**Strategy and workplan of the Network of Youth NA’s**

Sept 2021- Slovenia

1. Background

This document endeavours to express the essential elements which guide and form **the network of National Agencies in the field of youth (NA Network)**. It is based on the reflections of the **Co-ordination group (Co-Group)** and has been discussed and agreed in the Business Meeting of the NA Network in Slovenia in October 2021.

The document establishes a strategic framework for the cooperation of the Network and contains a new Network workplan. It gathers the existing ‘corporate memory’ of the Network, its history and practice and formulates reflections for the future. It supports a close partnership and positive working relationship with the Commission, in the interests of achieving the aims of the Programmes.

1. Values of the Network

In examining what the network is , what it wants to become and how to speak with one voice, the network needs to openly operate from its values. What does it stand for and how is this safeguarded ? The programmes are the common base for this, and its values provide guidance for NA’s as custodians of the programmes.

The Network values for the purposeful implementation of the programmes:

* + Equal implementation of the programme in each country
  + Equal access to the programme
  + Ensure good use of funds to quality projects
  + Connecting the activities of the Programmes strongly to the values of the Programmes

Supporting this there are the two sets of values to be considered:

1. Dealing what is considered to be achieved in the youth field/youth work/youth policy: its quality and impact.
2. European Values of importance values for young people and for Europe; These values are as important. It is important for the European Union that there is a Youth Programme. That the European Union is not only a single market, but that it is dealing with objectives on young people rights. Youth policy becomes then a value per se.

The network identifies with the objectives and priorities of the programme and promotes these. It ensures that projects funded are close to these values and explores ways how the set of values (youth specific or European) are translated in the implementation of the programme.

The network also refers to the values of the EU as mentioned in the Treaty of Lisbon:

* Respect for human dignity.
* Freedom.
* Democracy.
* Equality.
* Rule of law.
* Respect for human rights, including those of minorities.

1. Purpose of the Network

Through more than 30 years of experience in implementing EU programmes related to youth, the Network has developed specific values, methods and strategies that shaped its specific and unique character. Based on the principles of cooperation across Europe, mutual support, developing common approaches and practices, the Network builds its work to achieve an impact on the lives of young people through quality non-formal learning and support for youth work, and to empower young people and cater for active citizenship and participation in decision making of young people.  Through theories, concepts and practices developed and implemented by the EU programmes, the Network has an impact on youth policy and on the practice of youth work across the EU and beyond.

Since 2018 the Network deals with two youth programmes - “Erasmus+: Youth” and the “European Solidarity Corps. The Network is committed to further strengthen the purposeful, quality and equal implementation of these programmes in each country, to use both programmes to its fullest potential and contribute to the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy.

Being self-organised, the Network is responsible to maintain and develop its own structures and working methods to ensure participation of all National Agencies in its functioning and to enable the Network to speak with one voice.

The purpose of the network is:

* To foster the values and priorities of both programmes and exchange good practices on how the set of values and priorities can be translated in the implementation of the programmes and/or promoted by the programmes.
* To Foster the European Dimension of the Programmes;
  + broaden the impact and reach of the programmes through innovation and collaboration activities broaden the implementation and reach of the programmes in co-operation with Partner Countries
* To see opportunities and trigger development to use both programmes to their fullest potential. To voice common bottle necks and threats to the programmes to relevant stakeholders.
* To maintain and develop quality of the network and its structures. To build common understanding and practices among NAs, to support newcomers across the wider spectrum of National Agencies.
* To strengthen the individual NA’s in the implementation of their three roles:

1. implementation of the programmes
2. contribution to youth work and
3. contribution to youth policies

1. Strategic Objectives of the Network (2022-2024)

The objectives are based on the discussions during the Business Meetings (BM) in (virtual) Germany, where ideas have been expressed for the future programmes and recommendations formulated for the Commission and for the Network, and the BM’s in (virtual and hybrid) Portugal, where implementation strategies and policy frameworks of the renewed programs were discussed.

1. ***Strengthen capacity and visibility of Youth NA’s and the Network*** 
   1. Build capacity for staff at Youth NA’s
      1. KMST with an offer of online and offline trainings, including offer for Heads of NA’s
      2. Use Staff Support Groups and “buddies for newcomers”
   2. Strengthen the Youth NA’s with staff competence framework(s)
      1. Finalize the framework and discuss its implementation
   3. Increase visibility and communication on identity, activities, and achievements of the network
      1. Seek and make use of external expertise on communication
      2. Use accessible factsheets (statistics and stories), making use of RAY data
      3. Focus on “community building”
   4. Improve internal communication and information flows inside the network and with related networks, taking into account the diversity of the network
      1. Cooperation platform
      2. Overview of structures and staff “who is who” in NA’s
      3. Regular dialogue with RAY, SALTO and Eurodesk networks
      4. Establish a network newsletter
   5. Keep open and transparent communication and dialogue with the European Commission (COM) and National Authorities (NAU’s)
      1. Link with Youth Unit and its programmes and policy sectors, and with Coordination Unit
      2. Discuss organization of consultations by COM, considering online possibilities.
2. ***Maintain and strengthen the Youth specific identity of the two programmes.***
   1. Relaunch the programmes in the post-covid mode
      1. Monitor implementation of programs since 2020 and discuss necessary remedial actions
      2. “post-covid” Recovery Conference of the network
   2. Strengthen the implementation (and results) of the European Solidarity Corps
      1. Discuss the recognition and the status of volunteers
      2. Introduce strategic cooperation between NA’s (SNAC) in NET
   3. Strengthen the Youth identity of the actions of the Erasmus+ programme
      1. Discuss the concept and the implementation of Discover EU in general
      2. Monitor the developments in accreditations and other new actions, like small scale partnerships and participation projects
   4. Implement the decentralized actions of “Discover EU”
      1. Discuss implementation of Learning Cycle
      2. Discuss implementation of “Discover EU-Inclusion”
   5. Strengthen Youth Pass implementation and analysis of results in obtaining Key Competences, both in E+ and ESC
   6. Revamp the cooperation with Partner Countries
      1. Implement the recommendations from the Helsinki paper
      2. Re-open discussion with the EC
   7. Create pathways to gradually increase the impact of program priorities and strategies
      1. Develop and implement the inclusion & diversity strategy
      2. NA’s to act as a source of inspiration to make the programme (incl. TCA/NET) more green
      3. Take a pro-active role in encouraging virtual, blended and digital activities
      4. Implement the Youth Participation Strategy and make youth participation more visible
   8. Develop future oriented ideas for the programmes.
      1. Advocate the needs of the youth field and adapt the programs to fulfil those
      2. Prepare for the interim evaluation (’21-’24) and final evaluation (’14-’20) of the programmes, making use of RAY research and monitoring
      3. Discuss ideas for next programme period.
3. ***As part of the community of practice in the youth field, support and contribute to the EU Youth Strategy and the European Youth Work Agenda.***
   1. Strengthen the impact of our cooperation and our initiatives in this field.
4. Support the further development of TCA/NET as a tool for this objective.
5. Support and monitor the implementation of all SNAC’s
   1. Prioritize and focus on those elements of the Declaration of the 3rd European Youth Work Convention, that can be implemented by making use of the programs.
6. Cluster Youth Work related SNAC’s and link with SALTO’s concerned
7. Discuss implementation of ETS-youth worker competence framework in both programs
   1. Link with the EU Youth Strategy to support youth policy development
      1. Cluster Youth Strategy related SNAC’s and link with SALTO’s concerned
8. Capacity of the Network

**Network strengths - knowledge, resources & commitment**

The Network with its responsibility for the implementation of EU programmes Erasmus+: Youth and European Solidarity Corps has over the years become an important actor in the development of quality youth work and is a recognised partner for the support of development and implementation of youth policy in European Union, and on a national level in many Members States.

The Network has well established organisations across Europe, with a large number of dedicated and professional staff and partners, with knowledge and expertise in implementation of EU programmes and within the development of quality youth work.

One very clear strength of the Network is its creativity and imagination, existing within all Youth National Agencies individually and enhanced as a collective, permanently supporting innovation in youth work and contributing to the development of new initiatives and methods of quality youth work.

TCA, NET and STEC funds and other supporting tools and platforms give the Network resources to support and ensure quality implementation of the programmes, but also to invest in the capacity building of the youth (work) sector beyond the programmes, supporting young people to be active European citizens and contributing to the development and implementation of European Youth Strategy and national youth policy priorities.

This establishes the Network, in all its diversity, as a safe harbour for all Youth National Agencies and colleagues, where the approach *‘sharing is caring’* is valued and encouraged.  The strongest point for each National Agency is knowing that it is supported by the network and that it rely on colleagues to pool the resources and knowledge when needed.

It is a strength that the network has a long established and functioning mission statement and an informal organisational structure with the co-ordination group of the network, the systematic Business Meetings and Working Groups as well as the Knowledge Management and Staff Training (KMST) framework to support competence and capacity development.

**Network challenges**

The Network does face external challenges: the lack of stability in many parts of the programme, in the external environment and sometimes in NAs. Moreover, the Network had to respond to societal changes (for example incoming refugees from warzones) and, compounded with a global pandemic, new ways of working are emerging. One learning from this, is that the Network has to be ready for another crisis to come.

Recognising the strength in diversity, is also an important challenge. The Network must understand the situation of each NA. Different national realities and societal or political pressures may affect NAs. The network has to create unity and common objectives despite different realities in each NA.

The Youth NA’s Network needs to take into account other challenges for its own functioning:

* Presence and visibility: the Network should be accessible and offer expertise to its members and partners
* Balanced participation and involvement of all NAs: it is important not to lose any NA’s; the Network needs to identify interests and motivations of the NAs; it is also necessary to involve all NA’s in the different range of activities. To support this strengthening internal communication and establishing clear channels for that is needed.
* Making best use and sharing the experience for reaching the full potential. There is huge experience and really good existing practice, also in terms of innovation. But making this visible and learning from it, is not always successful.
* With the establishment of umbrella NA’s for all sectors, it may sometimes become a challenge for national agencies to maintain their youth specific identity. A challenge for the future is how the Network could support the establishment of a common Youth identity in the NA’s.
* Common understanding/vision of the purpose of the priorities and actions in the programme as well as the establishment of strategic NA’s cooperation projects (SNACs). Especially with the start of the programme it is needed to have exchange on this.
* Within the network, there’s a lot of exciting ideas and good insights in the form of reading papers, but a lot of times it is difficult to put this into practice, no matter whether it is for the whole network or some groups. Good intentions need to be balanced with the existing resources, otherwise it might be counterproductive. The network has to offer space to explore these options

**Network needs for development**

Several needs for development of the Network are linked to **values**. In fact, the Network needs:

* to use the KMST as a framework for exchange on values and to ensure that there are places to exchange on the topics, priorities and engagement on policies for the programmes.
* to think about the integration of European values and to advocate for these values.
* to establish a system for continuous monitoring and development of the programmes and the future programme, to make sure that the opportunities in the programmes are the right and most relevant ones.

It is necessary for the Network to consider the approach for development of the programmes and the future programmes.  Moreover, the Network must develop its approach to reinforce, support and link with newcomers by having an overview of the situation of each NA. It is important for the Network to support and connect newcomers to the identity and legacy of the Network, so that we can understand and check-in to know more about the position and state of the NAs who form the Network.

Finally, the needs for development are also external: we must do more to inform and communicate to other stakeholders about our objectives, activities, impact and achievements as a Network.

1. Role of the Co-Group

The Network has the potential to make an impact on systemic change at any level – from local, regional, and national level to a European scale. Working as a network allows the National Agencies and their staff (often with quite different perspectives, strengths, and experiences) to work together to achieve a common goal in strategic implementation of the EU Youth programmes.

**The Coordination Group (Co-Group) is in the lead of and supports t**he Network**, with a following purpose:**

**As a community builder** – It supports building the community of practice and a coherent network that is needed to speak with one voice in quality implementation and development of the EU Youth programmes,  and to plan, implement and sustain the continuous development of and cooperation in the network.

**As a network facilitator** – It designs and coordinates network gatherings (Business Meetings) to help NA’s uplift their interests, identify challenges and structure network activities that connect NA’s strategically where there’s common need or interest and mutual benefit. The Co-Group sets the agenda, plans the process, and invites the stakeholders, etc. It coordinates network consultations on issues which arise.

**As a network catalyst** – the Co-Group encourages meaningful reflection and discussions, listens to capture and synthesize. It acts as a catalyst for the ideas of the Network members, gathers and translates these ideas into collective statements or coordinated action. The Go-Group generates new initiatives and makes sure to keep the attention of the network on the updates of these developments. It brings impulses and external input into the network - with the aim to link the different groups within the network and supporting the information flows. It seeks to balance the demand of implementing the programmes with the ambition we all share to develop them.

**As a network connector** – the Co-Group represents the network towards the Commission and other stakeholders, acting as a partner in the improvement and development of the programmes. The Co-group seeks external insights, information and knowledge which can impact the development and implementation of the programmes. It acts as a channel on behalf of the network to the COMM (for example in communicating the BM outcomes). It influences and advocates for the network and the programmes towards the wider stakeholder group. It seeks to foster good communication between the different parts of the programme/sectors/NA’s etc.

**As a network capacity builder** – the Co-Group supports needs analysis and seeks a variety of spaces and opportunities for development. It encourages and creates space for learning from each other, integrates new people in the network and support them to find their way. It keeps focus on maintenance of quality and capacity building in the network (network, structures and individuals) and initiates relevant discussions on solutions for bridging the gaps. It facilitates coherent implementation of the three roles of the NAs.

1. Co-Group Principles and Ways of Working

**Members and Membership**

Being a part of the Co-Group is completely voluntary, any Head of Youth NA may join the Co-Group and will be welcomed. Members do not always need to be a Head of Youth NA , they should however have a decision-making role in the Agency.

The process to join and leave is usually via an open call for members at the BM, at least every 2 years. Alternatively, network members can nominate themselves to the Co-Group, and then be confirmed at the BM. There is no upper limit to the number of members, although 11-13 is seen as an optimal number. But those who wish to join can join.

Those who do join, are expected to make the commitment to contribute to the work of the Co-Group. Members need to be able to dedicate an amount of time to the work of the Co-Group in support of the Network.  From time-to-time when or if members are unable to meet the commitment requirements, they are asked to communicate this to the group. If this is a prolonged period it can be discussed further with the Co-group.  The commitment includes a period of minimum 2 years.

The composition of the Co-Group should seek to foster the diversity of the network to be represented as best as it can. NA’s from the presidency countries (incoming, current and outgoing) have a specific focus and role on the presidency issues and the BM. They are members of the Co-Group for a period of 18 months: 6 months before, during and after their Presidency.

**Tasks of the Co-Group**

The Co groups is mandated to work on behalf of the network based on the agreed Network Workplan.

Members of the Co-Group commit to contribute to the following tasks :

* Participation in the Co-Group meetings
* Responsibility for and division of tasks between the members
* Preparation of BM content and ensuring input for BM
* Representation of Network towards other stakeholders
* Networking and inviting partners to engage with the Network
* Communicate and work with Facilitator/Technical support person
* Develop an info kit for BM hosts
* Follow-up of outcomes of the BM
* Responsible to ensure reporting/documentation of BM to the network
  + Drafting executive summary
* Sending executive summary to COM
* Rapporteur to the BM
* Monitor the implementation of the NA Networks strategy and workplan and report on the progress to the wider network and partners

**Meetings and decisions**

The Co-Group is primarily responsible for the organization of content for the BM, to ensure quality and to progress the objectives of the Network Workplan, it does this through;

* Monthly online meetings - approx. 2 hours- for regular updates
* A BM is hosted twice per year, by the presidency NA- the Co-Group meets for half a day before and after each BM
* The Co- Group meets separately twice per year
* The Co-Group should examine and evaluate its work by maintaining the practice of having one retreat per year

TheCo-group makes its decision about how to conduct Co-group business, and present its decisions to the Network. Final decision making in the Network is based on consensus

**Representation**

The Commission is a very important stakeholder for the Network, and over many years a good partnership and understanding has been established to deliver EU programmes for young people. The Co-GGroup is responsible for renewing and maintaining this partnership on behalf of the Network, in the spirit of co-design and implementation, through:

Ensuring a Commission representation and its input / discussion during BM

Renew and maintain co-creation and find new ways of discussion with COM, taking into account the importance of the different Units and sectors (Coordination Unit, Youth Unit with Programme Sector and Youth Policy Sector).

Develop long term plan in view of the mid-term evaluation and following political discussions in 2024.

While continuing these contacts, also other stakeholders should be approached such as national authorities, the EU-CoE Partnership, European Youth Forum, and others. The Co-Group should focus its networking efforts on stakeholder and partners as established in the Network workplan, as well as on topics that are a priority of the agreed Network workplan.

When invited by an external stakeholder, , the Co-Group should have a discussion about the appropriateness and whether there is something specific to discuss. Where relevant, offers for engagement in representing the network should be brought to the whole Co-Group and network where relevant.

1. Communication

**Communication - with the Network**.

The quality and accessibility of information to the network is a priority :

* To maintain an overview of all addresses to contact individual heads of NAs.
* NA heads are requested to keep the Co-Group updated with contact information
* Email [co-group@salto-youth.net](mailto:co-group@salto-youth.net) is always available
* The future Co-operation Platform will offer new opportunities

The Co-Group will issue important programme information to the Network – e.g. on the Programme committee. The NA of the Presidency Country has a clear communication role in this.

To improve contact with the whole network the proposal is to divide all NAs among the co-group members to be in contact with them: NA has a contact person in the co-group/buddy

**Communication - Towards the outside world**

To be active in the task to communicate the impact and achievements of the Network, the Co Group

* Identifies important stakeholders who should be informed
* Carry out mapping: what do we need to or wish to communicate, and identify what is already available and what should be developed for communication to these stakeholders
* Engage stakeholders, including the Commission (role for Network also) in communication and dialogue
* Establish a network newsletter
* Set up a task force for communication

**Communication- - Internally for Co-Group.**

* Establish a space within the new Co-operation Platform – to allow for effective project management / teams as an interim alternative

1. Financing

In building the Network Workplan there is an important practicality of costs and finance to be considered. Previous practice has been to cover additional hosting costs for the meetings of the Co-group from the BM participation fee. Considering the experience of the Co-Group for increased workload to support the Network during 2020 and 2021, and in anticipation that the objectives and activities of the Co-Group are likely to further increase in line with the demands of the Network Workplan there is a need to review calculation of costs and establish an adequate budget for this work. The budget needs to reflect the work and properties of the workplan. In parallel, it is also necessary to consider the costs and budget for the of the Knowledge Management and Staff Training (KMST) working group.

A proposal on financing these costs within the network will be developed.