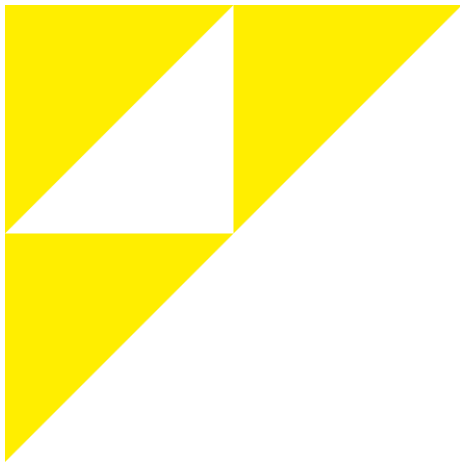


Report

***EU Meeting of Directors-  
General for Youth  
Brussels, 26-28 March 2024***

EU  
NEEDS  
YOUTH



TITLE: Report of the EU Meeting of Directors-General for Youth, Brussels, 26-28 March 2024

AUTHORS: Agathe DENAIS and Susie NICODEMI

PHOTOGRAPHERS: Erik Van Cauter, Freedom Photography, Sanad Latifa

DEPOT NUMBER: D/2024/3241/171

PUBLISHER: Flemish Government, Department for Culture, Youth and Media

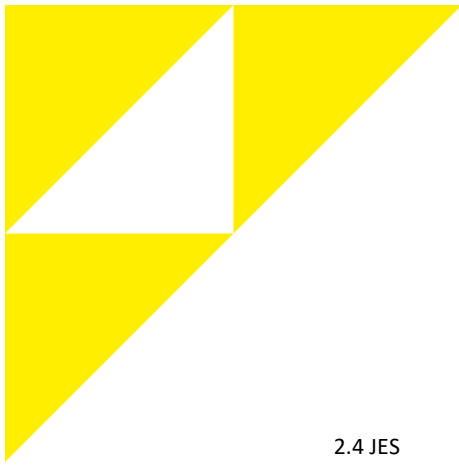
PUBLISHED: April 2024

Please quote as follows: Nicodemi S., Denais A. (2024). Report of the EU Meeting of Directors-General for Youth, Brussels

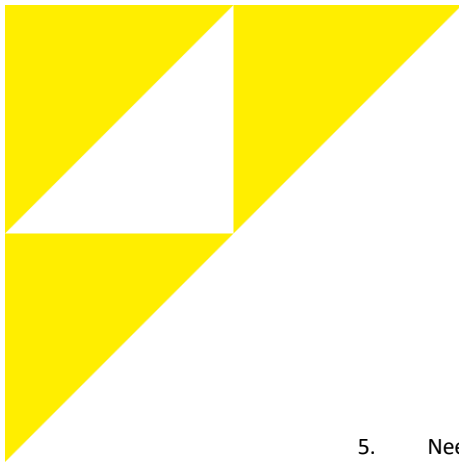


# Table of content

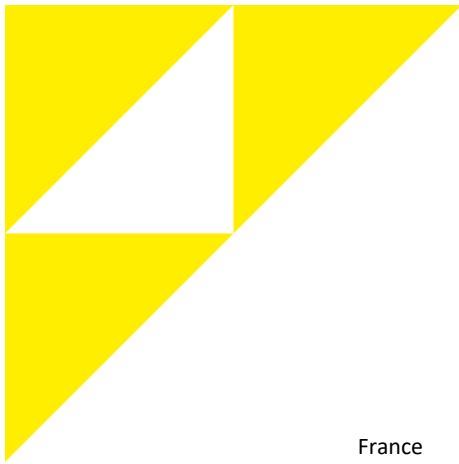
|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>1. Introduction, context and background to the meeting</b>  | <b>1</b>  |
| 1.2 Context of the meeting   | 1         |
| Overview of the meeting  | 1         |
| What is this about?  | 1         |
| Why is this important?   | 1         |
| What does this report include?   | 2         |
| 1.3 Programme of the meeting   | 3         |
| 1.4 Welcome speeches   | 4         |
| Bart Temmerman, Secretary - General, Department Culture, Youth and Media, Flemish Government   | 4         |
| Sophia Eriksson Waterschoot, European Commission's Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Director for Youth, Education and Erasmus+ | 5         |
| Koen Lambert, Director National Agency, JINT vzw.  | 6         |
| 1.5 First joint meeting between Directors-general and Heads of National Agencies   | 7         |
| 1.6 Setting the context  | 7         |
| Bart Temmerman, Secretary - General, Department Culture, Youth and Media, Flemish Government   | 7         |
| Sophia Eriksson Waterschoot, European Commission's Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Director for Youth, Education and Erasmus+ | 8         |
| <i>(Wednesday 27th March morning)</i>  | 8         |
| Benjamin Dalle, Flemish Minister of Brussels, Youth, Media and Poverty Reduction   | 9         |
| <i>(Wednesday 27th March afternoon)</i>  | 9         |
| <b>2. Session I: Organisation Visits</b>   | <b>10</b> |
| 2.1 Camera Quartier  | 10        |
| 2.2 De Ambrassade  | 11        |
| 2.3 Habbekrats   | 11        |



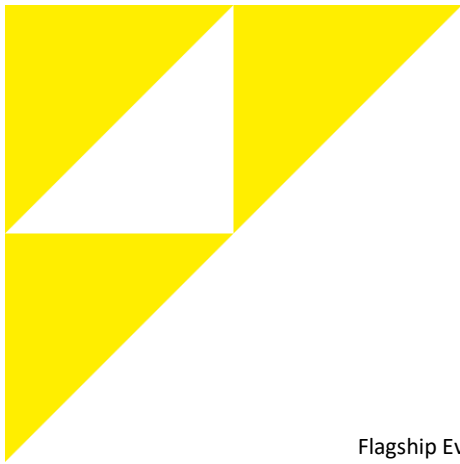
|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| 2.4 JES   | 11        |
| 2.5 Urban foxes   | 12        |
| 2.6 Young Thinkers  | 12        |
| 2.7 Dynamo International  | 12        |
| 2.8 Zentrum für Förderpädagogik   | 13        |
| <b>3. Session II: Inputs - setting the basis and things to consider</b>         | <b>13</b> |
| 3.1 European Youth Programmes   | 13        |
| 3.2 Input on RAY  | 14        |
| Introduction  | 14        |
| What is the RAY Network?  | 14        |
| Monitoring Surveys: A Comprehensive Overview                                    | 14        |
| Insights on Democracy and Values  | 14        |
| Insights on Quality and Youth Work Development                                  | 15        |
| Insights on Operational Challenges  | 15        |
| Reflections   | 15        |
| Discussion after the input  | 16        |
| 3.3 Inputs by SALTO Inclusion & Diversity: inclusion in the EU Youth Programmes | 17        |
| Getting Familiar with Concepts and the Framework                                | 17        |
| A Brief History of the Inclusion & Diversity Strategy                           | 17        |
| Key Actors  | 17        |
| Reviewing the I&D strategy  | 17        |
| Findings  | 18        |
| Programmes  | 18        |
| Food for Thought  | 19        |
| 3.4 Data on international mobility within the EU Youth Programmes               | 19        |
| 1. Significance of Transnational Learning Mobility                              | 19        |
| 2. Addressing Underfunding in the Youth Field                                   | 20        |
| 3. Importance of Volunteering Work  | 20        |
| 4. Addressing Budget Constraints  | 20        |



|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| 5. Need for More Detailed Data  | 20        |
| <b>4. Session III: A common high-level meeting of National Authorities and National Agencies: reflections on the (future) EU-Youth Programmes</b> | <b>21</b> |
| 4.1 Introduction to the session   | 21        |
| 4.2 Questions discussed   | 21        |
| 4.3 Recommendations for the European Youth Programmes   | 22        |
| <b>5. Session IV: Reflections on the Future EU Youth Strategy</b>   | <b>23</b> |
| 5.1 Inputs from representatives of the Directors-general  | 23        |
| Lithuania   | 23        |
| Finland   | 24        |
| Spain   | 24        |
| Croatia   | 24        |
| Sweden  | 25        |
| Austria   | 25        |
| Poland  | 25        |
| Ireland   | 26        |
| Italy   | 26        |
| Czech Republic  | 26        |
| Bulgaria  | 27        |
| Hungary   | 27        |
| Cyprus  | 28        |
| Portugal  | 28        |
| Slovenia  | 28        |
| Germany   | 29        |
| Romania   | 29        |
| Slovak Republic   | 29        |
| Netherlands   | 30        |
| Malta   | 30        |



|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| France  | 30        |
| Latvia  | 31        |
| Greece  | 31        |
| Estonia   | 32        |
| Belgium   | 32        |
| 5.2 Summary of the reflections on the current EU Youth Strategy   | 33        |
| 5.3 Recommendations for the future EU Youth Strategy  | 34        |
| <b>6. Session V: Inputs from stakeholders</b>   | <b>35</b> |
| 6.1 Zsófia Nagy-Vargha, Deputy State Secretary for Youth, Ministry of Culture -<br>Incoming Presidency Hungary                    | 35        |
| Hungarian Presidency Priorities   | 35        |
| Inclusive Societies and Rural Youth   | 35        |
| European Youth Conference and Council Conclusions   | 35        |
| Upcoming Events and Dialogue  | 36        |
| Conclusion and Invitation   | 36        |
| 6.2 Tobias Flessenkemper, Head of Department, Directorate of Democratic<br>Participation - Council of Europe                      | 36        |
| Reflecting on 75 years of the Council of Europe, the Reykjavik Declaration, the<br>Democracy Principles and the Youth Perspective | 36        |
| Practical dimensions entering the Council of Europe's 2024-2027 Work<br>Programme   | 37        |
| The Ukraine Crisis and Youth Policy Response  | 37        |
| Cooperation with the European Union   | 37        |
| 6.3 Nicholas Kujala, Board Member, European Youth Forum (YFJ)   | 38        |
| Recent Achievements   | 38        |
| Challenges and Concerns   | 38        |
| Future Programme Directions   | 38        |
| Other priority topics   | 39        |
| 6.4 Tanya Basarab, Research & Youth Policy Officer, EU - Council of Europe Youth<br>Partnership.                                  | 39        |
| Background of the Partnership   | 39        |



|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| Flagship Events and Research Initiatives  | 40        |
| Youth Policy Initiatives  | 40        |
| Youth mainstreaming   | 40        |
| Improving Youth Work and Recognition  | 40        |
| Youth Research and Knowledge Dissemination  | 40        |
| <b>7. Closing Words</b>   | <b>41</b> |
| <b>8. Annexes</b>   | <b>43</b> |
| 8.1 Speakers  | 43        |
| 8.2 Organisations Visited on 26th March 2024  | 46        |
| 8.3 Round Table discussions between National Agencies and Directors-general,<br>clustering of discussions | 52        |
| <b>9. Appendix: Round Table Multi-Stakeholder Discussions</b>   | <b>53</b> |



## ***1. Introduction, context and background to the meeting***

### **1.1 Introduction**

**Date:** 26th to 28th of March 2024

**Place:** Brussels, Belgium

**Description:** The Directors-general for Youth gather semi-annually, in a meeting hosted by the country holding the Presidency of the Council of the EU. Its purpose is to exchange information on the key initiatives undertaken in the 27 Member States and by the European Commission in the youth sector.

**Delegations:** Delegations from 27 Member States + European Commission + European Youth Forum + Council of Europe + EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership + RAY research network + SALTO Inclusion & Diversity + Heads of National Agencies of Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps Programmes, including Turkey, Macedonia, Serbia, Iceland, Norway and Switzerland.

**Number of participants:** about 150 people

**Facilitator:** Gisele Evrard

### **1.2 Context of the meeting**

#### **Overview of the meeting**

In the field of youth, in its role hosting the Presidency of the European Council, Belgium supports the further development of the EU Youth Strategy, helps shape future EU Youth Programmes and stimulates discussions and knowledge exchange on youth policy, including youth work policy, between the Member States of the European Union.

#### **What is this about?**

The European Union has developed an EU Youth Strategy (2019-2027), alongside two Programmes for young people - Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps (2021 - 2027). In 2024, several evaluations are planned: The European Commission has foreseen a mid-term evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy, and the legal bases of both youth Programmes also foresee a mid-term evaluation to be performed during this year. At the same time, the final evaluation of the Programmes during the preceding period 2014-2020 is planned.

At this meeting, the Directors-general for Youth discussed the state of affairs and their contributions to the mid-term and final evaluations of the EU Youth Strategy and the EU Youth Programmes. During one day of their meeting, the Directors-general met the directors of National Agencies in the field of youth to have common discussions and reflections focussed on the EU Youth Programmes. Leveraging their experience and knowledge about the development of the EU Youth Strategy and the Programmes, these officials engaged in a forward-looking exchange of opinions between the Member States and the European Commission.

#### **Why is this important?**

About the halfway mark of the EU Youth Strategy and EU Youth Programmes' timeline, it is important to assess potential adjustments for the latter half of the period, but it is also a good time to look ahead and engage in future-oriented discussions, with an eye towards shaping a new EU Youth Strategy and EU Youth Programmes beyond 2027.





### **What does this report include?**

This report gathers the outputs of that meeting. It reflects the opinions expressed by the representatives of each Member State during the meeting and can serve as inspiration for use in the participating countries, by the ministries or departments for youth, to support the development of their vision on European youth policies and their future cooperation on European level. The report will also inform the European Commission, in view of preparing their policy proposals in the field of youth.

### 1.3 Programme of the meeting

| TIME          | ACTIVITIES   | SPEAKERS  |
|---------------|--|---|
| <b>DAY 1</b>  |  |   |
| Before 13:00  | <b>Arrival and registration</b>  |   |
| 13:00-14:00   | <b>Lunch</b>   |   |
| 14:00         | <b>Opening and welcome words</b>   | <b>Bart Temmerman</b> , Secretary-General Department Culture, Youth, Media, Flemish Community – <b>Sophia Eriksson-Waterschoot</b> , European Commission  |
| 14:15 - 17:30 | <b>Field visits to Brussels:</b> youth organisations and European youth programmes in practice |   |
| 17:30 - 20:30 | <b>Closing of the day, free time</b><br>Optional: visit of Beerworld, the Beer museum          |   |
| 19:30         | <b>Dinner and welcome words</b>  | <b>Koen Lambert</b> , Director National Agency, JINT vzw. – <b>Bart Temmerman</b> , Secretary-General Department Culture, Youth, Media, Flemish community |

| <b>DAY 2</b>   |   |  |
|----------------|---|--|
| 08:30 – 09:30  | <b>Arrival, security check and welcome coffee</b>   |  |
| 09:30 – 10 :00 | <b>Opening of the meeting</b>   | Welcome words by <b>Bart Temmerman</b> , Secretary-General Department Culture, Youth, Media, Flemish community<br>Opening address by <b>Sophia Eriksson-Waterschoot</b> , European Commission<br>Setting of the scene by <b>Gisèle Evrard</b> , facilitator. |
| 10:00 – 11:00  | <b>RAY – Research-based analysis and Monitoring of European youth programmes:</b> Presentation of key research findings for the previous and the current programme generation | <b>Carmen Teubl-Kiviniemi</b> and <b>Andreas Karsten</b>   |
| 11:00 - 11:30  | <b>Coffee Break</b>   |  |
| 11:30 – 12:15  | <b>SALTO Inclusion &amp; Diversity:</b> Inclusion in the EU youth programmes  | <b>Pieter-Jan De Graeve</b>  |
| 12:15 – 12:40  | <b>Department Culture, Youth, Media of the Flemish community:</b> Learning mobility of young people and youth workers – a quantitative analysis                               | <b>Hilde Lauwers</b>   |
| 13:00 – 14:00  | <b>Lunch</b>  |  |
| 14:00 - 16:00  | <b>Reflections on the future EU youth programmes:</b> Round table discussions between Directors-general and National Agencies' directors                                      | <b>Gisèle Evrard</b> , facilitator   |
| 16:00 - 16:30  | <b>Coffee break</b>   |  |
| 16:30 - 17:45  | <b>Reflections on the future EU youth programmes:</b> Round table discussions between Directors-general and National Agencies' directors (cont.)                              | <b>Gisèle Evrard</b> , facilitator   |
| 17:45 - 18:00  | <b>Speech by the Minister</b>   | <b>Minister Benjamin Dalle</b> , Flemish minister of Brussels, Youth, Media and Poverty reduction  |
| 18:00 - 19:00  | <b>Group picture and free time</b>  |  |
| 19:00          | <b>Dinner</b>   |  |

| TIME          | ACTIVITIES   | SPEAKERS  |
|---------------|--|---|
| <b>DAY 3</b>  |  |   |
| 08:45 – 09:30 | Arrival, security check and welcome coffee   |   |
| 09:30 – 09:45 | Opening and welcome words  | Welcome words by <b>Bart Temmerman</b> , Secretary-General Department Culture, Youth, Media, Flemish community - Opening address by <b>Sophia Eriksson-Waterschoot</b> , European Commission                                |
| 09:45 – 11:00 | Tour de Table on the future EU Youth Strategy  | Speaking time for each delegation along guiding questions on the future EU Youth Strategy   |
| 11:00 – 11:30 | Coffee Break   |   |
| 11:30 – 13:00 | Inputs by European-level institutions and organisations and by the incoming presidency | Incoming presidency of Hungary – <b>Zsafia Nagy-Vargha</b><br>Council of Europe – <b>Tobias Flessenkemper</b><br>European Youth Forum – <b>Nicholas Kujala</b><br>EU – Council of Europe Partnership – <b>Tanya Basarab</b> |
|               | Closing words  | European Commission – <b>Sophia Eriksson-Waterschoot</b>  |
| 13:00 – 14:00 | Lunch  |   |

## 1.4 Welcome speeches

### Bart Temmerman, Secretary - General, Department Culture, Youth and Media, Flemish Government

*(Tuesday 26th March, afternoon and evening, Wednesday 27th March morning)*

The Presidency extended a warm welcome to everyone attending the meeting of the Directors-general responsible for youth. He explained that this gathering occurs at an important moment, marking a significant phase in the implementation of current EU Youth Programmes and EU Youth Strategy and the formulation of the next generation of Programmes. He introduced a planned reflection and exchange of ideas in the ‘Round Tables’ on Wednesday 27th March, with the inaugural additional participation of directors from National Agencies (NAs) responsible for European Youth Programmes. Also during this meeting, first-hand immersive visits to organisations were arranged to showcase the tangible impact of EU Youth Programmes on our societies, representing diverse communities and highlighting exemplary practices in youth work and youth participation. It was hoped that these encounters would enrich the discussions, as participants of this meeting built on their insights and collectively reflected on their implications for young people across our nations.



*“Let us unite our efforts towards realising a future where every young person in the EU can fulfil their potential.” Bart Temmerman, Secretary General*

The Presidency had also prepared several cultural and culinary opportunities, allowing participants to appreciate the local hospitality and to encourage interaction, meaningful dialogue and exchange of ideas between the participants. In conclusion, the Secretary General encouraged everyone to seize the opportunities presented, working collectively towards a future where the potential of every young person in Europe is fully realised.

*“As a longtime resident and guide of this vibrant city, I am delighted to share this experience with you. Thank you for joining us, and I look forward to our collaboration ahead.” Bart Temmerman, Secretary General*

## **Sophia Eriksson Waterschoot, European Commission's Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Director for Youth, Education and Erasmus+**

*(Tuesday 26th March, afternoon, and Wednesday 27th March, morning)*

The European Commission thanked the Belgian hosts of the Presidency for all the preparation and efforts made for this meeting. As part of the Presidency trio, she appreciated the previous nicely organised one of Alicante, under the Spanish Presidency, with the substantial and great discussions that were had there, and is also looking forward to the one that follows in Hungary.

Youth is very high on the agenda. The European Commission is happy that they could table a communication in January on the legacy of the European Year of Youth. She mentioned interesting discussions in the Youth Working Party, especially related to the EU Youth Test or Check (as discussed in the previous Presidency), taking a step forward to give young people a voice in EU policy making - and, where it does not already happen, also on national/regional level.



At this moment, there are many mid-term evaluations on the table: the EU Youth Strategy coming soon in spring, and also that of Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps Programmes, which will come a bit later. These months are also leading up to the European Elections in June 2024, with a strong focus on that during the European Youth Week in April, for everyone to play their part in encouraging young people to go and vote, as part of democratic society.

The Commission expressed enthusiasm for the organisation visits on the first day, and the fruitful discussions to be held all together.

*"It's great to be in the heart of Europe...[Our Presidency hosts the] Belgians have willingly taken many topics on their already very busy agenda, with a speed and an excellence of work" Sophia Eriksson Waterschoot, the Commission*

## Koen Lambert, Director National Agency, JINT vzw.

*(Tuesday 26th March, evening)*

The Director of the Flemish National Agency (NA) for Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps (JINT) expressed the significance of the work of the NAs and was pleased with the positive reception of the organisation visits. He believes that the enthusiasm displayed indicated the successful achievement of their objectives. The National Agencies value the opportunity to engage with Directors-general of Youth, recognising the importance of close cooperation and dialogue between National Agencies and national policymakers to pursue shared goals for young people in Europe. He extended gratitude to the Presidency, Secretary General, Jan Vanhee, and other colleagues for their intensive involvement in event preparation and cooperation.



Emphasising the unique nature of the event within the current Presidency, bringing together National Agencies and Directors-general in one discussion, Koen Lambert highlighted the role of informal and non-formal learning as part of this meeting, aligning with the same concepts encouraged for young people during different types of exchanges with youth. Through an informal European evening featuring food, drinks, and music from different countries, they aimed to facilitate informal learning and meaningful interactions among participants.

*"I believe in a close cooperation and dialogue between National Agencies and national policy makers, to strive for the same goals and work in the same direction. It is important for us, and it's important for young people in Europe" Koen Lambert, JINT*



## 1.5 First joint meeting between Directors-general and Heads of National Agencies

This gathering marked a significant milestone. While each Presidency has its Directors-general Youth meeting and the Business meeting of the National Agencies, this was the very first time that Directors-general came together with the directors of National Agencies, involved equally together to discuss and contribute from their perspectives. In his input on Wednesday 27th March, Minister Dalle stated that this represented a pivotal moment for synergy discussions, where both policy and operational perspectives were addressed simultaneously, contrasting with the usual practice of discussing them separately. Sophia Eriksson Waterschoot from the European Commission acknowledged the challenge of formulating policy frameworks and emphasised the importance of EU Youth Programmes as vehicles for implementing priorities, with each playing their role to effectively achieve this integration.

This joint meeting had the intention to initiate strategic reflections on the roles and responsibilities of different actors in policy-development processes; to enhance and support cooperation opportunities; to facilitate a forward-looking exchange of opinions between Member States, National Agencies (youth), and the European Commission on the two European Programmes in the field of youth and the future EU Youth Strategy.

In her concluding address, Director Eriksson Waterschoot gave special thanks to the Belgian hosts for this new way of bringing the different stakeholders together and for always challenging the Directors-general, the National Agencies and the European Commission. She recognised the bridges and synergies that were brought, for those who implement the Programmes and those who set the policy for them.

## 1.6 Setting the context

### **Bart Temmerman, Secretary - General, Department Culture, Youth and Media, Flemish Government**

*(Wednesday 27th March morning)*

The Presidency greeted the participants, including the European Commission, Directors-general Youth of National Authorities, and directors of National Agencies responsible for Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps Programmes. Recognising the transformative potential of these Programmes, the Secretary-General emphasised the importance of empowering young people to navigate the challenges of a changing world. The European Youth Programmes go beyond mere activities, offering opportunities for youth to explore, learn, and grow beyond conventional boundaries with a belief in their potential at the core. He promoted the concept of investing in youth, as investing in an inclusive and diverse present and future.

The Presidency expounded on the importance of these Programmes, lying not only in tangible benefits but also in intangible treasures such as solutions found, horizons discovered, and democratic values



instilled. As ambassadors of these Programmes, it is crucial for participants here to ensure they remain true to their core mission of empowering youth.

*“Les voyages forment la jeunesse” Bart Temmerman, Secretary-General*

<sup>1</sup>

Discussions during the meeting should explore various aspects, including the Programmes' contributions to safeguarding European values and their role in strengthening youth work and inclusive societies. Operational and financial challenges should also be addressed to enhance the accessibility of Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps.

The meeting aimed to produce key messages to be conveyed to the Council of Ministers which will shape future Programmes. The Presidency expressed gratitude to attendees for their dedication in advancing youth empowerment and social cohesion. Together, they strive for excellence, inspire change, and make a lasting difference in the lives of young people across Europe and beyond.

### **Sophia Eriksson Waterschoot, European Commission's Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Director for Youth, Education and Erasmus+**

*(Wednesday 27th March morning)*

The European Commission welcomed everyone, with thanks to the Secretary General and the Belgian presidency for providing enriching experiences like youth organisation visits and a cultural dinner in a beautiful place. The agenda for the meeting has been prepared to focus on the trends and priorities for the next generation of EU Youth Programmes, emphasising the need to build on past achievements, reflect on long-term goals, and strengthen the role of youth in policymaking. The meeting aims to highlight the importance of mainstreaming youth perspectives across different policy areas and the need for credible arguments to secure future budgets. It should also address challenges such as oversubscribed Programmes and the importance of adapting management approaches to better serve the objectives of the EU Youth Programmes. The discussion should underscore the role of the EU Youth Programmes in addressing broader policy priorities such as competitiveness, green initiatives, digital transition, and democratic participation; while also emphasising the importance of inclusive, green, digital, and democratic participation as horizontal priorities. The meeting will conclude with handover plans for further discussion and evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy in the next presidency in Hungary.

---

<sup>1</sup> Travel broadens young minds

## Benjamin Dalle, Flemish Minister of Brussels, Youth, Media and Poverty Reduction

*(Wednesday 27th March afternoon)*

The Minister welcomed esteemed attendees to Brussels, emphasising the city's significance as the heart of Europe and the historical importance of the Egmont Palace where the Directors-general meeting was held, which symbolises the interconnectedness of state, economy, and social capital. As the Belgian EU Presidency reaches its midpoint, Dalle reflected on the success of the three previous conferences, which addressed crucial youth policy themes and emphasised building sustainable connections between children's rights and EU Youth Policy and formulating strategies towards inclusive societies in Europe (the third EU Youth Goal).



In this fourth event, Benjamin Dalle highlighted the unprecedented collaboration between Directors-general and National Agency directors, marking a significant milestone in European cooperation within the Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps Programmes. He expressed gratitude to the European Commission and attendees for their dedication, emphasising the profound impact of these programmes on countless lives across Europe. He described how the Programmes embody our collective commitment to fostering cooperation, understanding, and solidarity among European youth; they reflect our values of unity, inclusivity, and the ambition for a Europe fit for all.

The knowledge about the added value and importance of Europe is under pressure, he warned. In times of successive crises, such as energy, climate, and conflicts, compounded by accelerated digitalisation and diminished community infrastructure, voluntary engagement of young people and youth workers, exchange, and mobility within Europe become even more critical.

*“Your work may not always be visible, but it is invaluable in the lives of young people and youth work organisations. You are the architects of youth policy, shaping the present and future of our youth Programmes.” Benjamin Dalle, Minister*

Acknowledging the pivotal role of policymakers and National Agencies in managing and implementing these Programmes, Dalle called for continued efforts to ensure accessibility, visibility, and support for volunteers and organisations. He identified four key areas for strengthening Europe's commitment to young people:

1. Accessibility for all young people, cultivating a culture of civic engagement and active citizenship, empowering young people from diverse backgrounds to contribute to society.
2. Visibility, encouraging innovative and outreach communication as necessary to attract new participants and motivate young people to overcome barriers to participation.



3. Recognition of volunteers, volunteer organisations (formal and informal) and youth work organisations as the driving force behind grassroots initiatives, addressing social issues, and fostering positive change; they are the very centre of these Programmes, and this should be maintained at all costs.
4. Adequate funding: Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps have demonstrated their value over the years, with numerous personal and societal benefits. It remains important to identify the EU Youth Programmes as specific stand-alone programmes with sufficient earmarked budget.

In conclusion, Dalle reaffirmed the importance of cooperation and solidarity in shaping the future of European Youth Programmes. He encouraged recommendations from the attendees, crucial for further shaping these Programmes now and in the future, expressing gratitude for their strong work and dedication to European youth.

## 2. Session I: Organisation Visits

**Format:** Visits were organised to different youth projects in Brussels. The organisations were nominated by each of the three communities in Belgium, and showcased grass roots youth work. Many (but not all) of the organisations had benefited from European funding, and between them there was a wide variety of project work and long-term pedagogical support for specific target audiences. Participants were accompanied by a representative of the Flemish National Agency to support the experience, and learned a lot from the experiences and interactions with youth workers, youth leaders and young people on the ground. Having this input from a youth work practice perspective, together with the inputs from invited speakers in the plenary programme on the days after, served to enrich the discussions that followed.

The following organisations invited the participants for insight to their practice:



### 2.1 Camera Quartier

Camera Quartier provides a platform for young immigrants to engage in reflection and cross-cultural dialogue. They address prevalent issues of discrimination in European societies to foster a deeper understanding of societal challenges and the role of young immigrants as European citizens. Camera Quartier shows how young participants can become leaders and mentors, guiding other young people in the organisation.

*“It was really a revelation to be accepted with the official status of ‘Youth House’ and to receive a budget - both for us and for our young people.” Ismail, Camera Quartier*



## 2.2 De Ambrassade



De Ambrassade is a hub for youth work, youth information, and youth policies in Flanders and Brussels. They aim to help young people thrive by supporting youth organisations across Flanders, providing information, and connecting young people with decision-makers. De Ambrassade shows how collaborating with many types of organisations can improve youth work and quality standards, also by developing policy papers with young people, youth workers, organisations and experts.

*"Every village in Belgium has some kind of youth work organisation, often more than one. At the local level, you are not always aware of the bigger picture, and the extent of the network around youth work - but it exists." Jan, De Ambrassade*

## 2.3 Habbekrats



Habbekrats is about helping vulnerable children and young people. They give them space to play and grow, aiming to improve their lives and give them better opportunities. Habbekrats shows the value of creating a supportive environment where young people can help each other and stay involved even as they grow up. They support the creation of safe spaces, because they believe in their long-lasting impact for young people.

*"We cook together to give the children a sense of a family meal, and to make them feel like they deserve the best even though they might not have that luxury on a day to day basis." Joachim, Habbekrats*

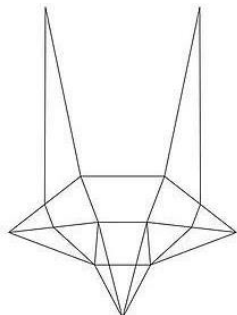
## 2.4 JES



JES vzw is about empowering young leaders in Antwerp, Brussels, and Ghent. They run activities, workshops, and training courses to help young people make positive changes in their communities. JES uses various methods, including street outreach and partnerships, to reach and support young people effectively. They involve young people in city planning to foster a sense of belonging and help tackle urban issues together. They adapt their language to connect diverse communities.

*"Strong cities are built together." Els, JES vzw*

## 2.5 Urban foxes



Urban Foxes is an international NGO, striving for sustainable, inclusive and co-created cities. They are working to make cities better for everyone, to improve urban health and well-being by making sure everyone has a say in how cities are run, especially those who are often ignored. They use methods where young people can do research and take action, and have a say in decision making processes.

*“Young people often see their environment as static. Our mission is to let young people dream.” Bram, Urban Foxes*

## 2.6 Young Thinkers



Young Thinkers is a network of young philosophers who want to bring fresh ideas to today's problems. They run workshops to help people think deeply and talk about important issues. In their daily work, they show how important it is to listen to young people and understand their lives. They bring out ideas that challenge young people and they give young people a place for discussion, sharing languages and stimulating thought.

*“Thinking needs to be promoted: Policy makers should support projects that help young people think critically and talk about important issues. They should promote questioning, raising awareness and caring.” Majid, Young Thinkers*

These following two organisations also offered and prepared a visit. Due to circumstances beyond their control, the visits did not take place.

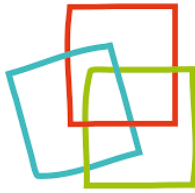
## 2.7 Dynamo International

Dynamo International is a youth service and an NGO, that fights all over the world for the defence of the human rights of people in a situation of social exclusion and in particular of children in street situations.

Their three main working focuses are :

- Street Workers Network, an international network of street social workers coordinated and mobilised to increase the scope, effectiveness, sustainability and quality of their practices and actions.
- International cooperation and solidarity projects that prioritise action in an open environment, for the benefit of children and young people in difficulty, particularly those in street situations, and the strengthening of street social work at a local and regional level.

- Dynamo International Mobility, a support service offering socio-educational assistance in Belgium for young people in difficulty, aged 13 to 25, using international mobility as an educational and motivational tool for individuals or groups.



## **2.8 Zentrum für Förderpädagogik**

Zentrum für Förderpädagogik is a centre for special needs education. Their goal is to incorporate a maximum number of pupils with disabilities, as well as those facing adaptation or learning challenges, into the mainstream school system. They work with a team of 265 professionals and several European projects to develop competences, both with staff and with their students.

They offer three categories of services: Adapted education for schools to meet the specific needs of pupils; Integration, which enables pupils with specific needs to be educated in "ordinary" schools thanks to various forms of support; Support through the 'Competence Centre' to adapt mainstream schools in the German-speaking Community of Belgium. To do this, it provides schools with experts in specific fields, and organises training courses.

## ***3. Session II: Inputs - setting the basis and things to consider***

### **3.1 European Youth Programmes**

Gisele Evrard, facilitator of the meeting, explained some elements of the youth dimension of Erasmus+ youth and the European Solidarity Corps. The comparative data from 2023, collated from the Programmes' Dashboard on 21st March 2024, shows that with 11% of the overall budget, the European youth programmes support more than 22% of the projects of all education sectors, with the largest percentage of inclusion participants, at more than 42%. With a relatively small budget, the youth programmes reach many participants, which is not the case for other education sectors. It shows what can be done with low budgets. It also shows how significant the youth dimension of the Programmes is.

It should be noted that not all data is included in this analysis (eg. from 2019 and 2020 there is no inclusion information available for the Solidarity Corps). Also, data is collected at the selection stage and can be different at the implementation stage, especially for accredited projects - anecdotal evidence says it would be a higher percentage of inclusion participants.

## 3.2 Input on RAY

*Format: Presentation input by Andreas Karsten & Carmen Teubl-Kiviniemi of the RAY network: Research-based Analysis and Monitoring of European Youth Programmes (transnational analysis 2014-2020 and midterm evaluation 2021-2023).*

### Introduction

There was appreciation for the invitation and the possibility to present key research findings from previous and current programme generations at this meeting. The data used for this presentation is a small sample and aims to give a snapshot of RAY research, on democracy and values, quality & youth work, operational challenges and some questions for reflection. It aims to inspire, bring some food for thought and help participants with reflections.



### What is the RAY Network?

The RAY Network, short for the “Network for the Research-based Analysis of the European Youth Programmes”, is a collaboration across 35 National Agencies of the European Youth Programmes and their research partners. Founded in 2008, RAY has been instrumental in conducting biennial monitoring surveys of the Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps programmes. These surveys, along with thematic research projects, offer valuable insights into the impact, challenges, and potential of these programmes.

### Monitoring Surveys: A Comprehensive Overview

The RAY Network's monitoring surveys provide a comprehensive understanding of the European Youth Programmes' landscape. From 2014 to 2023, these surveys have gathered insights from over 100,000 project participants and team members (project organisers or beneficiaries of the grants). Complemented by thematic research projects, including RAY COMP (Research project on competence development and capacity building for youth work and training in the European Youth Programmes) and RAY DIGI (Research project on the role of digitalisation in youth work and non-formal learning in the context of the European Youth Programmes), these surveys form one of the largest learning mobility datasets in Europe (and in the world). Through interviews, focus groups, and case studies, RAY ensures a multifaceted approach to data collection, and then transfers that data into accessible formats for people to understand and use.

### Insights on Democracy and Values

RAY's research shows that European Youth Programmes are extremely good at engaging, connecting and empowering young people. They strongly foster intercultural learning and active citizenship. The surveys reveal a consistent trend: participants appreciate cultural diversity more after their programme experience. Moreover, the Youth Programmes play a crucial role in stimulating discussions on political and social issues among young people: after their projects, they are more interested in participating in elections and participating in processes that link to civil society. This underscores the transformative potential of the Programmes in shaping democratic values, fostering civic engagement and boosting active citizenship.



Young people discuss political issues more than we think and are keen to change things in society for the better. They join projects to discuss and deal with socio-political challenges, with this motivation strongest in participation projects and solidarity projects.

For those that participate in the Programmes, it is a powerful and transformative experience. The question remains - how to ensure these experiences are available for more young people in Europe?

*“European Youth Programmes are intercultural learning at its best! They do what they do extremely well.”, Andreas Karsten, RAY*

## Insights on Quality and Youth Work Development

Both European Youth Programmes are powerhouses for youth work, providing valuable opportunities for youth workers and leaders to strengthen the international dimension of their work. Youth work is based around the pedagogy of non-formal learning, and close to 90% of youth workers learned more how to foster non-formal learning through their programme experience. When it comes to learning digital and media literacy skills, there is a gap between what the young people say they have learned during their European projects, and what the youth workers think they have learned: youth worker teams are under the wrong impression that they have educated their young people well about digital issues, but unfortunately this is not always the case. RAY data shows that young people have learned something, but not as much as youth workers say. In 2023, only 30% learned something about mis-/disinformation. Compared to other Programme priorities developed during projects (such as participation, inclusion, sustainability) it is a very low number. The research underscores the need to improve the approach to mis-/disinformation and to empower youth workers to navigate digital and media landscapes more effectively.

## Insights on Operational Challenges

Despite their successes, the Youth Programmes face operational challenges, exacerbated by the profound impact of the pandemic on the youth field. Structural support for youth work organisations, streamlining application procedures, and establishing a unified European volunteer status are identified as crucial areas for improvement. RAY's research calls for a concerted effort to address these challenges and ensure the sustainability and accessibility of the programmes.

## Reflections

Following the insights provided by the research, the RAY Network raises several questions:

- How can we improve programmes to support young people to address socio-political challenges?
- How can we scale the European Youth Programmes while maintaining quality and inclusivity?
- How can we better equip youth workers and leaders to address digital literacy and mis-/disinformation?
- How can we overcome operational challenges, buffering the impact of the pandemic, to ensure the long-term viability of the programs? Can we walk the talk and reimagine applications courageously?

These questions invite stakeholders to engage in critical dialogue and collaborative action to maximise the impact of the Youth Programmes across Europe.



## Discussion after the input

Data collection: every participant and team member who has been involved in the programme/project receives a survey. The response rate is 25-30% for participants and approximately 50% for team members (project organisers, or beneficiaries of the grants). In 2022/23, the surveys were adapted with parallel modules to avoid an overlap of core questions. Questions are kept similar over the years to be able to compare data and trends. Surveys are done retrospectively, so run behind real time. Addressing societal and political challenges related to Ukraine, for example, will come in the next analyses.

It is presumed that Ukrainian refugees and migrants hosted in programme countries will have quite some impact in the youth field, which will surface in the RAY results in different ways over the next years. However, when looking at migrants, the status is so vaguely defined between Member States that comparison is very unclear. It was noted by Tobias Flessenkamper from the Council of Europe that to have mobility for migrants, with Programmes shaped for this public, would be an important category to explore in the future.

Mis-/disinformation as part of the wider digital priority was queried by the European Commission. Andreas Karsten clarified that the digitalisation module was developed with SALTO Digital in Finland, with questions shaped around the DIGICOMP framework. Mis-/disinformation is embedded in a larger set of questions. Even if we have better guidelines now for the digital priority, it is hard for youth workers/organisations to find orientation in the topic. Many tend to think that if they use a very small part of digital offers in their work (e.g., Zoom meetings learned during pandemic times), their competences will grow, but there are many other areas of the topic to tackle and improve.

Tanya Basarab from EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership asked if we should scale up Youth Programmes, or scale down to smaller initiatives for first time users? Andreas Karsten responded that the data shows the Programme experience is indeed more powerful for first time participants, even if many do try to return to the Programme (another quality indicator). Figures from application data show there is significant potential to provide more opportunity for more youth workers, volunteer leaders, organisations, networks, young people etc. The challenge is to make the scarce resources available to as many as possible. Expanding the Programme project types and sizes could disadvantage small organisations and (informal) youth groups seeking to apply. It is important for the European Youth Programmes to expand in volume while retaining smaller project types and low-threshold pathways to accommodate their needs. It is crucial not to sacrifice small and easily-accessible project formats.

A story was shared by the National Agency of the Czech Republic, of a young girl in their country who was underprivileged and bullied, whose experience in a youth exchange in Germany changed her life. The importance of complementing statistics with the illustration from real life stories was strongly underlined. The egalitarian nature of Youth Programmes as an educational approach, open to all, was also emphasised.

### 3.3 Inputs by SALTO Inclusion & Diversity: inclusion in the EU Youth Programmes

*Format: Presentation input by Pieter-Jan De Graeve of SALTO Inclusion and Diversity: Inclusion in the EU Youth Programmes*

There was appreciation shown towards the Belgian Presidency for inviting SALTO Inclusion & Diversity to this meeting, to have the possibility to present the results of their contribution to the mid-term evaluation. More specifically, it is good that inclusion and diversity, or social inclusion at large, are high on the policy agenda. The input here aimed to give a little extra push to convince participants even more of the importance of these priorities, and to explore which changes could be made to make the Programmes even more inclusive and diverse.



#### Getting Familiar with Concepts and the Framework

Diversity covers personal and social differences; everyone has different characteristics; there is no ‘diverse part’ of the population, nor is diversity a personal trait or a trait of a certain group. Inclusion is about removing barriers and ensuring fair participation for all. It is important to understand that diversity includes various aspects of individuals and their backgrounds, while inclusion means actively breaking down barriers, including structural factors, for those with fewer opportunities, aiming for full participation of every member of society. Inclusion requires equitable opportunities and access to overcome privileges. This requires coordinated efforts from different groups and sectors.

#### A Brief History of the Inclusion & Diversity Strategy

The European Youth Programmes have a longstanding tradition of focusing on inclusion and diversity, with SALTO Inclusion & Diversity playing a pivotal role since its establishment in 2000, collaborating with the European Commission, National Agencies, and field experts to develop successive inclusion strategies, including the current Implementation Guidelines for 2021-2027.

#### Key Actors

Multiple stakeholders support the implementation of inclusion and diversity strategies. Where SALTO Inclusion & Diversity provides tools, resources, and training to translate strategies into practice, the I&D Steering Group oversees strategy implementation and offers guidance, National Agencies ensure mainstreaming of inclusion and diversity principles, and initiatives like the Strategic Partnership for Inclusion extend outreach to organisations serving marginalised youth.

#### Reviewing the I&D strategy

The mid-term evaluation of the I&D Strategy aimed to assess its impact on making the Programmes more inclusive, identifying areas of strength and areas of improvement. It was carried out and written by Gisele Evrard as the researcher, who included diverse perspectives through desk research, focus groups, and interviews.



## Findings

- **Inclusion is on the Rise:** Stakeholders agree that inclusion efforts have produced positive outcomes in the EU Youth Programmes, including the implementation of more inclusive projects, greater participation of young people with fewer opportunities, diversification of applicant profiles (such as social workers), and enhanced quality of inclusion projects.
- **Drivers of Inclusion in the Programme:** Factors contributing to this rise include: implementation of national I&D strategies; the supportive tools and capacity-building efforts of SALTO I&D; introduction of new project formats (such as small-scale partnerships); accreditation mechanisms allowing simplified applications, better planning and implementation of projects, and financial support mechanisms tailored to inclusion needs.
- **More Needs to be Done:** Inclusion and diversity projects need well-designed and careful processes, which take time, space and budget. The Programmes need to be adjusted to be more inclusive. There needs to be less complexity in application forms, activity formats, budget constraints and IT tools, none of which are currently fit for inclusion.

Other actions are proposed to respond to the challenges of the Programmes such as: simplification of Programme processes for smaller organisations (one size does not fit all); recognising and effectively addressing barriers to inclusion, diversity and accessibility to the Programmes, including better resource dissemination; improved evaluation mechanisms to monitor the effectiveness and efficiency of the Programmes in addressing inclusion and diversity; strengthened collaboration with neighbouring partner countries and regions in the face of global challenges.

Budgetary constraints need to be addressed to sustain and expand inclusion initiatives such as: the bigger financial investment that inclusion projects demand; resource limitations of National Agencies and SALTOs; appropriate lump sums and financial support for organisations to manage inclusion projects; a more comprehensive lump sum and coordination fee within the Solidarity Corps; improvement of quality and representation in Training and Evaluation Cycle training for volunteers of the Solidarity Corps.

## Programmes

Practically within the Programmes, there are further concrete elements that would help with the pathway to more inclusion:

- The Quality Label in the Solidarity Corps and accreditation in Erasmus+ Youth need to be quality controlled with an emphasis on the assessment of applications. It is agreed they bring added value in the management of projects, but need monitoring to check if they can demotivate organisations from participating.
- Rights and responsibilities of lead and partner organisations need to be carefully monitored, to avoid mismanagement.
- 'Discover EU' - even if there is a lot of inclusion potential within the action, it requires profound revision: the age limit is too restrictive and does not fit the profile of inclusion target groups; the 'Inclusion action' is viewed as stigmatising and inconsistent with KA1 project types, and its exclusivity actually limits interaction and learning from and with other groups; the procedures are complex and time-consuming, generating additional workload for organisations and National Agencies.

## Food for Thought

Two critical reflections emerge. Firstly: balancing individual needs with structural changes to develop inclusive, diversity-sensitive structures that eliminate barriers from the beginning. How can we realise this? How can we move from equitable societies to just societies?

Secondly, navigating the use of labels and categories sensitively to avoid stigma and homogenisation. There is a paradox in this for researchers, policy makers, and youth workers: sometimes we need labels, while labelling is problematic. How can we instil a more sensitive approach to labels?

## 3.4 Data on international mobility within the EU Youth Programmes

*Format: Presentation input by Hilde Lauwers of Department of Culture Youth and Media: Transnational learning mobility for young people and youth workers in the Flemish Community. A quantitative analysis of the EU Programmes Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps, 2007-2024*

As National Authority for EU youth learning mobility programmes, the Flemish government is responsible for several tasks, including the implementation, evaluation and monitoring of the Programmes. National ongoing analysis aims to keep its finger on the mobility pulse, present key findings and address related challenges in the future.



Youth policy, whether at the European, national, or local level, is fundamentally rooted in a commitment to fostering the well-being, empowerment, and active engagement of young people within society. To achieve these goals, policymakers must adopt an approach that values the perspectives of young people themselves, while also integrating other relevant sources of data. By adopting an evidence-based and a knowledge-based approach, policy decisions become more rational, more transparent, and ultimately more effective, as they are grounded in the lived realities of young people. Given the diverse and rapidly evolving nature of youth experiences, it is important to regularly collect information to identify emerging needs and inform the development of appropriate support services. Five “thought provoking” reflections are derived from this analysis:

### 1. Significance of Transnational Learning Mobility

Transnational learning mobility serves as a vital policy tool for the European Union, witnessing an expansion in financial resources and participation rates. Despite facing significant challenges such as the Eurozone Debt crisis, migration crisis, Brexit, and the Covid-19 pandemic, the EU remains committed to investing in learning mobility. Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps have experienced a rise in the number of participating organisations, projects, and participants, demonstrating their increasing significance in promoting youth empowerment and active engagement.



## **2. Addressing Underfunding in the Youth Field**

The youth field, despite its substantial impact, faces underfunding issues, evident in the allocation of resources relative to other sectors. Despite the high number of participants, projects, and organisations involved, the financial support for youth initiatives remains disproportionately low. This underfunding poses barriers to youth participation in transnational projects, hindering their opportunities for personal growth and skill development.

## **3. Importance of Volunteering Work**

Volunteering work plays a crucial role in both Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps, providing significant added value for volunteers and volunteer efforts. This extends beyond the borders of the European Union, highlighting its international importance. However, financial barriers and other obstacles impede volunteer participation, necessitating adequate support to ensure inclusivity and accessibility.

## **4. Addressing Budget Constraints**

The percentage of high-quality projects that cannot be approved due to budget constraints remains high. Limited data availability restrains comprehensive analysis, making it challenging to determine the root causes of project rejections. Further investigation into the evaluation process is required to understand whether rejections stem from proposal quality or budget limitations.

## **5. Need for More Detailed Data**

National Authorities require more current and detailed data on both Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps from the European Commission to develop evidence-based and knowledge-based policies effectively. The limited availability of data limits informed decision-making, which requires improved data sharing and collaboration between National Authorities. Peer learning and exchanges of information can enrich analysis and sharpen methodologies for a collaborative approach to advancing youth mobility initiatives across Europe.

## **4. Session III: A common high-level meeting of National Authorities and National Agencies: reflections on the (future) EU-Youth Programmes**

### **4.1 Introduction to the session**

*Format: Groups of mixed participants sat together, representing the Directors-general of Youth and the National Agencies of Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps, as well as representatives from the European Commission, RAY research, SALTO Inclusion & Diversity, Council of Europe, EU-CoE youth partnership and the European Youth Forum. In three discussion rounds, they reflected on the following questions, and came up with some suggestions for next steps or future Programme generations.*

### **4.2 Questions discussed**

1. **Democracy and values:** How do both European Programmes contribute to respect(ing) and safeguard(ing) European values (and do they?) What else is calling to be done in this area and why?
2. **Quality and Youth work development:** How do and can the European Programmes (better) contribute to youth work development in Europe and quality projects? What is missing and/or calling for today to set up and realise (more) high-quality projects in both European Programmes? What (other) incentives and drives are necessary to let more young people, incl. those from more diverse backgrounds, have a successful and insightful international learning mobility experience? What would society miss, should the youth sector not have access to both European Programmes?
3. **Operational and financial improvements and challenges:** what are the remaining challenges in the implementation of the European Youth Programmes? What do they impede? What led to having the current financial resources of both European Programmes insufficient? What are the "hard" arguments/evidence needed to convince legislators of this and the need for more? What are, without being necessarily direct responses to the challenges, the improvements needed for the contribution to the European Programmes to fulfil their purpose?

In the appendix to this report, the clustered outcomes of these joint conversations are mapped. Nothing else was added by the rapporteuses, so the contents are faithful to the contributions of the attendees only. They do not claim to be an agreed common ground between all actors, or an official position of any institution or role that was present on the day; nor are they the full picture related to that theme or topic. Rather, they illustrate the value of collaboration and interaction from different perspectives around common topics, and are a few ideas to build from, providing some inspiration to continue the discussion, to help different stakeholders prepare for the future generations of European Youth Programmes.

### 4.3 Recommendations for the European Youth Programmes

These recommendations for the European Youth Programmes are a combination of the responses, opinions and suggestions from the contributions from different stakeholders on the afternoon of 27th March. Each of these areas received comments from at least 40% or more of those participating on 27th March, giving a certain critical mass to the issues. They are not in priority order. They relate specifically to the 3 question areas discussed on the 27th March.

#### REINFORCE A VALUES-BASED APPROACH

- Retain values as the core of the Programmes
- Explore and discuss the values more, using accessible and understandable language
- Keep community impact as a core element of the Programmes
- Prioritise inclusion

#### FOCUS ON COMMUNITY / STRUCTURAL IMPACT

- Improve recognition of youth work and international youth work through the Programmes on policy level and foster stronger connection with other education sectors
- Provide funding for project formats to link projects and their outcomes more sustainably to a wider stakeholder group on community/regional level

#### SUPPORT QUALITY

*most popular topic - received the most comments and suggestions from most tables*

- Define the criteria of quality projects, measuring and monitoring it (putting pressure on the local level for quality youth work)
- Support the rollout of the Youth Test or Check, on European and National levels, for the needs and voices of young people to be heard in different policy areas
- Improve harvesting and disseminate of good practice from projects, especially outputs from Key Action 2 - Cooperation Partnerships
- Continue to ensure training, professional development and international practice sharing between youth workers through the Training and Cooperation Activities budget

#### INCREASE THE BUDGET

- Recognise that the Programmes work (see RAY for evidence base). There should be more funding, more projects, more people positively impacted
- Ensure equality with other education sectors for the grant funding
- Respond to the need and existing demand of the youth sector: increase the national success rates for project approvals
- Support more quality projects that impact individuals and communities

#### ENABLE NAS TO INCREASE OUTREACH

*include more young people with fewer opportunities and newcomers*

- Build in response mechanisms beforehand, to deal with changing situations and unforeseen crises
- Listen to the needs of the field when adapting;
- Offer tailor-made project actions around the diverse needs of the field;

#### MAKE IT EASIER TO APPLY

- Reduce complexity of the Youth Programme offer
- Consider micro-grants as a new format, for a low-threshold entry point
- Ensure proportionality of administration to grant size
- Consider applications not only text based (consider video etc)

#### INCREASE FLEXIBILITY OF PROGRAMMES

- Increase the management fee for National Agencies
- Promotion of opportunities through third parties and alumni
- Support newcomers in their journey to become beneficiaries

#### IMPROVE THE IT ARCHITECTURE

- Reduce complexity
- Have better synergy between systems which are more stable and easier to use
- Have data more readily available to enable quicker evidence-based decisions

## 5. Session IV: Reflections on the Future EU Youth Strategy

*Format: Hosted by the chair, Secretary General Bart Temmerman, Tour de Table (3' per delegation)*

### 5.1 Inputs from representatives of the Directors-general

Each representative of the Directors-general extended their appreciation for all the preparation and effective organisation of the meeting, and the hospitality through cultural and social activities too. Mention was made of the stimulating discussions, the great programme and the presentations and inputs.

The Belgian Presidency was commended for their state-of-the-art documents, utilising researchers for evidence-informed EU policy to a new level, which sets a valuable example for future strategies. It was stated that they have taken the concept of evidence-informed youth policy to a new level.



Participants were also thankful for the essential topics highlighted during this meeting and specifically for enabling everyone to reflect on the topic of the EU Youth Strategy.

They then expounded on the two questions :

1. What is missing in the current EU Youth Strategy?
2. What should be included in the future EU Youth Strategy?

### Lithuania

A recent international survey, with information about under-30 year olds, showed that Lithuania ranks as the country that has the happiest youth!

A national consultation was held with young people in Lithuania who stated that there are still concerns regarding mental health, well-being, and digital competences. These issues are high on the young people's agenda, and they want there to be more actions in these fields.

The current EU Youth Strategy sometimes feels very broad, with perhaps too many issues inside to deal with at once.

Regarding the future EU Youth Strategy, it is hard to predict what will come in the next years (potential conflicts, war, and economic and social issues), however there are still specific topics which are important to them (well-being, mental health, housing, employment, AI, digital competence, social integration, diversity). Lithuanian youth emphasise the importance of integrating these priorities with other sectors such as employers and the economy, as they are cross-cutting issues relating to other policy areas and institutional expertise. We should also ensure that equal opportunities and gender equality are core principles and must be kept in the future strategy.



## Finland

Finland also comes high on surveys for 'happiest people'.

The contents of the EU Youth Strategy should be in line with what we do on the national level, and it does indeed hold many current issues relevant for young people in Finland and should continue to do so in the future. The EU Youth Coordinator role is somewhat unclear, we hope they will have a stronger and more visible role in the youth conferences, Youth Working Party or also someday in the Directors-general meeting. The future EU Youth Strategy should be clear and more focused, with a clear plan of who is doing what and when. This way, the execution will be more accurate and transparent. For the contents of the strategy, the youth sector and youth policy makers should respond to the needs, concerns and themes that come directly from young people. In a national consultation of more than 7000 young people in Finland, the most important aspect to be changed was climate change. Value-based European Youth Programmes must be in line with the new EU Youth Strategy. Inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities is still important and must stay a key value.

## Spain

The EU Youth Strategy is our strategy. In Spain, there is also the Youth Strategy 2030. Young people must be implicated in the forming, delivering and re-shaping of youth strategies.

Attention should be paid to 5 key issues for the future EU Youth Strategy:

1. Budget. A strategy without budget makes things worse.
2. Clear link between the EU Youth Strategy and the EU Youth Programmes, as tools to deliver it.
3. Clear system of monetary actions and goals.
4. Introducing the EU Youth Test or Check, which is a big step in the right direction.
5. Young people's opinions and concerns, which must be considered.

The main topics of mental health, decent work and housing should be renewed, and of course gender equality, youth participation and climate change.

## Croatia

The role of the EU Youth Strategy is to enable young people to shape their own destiny, support their personal development and path to independence, also to become resilient and acquire skills (life skills but also skills for different aspects of life). There is always room for progress to provide young people with the necessary resources to be active citizens and bearers of positive changes, in line with the European values and identity.

Young people play a vital role in society, facing unique challenges while also striving for independence, personal development and to help others. The EU Youth Strategy aims to empower youth to shape their own destiny, fostering resilience and acquiring essential life skills, and skills for life, to be active citizens and bearers of positive changes aligned with European values. However, there is room for improvement, particularly in crisis management within the strategy, which could be addressed through different synergies within the Programmes and activities implemented by EU and the Member States. Issues like mental health and the challenges of rural youth should be addressed more prominently, given recent crises and demographic complexities across the EU.

The future EU Youth Strategy should align with the Directors-general agenda of the next political cycle, while reflecting the needs and aspirations of young people. It should focus on the greater inclusion of all



young people, especially for those with fewer opportunities. It must also prioritise green and digital objectives through youth work and address demographic challenges (for example labour market needs, enhancing young people's skills, and advocate for affordable and accessible housing). While the current EU Youth Strategy is effective, more flexibility is needed to adapt to evolving needs more swiftly.

## Sweden

The current EU Youth Strategy has shown resilience amidst various crises, thanks to its built-in flexibility and its original design as 'future proof', allowing for adaptability and relevance despite changing circumstances, which is a great strength. This flexibility in the short term also allows the trio Presidencies to focus on their own priorities within that frame, which is good.

However, there is a lack of medium-term strategic discussion and tools, context or structures to plan for the next 3 or 4 years effectively - the FNAPs do not play that role. While the current strategy has long-term vision, there is a need for more concrete plans with clear responsibilities and timeframes. We should conclude one chapter, and move on to the next, especially for a strategy that covers 7 years. This different type of strategy document would facilitate dialogue with other policy areas, and address pressing issues like mental health and housing, as highlighted by youth feedback.

## Austria

First some evidence: despite some challenges, recent national data in Austria shows that in 2022 over 80% of young people aged 16 to 29 were satisfied with their lives. Additionally, nearly half of young Austrians (1.4 million) aged 15 to 29 volunteer, reflecting high levels of youth engagement. Climate protection emerges as a top concern for 80% of Austrian youth, indicating a clear focus for future initiatives.

Moving forward, Austria aligned its national youth strategy with the EU Youth Goals, because in Austria all national regulatory youth measures must be linked to the EU Youth Goals. All national youth strategies should be linked to these goals and there should be more ways to compare the implementation of the strategies in other EU Member States. Implementing tools like the EU Youth Test or Check and the EU Youth Dialogue are existing instruments that should not be forgotten as a way to foster youth participation, which is always a fundamental priority. In Austria, we already have an impact assessment for children and young people for legislative initiatives. Micro grants for the EU Youth Programmes should be considered as they offer low-threshold access, building on successful initiatives like those during the European Year of Youth.

## Poland

Our Lithuanian counterparts highlighted that they consulted with youth for input on the future strategy, echoing our findings in Poland, and we also added data from the Open Society 'Can Democracy Deliver Report'. The new EU Youth Strategy should be based on the needs and concerns of young people, such as diminishing faith in democratic processes, mental health crises, the isolation effectuated by social and informational bubble and emerging challenges posed by such things as AI and the metaverse. The new EU Youth Strategy must prioritise mental health support for young people, including expanding access to mental health services, providing mental health education, launching campaigns to destigmatize mental health issues.

Combating hate speech and cyber violence, scam phishing and preparing youth for AI and the metaverse are crucial aspects. It was questioned why digitalisation, once seen as the ideal solution for education and youth work, has now become a challenge and even a danger for children and young people. The strategy should also focus on promoting digital skills and STEM education, ensuring young people are equipped to participate in and contribute to the digital economy. To be effective, the future EU Youth





Strategy must not only acknowledge the challenges faced by young people, but also act decisively to address them. We should foster active and informed youth participation. We should take into account several key actions in the future EU Youth Strategy such as exchange of good practices, financial support, promoting dialogue and youth participation and cross-sector partnerships.

## Ireland

The current EU Youth Strategy comprehensively serves as a valuable framework for youth policy and coordination. Its three key principles of “Engage, Connect and Empower” remain relevant and useful. In Ireland, youth participation and inclusion are top national level priorities and we need for these to continue as focal points in the future strategy. Looking ahead, it is more about what needs a stronger emphasis and prioritisation rather than what is missing. We must be guided by the young peoples’ request for the legacy of the European Year of Youth.

It is essential to prioritise mental health and well-being, especially given the impact of events like the COVID-19 pandemic on young people.

Enhancing the accessibility and impact of the EU Youth Dialogue and Programmes is crucial: making EU Youth Programmes more accessible, requiring a more youth-friendly format for the strategy itself. It should speak directly to young people for them to be better informed and more empowered.

Addressing social rights for young people and tackling intersectionality are emerging themes that demand attention, despite the complexity and challenges involved (age range, different authorities’ mandate). Inclusion should be approached through an intersectional lens, recognising and overcoming the multiple barriers faced by young individuals.

Empowering young people to navigate the increasingly unreliable information landscape is also vital for fostering trust in society and democracy. Mis-/disinformation should have a stronger focus in the new strategy. The quality of youth work should be emphasised, with a focus on data-informed and evidence-based approaches and adapting to the evolving needs of young people, especially considering demographic shifts and social integration challenges. The role of youth work as a force for social integration may require renewed attention.

## Italy

Many colleagues have already highlighted the most significant aspects missing from the current strategy. I particularly agree with my Finnish counterpart’s emphasis on clarifying and strengthening the role of the EU Youth Coordinator, which is also our role as Member States to support. One notable absence in the current strategy is intergenerational justice and equity, which requires a clearer definition and focus. Additionally, when discussing inclusion, the category of young people with fewer opportunities is broad and requires better definition, especially considering the varying situations across different Member States. Often the larger countries have similar situations, but in smaller countries it is very different.

## Czech Republic

We find that the current strategy offers considerable flexibility, allowing us to adapt to unforeseen crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian military aggression against Ukraine. The three pillars of “Engage, Connect and Empower” remain relevant, but we believe they could be further targeted and expanded.

Under the “Empower” pillar, we propose a stronger focus on supporting all young people, especially those in vulnerable situations, to reach their full potential and successfully transition to adulthood. In terms of “Engagement”, we are entering an era where young people are expected to participate in policymaking processes actively, requiring specific skills to articulate their opinions and make



compromises as equal partners in society. In the context of “Connecting”, promoting youth mainstreaming necessitates close cooperation between young people and decision-makers, emphasising the need for intergenerational justice and solidarity. Youth policymakers and young people need to understand each other, and go beyond the youth sector, to avoid making narrow, self-centred decisions. As for the thematic priorities outlined in the EU Youth Goals, we suggest reassessing their relevance and potentially adding new priorities through a participatory process similar to the one used when developing the original goals. From our ministry's perspective, combating mis-/disinformation is crucial and could be incorporated into the new EU Youth Strategy. Given the prevalence of mis-/disinformation, described by some as ‘cyber war’, young people need tools to discern fact from fiction, though finding effective solutions may pose challenges.

## **Bulgaria**

We strongly support involving and empowering all young people in youth policy to promote opportunities and European values. We advocate for wider participation in mobility to enhance democratic engagement among youth. The current EU Youth Strategy acknowledges the potential impact of the younger generation on society, and we believe that engaged and empowered youth can drive positive change. Youth organisations should play a leading role in this process working closely with Member States and the EU institutions.

The EU Youth Strategy (2019-2027) has laid a solid foundation for promoting opportunities, diversity, social inclusion, and eradicating youth poverty. It is crucial that young people and youth organisations are actively involved in its implementation, working closely with Member States and EU institutions.

In the future strategy, we propose focusing on education and acquiring skills, smart industry and digital connectivity, social inclusion and youth work, health and mental well-being, cultural diversity, media literacy and online safety. The EU Youth Dialogue, particularly the EU Youth Conferences, should continue as essential tools including youth representation, but efforts are needed to make them more inclusive for unorganised youth and to be authentically recognised at the political level, where commitment of the policy makers should not seem ‘fictitious’ to youth.

Additionally, the future strategy should address limited youth participation in decision-making at local and national level, ensure sustainability of consultation mechanisms with civil society stakeholders, and foster youth involvement in planning, implementing, and evaluating strategies, especially in the Youth Dialogue.

For digital literacy, there is a need to equip, analyse and have stronger information to navigate mis-/disinformation. As artificial intelligence increasingly impacts young people's lives, we need to shape relevant youth policies aligned with digital/AI processes, find synergies between different policy fields and ensure adequate responses to their needs.

## **Hungary**

I would like to emphasise the importance of mental health, a shared concern across many countries, including Hungary. The unpredictability of the future, exacerbated by recent crises like the pandemic, economic challenges and conflicts, has heightened this issue especially for young people. Despite mental health being a goal in the EU Youth Strategy, its connection to digitalisation remains underexplored. We believe it is critical to develop media literacy and investigate the impact of digitalisation on well-being in the next EU Youth Strategy, considering its prevalence among young people. While digitalisation offers opportunities, it also poses risks like cyberbullying, loneliness and social isolation. Hungary's digital child protection strategy, established in 2018, sets standards to mitigate these risks and is a potential solution for this area.

Improving mental health is both a social and financial imperative, as neglecting it incurs significant costs



which might increase in the future. Any EU Youth Strategy should prioritise mental health initiatives. We welcome efforts aimed at enhancing the mental health and well-being of young people in Europe.

## Cyprus

We are pleased with the current EU Youth Strategy, particularly its collaborative creation with young people and the amplification of their views and voices. The new strategy should maintain this approach, prioritising input from young people from local, national and European level and with different backgrounds, engaging as many young people with fewer opportunities as possible.

Flexibility of the EU Youth Strategy is crucial, to take into account the changing challenges that young people face. We must address the pressing issue of mental health, for which the existing strategy lacks comprehensive measures. Also, addressing social inequalities presents an opportunity to empower marginalised youth. In my country, a sustainable employment prospect is a significant concern for young people, which can be tackled through the enhancement of skill development.

## Portugal

In discussing the EU Youth Strategy and Programmes, it is important to highlight youth mainstreaming, ensuring youth perspectives are present in all policies and Programmes.

The new EU Youth Strategy should include a new chapter on the EU Youth Test or Check, outlining its process, relevance to young people, proposal assessment, youth consultation, impact assessment, and for those results to be publicised.

Emphasising European values like democracy, active citizenship, and non-discrimination is crucial in Programmes and need stronger emphasis. Access to relevant data for evidence-based youth policymaking is essential. Despite the current strategy's recognition of this, challenges remain in accessing relevant youth-specific data, hindering problem identification and solution proposals. For example, Eurostat does not allow an accurate description of young people's lives. Establishing a comprehensive platform for youth-specific data in the youth portal across policy fields is vital to prevent data fragmentation and enhance accessibility.

The current strategy is based on 11 European youth goals developed through an extensive co-creation process with thousands of young people. This co-creation process, involving youth, experts and representative organisations, should continue in the next version of the strategy via EU Youth Dialogue and the Youth Conferences. The EU Youth Dialogue and the independent youth-led national youth councils also play central roles, requiring follow-up at all local, regional and national and European levels to ensure youth perspectives are mainstreamed, resonating in all relevant policy areas.

Reflecting on the role of the EU Youth Coordinator and further defining it is necessary for the next EU Youth Strategy. Exploring synergies between EU Programmes is vital to ensure implementation of existing schemes and ensuring sustainable and dedicated funding for youth organisations and actions carried out for youth development in the framework of the EU Youth Strategy.

## Slovenia

The EU Youth Strategy for managing youth affairs at EU level promotes inclusive participation and collaboration among all young people. It should reflect participation for all interest groups and all youth. We propose to strengthen youth inclusion, particularly focusing on implementing the EU Youth Test or Check initiative and incorporating activities from individual priority areas. In Slovenia, youth inclusion is not only about the interest of a particular group, but viewed as vital for cohesive democratic processes, supported by a special advisory body at the national level, so youth issues are included in national policies.

Key highlights from our reflection on the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 include addressing the lack of



digital skills among young people (quality digital education and training) promoting social inclusion and diversity (actively addressing these issues, with clear guidance for implementation and measurement of success of policies), recognising non-formal education and informal learning (recognising and incorporating non-formal education and clear guidance for these practices) and incorporating migrant youth (need for inclusion, and linking to social inclusion and diversity). With these changes, we aim to contribute to the effective implementation of the EU Youth Strategy and ensure equal opportunities for youth development and success in society. Every political decision today shapes the future lives for young people and future generations.

## Germany

In Germany on a national level, our youth currently face unprecedented pessimism since 50 years, making it crucial to bolster their confidence. The next EU Youth Strategy should prioritise instilling confidence in young people. The current strategy has been effective, being a good framework for youth strategies in Germany and providing flexibility during crises, but we must ensure the next one offers the same adaptability for unforeseen challenges.

The existing framework of the pillars of “Engage, Connect and Empower” are well chosen and remain important fields of action from 2028 and beyond. Nevertheless, as a follow up of the European Year of Youth, a fourth area should be added: we must also address young people's specific concerns, as highlighted by recent discussions. Implementing the EU Youth Test or Check is a step in the right direction, but we need to go further by mainstreaming youth concerns across all policy areas. We should be more aware of our responsibility toward the young generation, taking its interests and needs into account more systematically across all policies. Mainstreaming should be an additional element of the new EU Youth Strategy.

We have to activate the policy fields of climate change, transportation, education, housing, mental health and well-being, as they are all fields that concern the future of young people and their needs must be taken into account.

Involving young people in shaping the next strategy through co-creation processes, such as the EU Youth Dialogue, participation and youth mainstreaming on the agenda, is essential for achieving intergenerational justice and addressing demographic changes. We should also review and update the 11 EU Youth Goals from 2018, in collaboration with young people and youth organisations, to reflect current developments.

## Romania

The current EU Youth Strategy focuses on education, employment, and inclusion, but some critics say it lacks sufficient emphasis on mental health support, digital literacy, and environmental sustainability. For the future strategy, we should strengthen mental health services for youth, enhance digital skill training, promote sustainability practices, foster intercultural understanding, and ensure meaningful youth participation in decision-making processes. Addressing youth unemployment and social inequality should also be key priorities. Additionally, we should consider enhancing the strategy by promoting civic engagement and democratic participation, cultural exchange and mobility programmes, affordable housing, quality healthcare, financial literacy and entrepreneurship education, combating discrimination, promoting equality, and addressing the fake news phenomenon for youth.

## Slovak Republic

A brief input since many have already covered important points. Having an EU Youth Strategy for youth is wonderful, but we believe it needs more specificity. For instance, what does "quality learning" entail? This should include fighting mis-/disinformation, developing critical thinking, and enhancing digital and



social competences. The strategy should then outline how to achieve these goals. Additionally, it is crucial to have national strategies in each country based on the EU Youth Strategy, tailored to regional needs. Without national strategies, achieving our goals with the EU Youth Strategy alone would be challenging.

## Netherlands

We propose that the new EU Youth Strategy is more youth-led, incorporating input from knowledge and insights of policymakers and pays attention to intergenerational solidarity. This aligns with suggestions from Germany and Italy regarding co-creation and inter-generational aspects. It should be in line with the rights of the child. Flexibility to address emerging topics, such as crisis management as mentioned by Croatia, is crucial.

Themes, youth goals, and campaigns should be included in the Strategy to reflect the diverse voices, hopes and dreams of young people from all walks of life from across the EU. From the voices of the young people in the streets of Europe, to the policy makers at European level, and then back to the streets of Europe. "Don't ask what Europe can do for you, ask what you can do for Europe!". Insights from 14 youth organisations in the Netherlands, though focused on national concerns, are relevant for the new EU Youth Strategy. These include: fair and affordable climate transition, affordable housing for young people, health care for every young person that needs it, accessible education, to work with young people to 'get their mental health back', to work on a generation test (a national level one that is similar but broader to the EU Youth Test or Check) and work with young farmers for future-proof agriculture.

Strengthening youth organisations and ensuring financial stability for young people are additional considerations. Addressing the influence of influencers and promoting responsible financial behaviour among youth should also be explored.

## Malta

Strategies are never perfect because circumstances are always changing, and we can not predict the future. So, flexibility is crucial. The EU Youth Strategy should also inspire Member States, because it is at the national level that the strategy is implemented.

Our strategy should strongly reflect European values like peace, freedom, and security. We moved away from the previous strategy, which had multiple pillars relating to themes such as well-being, education etc, to focus on Engaging, Connecting, and Empowering which are core values for young people, which we still find valuable.

The Youth Coordinator and the EU Youth Test or Check, youth mainstreaming and youth proofing are being developed now. This should actually be the biggest pillar in the strategy: engaging young people in a wider policy discussion and for policy makers to understand what the real needs of youngsters are. We are not experts in every field, like mental health, but we want youth perspectives to shape policies in those areas.

There should also be a pillar in the new EU Youth Strategy for the European Youth Work Agenda, incorporating the future of youth work in the strategy.

Additionally, we need to better integrate Programmes into our strategy implementation, both at the European and national levels. We have had discussions about this, but there is still a disconnect between the two levels of policy and practical implementation that needs to be addressed.

## France

I echo many relevant points made by my colleagues. The current EU Youth Strategy remains relevant, with a focus on inclusion being crucial, both in the Strategy and in the Programmes. Flexibility is needed,



given the uncertainty of the times we live in, and the unknown future. Emphasising EU values is important, along with addressing eco-mental health, sustainable development, and climate change. Mental health and well-being is an important priority for the youth field, but is also the responsibility of wider policy sectors.

Fighting against mis-/disinformation and promoting critical thinking are essential, as is fostering civic engagement, especially now with the mis-/disinformation campaigns leading to the EU election. The EU Youth Dialogue needs more visibility and could perhaps benefit from a dedicated page on the youth wiki, to explain what has been done on a national level, updated at the end of each cycle. This will also help with monitoring. Clarifying the link between the European Youth Conference and the strategy is necessary, to show policy makers that the Youth Dialogue process is an integral part and important moment, as is integrating research and data into evidence-based policy, as Sweden and Portugal have underlined today.

The role of the European Youth Coordinator and the importance of youth mainstreaming are emphasised. Constructing the Strategy with input from young people is crucial, with the EU Youth Dialogue process, consulting and constructing it also on the recommendations they have already given us to shape the future direction.

## Latvia

I am grateful for the important topics discussed in the meeting. We highly value the common EU Youth Strategy and the efforts of the European Commission and Member States in its implementation, which elevate the needs of young people higher in the agenda.

It is crucial to involve young people in crafting the strategy to ensure it meets their needs, a practice we should continue for the future strategy. However, significant changes, like the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian aggression in Ukraine and advancements in artificial intelligence, have reshaped youth priorities rapidly.

We must address mental health support for young people post-COVID, while also tapping into the potential of digital youth work which was catalysed during the pandemic times. The rise in mis-/disinformation and insecurity underscores the need for stronger and more visible international solidarity and promotion of democratic values among young people.

The rapid development of AI, with the way young people study, work and learn, brings both challenges and opportunities in youth work, emphasising the need to support well-being and mental health, media literacy, and digital security and assess possibilities and risks of AI. Youth work plays a vital role in building resilience, developing civic education and promoting European values, requiring a focus on developing youth workers' skills, especially in digital, crisis support for young people and working with young people with fewer opportunities.

Youth mainstreaming should be central in the next strategy, leveraging the flexibility of the current framework to meet young people's needs effectively.

## Greece

It is clear, as many colleagues have noted, that young people are grappling with significant uncertainty due to recent unpredictable events like war in Europe (whose end we cannot foresee), a pandemic that killed millions of Europeans, fragile economies, and climate crises that present other threats. These challenges impact their lives, emotions, and engagement in social and political spheres.

To address this, young people who are the future of our existence should feel more confident; they need to feel heard and supported. The current strategy has effectively addressed their needs, providing a relevant framework for current issues such as: social and political activation; peer cooperation; well-being and mental health' fake news and hate speech; soft, green and harmonising personal and professional skills development, and combating stereotypes and discrimination.



Priority should be given to enhancing European opportunities through Programmes. I echo Sweden's suggestion to review and update the strategy periodically at regular mid-term points, to adapt to evolving challenges.

### **Estonia**

Colleagues have already shared many insights, and I would like to emphasise some key points from the Estonian delegation regarding the EU Youth Strategy. We advocate for prioritising youth voices, ensuring diverse representation in decision-making processes. This involves setting up spaces at the table to listen to young people's voices, representing an increasingly more diverse range of lived experience including those from minority groups and those with fewer opportunities.

Additionally, we emphasise the importance of youth-led design and management within the strategy. Finally, we support promoting youth rights, including implementing the EU Youth Test or Check and support for debates on lowering the voting age in Member States.

### **Belgium**

On behalf of the Belgian Presidency, I would like to express gratitude for everyone's insightful contributions to the current and future EU Youth Strategy. Despite our role as the Presidency team, we unusually would like to share our opinions on today's topic. We echo Minister Dalle's insights from yesterday and focus on today's questions.

Firstly, the EU Youth Strategy serves as a guiding framework for all, promoting a common understanding of youth policy and youth work, fostering cooperation in the field. It is crucial to provide additional support to countries and regions, particularly those with limited capacities, in policy development and cooperation. Strengthening the overall youth perspective is essential.

The next EU Youth Strategy should undergo the EU Youth Test or Check once established. Capacity building should be emphasised, particularly in interdisciplinary policies, benefiting young people directly. Refresh the 11 European youth goals in collaboration with stakeholders, including a co-creation process with young people. It is crucial they should be a major part of the strategy, not be 'just an appendix'. We advocate for reinforcing youth participation in democratic life and supporting social and civic engagement, so that all young people have the necessary resources in society, with a focus on mainstreaming in the future Strategy.

In addition to "Engage, Connect and Empower" we propose a dedicated chapter on youth mainstreaming, accompanied by related instruments like peer learning and capacity building, supported by regular work of dedicated expert groups. This approach promotes solidarity within the Union, one of its assets, and facilitates participation from regions with fewer capacities for evidence- and knowledge-building. The policy development at EU level should also follow this approach, such as for the future generation of EU Programmes. Further support for research, analysis, monitoring, and data collection on youth policy and youth work is necessary, ensuring accessibility and readability of results. This links to the EU Youth Dialogue, where monitoring, a coherent communication strategy and also financial means are needed.

Recognising the overlap in policy between children and young people up to 18 years old, the new EU Youth Strategy (and other policies concerned) should facilitate a seamless transition from childhood to adulthood, especially for young people in vulnerable situations. Finally, promoting and supporting volunteering among young people should be explored within the future EU Youth Strategy and Programmes, considering the economic, educational, vocational and professional constraints of young people.

## 5.2 Summary of the reflections on the current EU Youth Strategy

Overall, the national inputs on the current EU Youth Strategy from the Tour de Table National Inputs on 28th March highlight several key points of the current EU Youth Strategy:

### VALUABLE FRAMEWORK

The current strategy is seen as a valuable framework for youth policy and coordination, elevating the needs of young people in the agenda at different policy levels. Improvement is needed for those needs to be heard in different policy sectors. The strategy serves as a guiding framework, providing common understanding and cooperation in the youth field in different Member States.

### FLEXIBILITY AND RESILIENCE

The current strategy has demonstrated resilience amid crises and is considered "future-proof" due to its flexibility, allowing adaptation to changing circumstances. This is highly valued.

### THE 3 PILLARS REMAIN RELEVANT

The three pillars of engage, empower, and connect are seen as valuable and relevant, but there is room for further expansion, especially around youth mainstreaming.

### FOCAL POINTS FOR THE FUTURE

Youth participation and inclusion are top priorities at national levels, and there is a need for these to continue as focal points in the future strategy. Other important elements exist in the current strategy, such as mental health & well-being, digital literacy and environmental sustainability but need emphasising. Currently the Youth Goals are only included in the EU Youth Strategy as an annex, whereas these issues are priorities of young people in many countries.

### COLLABORATION WITH YOUTH ORGANISATIONS

Young people and youth organisations were integral to creating this current EU Youth Strategy. It is important to have youth participation at every stage of creation, adaptation and management of a strategy, working closely with Member States and EU institutions.



### 5.3 Recommendations for the future EU Youth Strategy

The following recommendations can be distilled from the future EU Youth Strategy discussions from the Tour de Table National Inputs on 28th March:

#### YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND INCLUSION

Prioritise active involvement of young people in all stages of Youth Strategy development, implementation, and evaluation through inclusive processes like the EU Youth Dialogue. Reflect on and refresh the existing Youth Goals to ensure their relevance for the future, adding new priorities where necessary. Emphasise inclusion of all young people in the Strategy and in the European Youth Programmes, prioritising those with fewer opportunities.

#### MAINSTREAMING AND EMPOWERMENT

Develop a flexible EU Youth Strategy that can adapt to evolving challenges. Apply an EU Youth Test or Check when developing it to ensure its appropriacy and that it is as future-proof as possible. Add a dedicated fourth pillar for mainstreaming youth perspectives across all policy areas, accompanied by related instruments, engaging multiple sectors and stakeholders in the priority themes for which young people have needs (mental health, digital literacy, housing, transport etc). Empower diverse youth voices to shape policies that affect them directly, with youth-led design and management of the process.

#### MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING SUPPORT

Enhance mental health services and promote well-being initiatives for young people. Combat stigma associated with mental health issues and ensure accessible support mechanisms. Emphasise this existing Youth Goal as a priority for the future EU Youth Strategy.

#### DIGITAL LITERACY

Address digital literacy gaps and prepare young people for the digital age, including quality digital education and training to tackle mis-/disinformation, digital security, the use of AI and promoting online safety.

#### EU YOUTH COORDINATOR ROLE

Clarify and strengthen the role in alignment with the EU Youth Strategy and Programmes. Make their achievements more visible and impactful.

#### EUROPEAN YOUTH PROGRAMMES

Ensure that EU Youth Programmes are value-based and closely align with the objectives and priorities outlined in the EU Youth Strategy; the two mechanisms should have synergies.

## 6. Session V: Inputs from stakeholders

### 6.1 Zsófia Nagy-Vargha, Deputy State Secretary for Youth, Ministry of Culture - Incoming Presidency Hungary

Zsófia Nagy-Vargha expressed gratitude to the Belgian Presidency for hosting the meeting and highlighted the informative roundtable discussions with National Agencies and the insightful organisation visits. She also thanked Belgium and Spain, their trio partners, for their remarkable achievements during their respective presidencies.



#### Hungarian Presidency Priorities

She outlined Hungary's seven overarching priorities for their presidency, starting July 2024, including: strengthening competitiveness (which directly affects young people's lives), addressing demographic challenges, facilitating EU enlargement policy, strengthening EU defence policy, shaping the future of cohesion policy, adopting the EU budget for 2025, and addressing different dimensions of migration including the external dimension.

#### Inclusive Societies and Rural Youth

Hungary's commitment to inclusive societies, one of the cross-cutting priorities from the Youth Goals, will be discussed as well as the importance of focusing on young people living in rural areas. She focused attention on the importance of ensuring that their voices are heard and their needs addressed, especially in terms of access to opportunities and resources, ensuring their connection to all levels of policy and policy making.

#### European Youth Conference and Council Conclusions

Zsófia Nagy-Vargha outlined plans for the European Youth Conference, where discussion will be held around issues such as employment, affordable housing, education, access to social protection, supporting mental health, addressing land development and supporting the potential of young people from rural areas to prosper.

These topics will be worked on within the framework of the Council conclusions, tailored to regional and local needs.

### Upcoming Events and Dialogue

She highlighted the busy schedule for the autumn, including hosting the European Youth Conference and the DG meeting simultaneously in mid-September, which will give young people the opportunity to meet policy makers, with an emphasis on bringing rural youth from the periphery to the centre.

### Conclusion and Invitation

An invitation was extended to the attendees to join the events in Budapest in September and she encouraged others to reach out with any questions. Zsófia Nagy-Vargha concluded by exchanging gifts with the current Belgian Presidency hosts.

## 6.2 Tobias Flessenkemper, Head of Department, Directorate of Democratic Participation - Council of Europe

In his role also as head of the youth department at the Council of Europe since September 2023, Tobias Flessenkemper expressed gratitude for the invitation, highlighting the importance of collective youth policy discussions, as well as the longstanding cooperation between the European Union and the Member States of the Council of Europe, with many areas of youth policy connection. Belgium was the founding member of this, and continues to be a key player in ensuring youth policy remains an international public concern.



### Reflecting on 75 years of the Council of Europe, the Reykjavik Declaration, the Democracy Principles and the Youth Perspective

Over the past 75 years, Europe has faced challenges reflecting past struggles for freedom, including current issues such as the war in Ukraine, securing democracy, equitable economies, youth development, discrimination, and even securing human civilisation. At the Reykjavik summit in May 2023, leaders of the Council of Europe decided to prioritise involving young people in decision-making processes across various sectors, aiming for progress in governance, the environment, health, social policy, anti-corruption efforts, and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Tobias Flessenkemper stressed that priority of the Youth Perspective should be given to supporting youth participation in democratic life and decision-making, alongside education on human rights and core democratic values such as pluralism, inclusion, non-discrimination, transparency and accountability. He indicated that the Council of Europe youth sector is integrating this perspective, and the upcoming mid-term review of the Council of Europe EU Youth Strategy 2030 will identify new priorities and adjustments too.

*“To give a ‘Youth Perspective’ is a gift from the Council to itself”, Tobias Flessenkemper, Council of Europe*



## Practical dimensions entering the Council of Europe's 2024-2027 Work Programme

Tobias Flessenkemper outlined upcoming Council of Europe events and collaborations for 2024-2027, including the [Intergovernmental Steering Committee for Youth](#) meetings, the 50th [Joint Council on Youth](#) meeting in Budapest, and a youth conference entitled '[Confidence in Tomorrow](#)', also commemorating the 75 years of the Council of Europe.

He highlighted the importance of translating young people's rights into practical action, mentioning standards prioritised by the Joint Council on Youth. Highlighting the democracy principle as crucial to develop youth policies, he noted the Committee of Ministers' adoption of a resolution on active political participation of national minority youth<sup>2</sup>. He mentioned young people's involvement in negotiating a treaty on artificial intelligence upholding the Council of Europe legal standards, human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Additionally, he stated that gender equality, discrimination, climate change, and young people's active role in these areas remain high priorities. Tobias Flessenkemper mentioned that the European Union and all Member States have now joined the Istanbul Convention, the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. The current Council and the Advisory Council are developing an instrument on human rights and the environment, and also on mental and physical well-being. Even if it is not yet defined how to work on it, he highlighted the importance to look at the conventional framework for ensuring mobility for young people in Europe, including short-term stays, voluntary service and group exchanges, including culture, sports and peace building.

## The Ukraine Crisis and Youth Policy Response

Tobias Flessenkemper underlined the urgent need for comprehensive youth policy development and mobilising resources to address the situation in Ukraine and support affected communities. He emphasised the importance of mobilising financial resources for infrastructure, including housing, youth centres, and sports facilities that have been destroyed, and highlighted the potential role of the Council of Europe [Development Bank](#).

## Cooperation with the European Union

He emphasised the strategic partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Union, focusing on shared values and collaborative efforts to support youth welfare, equality, and prosperity.<sup>3</sup> He stated that although the partnership is the result of trust and strategic collaboration, a recent communication from the Commission outlined areas for additional cooperation. Tobias Flessenkemper concluded by congratulating the Belgian Presidency, and looking forward to continued cooperation.

---

<sup>2</sup> Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)9 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the active political participation of national minority youth (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 4 October 2023 at the 1477th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)

<sup>3</sup> With reference to Article 2 of the Treaty on the European Union, which addresses human rights, democracy and the rule of law, and Article 3, which aims to enhance welfare, more equity and more prosperity to young people in Europe. Voetnoot

### 6.3 Nicholas Kujala, Board Member, European Youth Forum (YFJ)

Acknowledging the collaborative efforts of the participants in supporting the EU Youth Check, Nicholas Kujala thanked everyone for their contributions. He highlighted the inclusion of the EU Youth Check in the Commission's communication (January '24) on the European Year of Youth, emphasising the need for concrete and meaningful implementation of this initiative.

To facilitate this, the Youth Forum is working on two key products: a checklist of questions to establish the relevancy of legislative proposals to youth, including which research to consider to measure impact, and an amendment to the regulation to incorporate the EU Youth Check, so that it is systematically built in EU decision making. He emphasised the importance of giving the EU Youth Check a home, similar to the Small and Medium-sized Enterprises test.



#### Recent Achievements

Nicholas Kujala also shared updates from the recent EU Youth Conference held in Ghent, where over 300 participants collaborated to develop 6 recommendations.

To summarise, the young people want the Member States to: enhance support for young people facing poverty and financial exclusion (R1), ensure accessible and youth-friendly healthcare, including mental health services (R2), to increase funding and training for educators to foster inclusive learning environments (R3), improve the capacity of people working with and for youth to effectively disseminate youth friendly information (R4), promote inclusive education and youth work (R5) and implement policies to combat discrimination and biases (R6). To support these, 34 concrete possible implementing measures were co-created, to address pressing issues facing youth from local level to EU level and beyond. He emphasised the importance of disseminating the conference outcomes throughout the Member States to create positive change for young people.<sup>4</sup>

#### Challenges and Concerns

Moving on to other priorities, Nicholas Kujala discussed the Commission's publication of a Directive on traineeships, expressing concerns about its effectiveness in addressing unpaid internships. He called for support during negotiations to ensure that the directive effectively tackles sham traineeships and guarantees that interns receive proper pay and employment rights. He specifically mentioned fair play and social security as priority issues.

#### Future Programme Directions

Regarding the mid-term evaluation processes of the Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps programmes, the European Youth Forum (YFJ) has produced position papers with recommendations to better address the needs of young people. He highlighted the need for: increased budgetary allocations (indexing the overall budget to inflation rate); simplification of bureaucratic processes (allowing better

<sup>4</sup> This document gathers the 6 recommendations and the 34 implementing measures created during the EU Youth Conference (EUYC) in Ghent, Belgium, that took place on the 2nd to 5th March 2024 under the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union: <https://publicaties.vlaanderen.be/view-file/65577>

inclusion of local and grass roots voluntary organisations); improved inclusion for young people in all their diversity by the removal of barriers; for young people from outside the EU to participate more in these programmes and to ensure a European volunteer status. The European Youth Forum is also launching its own research process on how people experience the programmes, so requests any data or information that could help with that, for example national reports that are shared with the European Commission etc.

### Other priority topics

A paper is coming soon from the European Youth Forum on ‘Precarious work and mental health and well-being’; an invitation was extended for Member States to work together with European Youth Forum on the Youth Progress Index, measuring values of young people round the world over 10 years of data, trends and systemic changes across topics and time; related to housing, the scope for the European Youth Forum’s advocacy and action in 2025 and beyond is currently being defined; related to the environment, global warming, biodiversity loss and social injustices, the European Youth Forum are calling for an EU directive to limit resources consumption to 5 times per capita by 2050.

In closing, Nicholas Kujala mentioned the upcoming second edition of “LevelUP! I care, I vote” during the European Youth Week, where 1,300 young people will gather in the European Parliament to learn about the EU and enhance their activism skills in mobilising youth and young votes when they return home. He thanked the Belgian Presidency for the invitation and expressed the Youth Forum's commitment to continued collaboration in the future political mandate.

## 6.4 Tanya Basarab, Research & Youth Policy Officer, EU - Council of Europe Youth Partnership.

Tanya Basarab congratulated Belgium who had held this wonderfully rich flagship presidency. She appreciated being invited and for stakeholder contributions to have a place at this meeting.

### Background of the Partnership

Tanya Basarab highlighted the longstanding cooperation of more than 25 years between the European Commission and the Council of Europe through the Youth Partnership, which focuses on common interests of the two institutions, fosters synergies, and conducts research to support policy debates. They create a lot of tools which translate policy-oriented findings into accessible formats so debates can continue nationally and locally. It is their role to respond to requests from EU Presidencies and Council of Europe Chairmanships and to support European youth policy debates. They have contributed to the evaluation of the EU Youth Dialogue and are supporting the Council of Europe in the mid-term review of its 2030 Youth Strategy.





## Flagship Events and Research Initiatives

She discussed the annual symposium, focusing this year on young people, the climate crisis, and sustainability. The [symposium in September 2024](#) will be accompanied by research papers on eco-anxiety and litigation as a tool for young people. Additionally, preparations for the [European Youth Work Convention in Malta in May 2025](#) have begun.

## Youth Policy Initiatives

Tanya Basarab detailed ongoing initiatives under youth policy, including the [Massive Open Online Course \(MOOC\) on Youth Policy Essentials](#), master classes, and the [Shaping Youth Policy in Practice project](#) for 6 national delegations which has its closing seminar in April 2024. The partnership also introduced the new [Tool-Kit \(T-Kit\) on Participatory Youth Policy](#), complementing the manual that supports youth policy development and advocacy.

## Youth mainstreaming

In a peer reviewing role, the partnership supported the background research for the Belgian Presidency's seminar on child rights and youth policy. The biggest project under youth policy in the next two years will be looking at youth perspective and youth mainstreaming. There are two steps to this: seeing how youth mainstreaming has developed in international organisations - not only the Commission and the Council of Europe but the guidelines from the UN and other structures - to see what can be learned; and to collect and analyse national case studies on mainstreaming which will help Member States for policy guidelines, support the work of present/future Youth Coordinators, improve the EU Youth Test or Check etc.

## Improving Youth Work and Recognition

The partnership continues to support youth work development, particularly in Eastern and Southeast Europe, through seminars and the development of advocacy tools. [The draft report from the previous seminar in Bucharest](#) has been published, and the next seminar is expected in October 2024. Efforts include creating a manual on developing youth work strategies (to be presented at the 2025 Convention) and advocacy tools for more resources, spaces, support for youth work, that can be adapted to the national/local contexts. A [MOOC on Youth Work Essentials](#) is ongoing and a MasterClass for that will be held on 23rd May 2024. The 'Recognition of Youth Work' objective is being supported by the [Visible Value Library](#), updated with national information from different Member States.

## Youth Research and Knowledge Dissemination

The partnership coordinates the Pool of European Youth Researchers, who will have their annual meeting at the end of May in Brussels. March 27th there was an online expert meeting sharing research on mental health & well-being in youth work, and a seminar will follow in November. There is a lot of research, the question was posed whether a compendium would be useful, with 'mapping' and 'gapping' of the areas where the partnership could contribute more.

In 2022, a research paper was published on '[Young People in Rural Areas](#)' and there is now follow up on that. Two studies are currently being done on democracy and young people: the first being the impact of the vote at 16 (interesting to see the first overview of the changes that brings to EU elections in May); the second on what ideologies motivates young people to vote these days.



Tanya Basarab thanked the participants and offered collaboration together with the EU-CoE youth partnership in the future.

## 7. Closing Words

**Format:** Input from Sophia Eriksson Waterschoot, European Commission's Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Director for Youth, Education and Erasmus+

The European Commission expressed gratitude to all delegations for the substantial and useful contributions for the next steps for the EU Youth Strategy. Potential changes and specific adaptations were identified to make it more concrete and could enhance the strategy's visibility and impact. She thanked the Belgian presidency for their efforts in organising the meeting and fostering bridges and synergies between Programme implementers and policymakers. There was acknowledgement of the useful encounter as a foundation for future presidencies. She highlighted the enriching experience of the organisation field visits, which many colleagues learned a lot from and will bring inspiration for all the work that is being done.

Even those living in the city got to know something new of Brussels. She expressed appreciation for the culinary delights and social events that were organised.

The positive sequencing of the Belgian presidency events, incorporating research and inputs from the different youth events, including this Directors-general meeting, will now lead to a rich number of documents that should be consolidated at the May Council.

Ongoing work for the European Commission team was outlined, including the realisation of the legacy of the European Youth of Year in helping to shape the EU Youth Strategy; the Eurobarometer dedicated to young people, analysing the trends of youth and democracy, which should be launched in time for the EU elections in May; and preparing for the next generation of Programmes. She emphasised the importance of youth participation and democracy, also in the EU elections in May, inviting attendees to the European Youth Week (Brussels event, April 12th 2024).

The next EU Youth Strategy will be built on the mid-term evaluation (which will be available late spring 2024). It should be youth-led, with co-creation and ownership directly by young people and a strong link to the Programmes. There will be reliance on the European Youth Forum to help put that in practice.

The Commission underlined its core role in supporting and facilitating reforms in Member States, adding that our European Youth Programmes are strong and could include incentives. She raised questions on what support and guidance is needed from the Commission for those Member States who would like to develop and implement the EU Youth Test or Check. If Member States will put in place national youth coordinators, that will be important to know before the youth stakeholder platform in Autumn 2024.

Gratitude was expressed to the Belgian Presidency with special tribute being paid on the occasion of his last Directors-general meeting to Jan Vanhee (Youth Policy Advisor, Flemish Community of Belgium) for his longstanding dedication to youth cooperation. Jan has been a cornerstone of European youth cooperation for about 30 years. His extensive institutional memory and dedication have made him a driving force behind the EU Youth Strategy and other European tools. He has been an excellent and





invaluable partner for the team at the Commission. Jan's passion and commitment to the youth agenda have been inspiring.

“Thank you Jan, as this is your last Directors-general meeting. It has always been a pleasure to work with you, always young at heart and pushing for the youth agenda; we are all so grateful for that.” Sophia Eriksson Waterschoot, European Commission

The Director concluded with wishes for a safe trip home, and looking forward to the next Directors-general Presidency meeting in Hungary.

## 8. Annexes

### 8.1 Speakers



**Bart Temmerman** - Secretary General of the Department Youth, Culture and Media of the Flemish Government

Bart Temmerman is the Secretary General of the Department Youth, Culture and Media of the Flemish Government. Previously, from 2009 to 2023, he was leading publiq, a digital cultural marketing services platform. The Brussels resident was also responsible for the introduction of UiTPAS as a collective cultural loyalty card and the launch of the museum pass in collaboration with the museum sector. Bart Temmerman also has experience in the film sector, as financial manager at Marmont Film Production. He also handled management positions at associations and organisations, such as Kunstenwerkplaats Pianofabriek and Cultuurkrediet (Hefboom). Temmerman also worked at Nokia and Proximus Group. He obtained a degree in Commercial Engineering from the Vrije Universiteit Brussel - Solvay in 1996 and an International MBA from the Vlerick Management School in 2008.



**Benjamin Dalle** - Flemish Minister of Brussels, Youth, Media and Poverty Reduction

From 2000 to 2005, he studied law at the University of Ghent. He then obtained his LL.M. in International Legal Studies from New York University. He completed his studies with a three-month internship at the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Geneva. After his studies, he went to work as a lawyer at the Brussels Bar and was also a part-time assistant at KULeuven, under judge and professor André Alen. From 2007 to 2011, Dalle served as advisor to Deputy Prime Ministers Yves Leterme, Jo Vandeurzen and Steven Vanackere. In December 2011, he became director of the policy cell of Servais Verherstraeten, Secretary of State for State Reform and Public Buildings Administration. From 2014 to 2016, he was deputy chief of cabinet to Justice Minister Koen Geens. In March 2016, Benjamin Dalle was appointed head of CD&V's study department, Cedar. He would continue to hold this position until his appointment as Flemish minister in October 2019. Benjamin Dalle has long been active in Brussels politics. Among other things, he served as chairman of the party's Brussels Capital Division and was also a co-opted senator replacing Steven Vanackere from January to May 2019.



**Sophia Eriksson Waterschoot** - European Commission's Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Director for Youth, Education and Erasmus+

Sophia Eriksson Waterschoot is Director for Youth, Education and Erasmus+ at the European Commission's Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture. She is in charge of European cooperation on higher education, schools and youth policy, managing Europe's flagship programme for education, training, youth and sport Erasmus+ with a budget over €26 billion 2021-2027. She launched and manages the European Solidarity Corps, an EU youth volunteering programme, and coordinated the 2022 European Year of Youth. She launched flagship actions under the European Education Area and the EU Youth Strategy, such as European Universities, Teacher Academies and DiscoverEU. She has previously held various positions within the European Commission in the field of strategy and investment in education, employment policy, European Semester, European cohesion funds, cultural policy and business statistics. She studied economics, business, political science and EU affairs in Sweden, France and Belgium, including an Erasmus student exchange.



**Carmen Teubl-Kiviniemi** - Coordinator and project manager of the European youth research network RAY

Carmen Teubl-Kiviniemi is a Project manager at the Finnish National Agency for Education – EDUFI, Internationalisation Services for Youth, Culture, and Sport. She coordinates the European youth research network RAY (Research-based analysis of the European Youth Programmes), which is hosted by the Finnish National Agency for Education. She has experience in managing and leading international projects, networks as well as processes in the non-formal education sector, intercultural and youth field focusing on international cooperation, youth participation, policy and research as well as intercultural dialogue. Lately, she has been expanding to mediation and conflict resolution.



**Andreas Karsten** - Research coordinator of the European youth research network RAY

Andreas Karsten coordinates the transnational research team of the RAY Network for the research-based analysis of European Youth Programmes. He works for Youth Policy Labs, a small research agency and think tank in the youth sector, where he leads an international team of participatory research, public policy and open data aficionados.



**Pieter-Jan De Graeve** - SALTO Inclusion & Diversity Officer at SALTO Inclusion

Pieter-Jan is project officer at Salto Inclusion & Diversity since October 2021. He is mainly busy with coordinating the SNAC Strategic Partnership for Inclusion and co-coordinating the I&D Strategy Steering Group. Before he was a researcher at the KU Leuven and Ghent University, working on the topics of young people in a NEET-situation and poverty.



**Hilde Lauwers** - Policy Officer Department Culture, Youth and Media - Flemish Government

Hilde Lauwers is a policy officer at the Department of Culture, Youth, and Media of the Flemish government, specialising in international and European youth policy. She holds a master's degree in history and has conducted historical research on educational methodologies. Additionally, she has conducted both qualitative and quantitative research on the contemporary experiences of children and young people. Hilde has also managed policy and practice projects focusing on youth issues, such as initiatives aimed at fostering resilience among young people against violent extremist narratives.



**Koen Lambert** - Director of JINT vzw

Koen Lambert graduated at the Ghent University as a master in modern history. During a 3-year period he worked as a civil servant at the Ministry of the Flemish Community, on local youth policy in Flanders. From 1990 on, he became the director of JINT, the co-ordination agency for international youth work of the Flemish Community, Belgium. He is Head of the National Agency and involved in the European Commission Consultation Group of Youth NA's, the network of National Agencies, the Steering group on the European Training Strategy.



### Nicholas Kujala - Board Member of the European Youth Forum

Nicholas started volunteering at a local youth council at the age of 13, followed by several roles in the Finnish National Youth Council Allianssi. Through volunteering, he developed his passion for advocacy and policy work as well as his expertise in youth rights equality and security topics. Nicholas currently works on aviation weather prediction for the Finnish Meteorological Institute and studies natural sciences at the University of Helsinki.



### Tobias Flessenkemper - Head of the Department Directorate of Democratic Participation at the Council of Europe

Tobias Flessenkemper is Head of the Department Directorate of Democratic Participation at the Council of Europe, and within this role is also responsible for the youth department. His previous postings include the European External Action Service (EEAS) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Council of the European Union in Brussels, Skopje and Sarajevo and the OSCE. 2012-13 he was visiting fellow at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP). In 2013 he became managing director of the Berlin-based agency elbarlament.org - cultures of democracy. He regularly contributes to research and higher education programmes with a focus on European cooperation. From 1998-2001 he was Secretary General of the European Youth Forum. He holds a Magister Artium (M.A.) in Political Science from the University of Cologne and European Master in International Humanitarian Assistance (E.MA) from the Ruhr-University Bochum.



### Tanya Basarab - Research and Youth Policy Officer - EU-Council of Europe Partnership

Tanya Basarab is research and youth policy officer at the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership, manager ad interim. She has been working on a range of projects within the EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership dealing with youth policy, youth work and youth research development. Thematically she has coordinated research on youth transitions, social inclusion and youth worker education and has coordinated the development of a new Youth Policy Manual from a European perspective.



### Zsófia Nagy-Vargha - Deputy State Secretary for Youth, Ministry of Culture - Incoming Presidency Hungary

Zsófia Nagy-Vargha serves as the Deputy State Secretary for Youth at the Ministry of Culture and Innovation. She graduated from the Faculty of Humanities at Eötvös Loránd University, specialising in German language and literature teaching and also the field of television journalism and print media studies. Throughout her professional career, information and communication have played a prominent role.

As a journalist and editor-in-chief, she has placed great emphasis on delivering public affairs topics in a credible and understandable manner. In her current role as Deputy State Secretary for Youth, she pays special attention to providing young people and talents with opportunities to express their thoughts and concerns directly, with a particular focus on the mental health of young individuals. She has been in her current position since July 2022.

## 8.2 Organisations Visited on 26th March 2024



### CAMERA QUARTIER

#### AIM AND PURPOSE OF YOUR ORGANISATION

Camera Quartier provides a platform for young immigrants to engage in reflection and cross-cultural dialogue. We address prevalent issues of discrimination in European societies to foster a deeper understanding of societal challenges and the role of young immigrants as European citizens.

#### MAIN NEED OF YOUR YOUNGSTERS

Young people need to tackle daily racism. Young people need opportunities to learn new skills, gain recognition, and grow through projects. They need exposure to different cultures and countries to broaden their horizons.

#### PROJECTS

- **Caméra Contre Racisme:** This programme brings together young people from Belgium and Spain to talk about their cultures and experiences with racism. By sharing stories and challenging stereotypes, they build understanding and empathy.
- **Intercultural Exchanges through Erasmus+ projects:** These exchanges let young people explore different cultures and discuss issues that affect them personally.

#### WHAT COULD OTHER ORGANISATIONS LEARN FROM YOURS?

- **Get Young People Involved:** Camera Quartier shows how young participants can become leaders and mentors, guiding others in the organisation

#### ONE KEY MESSAGE TO GIVE POLICY MAKERS?

Staff and Resources are needed: Camera Quartier and other organisations need more qualified staff and better facilities to allow good working conditions.



## DE AMBRASSADE

### AIM AND PURPOSE OF YOUR ORGANISATION

De Ambrassade is a hub for youth work, information, and policies in Flanders and Brussels. They aim to help young people thrive by supporting youth organisations, providing information, and connecting young people with decision-makers.

### MAIN NEED OF YOUR YOUNGSTERS

They need more public space, to reinforce their right to leisure opportunities, and their need to feel good and develop positively (using the power of youth work for their mental well-being).

### PROJECTS

- **Youth Work in Flanders:** De Ambrassade works with 109 youth organisations, supporting 6,000 local projects and reaching 100,000 young people. They focus on making sure youth work meets high standards and has a positive impact.
- **Youth Information:** Teaming up with 'Wat Wat,' they provide information to young people. Their website had 1 million visitors, and their Instagram has 12,800 followers. Flemish Youth Council: Every three years, they hold elections to choose 16 members who represent young people and youth workers, making sure their voices are heard.

### WHAT COULD OTHER ORGANISATIONS LEARN FROM YOURS?

- **Work Together to support quality standards of youth work:** De Ambrassade shows how collaborating with many organisations can improve youth work, developing policy papers with young people, youth workers, organisations and experts.



## HABBEKRATS

### AIM AND PURPOSE OF YOUR ORGANISATION

Habbekrats is all about helping vulnerable children and young people. They give them space to play and grow, aiming to improve their lives and give them better opportunities.

### PROJECTS

- **Youth Centres:** They have 19 centres in Flanders and Brussels, providing lots of space for young people to hang out.
- **Adventure House:** In the Ardennes, they have a place for camps, where kids can have fun and learn important social skills.
- **Leading the Way:** Other organisations are learning from Habbekrats' methods of working with young people.

### MAIN NEED OF YOUR YOUNGSTERS

Young people need to feel like they belong. Organising activities like shared meals is a way of creating/building the feeling you are part of a big family. Young people need safe and positive spaces, they need support with homework and social issues in a friendly environment.

### WHAT COULD OTHER ORGANISATIONS LEARN FROM YOURS?

- **Working Together:** Habbekrats shows the value of creating a supportive environment where young people can help each other and stay involved even as they grow up.
- **Supporting Spaces:** Spending time and resources to create safe spaces has long-lasting benefits for young people.



## JES VZW

### AIM AND PURPOSE OF YOUR ORGANISATION

JES vzw. is about empowering young leaders in Antwerp, Brussels, and Ghent. They run activities, workshops, and training courses to help young people make positive changes in their communities.

### MAIN NEED OF YOUR YOUNGSTERS

Young people in cities need an authentic connection. They need to trust institutions and use their support, understanding their challenges and building trust.

### PROJECTS

- **Urban Leadership Development:** About 10 young leaders get support each year to make a difference in their cities. JES gives them space to grow and connect with other youngsters.
- **Visibility and Advocacy:** JES helps young people share their ideas and projects at events and meetings. This support boosts their credibility and helps them access resources.
- **Gender-Specific Initiatives:** They started the M-Power project for young women aged 18-25 to help them speak up and advocate for themselves.
- **Support for Youth Initiatives:** JES backs projects like Loupix in Brussels, giving resources and guidance to young leaders.
- **Artistic Opportunities:** Collaborating with cultural groups, JES gives young artists a platform to showcase their talents and engage with their communities.

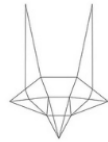
### WHAT COULD OTHER ORGANISATIONS LEARN FROM YOURS?

- **Outreach and Collaboration:** JES uses various methods, including street outreach and partnerships, to reach and support young people effectively.
- **Urban Challenges and Community Engagement:** Involving young people in city planning fosters a sense of belonging and helps tackle urban issues together.
- **Language and Cultural Considerations:** Organisations should find creative ways to connect with diverse communities by adapting to different languages and cultures.

### ONE KEY MESSAGE TO GIVE POLICY MAKERS?

There should be more trust and recognition from policymakers and funders: giving flexibility to organisations like JES encourages innovation and supports youth-led projects.





## URBAN FOXES

### AIM AND PURPOSE OF YOUR ORGANISATION

Urban Foxes is an international NGO, striving for sustainable, inclusive and co-created cities. They are working to make cities better for everyone, to improve urban health and well-being by making sure everyone has a say in how cities are run, especially those who are often ignored.

### MAIN NEED OF YOUR YOUNGSTERS

Young people need recognition and credit for what they can bring to a city : Many young people do not think they can make a difference in how cities are planned.

Young people need to be included as much as possible in decision making, procedures and planning: Some groups, like girls and homeless youth, feel left out. Young people are not often included in planning how cities should be built. Schools do not teach much about city planning, and there are not many ways for young people to get involved.

### PROJECTS

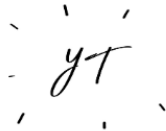
- **The Academy for Urban Action:** This project helps young people get involved in making their cities better through research, workshops, and working together.
- **DURF:** This project aims to give young people a voice in decision-making by helping them write proposals and advising policymakers.
- **Placemaking for Inclusion:** Urban Foxes runs big projects to make cities more welcoming and sustainable for young people, providing tools and resources to help.

### WHAT COULD OTHER ORGANISATIONS LEARN FROM YOURS?

- Use **methods** where young people can **do research and take action**.
- **Be creative** and use design tools to **get young people involved**.
- Follow projects like DURF to give young people a say.
- **Work together internationally** to have **a bigger impact**.

### ONE KEY MESSAGE TO GIVE POLICY MAKERS?

Instead of focusing only on big plans, there should be small and fun projects that can make a big difference. "With small wins, we can make lasting change." Invest more in people and education rather than just measuring outcomes.



## YOUNG THINKERS

### AIM AND PURPOSE OF YOUR ORGANISATION

Young Thinkers is a network of young philosophers who want to bring fresh ideas to today's problems. They run workshops to help people think deeply and talk about important issues.

### MAIN NEED OF YOUR YOUNGSTERS

Young people need more self-confidence and recognition to help them realise their talents. They need new narratives and possibilities to break out of binarity. They need legitimacy and intergenerational links to explore new ideas and hear different opinions. They need to reconnect with the place where they live, and have relationships with reality and the world itself.

### PROJECTS

- **Philosophy Workshops:** They empower young people from different backgrounds by asking philosophical questions related to their daily confrontations and having discussions about it.
- **International Philosophy Encounter for Youth:** This project brings together young people from all around Europe to discuss philosophical ideas and concepts together, while giving young people the power to let their voices be heard.

### WHAT COULD OTHER ORGANISATIONS LEARN FROM YOURS?

- **Understanding Youth:** Young Thinkers show how important it is to listen to young people and understand their lives.
- **Bring out ideas that challenge young people:** Give young people a place for discussion, sharing languages and stimulating thought. Question young people starting from the reality, clarify terms.

### ONE KEY MESSAGE TO GIVE POLICY MAKERS?

Thinking needs to be promoted: Policy makers should support projects that help young people think critically and talk about important issues.



### **8.3 Round Table discussions between National Agencies and Directors-general, clustering of discussions**

In the appendix to this report, please find the clustered outcomes of the joint conversations held on March 27th between Directors-general of Youth, the National Agencies of Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps, as well as representatives from the European Commission, RAY research, SALTO Inclusion & Diversity, Council of Europe, EU-CoE youth partnership and the European Youth Forum.

Appendix to

***EU Meeting of  
Directors-General for Youth  
Brussels, 26-28 March 2024***

***Round Table Multi-Stakeholder Discussions***

AUTHORS: Susie NICODEMI and Agathe DENAIS

PUBLISHER: Flemish Government, Department for Culture, Youth and Media

PUBLISHED: April 2024



EU  
NEEDS  
YOUTH



## THE JOINT ROUND TABLES SESSION, EU MEETING OF DIRECTORS-GENERAL MARCH 27TH 2024

During one day of their meeting (March 27th 2024), the Directors-general met the Directors of National Agencies and others in the field of youth to have common discussions and reflections.

This joint meeting had the intention to initiate strategic reflections on the roles and responsibilities of different actors in policy-development processes; to enhance and support cooperation opportunities; to facilitate a forward-looking exchange of opinions between Member States, National Agencies (youth), and the European Commission on the two European programmes in the field of youth, also taking into account the future EU Youth Strategy.

Groups of mixed participants sat together, representing the Director-generals of Youth and the National Agencies of Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps. Also participating were representatives from the European Commission, RAY research, SALTO Inclusion & Diversity, Council of Europe, EU-CoE youth partnership and the European Youth Forum.

In three rounds, they discussed the following questions:

### 1. DEMOCRACY & VALUES

*How do both European programmes contribute to respect(ing) and safeguard(ing) European values (and do they?) What else is calling to be done in this area and why?*

### 2. QUALITY & YOUTH WORK DEVELOPMENT

*How do and can the European programmes (better) contribute to youth work development in Europe and quality projects? What is missing and/or calling for today to set up and realise (more) high-quality projects in both European programmes? What (other) incentives and drives are necessary to let more young people, incl. those from more diverse backgrounds, have a successful and insightful international learning mobility experience? What would society miss, should the youth sector not have access to both European programmes?*

### 3. PROGRAMME OPERATION & FINANCING

*What are the remaining challenges in the implementation of the European youth programmes? What do they impede? What led to having the current financial resources of both European programmes insufficient? What are the "hard" arguments/evidence needed to convince legislators of this and the need for more? What are, without being necessarily direct responses to the challenges, the improvements needed for the contribution to the European programmes to fulfil their purpose?*

The clustered outcomes of these joint conversations are listed here. Nothing else was added by the rapporteuses, so the contents are faithful to the contributions of the attendees only. They do not claim to be an agreed common ground between all actors, or an official position of any institution or role that was present on the day; nor are they the full picture related to that theme or topic. Rather, they illustrate the value of collaboration and interaction from different perspectives around common topics, and are a few ideas to build from, providing some inspiration to continue the discussion, to help different stakeholders prepare for the future generations of European Youth Programmes.

## 1. DEMOCRACY & VALUES

### PROJECTS AS DEMOCRATIC EXPERIENCES

*Through project activities, and guided non-formal methods by youth workers and leaders, young people can experience democracy and learn for themselves more knowledge, skills and attitudes about being democratic. Evidence, and experience, show that the European Youth Programmes support learning about democracy extremely well, even if more can still be done related to democratic experiences of young people in the Programmes.*

#### REFLECTIONS

The Programmes are unique in providing an opportunity to **experience the EU and its values**, that **sense of belonging** to a larger European community.

The Programmes are one of the best and most effective concrete learning environments where young people can **really practice and try out participatory democratic processes**. They empower young people already from the age of 13 and allow them to be **responsible and conscious citizens**. There are opportunities for them to experience these values first-hand: trying **participation as a personal experience**.

Locally embedded projects, also shaped and steered by young people themselves (such as participation projects and solidarity projects) offer **important and unique spaces** for young people to practice democracy and participation, which can stimulate **further engagement in society**.

Both programmes have a huge potential and tools to encourage **participation in elections**. Projects work both **explicitly** on democracy (eg, they learn about elections) and **implicitly** (learning by doing through participative methods).

#### SUGGESTIONS

- ☑ Highlight democracy, participation and other EU values in youth projects; give visibility to the fact that youth projects give opportunity to young people to **engage in the democratic life of their own community**; give visibility to the EU Youth Programmes as tools that can be used to **learn about the values**.
- ☑ Consider **new non-classical forms of democratic participation** - not only mock parliaments, but also activism or solidarity projects.
- ☑ Research to see if local or national elections have been **influenced by youth work projects** on participation and democratic citizenship.

## PROGRAMMES' STRUCTURE AROUND EUROPEAN VALUES

*The European values are: democracy, equality, human rights, freedom, human dignity and rule of law. The European Youth Programmes were founded on these. But how well does the shape and format of the Programmes support these values in real life? And how present are these values in the Programme processes and projects of youth organisations?*

### REFLECTIONS

The different Programme priorities give input to the European values and **what Europe stands for** (see [RAY for impact evidence](#)). It is crucial that the **EU values and democratic principles** (which is an EU value in and of itself) are a horizontal priority throughout the Programmes. The **NAs role is crucial**, as they help to translate the young people's needs and wants into projects that also support EU-values and promote the Programme goals. The projects give opportunities for people to **experience the values first-hand**. The values of the Programmes resonate with the target groups and organisations working with these groups. The **common values** explored through each individual project should help us to build the image of **Europe as a common construct**.

However, the values are **not always understood or explored** thoroughly. We use the terminology the "values" a lot - whereas the values themselves are **sometimes vague** and also their presence in the projects. We should be aware that European values are maybe **taken for granted** and not always very visible in the programmes. Also, it is sometimes unclear if some of the European values are **really truly shared** among countries. We need to keep in mind that values can change through time - and the focus on them. For many, European values should be **more concrete and reachable**. The Solidarity Corps, for example, could reach young people with fewer opportunities well with the value of solidarity. However, it is necessary to use **understandable words**, and for young people to experience them by learning through doing. Preaching at young people does not work, but activating young people to work on these questions through non-formal methodologies can be very effective.

### SUGGESTIONS

- ☑ **Retain values as the core of the Programmes** - they were the founding idea of them; specifically, retain **active citizenship, democracy and solidarity** as central values of the Programmes.
- ☑ Ensure a **clear direct link** between the funded projects and the European values; structures should be built in to the Programmes to assure we finance projects and actions that respect the EU-values.
- ☑ Consider the possibility to elevate European values as a **fifth core priority** of the Programmes.
- ☑ Explore more and **understand better** the European values, and their connection within the Youth Programmes.
- ☑ Discuss the values more, using **accessible and understandable language** that more people can relate to.
- ☑ Increase **visibility and clarity** of the values held by the Programmes - they should be 'branded'.
- ☑ Check the European values in DiscoverEU applications (applicants could provide a short motivation to prove they want the ticket to **grow and learn**, rather than random draw?).



## THE MANY VALUES OF THE PROGRAMMES

*Democracy is not the only core value of the Programmes. There are many others, some of which hold 'clusters' of values within them, or can be seen as umbrella values overarching across many others. Here are just a few others to give a first taste of the wider values of the Programmes.*

## REFLECTIONS

**Solidarity** - this is an integral EU value. The Solidarity Corps contributes strongly to this topic, and it should be reinforced in Erasmus+ also.

**Active Participation** - Erasmus+ Youth and Solidarity Corps projects are based on participation of participants. If the project is properly done, we have co-decision making of the process. Young people learn how to act in democratic society. After participating in projects, more young people show interest and willingness to contribute to society and participative processes (see RAY data).

**Inclusion** - we need to continue working on the inclusion of those not yet very involved (in the democratic process and/or in European Youth Programmes). How to engage young people who feel alienated from Europe or excluded from the opportunities offered by the Programmes (e.g. due to time or resources)? European Youth Programmes should not be considered as a luxury, but a standard for everyone: the Programmes should be more inclusive and available for all young people regardless of their background. Too often we only reach the usual suspects to participate in the opportunities. Related to the topic of EU values, there is a very high need to reach many more young people. One of the solutions for this are the national actions and activities. Discover EU also has a great potential to reach new participants that have never been in the Programmes and are not so aware of EU Values. The former volunteers of European Solidarity Corps could be a way to connect with potential newcomers and reach wider groups of young people (eg. Europeans).

**Diversity** - this is about tolerance and accepting difference. It is also worth remembering that group activities contribute to pluralism in society, and that youth exchanges are long-term processes, with much preparation before and follow-up afterwards, linking diversity in the participating group to their local community.

**European Citizenship** - RAY results prove that the European projects bring people closer to the EU and a feeling of European citizenship. The programmes can educate participants on the idea of Europe/on being a European citizen, thus also teaching about how life would be if the European community would not be available. Also, European identity can be achieved by participation in international projects, which also gives the possibility to learn about issues they have in common, despite their differences.

**Peace** - The added value in understanding the EU and contributing to peace cannot be underestimated.

Other values also mentioned: **Human Rights, Equality, Freedom of Speech, Active Citizenship, Sustainability.**

## SUGGESTIONS

- Reinforce SOLIDARITY in the Erasmus+ Programme;
- Emphasise SOLIDARITY in the new EU Youth Strategy; connect it with the focus on partner/third countries;
- Stress PARTICIPATION more in the programmes as it is still a bit hidden;
- Increase INCLUSION in the European Youth Programmes; consider options to increase outreach;
- Consider this SUSTAINABILITY idea: establish a European non-profit travel agency that promotes and supports green and sustainable travel.



## LEARNING

*“Non-formal learning is a purposive, but voluntary, learning that takes place in a diverse range of environments and situations for which teaching/training and learning is not necessarily their sole or main activity... It is planned..but seldom structured by conventional rhythms or curriculum subjects” (EU-CoE Youth partnership [glossary](#)).* Some reflections here about the learning involved in projects for participants, and a specific focus on digital/media literacy.

### REFLECTIONS

Participating in youth programmes **boosts confidence and opens minds**, but also gives a good work ethic that people can ‘dig into’ once they start employment. Programmes also help to build preventive measures, like **resilience and personal strength** of the young people. They become **more confident** with themselves, sure of their skills and competences. This should be upheld; individual resilience is compulsory for **good well-being and mental health**. Programmes can **de-stigmatise** issues which are important to young people - eg. depression, need for individual well-being, special needs etc.

More young people show interest and willingness to **contribute to society** after participating in these projects. That is a sign that the Programmes do contribute to European values. In volunteering projects, young people want to contribute to other societies and communities than their own.

Learning about **media literacy and critical thinking** is a very important aspect of these projects - the young people that were born after digitalisation are very tech savvy so they need the space to connect and engage. It should be considered that digital/media education is a specific expertise that might need the support of other experts / sectors.

### SUGGESTIONS

- Strengthen **digital & media literacy, critical thinking** and being **aware of risks** in the Programmes.
- Connect to **other expertise** and other programmes for the necessary specialised approach for digital & media literacy.

## LEARNING MOBILITY

*Learning mobility in the youth field is defined by the European Platform for Learning Mobility as the “mobility of young people (transnationally, regionally or online) undertaken freely and voluntarily for a specific period of time, consciously organised for educational purposes, to impact on the local community or to acquire new competences (knowledge, skills, attitudes or values)”. Some reflections here on learning mobility and how it should be incorporated in the Programmes.*

### REFLECTIONS

Travelling and going to other new places gives young people the feeling of being involved, of being European. That **attitude is important**. Mobility gives an important input to the **European identity**, they help to get to know each other, they gain values, gain skills. Mobility is closely linked with **diversity**: it develops the interest to meet people with different backgrounds. Bringing people together makes them better realise what their **common values** are.

Currently the programme is ‘about’ learning mobilities. That should be **enlarged**.

It is important to remember that mobility is not always the answer for everyone. It is important to give an experience to a young person who **will not (or can not) travel** on a transnational education experience. The Solidarity Corps does this, through solidarity projects for example. Also, there are **other ways** to reach these goals and support these values. Not everyone is interested in mobility programmes, or able to participate.

### SUGGESTIONS

- ☑ Brand the future Programmes to reflect all objectives, **more than learning, and more than mobility**;
- ☑ Integrate mobility in all youth policies, as it is stated in Europe on the Move, as a **powerful tool** to help youth and expand its potential.

## COMMUNITY IMPACT

*Projects in the European Programmes aim to make a change - to those participating directly, to others in the local community where it is hosted, to those back in the sending community afterwards, and others. The connection to the local community level is reflected upon here.*

### REFLECTIONS

The programmes are already contributing to **solidarity, belonging, cultural diversity and inclusion** as added European values in the key actions in Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps. This resonates both for in-country activities/projects as well as international ones. [RAY](#) provides very clear data on that.

With the change from EVS to the Solidarity Corps there was a notable shift to contributing to societal change, European values and young people giving back. **Solidarity** is a strong European value and should be resonant in all European Youth Programmes.

The projects which happen at local level are **important entry points** in the architecture of the European programmes for newcomers to experience diversity, dialogue, participation etc. Some examples of existing Programme elements that already show that **Europe is in their own community**: local activities within solidarity projects; active participation projects; horizontal priorities - specially participation; the whole dimension of solidarity within the Solidarity Corps; Training and Cooperation Activities on participation and democracy; SNAC's (Strategic National Agency Cooperation projects such as Democracy Reloading, Europe Goes Local etc); [Participation toolkit](#) done by SALTO Participation and Information etc.

Projects need follow-up - **impact on attitudes need a longer process**; the sending community should be connected more to the projects. There should be a better **cross-sectorial dimension** also on the local community level. How to reach the networks and communities around participants for more **internationalisation at home**? Especially for those that cannot travel? This should be done with/through the values that the European programmes represent and reflect, such as solidarity, diversity, inclusion etc. We should **move from individual learning mobility to the WE!**

It is not just the individual outcomes that should be in the focus. There is a **community of practice** growing which should be taken into account when thinking about the Programmes. The networking opportunities, and **social capital**, should be considered and built on.

### SUGGESTIONS

- ☑ Keep the **local value** in the Programmes (local/national project formats) since these are the ones that a (young) person will mostly connect with;
- ☑ Build and network the **community of practice**; There should be a structure for the sharing of experiences and building a community of experienced beneficiaries;
- ☑ Encourage **national follow-up activities** after the international experience; Adapt project formats to provide **support before and after** the activity to expand the impact and connect to wider stakeholder groups;
- ☑ Increase **cooperation** between education institutions and youth/work, especially for the topic of democracy and values.

## THE CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION

*The current socio-economic-political situation brings many challenges, for national governments and for individuals. The effects of recent events have had an impact on people’s priorities, and challenge some European values. The shrinking space for civil society (as highlighted by the Council of Europe) is also a worrying trend for youth work.*

## REFLECTIONS

In the current situation (pandemic, wars etc.) are politicians thinking about European values and do they find them valuable/current? Values such as human rights, active citizenship and freedom need to be highlighted more in the times we live in. Countering stereotypes and promoting tolerance towards diversity should be more underlined. The rising far-right movement is threatening democracy throughout Europe. How could Youth Programmes be used as a counteract for the threat?

When it comes to civil society, it is broader than democracy as a priority; it is also about how the Youth Programmes contribute to places for youth where they can participate / support civic society. Some national organisations face difficulties to receive funding, with the shrinking space and focus on civil society, or the move away from some European values. How to foster these values in the current political atmosphere. How to cooperate and with who? How to support civil society and civic activities in this day and age?

## NON-ASSOCIATED COUNTRIES

*There are 35 National Agencies for Erasmus+ youth, most of whom are also the Agency for the European Solidarity Corps. Under the current set up, it is also possible to include project partners from partner countries neighbouring the EU, and since 2022, over 70 countries worldwide not-associated to the Programmes. This opening-up to a wider Europe, focusing on solidarity with neighbouring regions and further worldwide, highlights several European values.*

### REFLECTIONS

At the moment, Youth Programmes create possibilities to co-operate with countries and societies which are **not part of the European Union** and therefore have not signed up to its core values.

Solidarity should be more emphasised between **citizens of Europe and other young people** in partner/ third countries of Eastern Partnership Countries and Western Balkans, especially in view of Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine, unrest in Belarus and recent election results in Russia.

### SUGGESTIONS

- ✓ Pay attention to **non-EU member states** when communicating European values and how they connect to these countries’ realities;
- ✓ Expand and enlarge programmes in neighbouring countries; **more support** for projects outside of the European Union; more **flexibility**;
- ✓ Consider the solidarity between Programme country participants and those of neighbouring countries; **Networking initiatives** such as **Young European Ambassadors** should be continued and enhanced; The link to the **Europeans** network should be added and a synergy link between both networks should be facilitated with the Erasmus+ youth and European Solidarity Corps programmes.

## 2. QUALITY & YOUTH WORK DEVELOPMENT

### NATIONAL LEVEL

*For many Programme countries, the European funding, structure and resulting policy and support has quite an impact at national, regional and local level. Having a European level that encompasses national levels brings accountability and interconnection between different stakeholders. This interdependent relationship on different levels stimulates different reflections and concrete suggestions for improvement.*

### REFLECTIONS

The European Youth Programmes have not only a European responsibility, but also a national one. They might not be the solution to everything - they can be seen as part of the key, but they are **not the whole key** for everything we miss. The **national level contributes** to the picture also.

The European dimension is not only important for the internationalisation of youth work, but also for the **national development** of youth work. The **networks, capacity and skills** that are built through participating in European Programmes help both organisations and individuals. Organisations active at international level **support each other**; being part of these networks helps **build capacity**. Erasmus+ youth has helped a lot to develop a network of youth workers connected to each other (Spain).

The European Programmes are a **'cohesion power'** to stimulate the development of youth work, helping to shape the **national priorities** as well as the international ones. Having a different approach to youth work in different countries means the Youth Programmes help to share the best practice and experiences to **learn from each other and improve**.

For the local level, it is important to realise that not all young people have access to youth organisations in their neighbourhood. The local projects which are funded by the Youth Programmes are a **vital tool** for some communities, and provide the **first step to longer term mobility projects**. Connection between different stakeholders can help improve the quality and sustainability of projects. More **synergies** are needed between the local level and the European level (for example, Europe Goes Local strategic partnership project).

The funding from European Programmes, delivered project by project, limits longer-term internationalisation strategies and sustainable cooperation. Having **accreditation** in the programmes supports internationalisation as a longer-term approach.

There is a **lack of resources** on the national level to be able to fully use the programmes to progress youth work in some countries / contexts. The oftentimes underfunded youth field gets support from the European Programmes, in some cases these are the **only financial support** to set up and develop youth work nationally. The European Programmes often fund youth workers' development on a national level.

### SUGGESTIONS

- More **circulation of knowledge** between those active on national level, and those active on international level;
- Link** Youth Programmes to the national youth policies and national youth strategies - at strategic and practical levels;
- Continue **mapping synergies** between all existing policies (national and European level) and the Programmes, and **make those visible**;
- Integrate** mobility in all youth policies, as stated in Europe on the move, as a powerful tool to help youth and expand its potential;

- ✓ International mobility should be **embedded and supported** as a method / tool in youth work at grass roots level;
- ✓ To ensure **sustainability and longer term impact** on national level, support and funding is needed to **keep alive the networks, outcomes and developments** created through individual European projects (eg. through KA2 projects);
- ✓ Empower youth workers to become a **bridge with other stakeholders**; create links and cooperation with **formal education** to share and learn in both directions; connect to other policy departments to **mainstream** the needs of young people and respond to them (eg. mental health, local authorities, agriculture etc).

## RECOGNITION

*There are four dimensions of recognition: individual, formal, social and political (see [Youthpass](#)). Understanding and acceptance of non-formal learning, volunteering, youth work, community activism and civil society varies considerably between programme countries. Having a European programme can help with the sharing of practice and comparison of positions at national level. Recognition is a large topic. Here are just some thoughts and a few suggestions for this important area of international youth work.*

### REFLECTIONS

Recognition of youth work as a profession **varies** from country to country. The Programmes recognise youth work that is provided on a voluntary basis and the **significant contribution from volunteering organisations**, not just the professional youth work providers. They provide a **common transferable definition of youth work** (also for those who might not have a national definition or where youth work as a concept is unknown), and can **provide a vision** thanks to the international dimension, which is important for many stakeholders.

Questions arise **how to define** what exactly is a youth organisation? How does it work?

Erasmus+ youth and the Solidarity Corps also support youth work development in countries **where youth work is not legislated**, and for some Member States the EU-Programmes are a **vehicle** (sometimes the only source of funding) to implement youth work itself. In countries where youth work is not legislated, they **support development**, both through the mobility of youth workers and through the strategic training and cooperation activities (TCA/NET).

Youth workers and the non-formal sector need to be **supported on a systemic level**, with concrete formalised recognition. The **European Youth Work Convention** is an important tool for this.

### SUGGESTIONS

- ✓ Increase recognition of international youth work in the national contexts, from a wide variety of stakeholders, to **increase support** for cross-border mobility of youth workers;
- ✓ Use the evidence base to **promote and raise awareness** of the Programmes; increase awareness and use of research at national level to increase support for the Programmes;
- ✓ Have a budget and ownership within the Programmes for the **European Youth Work Convention** to be used on national level to formalise recognition of youth work and non-formal education;
- ✓ Develop a **'Definition of Youth work'** - common quality standards, legislation, professional standards for youth workers and a practical implementation framework at European level;
- ✓ Develop a **concrete European volunteer status**, with explicit rights and obligations;
- ✓ Develop more the **validation and recognition of skills and the competence framework** on European level; improve the use of **Youthpass** as a key instrument to reflect on the learning in projects.

## QUALITY

The Programme aims to support projects for as many young people as possible, but also to improve the quality of the projects delivered. *“Quality is a significant factor when considering how to tackle, reflect and apply non-formal education principles in youth learning mobility schemes and projects. Quality needs to be an integral part of the design, implementation, execution and monitoring and evaluation of a given learning mobility experience”* [Eu-CoE Youth Partnership](#), part of the European Platform for Learning Mobility. Here, just a few reflections and suggestions in that area.

### REFLECTIONS

Some Member States want to improve the quality of projects in their own country. Does quality, or high quality, have the **same criteria** for different types of organisations? How to measure it? How to monitor it? What is the role of the NA officer in that? Do they all have the skills to be able to do that?

Having programmes based on the real and changing needs of the target audience brings **quality delivery**. Having mechanisms to ensure a **strong voice of advocacy directly from young people** will ensure continuity, despite changes after various elections.

### SUGGESTIONS

- ✓ Develop better tools to **detect the quality of projects** on the assessment process, vs. the reality of the project delivery;
- ✓ Create a **‘Quality’ instrument** to pressure the local level for quality youth work;
- ✓ Provide feedback, incentives and advice on how to better harvest and disseminate the **good practice** from projects, especially KA2 Cooperation Partnerships outputs;
- ✓ **Involve young people** more in the full process (eg. youth advisory groups for NAs);
- ✓ Support the rollout of the **Youth Check**, on European and National levels, for the needs and voices of young people to be heard in different policy areas.

## IMPACT

*The concrete physical outputs of a project often result in change or development (outcomes) which later on can have an impact at many levels; “The larger and broader social or other changes which also take place as a result of many players and factors” ([Dutch impact tool](#)). Here are a few examples of different changes that have happened due to the European Youth Programmes, and a few suggestions that would help keep these elements strong.*

### REFLECTIONS

Projects supported through European Programmes can change lives. However, the preparation and follow-up of the projects are sometimes the **weakest links** (especially in KA2, Cooperation Partnerships). The **systemic impact** of projects should be more supported. The results should be continued even after the final reports are evaluated, to have **longer-lasting impact**. Sustainability is an element that should be improved in the Programmes - not just with the ‘green’ angle, but for individuals and organisations too.

Programmes are already supportive. European grants are working at the local community level, in rural areas, and can even **force local municipalities to think about young people and youth work** in a more broad regional/national context. However, we see too many organisations **without a link** to (local) youth work.

European Youth Programmes teach youth workers (and youth councils etc.) that **youth work is a service, an ongoing approach**, that it really brings a difference to society and impacts can be tangible at local community level. Programmes should continue to **empower** individual youth workers who participate as individuals themselves, and then come back to their communities with more knowledge, experience and **improve their function** at local level.

European Youth Programmes impact on many different levels: individual, organisational, local, regional, societal etc. There are many **national impacts** that result from the values of both programmes. They help to build national laws (eg. "Law on youth" in North Macedonia) and to break down stereotypes (BE-FR - overcoming racism) . They build up the gap where values at the national level are missing (eg. perception of/respect towards LGBTQ+ people in countries where right wing parties are getting more attention). They are often a ‘mind-opener’ for the issues which are already well-defined at the European level (eg. mental health, bullying in schools) and should also be addressed at the national level.

### SUGGESTIONS

- Consider the **sustainability of results** as part of the project format design; Work with **multipliers**;
- Create a **stronger link** between the contribution of projects and local youth work; Provide support for youth workers to **consolidate** their knowledge and expertise across different projects; encourage longer-term connection to the programmes for them to **grow, benefit** from different experiences, and **connect** their development more strongly to an improved local community;
- Keep the **local value** of these programmes as it is the one that (young) person will connect mostly with.



## IF WE DIDN'T HAVE THE PROGRAMMES...

*To consider the value of the Programmes from a different perspective, a question was posed about the gaps that would be left if the Programmes weren't there. Quite some reflections and suggestions came from this.*

## REFLECTIONS

If we did not have Erasmus+ youth and the European Solidarity Corps, there would probably be no international mobility projects and cooperation, no internationalisation of the youth field. There would be less organised youth groups in Europe, less capacity for organisations, less policy development, less youth mainstreaming, and no shared culture of youth participation in Europe, and in European structures.

Many options of peer learning and opportunities for diversity would be missed. There would not be many opportunities for sharing experiences and best practices. There would be less quality and development through a pedagogically valuable educational tool. There would not be streamlined quality developed youth work trainings available for all European countries.

The specific European budget of the youth field would be missed by many players. National youth work would be smaller. There would be less funding at local level, resulting in fewer youth work developments at local level, and less enriched by the international level and others' perspectives.

There would not be a EU Youth Strategy or other EU level youth policies. There would not be common quality standards. European values and the long-term investment in young people would be lost (*"You do not learn democracy from a book, you learn it by collaboration"*).

For some countries, it would not be important to have a national youth policy or ministry responsible for youth on national level. Recognition on national level would differ considerably between different Member States. Support and funding for non-formal learning would not even exist in many countries. There would be no dedicated NA officers to support and strategically reach out to different audiences, with no equal access also for people with fewer opportunities.

Society would be a lot less tolerant. There would be less understanding of other cultures and diversity; democratic problems would be much bigger. There would be less awareness of European values, less language learning, less active citizenship. Intercultural exchange would be lost, with less dialogue across borders, less respect and value for diversity.

Society would be less open and young people would be less aware of the challenges in our society and the need for them to engage and to make changes. There would be less connection between organisations and other stakeholders at local and regional level. Civil society organisations would not be as effective at supporting a multicultural society. Thousands of volunteers would not help local communities. We would miss the concrete action that changes things.

Individual young people would be left alone and seen as a 'problem' by many in society. National funding would be prioritised more for elderly and younger children, with not much attention for the 'transition' period of youth.

Without the programmes, Europe would collapse. We propose NOT to try this out! The UK is an example of all of this. EU Programmes should not be taken for granted.

### 3. PROGRAMME OPERATION & FINANCING

#### TRAINING, COOPERATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF YOUTH WORKERS

*The Training and Cooperation Activities (TCA/NET) aim to bring added value and increased quality in the overall Erasmus+ Programme implementation and so contribute to increasing the impact of the Programme at systemic level. (Amendment of the Erasmus+ 2023 work programme). Here is some thinking about how to build on this powerful instrument.*

#### REFLECTIONS

We need **good quality tools/systems** to support youth work developments at national and European levels. The European Programmes already have a powerful instrument for the quality development and effective implementation of the priorities, as well as youth work development: the Training and Cooperation Activities (**TCA/NET**). These bring in the transnational dimension and networking possibilities. **Strategic partnerships** are developed on priority topics, steered and initiated by the NA network in partnership with the youth field, bringing in research and expert partners.

The Programmes improve the **quality** of youth work by training and developing youth workers through recurrent proven valuable training concepts and training formats for newcomers, providing them tools to use at local level and in international projects. There are not many other professional development activities for the needed youth work development on a national level.

Having more gamification or **fun** elements between young people and/or youth workers could encourage a stronger connection and sharing of success and experiences.

Transnational training activities are a good way to **find potential partners** with common interests.

The resources are there, and developed well through the TCA/NET activities, but unfortunately most of them are in the **English language**. This does not help when the target audience is more vulnerable young people.

#### SUGGESTIONS

- ✓ **Support** youth organisations that are **newcomers**: guide them through the process, help them to understand the relevance of their project to the funding, connect their ideas to programme priorities and objectives, and European policy. TCA/NET is there precisely for that;
- ✓ **Use TCAs more, and more strategically**, to support youth work development on national and European level;
- ✓ Have TCA activities and products in **language groups**;

## APPLICATION PROCESS

*To apply for grant funding under Erasmus+ or the European Solidarity Corps, it involves registering on IT Tools, application forms, assessment, grant management by National Agency staff, contracting, staged release of funding, reporting, and other administrative steps. Here are some reflections on that application process for grant funding for youth projects.*

## REFLECTIONS

For many young people, it is still **too difficult and too complicated** to participate in the Programmes. **Access is not inclusive.** Timeframes are too long for sustaining the motivations of young people. Those working with disadvantaged youth are under a lot of **resource pressure**, and it takes a lot of resources to apply for EU grants.

The Programmes are **complex** and the current **administrative process is a challenge**, especially for new applicants. The complicated channels to apply impedes access. It scares small organisations and does not deter the dubious actors. The level of bureaucracy needed makes it hard for applicants, beneficiaries, NAs and the COM. Contracts are too complex for the new target audience to understand.

**Simplification is needed:** a low threshold for grass roots and small organisations. Application processes should be easier and faster. More support is needed for newcomers and small organisations to find entry in the European Programmes.

Administration and IT procedures should be **proportional** to the grant and project size.

## SUGGESTIONS

- Adapt the administrative processes to the size of the projects - **simplify checks and make them proportional**. The **proportional risk** of projects should be taken into consideration;
- Simplify:** the tools, the wording, the promotion, the registration process and agreements;
- Create a **taskforce** of COM, Ministries and NA representatives to reduce the administrative burden on all actors. This concerns IT Tools, applications, agreements, guides etc;
- Focus on **all newcomers**, not only those from inclusion groups;
- Have **two steps** in the assessment process to identify less-relevant projects before the full application/assessment;
- Train evaluators to take into account the **diversity of applicants** in writing skills; they should be able to take different factors into account;
- Create **user-friendly Programme Guides** for both applicants and young people;
- Support **overhead costs** for administration as part of the grant;
- Encourage more **innovative** ways for applicants to describe their projects. Allow and combine text with other **non-text based** methods in applications and reporting; **video** applications should be considered.

## IT TOOLS

Both European Youth Programmes use European databases to manage the application, grant management, reporting and dissemination of good practices. There have been many challenges in the last years in the development and interconnection of the IT Tools. Here are a few reflections and suggestions related to that.

### REFLECTIONS

The **IT Architecture** for the programmes is poor. It is an operational challenge for applicants and the NAs, leading to frustration and it negatively impacts the reputation. It does not function well enough, which makes the process of application, assessment, reporting, monitoring and project closure extremely demanding in both European Youth Programmes. Many challenges of the programme management are directly related to the **poor performance** of the IT systems. There are too many IT Tools to manage the programmes (Project platform, PMM, BM, Project Results Platform etc). **Data/statistics** are not always readily available, and there is insufficient use of existing data and evidence in the development of the programmes.

### SUGGESTIONS

- Deliver **better, working, integrated IT systems** for both the NAs and the beneficiaries; systems should be unified with improved synergies between them; they should be more **stable and easier to use**;
- Enable more **evidence-based decisions** for programme development; improve **data access** for monitoring and analysis.

## OUTREACH

The European Programmes should be available for all young people in the EU Member States. Here follows some points related to the promotion of opportunities, communication and branding and the best ways to reach more and different young people.

### REFLECTIONS

Many young people who would benefit from the opportunities are **not aware** of the possibilities - they do not know about Erasmus+ or the Solidarity Corps. The **branding** of the Programmes does not always help with the reception and understanding by newcomer organisations. The Solidarity Corps sounds 'military'; it is not very understandable.

Young people also need to be **reached**. The promotion of opportunities needs a more extended outreach. **Peer-to-peer** exchange is crucial to get other young people engaged. Sharing the lived experiences is the best motivation for other young people to engage in the programmes - it is more important than social media.

### SUGGESTIONS

- Invest more in **ambassador networks** of young people and equip them with tools to share the value of their experiences;
- Put young people in the **centre as protagonists**; give them space to explain things their way, talk about what they want to talk about;
- Re-brand** the volunteering opportunity;
- Invest in working with **multipliers and third party** organisations and networks to extend our outreach.
- Find the youngsters **where they are** (eg. sports, arts, protest movements etc).

## PROJECT FORMAT IDEAS

Here are reflections gathered about the shape and format of project funding. The Erasmus+ Programme and the European Solidarity Corps (2021 - 2027) have evolved, building on such things as: experience from previous programmes; incorporating feedback; connecting to EU policies; reliant on budget decisions connected to the European Commission's Multi-Annual Financial Framework and to EC contractual and legal decisions, and many other factors. Here are some suggestions for improving the format of grant-funding in the future.

## REFLECTIONS

Many elements of the Programmes **work well and effectively reach** their priorities and objectives. **Accreditation** has been very positively received by many. It helps organisations work on a **strategy**, contributing to more **sustainable** youth work. The Solidarity Corps Quality Label and funding request are a positive development, even if the **relevance** of the applicant has to be handled strictly to avoid dubious actors. There are, however, challenges for youth organisations to **balance** the multi-annual planning of activities with the lack of Programme budget to fulfil their long-term ambitions.

Existing actions could be **re-thought or improved**. Some find there are **too many** different actions that overlap in objectives and can confuse applicants, especially newcomers.. Many applications are received from organisations that are **not part** of the youth field. Youth budgets are applied-for also by companies and universities that have very different levels of resource. It is important to consider who to include, and who to exclude and why. Small countries find the large project budgets a challenge as they take up a **significant proportion** of their budget and **limit flexibility**. Some actions (such as KA2 Cooperation Partnerships- and KA154, Youth Participation Projects) could **reach more and different** youth organisations better, or at least organisations that specifically have a **tangible impact** on the youth field.

## SUGGESTIONS

- Keep the **youth sector-specific actions**;
- Have further discussion on the **separation or synergies** between Erasmus+ youth and European Solidarity Corps - what is the best model to achieve our goals?
- Ringfence budgets** to fully ensure any financing of proposed youth sector actions are not negatively impacted by the percentage division of Erasmus+ sectors;
- Maintain Erasmus+ **accreditation** and/or Quality Label with funding request;
- Consider restricting the project funding to **relevant organisations** that have a direct ongoing impact on the youth field;

## KEY ACTION 2

- Focus KA2s more on the **development of youth work** to be more relevant to the youth field; link them to more **clear agreed policy objectives** such as the Youth Goals, the Youth Work Agenda etc;
- Consider having a **two-phase KA2**, with the first step as an accreditation / preparation phase with a European dimension but not necessarily all European partners already fixed. The second step could be the international strategic phase;
- Consider restricting KA2 to the **youth field applicants only**; have a chapter called '**context**' in the evaluation of applications, to better understand the reality of the applicant/project and how it connects to the youth field;

## OTHER ACTIONS

- Simplify and streamline project formats; reduce the **overlap** between solidarity projects and participation projects;
- Focus Small-scale cooperations only on organisations that have **existing youth work structures**;
- Re-prioritise** Discover EU Inclusion, considering the inclusion challenges it presents - does it add learning value?
- Have more **tailored** programme options for different kinds of projects;
- Have more **flexibility** within certain project types (eg. Discover EU restrictive age limit of 18 and Solidarity projects restrictive group limit of 5);
- Broaden the **age limits** to allow more people to participate and link more closely to youth work realities;  
Strengthen the connection with **neighbouring partner countries** with more support for projects outside of the EU.

## INCLUSION (OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITH FEWER OPPORTUNITIES)

*Inclusion is one of the core priorities of both Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps, as an aim to offer project opportunities to more vulnerable young people, to reach out to new and different audiences, and from the perspective of encouraging inclusive diverse societies. Inclusion is both a means and an end. Some elements follow here, that arose related to the topic of inclusion, supporting the more vulnerable and reaching newcomers.*

### REFLECTIONS

Some young people are **reluctant to travel, or unable to**. Smaller organisations without a large staff to support them do not have **capacity** to respond to opportunities. Understanding and awareness of inclusion is still work in progress in youth work in many countries, where training provided through Youth Programme tools is vital.

It takes **resources** to work with the more vulnerable target audiences. More support from NA or experts is needed, with more flexibility and more funding. It is important to understand which groups are **not currently being targeted**, and which initiatives or actions are missing. **Labelling**, or sharing data of individuals, is a complicated issue for many reasons.

The Youth Programmes already have invested in different mechanisms, such as additional support for inclusion etc, and already successfully reaching many young people with fewer opportunities (even if those numbers are under-reported, as a large part of beneficiaries do not self-identify with that definition or label). For many, the 40% of participants with fewer opportunities already reached by the Programme mean that the focus should rather be on **reaching newcomers**. More outreach is needed to support the youth organisations and civil society groups. Newcomers take more time and energy to support.

### SUGGESTIONS

- Provide **flexibility** in the Programmes project formats, and in the way funding is provided, to respond to the needs of a **wider range** of participants and newcomers;
- Increase funding to NAs so **flexible support** can be given to applicant organisations working with young people with additional needs, before, during and after a project is delivered;  
Enable more **research and data** to be gathered to map the current situation - who is being reached, and who not?
- Track and compare** new organisations and participants, analysing reports to check for repeat beneficiaries;
- Change the approach for collecting data on 'fewer opportunities' from individuals to the **organisations**.

## GRANT BUDGET

*The project funding under the European Youth Programmes is managed by the National Agencies in each Member State. The design of the grant funding is decided by the European Commission centrally for the whole programme, also taking into account connections with other education fields. Here are some reflections on the current reality of grant funding, and some suggestions for change.*

### REFLECTIONS

The youth sector has its own ring-fenced budget in Erasmus+, and it is fully spent. There is a growing interest of young people in the Programme opportunities, the **demand is higher than the allocated budget**. There is a need to increase the budget, to **scale up**.

Youth workers/leaders receive a **lower per diem flat rate** than workers from other educational sectors.

High rates of **inflation** have an impact on the number of projects that can be approved.

For many countries, there is a **lack of national funding** to support the youth sector around the European grant funding (before, during, after etc).

Some issues to take into account with an increased budget: **Risk assessment** will need to be developed because more funds will attract more dubious applicants; the **balance** between increased workload and management capacity has to be thought through carefully.

### SUGGESTIONS

- Scale up:** More funding for programme grants, more projects, more people positively impacted; NAs and DGs to work together to provide an **evidence base** for a specific increase request;
- Introduce the possibility to **partially fund** projects;
- Have a mechanism in the new programme to **anticipate inflation** in the overall budget;
- Equalise the rates** within the programme between all education sectors;
- Provide **more resources for training** for Solidarity Corps organisations and volunteers;
- Finance **smaller projects** that do not fit into national schemes; national actions and activities could have a **bigger share of the budget** (eg. solidarity projects / participation projects);
- Adjust contracts** to be changed more easily, then the budget uptake could be raised.

## FLEXIBILITY

*The European Youth Programmes are structured to be managed by National Agencies, and to be transparent and fair across Member States. After the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and inflation, all of which have impacted on the beneficiaries quite substantially, here is a reflection on the flexibility of the Programmes, and some elements to take into account when planning the next 7 year generation of Programmes.*

### REFLECTIONS

The programmes are quite **'stiff'**. The allocation of funds is very strict. Applying the same rules to all EU funding programmes for all education sectors does not make sense and creates huge problems. Programmes are planned for 7 years. It is necessary to take into account the **changing needs of young people** and both programmes' target groups, which are changing more quickly and more frequently. Both programmes should be more **flexible**.

### SUGGESTIONS

- Ensure programmes are in touch with reality, be open to feedback, and **adapt** to current challenges (such as AI, refugees etc); the suggestions from NAs should be **taken into account faster**; the adaptation of the Programme's rules should take into account NA and beneficiaries' feedback more **directly and more quickly**;
- Enable programmes to respond to unforeseen situations more rapidly (like the war in Ukraine, Covid etc.); there should be **better planning** of future actions beforehand;
- Allow **more flexibility** between action lines, based on demand and perhaps even national needs;



## NATIONAL LEVEL

*In each Member State there is a National Authority supervising and a National Agency managing the European Programmes. However, there could (should?) be more stakeholders connected at national level, and more national ownership of the Programmes.*

### REFLECTIONS

Different levels of policy and governance at national level should **feel a stake** in the European Programmes. The **cross-sectorial connections** are important at national level. It is important that local authorities become **more active** in involving young people in inclusion projects. For some smaller countries, the larger project formats can be **unwieldy** to manage. A system of **regional NA offices** could work in some countries (current example of Austria).

### SUGGESTIONS

- Host periodic complex **conversation between the DGs and NAs**, which should be introduced as a matter of course;
- Encourage **national ownership**: make the governments feel the **responsibility** of supporting the programmes;
- Improve the communication of Youth Programme **benefits and contributions to Europe**, so that it reaches all the national decision makers;
- Facilitate a **better connection** between National Authorities, National Agencies and business (employers); NAUs should be **'partners in crime'** with the NAs and, if need be, help with creating national regulations;
- Connect** more effectively to other stakeholders; involve more local institutions such as municipalities, schools etc; there should be more and closer cooperation with other sectors such as youth departments;
- Encourage **national youth panels** for the target group's opinion to be heard and acted upon;
- Allow a **diverse management** of the programmes at national level to some degree; allow flexibility to tailor both the priorities and application approaches/methods to target local needs; consider a **modular programme** where different Member States can choose the project types / options that work better in their different realities;

## NATIONAL AGENCIES

The National Agency in each Member State has the responsibility to manage and deliver the European Programmes in their own country or region. Here are some comments related to the current reality and suggestions for improvement.

### REFLECTIONS

The National Agencies do an important job. They play an **intermediary role** between beneficiaries and the European Commission and should be supported with a **bigger fee** to cater for the needs of all stakeholders. It takes more information guidance and support to give newcomers a **positive experience**, to bring potential applications to a **quality level**, especially those from informal or vulnerable groups.. Not all organisations have the same starting line, providing support at the application stage is very important for smaller organisations, or those from rural areas for example. At the moment, the human resources of the NAs cannot handle the **scale of the questions received** from applicants, beneficiaries and assessors. To maintain a supportive and labour-intensive approach towards small scale organisations and to safeguard the diversity of projects and applicants, as we have now, **more resources are needed**. The splitting of funds and management fees can be challenging in some countries, depending on the importance put on youth. Should the management fee be discussed every year?

The programmes at the moment are complex, with several application rounds and grant funding divided in different tranches. The **administrative workload** has been significant, with effects on NA staff. The IT tools exacerbate this. It drives the NAs back from the projects' content and the focus on improving project quality.

Some feel that the current system of raising the budget significantly in the last years of the programme, and before that in small percentages, is not sound financial management. The budget could be **planned better** and used **more strategically**.

### SUGGESTIONS

- Increase the management fee** to be at least 25%, to manage the increasingly complex and higher workloads required;
- Consult** the National Agencies regularly before changes are made in the programmes;
- Prioritise the **mental health** of NA staff, not just that of project promoters;
- Front-load** 2025-26 budgets, and in the future have a better **balanced growth curve**.

## ARGUMENTS TO SECURE FUTURE BUDGETS

*Both Erasmus+ youth and the Solidarity Corps are oversubscribed. The current financial resources of both European Programmes are insufficient, according to the demand and need of the youth field, as shown by the low success rate of quality project applications. What follows here are proposals for arguments and evidence to convince legislators of the need to secure (increased) future budgets.*

## REFLECTIONS

European Youth Programmes change lives. They invest in the **future of young people** and **build stable societies**. These tangible experiences help youngsters **find their purpose** and discover **what they can achieve** for the future. The EU Youth Programmes are a **flagship** of international learning mobility through non-formal and informal learning, with **instant impact** on participants. International opportunities help and support both organisations and individuals to grow. Young people are not just making friends and creating a network, but growing their **competence** and **broadening their minds**.

Participating in programmes **boosts confidence**, **opens minds** but also gives a good **work ethic** that comes to the fore once you are employed. Programmes also help with **preventative measures**, like resilience and personal strength of young people. They become more confident with themselves, their skills and competences, and this should be upheld - individual resilience is compulsory for good well-being and positive mental health. There should be more focus on the resilience of young people as a counterfeit to current daily uncertainties and help young people to **overcome change**. **Financial literacy** should also be promoted.

The good practice, the real experience and stories make the emotional links, and show the **quality results** of the programmes. The evidence-base (RAY) proves through data that many of the projects are very **successful and in demand**. The success of Solidarity Projects shows the need for **more resources** for national/local level projects. **More data and research** should be gathered to show more information about the impact. How many individuals do we actually reach? Collecting data should also include other EU programmes open for youth (Leader, C.E.R.V); Results and research outcomes are also available from beneficiaries (especially in KA2, Cooperation Partnerships). The European Commission should also **share** dashboards, monitor the results, connect the links between all the available data on the programmes.

## SUGGESTIONS OF ARGUMENTS TO SUPPORT ADDITIONAL FUNDING:

- Ensure **more places and opportunities**, enabling more young people to develop skills, gain intercultural experience and develop personally and professionally;
- Enable more social and volunteering projects that **benefit local communities** by supporting them in solving social, cultural and environmental problems;
- Provide more money - it is **more money for European integration and democracy**; Promote and invest in the programmes, to have results with the positive effects. Nothing comes for free.
- Show how these programmes are successful. **Evidence shows the impact and change** they make, for example on values, participation, quality, outcomes, development of participants and the youth field in general.
- Explain how these programmes are **in demand**. The increase in budget allocation has not kept pace with the increase in interest from young people and youth organisations. We are still **not reaching** a very large group of young people.
- Finance **more good quality projects**. The success rate is decreasing in some countries, because of the increased demand and application rate.
- Understand that the Youth Programmes are very **cost-effective**, and the **return on the investment is high**. See programme data from the dashboard, detailed in section 2.1 of this report (and also [RAY results](#)) for evidence-base of this.