Executive Summary

Business Meeting Madrid 2023

Dates: 16-18 October 2023
Location: Madrid, Spain

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1. Introduction

The executive summary provides an overview of the relevant report's discussions and outcomes from the Business Meeting of Heads of National Agencies of the EU Youth Programmes Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps held in Madrid, Spain from 16 till 18 October 2023. The meeting aimed to address key objectives, including reflections on the mid-term evaluation of current programmes, proposing changes to the Programme Guide for 2024, finding a common ground for the future of the EU Youth Programmes and discussing the evolution of Strategic National Agency Cooperation projects (SNACs) and experiences with Support, Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities Resource Centres (SALTOs).

2. Future Programmes

2.1. Common Ground for the Future of the EU Youth Programmes

The network received insights from various speakers to inform its opinions on future EU Youth Programmes:
- **Directors General Youth Meeting:** Focused on aligning EU Youth Programmes with the European Youth Strategy, discussing youth participation, mental health, climate change, housing, and digital challenges.
- **European Youth Forum's Vision:** Advocated for increased accessibility and inclusion in Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps, emphasising the need for expanded reach, budget adjustments, and enhanced youth participation.
- **Spanish Youth Council Perspective**
- **Volunteering Conference Insights:** Proposed improvements to European volunteering, including an EU Volunteer Status and a Quality Charter for Volunteering, and discussed the future of the European Solidarity Corps.
- **RAY Research on EU Youth Programmes:** Presented a draft analysis of the mid-term evaluation, highlighting positive experiences and a shift in youth motivation towards socio-political challenges.

2.2. Key Conclusions by the Youth NA Network

2.2.1. Linking the Youth Programmes to Megatrends

In addressing the future of EU Youth Programmes, key recommendations have been formulated that align with prevailing megatrends, ensuring the programmes remain responsive and relevant to the needs of young Europeans. These recommendations, drawn from various perspectives and discussions, focus on areas crucial for adapting to societal shifts and emerging challenges.

Civic Engagement and Democracy:
- *Understanding and Commitment to European Values:* Address the decline of democracy by equipping young people with tools to promote and spread European values.
- *Rapid and Direct Civic Engagement:* Enhance support for the growing trend of direct civic engagement through financial opportunities and stable IT systems.
- *Addressing Declining Democracy:* Equip young people with tools to promote and uphold European values and democratic principles.
- *Tackling Populism:* Strategically address the rise of populism and its impact on youth engagement and participation.

Wellbeing & Resilience:

- *Broadening Concept of Wellbeing:* Emphasise a holistic approach to wellbeing, encompassing mental health and social aspects, as fundamental in democratic societies.
- *Resilience in a Fragile World:* Enhance young people's resilience and participation in a world affected by migration, climate change, and technological disruptions.

Digital Transformation:
- *Digitalisation in Future Programmes:* Evaluate the role of digitalisation as a priority in the new cycle of Erasmus+ and ESC.

Sustainability & Climate Change:
- *Understanding the Value of Nature:* Foster a deeper understanding of nature's intrinsic value, linking it to climate change education and action.

2.2.2.   Strategic Choices for the Youth Programmes

In shaping the strategic direction for the future of EU Youth Programmes, several key recommendations have emerged, reflecting a collective vision to address the evolving needs of young people in Europe. These recommendations span various aspects, from policy alignment to administrative considerations, aiming to enhance the programmes' effectiveness, accessibility, and relevance.

Strong Links with Youth Work
- *ESC and Youth Work Ethics:* Maintain the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) within the youth field, adhering to "youth work ethics."

Policy Dimension
- *Alignment of EYS with the Programmes:* Ensure close alignment of the EU Youth Strategy with the programmes.
- *Policy Dimension Accessibility:* Improve accessibility and understanding of the policy dimensions of the programmes.
- *Reaffirming Programme Strategies:* Continue and reinforce thematic options like European values and active participation.
- Shift emphasis from policy aspects to more accessible and relevant programme activities.

Funding Philosophy for Youth Programmes:
- *Advocacy for Increased Funding:* Emphasise the need for more funding for youth as a crucial step towards strengthening European integration.
- *Preference for Smaller Projects:* Advocate for allocating resources towards a higher number of smaller projects rather than a few large-scale projects, to maximise reach and impact.

Administrational Aspects:
- *Adjusting Financial Parameters for Equity and Inflation:* Address the necessity of revising daily rates within the programmes.
- *Alternative Programme Contracts:* Propose alternative contract models for formats like Solidarity Projects.
- *Visa Considerations for Volunteering:* Explore implementing special visa categories for European volunteers.
- *Lowering Age in ESC:* Consider reducing the age limit to 16 for participation in solidarity projects and team volunteering.

Empowering Youth Work & International Mobility
- *Support professionals and others working with young people:* Empower youth work as agents of change and support organisations to integrate international youth work into their activities.
- *Recognize and promote* the positive impacts of international mobility.

Inclusion Aspects:
- *Inclusion & Diversity Strategy:* Maintain and enhance strategies for inclusion and diversity.
- *Inclusivity in Programmes:* Keep programmes open to all types of organisations and groups, avoiding strict definitions and focusing on the impact of projects.

Digital Transformation:
- *Digitalisation in Future Programmes:* Evaluate the role of digitalisation as a priority in the new cycle of Erasmus+ and ESC.

Risk Tolerance:
- Adopt a more risk-friendly approach, accepting failures without severe consequences for beneficiaries.

2.2.3.   Actions & Formats

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

Lower Age Limit in ESC:
- Consider lowering the age limit for participation in the European Solidarity Corps, especially for national activities and team projects.

Simplicity in Actions/Formats:
- Ensure actions and formats are simple, as the most straightforward formats tend to be the most successful.

Clear Messaging:
- Ensure all formats convey a clear, adaptable message over time (e.g., solidarity projects vs. KA2 projects).

Flexible Grant System:
- Develop a grant system based on versatile "building blocks" that can be adapted to various contexts.

Community Building:
- Support community building among current and former participants, fostering a sense of belonging to a community.

Civic Engagement and Democracy:
- *Rapid and Direct Civic Engagement:* Support the growing trend of civic engagement with financial opportunities and suitable formats.
- *Addressing Declining Democracy and Populism:* Equip youth with tools to promote European values and counteract populism.

Digital Transformation:
- *Clarity in Digital Priorities:* Define and clarify digital priorities within the programmes for effective communication and implementation.
- *Enhancing Human Skills in the Digital Age:* Focus on developing human skills like emotional intelligence to complement advancements in artificial intelligence.

Sustainability & Climate Change:
- Understanding the Value of Nature: Integrate nature's intrinsic value into programmes, linking it to climate change education and action.

Competence Development:
- Focus on competence development and active participation.

3. Priorities and Messages of the NA network

3.1. Co-Group Conclusions on SNAC Perspectives and Feedback from the NA network

The chapter on TCA/NET developments and discussions within the network provides a detailed overview of the strategic directions and feedback regarding the Strategic National Agency

Cooperation projects (SNACs) from the Co-Group and the wider Youth National Agency (NA) network.

The **Co-Group conclusions on SNAC perspectives** highlighted a strong appreciation for the work and outcomes of SNACs, emphasising their significant contributions and the need for their integration into future cooperation platforms. The group encouraged synergies among similar SNACs for joint efforts and efficiency and tasked the network communication support person with creating a transparent presentation of SNACs for broader understanding and visibility. A key meeting is scheduled for January 2024 to enhance coordination and planning of all TCA/NET activities, including SNACs, with regular joint meetings established for ongoing strategic alignment. The network is also tasked with analysing strategic needs for future cooperation projects, differentiating between strategic projects and other forms of cooperation. An update in the description of some less strategic NA cooperation projects is proposed, shifting from "Strategic National Agency Cooperation projects (SNAC)" to "Long-Term Activities (LTA)" to reflect a broader scope.

Feedback from the NA network underscored the need for clarity in the objectives and structure of SNACs, with suggestions for merging and clustering similar SNACs for better resource utilisation and impact assessment. The differentiation of SNACs from SALTOs was deemed necessary for clear role understanding. Strategic focus and limitations were discussed, with concerns about the large number of SNACs and the need to align them with main programme objectives. The idea of starting a new cycle of SNACs in 2025 was proposed, along with the need for time limitation and proper evaluation of each SNAC. Communication and dissemination strategies were highlighted for better external visibility of SNAC outcomes. The feedback also pointed to the EU Commission's perspective on SNACs and the importance of simplified internal communication. Finally, the establishment of a decision-making body to assess the effectiveness and goals of SNACs was underlined.
This chapter reflects a collective effort towards a more streamlined, strategically focused, and clearly defined approach to SNACs, ensuring their alignment with the broader objectives of the EU Youth Programmes.

3.2.   Experiences in Cooperating with SALTOs

The chapter on experiences in cooperating with Support, Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities (SALTO) Resource Centres within the network of National Agencies (NAs) reveals a diverse range of interactions and perspectives. NAs reported varying degrees of engagement with SALTOs, with some experiencing positive cooperation, particularly with regional SALTOs, while others had less interaction. Concerns were raised about the clarity of the European Commission's stance on SALTOs and their official mandate, as well as the inconsistent relationship between SALTOs and Strategic Network and Cooperation (SNACs).
NAs found the access to new tools, expertise, and resources provided by SALTOs, including support in organising staff trainings and events, to be particularly useful. Networking

opportunities and strategic collaborations facilitated by SALTOs were also valued, along with the quality of documentation and communication, including newsletters.

However, there were suggestions for improvement, such as clearer explanations of SALTOs' mandates, improved communication from the Commission, better identification of contact points within SALTOs, and increased sharing of outcomes and deliverables. Proposals included merging SNACs and SALTOs for efficiency, managing meeting volumes more effectively, and operational improvements like creating clear contact lists and integrating SALTO information into staff trainings.

The feedback also highlighted untapped potential in the cooperation with SALTOs. This includes exploring how SNACs can support SALTOs in building partnerships with NAs, investigating synergies between SALTOs and SNACs, allowing more development time for new SALTOs, enhancing the SALTO website for better navigation, addressing survey participation issues, and proposing annual sharing of SALTOs' work plans. Addressing the workload challenges for small NAs and creating manuals and standard training formats on SALTO topics were also seen as areas with unused potential.

3.3.   Co-Group Structure

3.3.1.   Working Groups

The coordination group of the National Agency network has established five specialised working groups, each focusing on key areas to support the implementation of the network's work plan. These groups are:

- **Communication (internal + external):** Led by Luis Alves and David Lafuente Durán, this group focuses on enhancing both internal and external communication strategies within the network.
- **Monitoring + Evaluation of Programmes (including RAY):** This group, headed by Reet Kost, Koen Lambert, and Uros Skrinar, is responsible for the oversight and assessment of programme effectiveness, including the integration of RAY research findings.
- **KMST + Competence Framework:** Managed by Jojanneke de Waal and Margret Zeiner, this group concentrates on Knowledge Management and Staff Training, along with the development and implementation of a competence framework.
- **Linking Programmes to Policy, Priorities, Youth Strategy, and EYWAgenda (including SALTOs, Strategies):** Guided by Manfred von Hebel and Koen Lambert, this group aims to align various programmes with overarching policy objectives, youth strategies, and the European Youth Work Agenda, including the integration of SALTO resources and strategic planning.
- **Monitoring of TCA/NET (including SNACs):** This group, led by Manfred von Hebel, Laurence Hermand, Reet Kost, and Uros Skrinar, focuses on the monitoring of

Transnational Cooperation Activities/Networking (TCA/NET) and Strategic Network and Cooperation (SNACs) projects.
- **Strengthening ESC Programme:** Overseen by Gerhard Moßhammer and Mathieu Roumegous, this group is dedicated to reinforcing the European Solidarity Corps programme.

3.3.2. Support Persons

The coordination group of the National Agency (NA) network is efficiently supported by two dedicated individuals. Sabrina Apitz, who began her role in April 2023, expertly manages the Secretariat duties, ensuring reporting, monitoring and smooth operational functions within the group. Andrei Popescu, who joined in August 2023, focuses on Communications, playing a crucial role in facilitating clear and effective information exchange both within the network and with external stakeholders. Together, their contributions are vital in maintaining the coherence and effectiveness of the coordination group's activities and therefore the whole network.