**CONTRIBUTION OF THE NETWORK OF NA’S IN THE YOUTH FIELD**

**TO THE MID-TERM EVALUATION OF THE EU-YOUTH STRATEGY**

The network of National Agencies in the field of Youth, responsible for the implementation of Erasmus+: Youth and the European Solidarity Corps, has met in its Business Meeting in Malmö, Sweden (April 2023). The Youth NA’s have dedicated their discussions to the mid-term evaluation of the European Union Youth Strategy and, more precisely, to the way how both European programmes have supported the EU Youth Strategy till now.

They did so following the Call for Evidence of the EU Youth Strategy and the Guidelines for the mid-term evaluation of both EU programmes. The discussions focused on the effectiveness of the programmes in supporting the EU Youth Strategy and on the relevance of its objectives, given the experience of the Youth NA network, stemming from the implementation of the programmes. The feedback and opinions expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect the opinion of each National Agency in all aspects.

The network took note of the results from both the previous program period 2014-2020 and the current period 2021-2027. Taking into account that E+:Youth and ESC has 13,83 % available of the E+ and ESC budgets combined, the figures consistently show that **E+:Youth and ESC activities represent between 27% and 34% of all approved projects in E+ and ESC. Moreover these activities represent between 22% and 25% of all participants, with more than 40% of them being young people with fewer opportunitie**s (Source: EC Dashboards, see Annex 1 and 1a).

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’ of their implementation on the ground. It also demonstrates clearly that this Youth Chapter gives an adequate answer to the **need and demand of young people for non-formal learning mobility** activities and opportunities. Finally, it demonstrates the important contribution of the Youth field to the **European Union’s ambitions concerning transnational learning mobility.**

**1.- Aligning Strategy and Programmes**

The network stressed that the EU Youth Strategy is the overarching strategy that links both programmes E+:Youth and ESC in a coherent frame. As a consequence, the “rationale” of both programmes, their actions, networks and tools (see Annex 2) is instrumental in achieving the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy. Programmes should be designed to reach these objectives. They should demonstrate how they contribute to the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy and effectively communicate about their systemic impact on the field in achieving these. The program guides should “translate” the Strategy in specific and concrete actions and formats.

As the needs and challenges of young people have evolved, the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy may need adjustment to reflect this development. The strategy should remain high-level and broad enough to adapt to evolving needs. However, it should keep a focus on engagement, participation and youth work. The EU Youth Strategy should also have a focus outside the EU, connecting with other regions of the world and engage with global issues.

In general, the programmes are well aligned with the EU Youth Strategy.

However, some elements were mentioned that are missing or not explicitly present enough:

* There is a need for refocusing on European values. Values, such as democracy, active citizenship and non-discrimination, need stronger emphasis in the programmes. They are sometimes seen as a byproduct rather than a core focus.
* The 11 youth goals of the EU Youth Strategy, as the outcome of the EU Youth Dialogue, should be more explicitly reflected in the programmes and the program guides.
* Newly emerging priorities, such as the well-being of young people, societal activism and environmental issues are not adequately addressed by the EU Youth Strategy and the programmes.
* From the 4 transversal priorities of the programmes, participation and inclusion are well embedded in the Youth Strategy. However, the digital and green transitions in and through youth work are not.

The development of competences and values of young people, through non-formal learning activities, is an essential contribution of the programmes. However, it was stated that the current programmes have a more important focus on individual benefits rather than structural changes, which differs from the approach and objectives of the EU Youth Strategy and of the previous programmes.

The focus of Erasmus+ should shift towards fostering active citizenship and prioritizing community and societal benefits over individual gains. Young people should be made aware that they are actively contributing to the EU-Youth Strategy through their participation in the projects. This should lead to a higher level of societal recognition of the programmes, and not only political recognition.

As for the instruments that link the Strategy and the programmes, it was stated that:

* There is a need to revise the “translation” of the Strategy into the programme guide to ensure alignment and effectiveness.
* There is a need for a tool to export data that better demonstrate the connections between the Youth Strategy and the programmes.
* There is a need to reestablish the connection between the activities of the network, including strategic cooperation (SNAC), and the work plan of the Council (Working Party on Youth). Links with the FNAP’s and the peer learning activities should be strengthened.
* There is a need for a stronger knowledge based approach in steering the programmes and to make better use of available data (such as RAY-data).

**2.- Which actions are more effective than others to support the EU Youth Strategy?**

Certain formats within the programmes have allowed for quality and impact on a systemic level, such as youth work mobilities, accreditations, and TCA/NET:

* **Youth Worker Mobilities** (YW Mobilities) require applicants to demonstrate the impact on local youth work, emphasizing the importance of local engagement.
* **Accreditations** have the potential to have a systemic impact on youth work due to its structure, potentially enhancing the overall quality of youth work. But there is limited experience with accreditations so far and there is an ongoing risk in the accreditation process, as the motivation of organizations to participate may be limited if they are not adequately supported with funding.
* **Transnational Cooperation Activities (TCA in E+) and Networking Activities (NET in ESC)** are recognized as filling spaces beyond the capacity of organizations and individuals and making significant contributions to transnational cooperation and youth work development. It requires that all participants have an organization behind them, ensuring that the activities have a tangible impact at the organizational level.
* The **long-term volunteering**, that is made possible by the European Solidarity Corps, offers unique opportunities to young people, that go far beyond being only a learning mobility activity. It puts solidarity and the community impact at its heart and opens possibilities to different beneficiary organisations compared to Erasmus+ Youth and includes a wider share of the civil society sector, social entrepreneurs, environmental organisations, municipalities and the entire volunteering field.
* Current **solidarity projects** of the ESC support effectively the "connect" priority of the EU Youth Strategy. They show great potential, particularly for smaller organizations or umbrella organizations working with local groups.

However, some aspects of other actions in the programmes need to be improved, in view of their potential for contributing to and supporting of the EU Youth Strategy:

* The capacity of **KA2 projects** to reflect the priorities of the EU Youth Strategy is reduced, compared to the previous program. Projects mostly do not involve youth organizations, as a result the Youth dimension in KA2 is lost.
* **Youth Participation Activities** (YPAs) are considered too difficult to promote. Moreover, they reflect much less the policy impact of the EU Youth Strategy as compared to the previous KA3. The previous KA3 projects were more effective in involving policy makers and having concrete results.
* **DiscoverEU** does not fully reflect the priorities of the EU Youth Strategy, although it is serving as an entry mechanism for newcomers in the other actions of the programmes.
* Clear rules on **virtual activities** under the Youth Chapter of E+ are missing.

**3.- Reaching out and targeting audiences**

The effectiveness of the EU Youth Strategy depends strongly on its capacity of reaching out to young people, of being inclusive and diverse and of enabling young people to actively participate in its implementation. In that respect the programmes have a key role to fulfill.

The programmes have been successful in reaching different target groups including marginalized and underrepresented groups, but there is a need for further evaluation and analysis of their effectiveness. The success of the programmes should be measured beyond dashboard figures to reflect the actual diversity and inclusion achieved.

In that respect a reevaluation of the monitoring and measurement tools is necessary. Efforts should be made to gather feedback and input directly from the target audiences to assess the programmes' effectiveness and identify areas for improvement.

The program design should be inclusive and enabling diversity in a two step approach. The general set up should be oriented towards an overall inclusive design, enabling all young people to engage, including hard-to-reach groups and specific disadvantaged groups. When needed and relevant tailored outreach strategies and specialised support mechanisms should be used to overcome specific barriers.

Obstacles to inclusion, such as complicated application processes and insufficient IT support, should be addressed. Clear guidelines, simplified application processes, and monitoring of diversity and inclusivity metrics are necessary for improvement. Inclusion strategies at the national level should be strengthened to improve the design and implementation of the programmes.

Inclusion should be a central focus, with long-term approaches and capacity building measures for organizations and youth workers. Tailor-made seminars and support programmes can effectively support and lead to the involvement of diverse audiences.

Balancing the involvement of both civil society and young people is crucial to address societal problems. Collaboration with relevant organizations and stakeholders, working in the field with marginalized groups, can enhance program implementation and lead to reasonable adaptations.

Cooperation with other EU strategies and instruments is important to strengthen, the success of the programmes. This should, however, not lead to a loss of identity of the youth field, of the non-formal methods used and of the stakeholders providing learning opportunities.

**4.- Recommendations for…**

**4.A) …the programmes, to better support the EU Youth Strategy:**

* Maintain the **role of the Youth Chapter** **in E+** as an incentive for the youth field to actively contribute to the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy.
* Strengthen the **European Solidarity Corps** in the youth field and increase its budget
* Strengthen the management and **implementation of TCA/NET** and align these activities better with the efforts of Member States to implement the EU Youth Strategy.
* Reinforce the **youth dimension in KA2**, by better defining its objectives for the youth field, in line with the EU Youth Strategy, the role of youth organizations and youth workers in KA2 projects.
* Reevaluate the **tools for monitoring** and measurement, especially in the field of inclusion and diversity.
* Establish clear rules on **virtual activities** under the Youth Chapter of E+.
* Embed **Discover EU stronger in the informal and non-formal learning** culture of E+.
* Ease the burden of **too complex administrative and IT procedures**. Reduce the number of procedures.
* Strengthen the **youth participation projects** and make them more effective in involving policy makers and being influential.

**4.B) …the current and future EU Youth Strategy:**

* Refocus on the **European values** of democracy, active citizenship and non-discrimination.
* Include better the **11 youth goals** and, in general, the outcomes of the EU Youth Dialogue.
* Integrate **new emerging needs of young people**, like well-being and societal activism.
* Have a more important focus on **structural changes**, rather than individual benefits.
* Focus on **youth work, engagement and participation of young people** in order to get more important societal recognition of the EU Youth Strategy.
* Make it more **knowledge based** by using better available data.