

Executive Summary

Business Meeting Malmö 2023

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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 Malmö, Sweden from 17th to 20th April

2023. The meeting aimed to address key objectives, including reflections on the mid-term evaluation of current programs, engaging with the European Commission, proposing changes to the Programme Guide for 2024, and discussing the evolution of TCA/NET, SNACs and KMST.

2. Youth programmes: Activity and participant numbers

Results from both the previous programme period 2014-2020 and the current period 2021-2027 consistently show that **E+:Youth and ESC activities represent between 27% and 34% of all approved projects and between 22% and 25% of all participants, with more than 40% of them being young people with fewer opportunities** (Source: EC Dashboards).

This demonstrates that the dedicated Youth chapter, with specific objectives and a dedicated budget line, serves as **a real incentive for the youth field** to engage with the programmes and take 'ownership'.

3. Future Programme Guide Suggestions

During the group discussions, several suggestions were made for future changes to the Programme Guide. For the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) volunteering activities, there was a focus on team volunteering and the potential to enhance its implementation. Regarding the Youth Participation programme strands, recommendations were made to strengthen the participation of young people and improve the impact of these initiatives. The discussions around Key Action 210 (KA210) highlighted the need for more clarity and guidance on small-scale partnerships in the youth sector. Additionally, a miscellaneous suggestions forum was created to address other ideas that may not fit into the specific categories mentioned. These suggestions should be taken into consideration for potential revisions to the Programme Guide.

3.1. ESC: Volunteering, including team volunteering

Three main proposals have been pointed out to address the imbalance between individual and team volunteering and to enhance the effectiveness of volunteering initiatives.

1. One proposal focused on leveraging long-term volunteers to promote group volunteering, recognizing its potential impact on young individuals, particularly newcomers.
2. Another suggestion aimed at introducing more flexibility to in-country team volunteering, considering it as a pathway or teaser for engagement in cross-border programmes.

3. Furthermore, the need to expand the eligibility criteria for in-country team volunteering to encompass a broader range of young people was emphasised, with the possibility of establishing a minimum quota for those with fewer opportunities, thereby fostering inclusivity in the volunteering experience.

Additionally, there were several proposals for changes dedicated to specific topics:

Team Volunteering

- Support reducing the minimum number for team volunteering to 5.
- Two suggestions regarding the upper limit of team volunteering:
 - (1) Retaining the maximum limit of 40 to ensure hosting organisations have the capacity to manage.
 - (2) Align the upper limit of team volunteering with youth exchanges, i.e., 60 participants. Agree on abolishing limits for team volunteering, with the caveat that organisations should have sufficient staff to manage large projects.
- Suggest opening team volunteering to more diverse participant groups, not exclusively to young people with fewer opportunities, to foster inclusivity.
- Request more flexibility in the number of in-country volunteers for team volunteering as this could be a stepping stone for them to experience long-term volunteering.

Role of Sending Organisation: Call for a more significant role for sending organisations in the guide, particularly to support inclusion.

Clarification Exceptional Costs: Expand the description for exceptional costs to clarify what is covered, including whether salaries for accompanying persons could be supported.

Volunteer registration: Advocate for the simplification of the volunteer registration procedure to make the portal more user-friendly.

Inclusion Pot:

- Propose reviewing the need for an 'inclusion pot' and considering lowering the percentage that needs to be set aside, leaving the decision to the National Agencies.
- Inclusion pot KA151 & ESC51: Provide flexibility and guidance on the use of the inclusion pot, allowing for adjustments based on project needs and giving National Agencies the ability to set the allocation percentage.

3.2. Youth Participation Programme strands

More simple and flexible funding rules (lower funds, levels, lump sums)

- Lower sums for easy application processes to encourage greater participation in youth projects.
- Simplify the funding rules, which are currently considered too complicated. Consider incorporating elements from Key Action 210 (KA210) already from 2024 to streamline the process.
- Introduce more flexible funding rules, potentially based on lump sums similar to the Small Scale Partnerships, starting from 2025. E.g.: Introduce three levels of Youth Participation projects based on experience:
 - newcomers (6.000 EUR),
 - more experienced (15.000 EUR),
 - and experienced (30.000 EUR).
- Consider adopting a lump sum approach, ideally including staff costs as exceptional costs, as they may not be adequately covered through organisational support alone.
- Establish separate micro grants, potentially distributed by organisations dealing with larger funding amounts. (municipalities, scout organisations, ...).

More focus on the content and form of youth participation

- Simplify KA154 to make it more accessible and user-friendly.
- Provide more focus and information on the content of youth participation, including reference documents from the Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe to support and inspire participatory approaches, particularly for informal groups and less experienced organisations.
- Emphasise the importance of including consultation from young people in the decision-making process.
- Clarify and explain the distinction between mobility and participation to organisations, ensuring they understand that they can participate in both kinds. National Agencies should consider how to effectively communicate this to organisations.

3.3. KA210: Small-scale partnerships in youth

Adjusting assessment criteria

- Revisit the assessment criteria to support the selection process among an increased number of applicants, while also facilitating the assessment and validation of final reports.
- Allow experts to adjust the lump sum payment downward if the value for money is not satisfactory.

Clarification of budget rules: Provide clearer explanations and guidelines regarding the budget rules for KA2 work packages, as the current LumpSum Guide is not sufficient. Include specific references for activities such as TPM (Transnational Project Meetings) and LTTS (Learning, Teaching, and Training Activities), which were part of previous KA2 but not explicitly mentioned in KA210-KA220.

Same deadline for KA1 + KA210: Establish the same application deadline for KA210 and KA1 projects to streamline the process.

Limited number of applications per round per organisation: Limit the number of applications per round for KA2 projects, proposing a range of 1-2 projects per action (to be defined by National Agencies) to prevent organisations from taking advantage of the action. For KA1 projects, suggest a range of 1-5 projects per action (also to be defined by National Agencies), with the possibility for organisations to request additional projects through accreditation.

Opening KA210 for organisations beyond newcomers?

- Concerns were raised about the strict limitation of the action to newcomers, as it was recognised that this approach may not fully address the underlying issue of organisations potentially taking advantage of the project.
- Recognize the need to provide opportunities for intermediary organisations, as KA210 is currently limited to newcomers and KA220 may be too large for some small organisations that are not newcomers.

3.4. Other suggestions

3.4.1. General

Refocus on European values

Clarification operational capacity + risk check: Description of operational capacity and risk check in the programme guide is needed

Exceptional costs: Exceptional costs for expensive travel: Consider allowing exceptional costs to be used for additional project participation expenses, such as travel and accommodation needs beyond the standard duration

APV online: APV as online activity: Explore the possibility of including online activities for the APV process, especially for exceptional cases like inclusion activities

Clarify the no-profit rule: The no-profit rule: Clarify the application of the no-profit principle for grants provided in different forms, including unit costs, lump sums, flat-rate financing, and scholarships

Virtual activities in Youth: Clear rules on virtual activities in Youth: Develop specific actions and tools to address virtual activities and indicators in the programme guide

Accurate translations needed: Correct translations to other languages: Ensure accurate translations to avoid inconsistencies in rates and participant calculations

Allocation of funds: Improve timing and transparency in allocating funds for accredited organisations, taking into account the final number of new organisations

3.4.2. Action-specific

KA1 - Limit the number of applications per round per organisation: For KA1 projects, suggest a range of 1-5 projects per action (also to be defined by National Agencies), with the possibility for organisations to request additional projects through accreditation.

KA152 (Mobility of young people)

- **Delete the 4 persons per national group rule:** Reevaluate the eligibility criteria to prevent the entire group from being ineligible and causing financial loss for the organisation.
- **APV:** Reinstate support for hosting organisations in the APV process to eliminate confusion for applicants and National Agencies

KA151 (Accredited projects for youth mobility) - Inclusion pot KA151 & ESC51: Provide flexibility and guidance on the use of the inclusion pot, allowing for adjustments based on project needs and giving National Agencies the ability to set the allocation percentage.

KA220 (Cooperation Partnerships) - Funding categories: Request for more flexibility in requesting numbers per funding category to better support high-quality projects across KA220.

EuSC - Quality Label: old E+ accreditations: Discrepancy between system and programme guide: Address the issue of organisations with old E+ accreditations and their participation status

EuSC - Solidarity Projects: Simplify registration:

- Simplify the registration process by allowing only the coordinator to register with the PRN in the database
- To consider: There is also a proposal to even register the additional young people often taking part in Solidarity Projects in order to increase the number of participants in general.

EuSC - Volunteering: Increase rates for TEC trainings: Consider different rates for different countries, especially for activities like On-Arrivals and Mid-term Trainings

4. Mid-term evaluation

4.1. Mid-term evaluation plan

The mid-term evaluation plan for the EU Youth programmes involves a comprehensive assessment of various aspects. It will be carried out in three steps during Business Meetings held in Sweden, Spain, and Belgium. The evaluation primarily focuses on examining the role of the programmes in supporting the EU Youth Strategy and delves into their objectives, functioning, and structures. The aim is to evaluate the effectiveness of the programmes in achieving the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy and identify areas where improvements can be made.

The evaluation will explore several key questions, such as whether the programmes have adequately supported the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy or if certain actions have been more effective than others. It will also analyse the differences between the previous programme period (2014-2020) and the current period (2021-2027) to determine if actions from the previous programmes were more effective. Additionally, the quality of the projects supported by the programmes will be assessed, with a focus on identifying measures to enhance their effectiveness.

The plan also addresses the relevance of the programmes by examining who they reach and how successful they are in attracting and engaging target audiences, including diverse backgrounds and disadvantaged groups. The evaluation will consider the design and adaptation of the programmes to cater to hard-to-reach groups and young people with fewer opportunities, promoting inclusion and ensuring equal access to opportunities.

Furthermore, the plan draws inspiration from previous youth strategies, such as the former Youth Strategy 2010-2018, as well as the EU Youth Dialogue's 11 Youth Goals, the "Signposts for the future" from the 3rd European Youth Work Convention, and the beneficiaries' perspective on the "fYOUTure for Youth." These elements provide valuable insights and directions for the future development of the EU Youth programmes.

First step has been taken during the Business Meeting in Sweden. This summary provides a comprehensive overview of the outcomes of the group discussions during the Business Meeting, focusing on mid-term evaluation of the programmes.

The discussions followed a step-by-step approach, addressing key questions to assess the level of support provided by the programmes and evaluate their effectiveness and quality in achieving the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy (3.1). Furthermore, the discussions examined the effectiveness of specific actions within the programmes (3.2), compared the differences between the programmes of the two periods of 2014-2020 and 2021-2027 (3.3), and assessed the overall quality of the projects supported by the programmes (3.4).

The second part of the summary focuses on the discussions and findings related to the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy, target audiences, and inclusivity during the Business Meeting. These discussions aimed to assess the need for adjustments to the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy (3.5), explore the inclusion of current programme priorities, consider a focus

outside the EU, and examine how the programmes can contribute to achieving the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy. Additionally, the success of the programmes in reaching target audiences (3.6), engaging hard-to-reach groups, and promoting inclusivity was evaluated. The following summary highlights the key points and recommendations derived from these discussions.

The following summary presents the key findings and recommendations derived from these discussions.

4.2. Assessing the programmes' alignment with the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy

General feedback:

- The programmes are generally aligned with the EU Youth Strategy, but there is a need for more systemic impact and better alignment with EU values and priorities.
- The youth goals of the EU Youth Strategy should be more explicitly reflected in the programme.
- The new programme has a greater focus on individual benefits rather than structural changes, which differs from the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy.
- Some EU values, such as democracy and active citizenship, need stronger emphasis in the programmes.
- Certain priorities of the Youth Strategy, such as the well-being of young people, are not adequately addressed.
- There is a need for a tool to better demonstrate the connections between the Youth Strategy and the programmes.

Action-specific feedback:

- **KA2 projects** have reduced capacity to reflect the priorities of the EU Youth Strategy compared to the previous programme.
- **In-country volunteering** does not effectively support the priorities of the EU Youth Strategy.
- **DiscoverEU** serves as an entry point for newcomers but could better align with the EU Youth Strategy.
- Current **Solidarity Projects** mainly focus on "connect" and may need more emphasis on "empower" and "engage."
- Current **Youth participation Activities** have less policy impact compared to the previous KA3 projects.

Suggestions:

- Shift the focus of Erasmus+ towards fostering active citizenship and prioritising community and societal benefits over individual gains.

4.3. Comparing the Effectiveness of Actions within the Programmes

The following findings and suggestions highlight the effectiveness of certain actions within the programmes and provide recommendations for improvement and future development.

General feedback:

- Certain formats within the programmes have demonstrated quality and systemic impact, including youth work mobilities, accreditations, and TCAs.
 - Youth Worker Mobilities emphasise local engagement and have a positive impact on local youth work.
 - Accreditation has the potential to enhance the overall quality of youth work and strengthen organisational capacity.
 - TCAs ensure tangible impacts at the organisational level through the involvement of participating organisations.
 - TCA/NET plays a vital role in transnational cooperation and youth work development.
- Allocation of funds and support for accredited organisations need further consideration and improvement.
- Monitoring and evaluation are essential for assessing project effects, but better methods are needed.
- Young people's inclusion and understanding of projects require improvement.

Action-specific feedback:

- **Solidarity Projects** have great potential, especially for smaller organisations and umbrella organisations.
- **Youth Participation Activities** (YPAs) need better promotion and differentiation from Solidarity Projects.
- **KA2 projects** lack involvement of youth organisations, leading to a loss of the youth dimension.
- **In-country volunteering** has shown limited successful effects.
- **DiscoverEU** serves as an entry point for newcomers, but alignment with the EU Youth Strategy can be improved.

Suggestions:

- Consider implementing a long-term training program for accredited organisations.

4.4. Comparing the Youth Programmes: 2014-2020 vs. 2021-2027

General feedback:

- New programme focuses more on engagement and youth participation, while the old programme emphasised employability and personal development.
- Systemic impact in terms of participation can be further improved.
- Significant improvement in TCAs/NET, allowing engagement of inexperienced organisations and individuals.
- Stronger focus on supporting youth work.
- Current programme contributes more to the competence development of young people.

Action-specific feedback:

- **YPAs** without mobility activities can work effectively for smaller youth organisations.
- **KA2 projects** often lack involvement of youth organisations, resulting in a loss of the youth dimension.
- Previous KA3 projects were more effective in involving policymakers and achieving concrete results compared to **current participation projects**.
- KA3 projects were perceived as easier to promote and engage applicants compared to **KA2 projects**.
- **Occupational strand** was not well integrated into the programme.

4.5. Assessing the quality of the projects supported by the programmes

General feedback:

- The programmes contribute significantly to the competence development of young people.
- Quality projects remain at the core, although the impact of Covid has affected regular organisations applying, resulting in an increase in empty organisations.

Action-specific feedback:

- **Current participation projects** lack the policy impact compared to the previous KA3 projects.

Suggestions:

- Improve inclusion by allowing the mixing of participant groups and targeting specific niche audiences.
- The projects should enable young people to become change-makers and address major issues like Brexit and climate change. Encourage participants to transition from being mere participants to leaders.
- Conduct evaluations to assess the impact on individuals and systems.

4.6. Objectives of the EU Youth Strategy

- The objectives of the EU Youth Strategy may need adjustment to reflect the evolving needs and challenges of young people.
- The strategy should remain high-level and broad, with a focus on engagement, political activism, and environmental issues.
- The priorities of the current programmes should be revisited and aligned with the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy, with effective communication to address tensions and highlight the positive impact.
- The EU Youth Strategy should have a focus outside the EU, connecting with other regions of the world.
- The programmes should be designed to achieve the objectives of the Youth Strategy and effectively communicate their impact and systemic role.
- The design of the programmes should align with the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy, considering social recognition alongside political recognition.
- There is a need to revise the translation of the strategy into the programme guide to ensure alignment and effectiveness.

4.7. Reaching Target Audiences

- The success of the programmes in reaching target audiences should be also evaluated beyond dashboard numbers to accurately reflect diversity and inclusion.
- Efforts should be made to attract and include marginalised and underrepresented groups in the programmes.
- The programme design should be oriented towards engaging hard-to-reach groups and specific disadvantaged groups, with tailored outreach strategies and specialised support mechanisms.
- Collaboration with relevant organisations and stakeholders working with marginalised groups can enhance programme adaptation.
- Obstacles to inclusion, such as complicated application processes and insufficient IT support, should be addressed.
- Inclusion should be a central focus, with long-term approaches and capacity building measures for organisations and youth workers.
- Tailor-made seminars and support programmes can effectively involve diverse audiences.
- Clear guidelines, simplified application processes, and monitoring of diversity and inclusivity metrics are necessary for improvement.
- The importance of addressing mental health, and the digital transition in the post-COVID era should be considered.
- Balancing the involvement of civil society and young people is crucial to address societal problems.

- Certification of organisations and funding for decentralised management should be ensured.
- Cooperation with other EU strategies and instruments is important for programme success.

5. TCA/NET Evolution

During the business meeting, discussions were held on the TCA/NET budget and the strategic involvement of National Agencies, focusing on addressing challenges and enhancing the impact of TCA/NET activities. The increase in the TCA/NET budget presented both opportunities and challenges, prompting National Agencies to express concerns and propose improvements. A needs assessment and mapping process was initiated to better understand the needs of TCA officers. Cluster discussions allowed for sharing best practices and identifying solutions to enhance the impact of TCA/NET initiatives.

During a dedicated session on TCA/NET evolution, participants discussed various topics related to management and administration as well as strategic planning of TCA/NET and perspectives of SNACs. The outcomes of the discussions highlighted the need to ensure control over content despite heavy workloads, collaborate with national partner organisations, establish procedures for future planning, clarify roles and responsibilities of TCA officers, and implement comprehensive tracking systems. The importance of qualified and experienced staff, guidance for newcomers, and the alignment of SNACs with NA needs and goals were emphasised. Clustering NAs based on topics and assessing NAs' involvement in SNACs based on available resources were also discussed. Challenges faced by smaller NAs, clear definition of roles and responsibilities, and the implementation of TCA/NET in the youth field were recognised. The discussions highlighted the need for ongoing exploration and development of strategies to optimise organisational structures and operations.

The next steps involved consolidating the findings and developing a comprehensive plan through collaboration between the Working Group and Cogroup. The aim is to address challenges, maximise the potential of TCA/NET activities, and improve effectiveness. The outcomes and plan will be revisited at the upcoming Business Meeting, reflecting the commitment of National Agencies to continuous improvement and the meaningful contribution of TCA/NET activities to youth sector objectives.

Following the Business Meeting in Prague, a joint letter from the Education and Training (E&T) and Youth sectors was sent to the European Commission. The letter highlighted the challenges faced in implementing TCA/NET activities and expressed the need for optimisation. Despite some solutions introduced in the 2023 GfNAs, several challenges persist. In response, a **joint proposal from the E&T and Youth NAs (TCA_NET_proposal_31.05.2023)** has been drafted and submitted to the Commission. With the upcoming NA meeting in June, the NAs are hopeful

for internal discussions and preliminary feedback on the proposal. They emphasise the importance of implementing solutions for TCA/NET activities in the 2024 GfNAs.

6. SNACs Action Plan

The Strategic National Agency Cooperation (SNAC) Action Plan outlines a series of actions aimed at enhancing the implementation and effectiveness of SNACs within the Youth NAs Network. The plan emphasises the importance of clear roles, effective communication, and partnership strategies at the SNAC level. It also highlights the integration of SNACs with programme implementation and policy developments. At the National Agency level, the plan calls for active participation, resource allocation, and internal organisation to support SNACs. At the Network level, the plan suggests mapping connections, developing a memorandum of understanding, ensuring visibility, investing in capacity building, and conducting regular monitoring and evaluation. The plan will undergo further exploration and revision by relevant stakeholders.

During the participatory discussion on the SNACs Action Plan, participants emphasised the importance of honest discussions on feasibility and coordination regulations. They highlighted the need to address SNACs at both the network and individual National Agency levels, establish rules of conduct, and handle instances where an agency withdraws from a SNAC. The challenges faced by smaller agencies and the significance of assessing the relevance of joining or leaving SNACs were also noted. It was suggested to prioritise managing existing SNACs before initiating new ones. Recommendations included providing timely updates to agencies through newsletters and TCA/NET meetings, focusing on the alignment of SNACs with the objectives of the Youth Strategy, and ensuring that SNACs align with their initial objectives to avoid overlap.

7. KMST: Updates and Planning

The KMST Working Group provided updates and discussed various topics related to staff training. The Staff Training Guidelines aim to organise training effectively and cover practical, financial, and content-related aspects. Job shadowing opportunities will be shared in a designated space, and a Competence Framework with support tools is available for trainers and HR departments. The 2023 staff training calendar is complete, with upcoming training focusing on different key actions. Evaluations of staff training have been positive, emphasising the importance of networking and addressing digital transformation challenges. Further engagement and communication with the KMST Working Group are encouraged.