IT tools and platforms, there is a lack of reliable data on the functioning of the programmes, the profile of their participants, etc... This makes it difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of the programmes, certainly with reference to their targets on inclusion and diversity.” (Erasmus+ in the next era) “Have data more readily available to enable quicker evidence-based decisions” (Report Multi-Stakeholder Discussions)

However, the success of the programmes in reaching target audiences should also be evaluated beyond dashboard numbers, to accurately reflect diversity and inclusion. “While progress was made in addressing inclusion and diversity and in reaching more marginalized groups, additional evaluation and analysis of their effectiveness and efficiency are required. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should go beyond the current tools employed by the European Commission, with the development of new tools for NA’s and SALTO Resource Centres.” (Evaluation report Strategic Partnership on Inclusion) Next to simple monitoring, more evaluations and research should be conducted to assess the impact on individuals and systems.

C.4. MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONAL ASPECTS

“The main obstacle for a smooth implementation of the Erasmus+ programme has undoubtedly been and still is the IT architecture. The Directorate General for Education and Culture (DG EAC) needs to be provided with all the necessary means to further improve this IT infrastructure.” (Erasmus+ in the next era)



In the run-up to the next programme period 2028-2034, a discussion is needed on the financial and operational capacity of the NA's and the management fee(s) they receive. Since 2014, the Regulations only stipulate that Member States should provide "adequate co-financing" for the smooth and effective running of National Agencies. As might be expected, this has led to a broad variety of situations. In some countries, the national co-funding amounts to only 10-15% of the total management fee.

National Agencies are required but also dedicated to deliver quality, to achieve the high ambitions of the EU Youth programmes (both in terms of general objectives and specific indicators), but they are already in a position where the level of the management fees is not allowing them to do so. Both the Commission and Member States should be aware of the need for proportionality between the tasks and responsibilities of NA's and the fee that they receive to cover the costs of all the growing work to be done. The need to increase the management fees of National Agencies was also stated in the report of the multi-stakeholders discussions.

Malmö, Madrid, Brussels – April 2023 – March 2024