



## **2015 report of the European Youth Forum on ERASMUS+ implementation.**

*The view of Youth Organisations in Europe on the implementation of the Erasmus+ - Youth in Action Programme*

The European Youth Forum is the platform of youth organisations in Europe. Independent, democratic, youth-led, it represents 99 National Youth Councils (NYCs) and International Non-Governmental Youth Organisations (INGYOs) from across the continent.

According to recital 19 of the Erasmus+ Regulation<sup>1</sup>, the European Youth Forum is identified as an essential stakeholder in order to achieve the objectives of the Programme, in particular by providing the Commission with regular, updated information regarding their various fields of activity and through the dissemination of the Programme results in the Union and in the partner countries. In this spirit, the European Youth Forum has put together this document gathering ideas and recommendations from youth organisations in Europe aimed at improving the overall usability of the Programme. The information collected in the report has been provided by the member of the European Youth Forum throughout the first half of 2015 through different tools and methods: a) an online survey opened in May and June 2015; b) online consultations held with the members of the Youth Forum Network on Funding for Youth Organisations<sup>2</sup>; c) informal face to face meetings held with member of the Youth Forum. The opinions and feedback of more than 50 INGYOs and NYCs have been collected, representing the view and voice of thousands of youth organisations in Europe.

In order to contribute even more widely to the overall implementation of the Programme, the **European Youth Forum asks the European Commission that the European Youth Forum would be regularly invited to the Programme Committee meetings of the Erasmus+ in order to share our expertise with the Commission and representatives of Member States.**

### **The implementation of the Erasmus+ Youth in Action Programme**

In 2015, Youth Organisations in Europe reported an overall improvement in the implementation of the Programme compared to 2014. While we applaud the efforts made, we believe there is still room for improvements on a number

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<sup>1</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/documents/erasmus-plus-legal-base\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/documents/erasmus-plus-legal-base_en.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> The Youth Forum Network on Funding for Youth Organisations is an online Yammer group gathering member organisations actively contributing to the work the Youth Forum does on funding for youth organisations.

of aspects linked to the implementation of the Programme and its policy priorities.

For instance, the European Youth Forum regrets to see that there are still considerable delays in the finalisation of contracts between some managing authorities and beneficiaries. This is putting at stake a considerable number of projects around Europe and we hope that this situation will not be repeated in the future.

In addition to that, **youth organisations are extremely worried about the situation in Greece and the difficulties faced by national and European authorities to restore in a reasonable delay the “procedural” issues faced by Greek authorities in implementing the Programme.**

### **- Policy Priorities of the Programme**

Recently, the European Commission has put a lot of emphasis on the radicalisation of young people highlighting how youth work can contribute to prevent radicalisation. Whilst we believe it is essential to emphasise the central role of youth work and non-formal education in educating adaptable, flexible and critical citizens for an increasingly complex society, where social inclusion, intercultural dialogue and well being of young people is put at its core, the youth sector should not be instrumentalised as part of the security agenda toolbox. However, as violent extremism does have roots in social and economic exclusion, making non-formal education more accessible does contribute to prevention of such radicalisation.

In view of that, we recommend that the Policy Priorities of the Programme should be:

- **focused more on the key role youth organisations play in society to empower young people and foster their participation in the decision-making process**
- **linked more to the cycles of the Structured Dialogue on Youth to foster coherence of policy making and use of European funding.**

### **- Coordination and harmonisation between National Agencies**

There is a strong need for harmonisation in the applied procedures in the different Programme Countries by the different National Agencies (NAs). To become a true European Programme, it is necessary to make sure that it is implemented by applying the same quality and procedural standards in all Programme Countries.

Beneficiaries have experienced substantial discrepancies in the level of quality standards and procedural practices applied by different National Agencies. For instance, beneficiaries receive conflicting information from different NAs regarding the reporting procedures on the lump-sum budget system.

Moreover, National Agencies proved to follow specific national priorities when evaluating projects. This situation is driving potential beneficiaries in looking for applicants in countries where the NAs are more inclined to funding projects in line with their organisations' priorities. This situation is leading to distorting the dynamics in partnership building and might undermine the truly European nature of the Programme in the long run.

European Youth Organisations are also experiencing linguistic barrier to access funding at the national level. Usually, their working language is English and they are experiencing difficulties in communicating with the NAs in the countries where they are legally established during the different steps of the project cycle (applications, feedback on the applications, reporting, general communication with the NA etc.). This is due to the fact that many NAs keep using their national languages for official communications with European Youth Organisations.

Although, most National Agencies in charge of the Youth part of the Erasmus+ have showed a global availability and willingness to support applicants, including European organisations, there are still cases where the support is not reaching acceptable standards.

As the information and services provided by different National Agencies differs considerably with variations in the level of quality of the information provided, we strongly recommend:

- **to put in place a system that would guide National Agencies towards common quality standards**
- **to make the available budgets per KA and per sector easily accessible after each application round on each NAs website in order to allow applicants to plan strategically their future actions.**

### **- Decentralisation of the Programme**

The decentralisation of the Programme towards the national level represents a serious concern for European Youth Organisations as they cannot apply anymore at the centralised level (EACEA) and they are now competing with their Member Organisations at the national level. Whilst the involvement of national authorities responsible for the Youth sector is essential to ensure the success of the Programme, it is important to not undermine its European dimension and thus its true nature.

The overall decentralisation of the Key Action 1 is perceived as a positive improvement as KA1 mobility projects are responding better to the needs of national and local youth organisations. However, the national management of Key Action 2 is much more problematic. KA2 should support innovation projects and exchange of good practices with a clear European wide perspective. In order to avoid duplication of similar projects funded by different National Agencies, thus jeopardising the expected outcomes of this KA, and considering the limited amount of resources available at national level for KA2 projects, we strongly recommend:

- **to consider centralising the management of KA2 projects at the EACEA level.**

In our opinion, this would lead to a better use of resources and would ensure a stronger European perspective for this Key Action.

### **- User friendly Programme and quality information throughout the project cycle**

Despite the improvements achieved compared to the first year of implementation, beneficiaries identified a number of recommendations to make the Programme more user friendly.

We recommend to introduce the following improvements:

- **provide clear indications as to which documents are needed at each stage of the project cycle and provide samples of those documents in a clear and accessible way.**
- **Put in place an evaluation system that would allow applicants to receive punctual feedback on the different part of their applications** as there is a lack of quality feedback regarding project applications, both rejected or granted. This system should be conceived as a tool to contribute to the overall improvement of the quality of applications received and implemented by all NAs at the same quality level.
- **Clear indications regarding the budget allocated to projects to be funded under the Balkan Window framework should be provided** by all National Agencies so that applicants can plan strategically their projects in the region.
- **The 2016 Programme guide should come with a track changes version from the previous edition and hyper-links should be created** in the pdf version of Programme Guide to connect quickly relevant parts of it.
- **Adapt the current eForms to projects involving more than 15 partners.** At moment they are not conceived for that and it becomes difficult to upload all the supporting documents required.

#### **- More extensive use of the Youth in Action label**

We regret to see that, despite the provisions of the legislator, the brand names for the different sectors of the Erasmus+ are not used. **We call for immediate re-introduction of the Youth in Action label for all projects granted under the Youth budget heading of the Erasmus+.** We believe that using the Youth in Action brand could contribute to valorise the specificities of the Youth sector, the experiences cumulated in the previous Youth Programmes and to further develop the Youth sector in Europe. Moreover, dividing the Programme Guide by sectors, using the different sectors' label names, would simplify the usability of the Programme as a sectorial approach is already reflected the de-facto in most Programme Countries where different NAs are in charge of the different sectors.

#### **- Participation of EU Neighboring Countries**

The cooperation in the youth sector in the wider Europe has proved to be extremely beneficial for both Programme and EU Neighboring Countries as a tool to promote European values and integration widely. **We call for immediate actions to put in place specific “windows” to allow Partner Countries Neighboring the EU to be more actively involved in the Erasmus+ Programme already as from 2016.**

#### **- Realistic unit cost rates**

The unit cost system for the budget calculation has been welcomed as a simplification in the application and reporting procedures. However, the rates applying to the different budget items are seen as unrealistic. The travel rates calculation system is disadvantaging beneficiaries living in remote areas and far from national airports. **We recommend to increase the travel rates thus ensuring a broad access to the Programme especially to beneficiaries coming from remote areas.**