SHADOW REPORT

ON THE MID-TERM EVALUATION
OF THE ERASMUS+YOUTH CHAPTER

european
youth forum

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document is the European Youth Forum Shadow Report on the mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme.

This European Youth Forum Shadow Report was commissioned with two specific intentions:

- first, to supplement the mid-term evaluation of Erasmus+ with a range of perspectives it could not necessarily be expected to yield, given that it was intended as a general evaluation of the newly integrated programme as a whole, specifically those of youth organisation applicants, users and beneficiaries;
- second, to inform a range of its advocacy messages with more solid evidence of how its membership and the wider youth organisation community experiences the Erasmus+ programme.

This document presents findings of research into issues both comparable with and distinct from those researched in the very comprehensive general evaluation commissioned by the European Commission, and conducted by ICF. In this sense it is not a 'true' shadow report. There was no ambition to check the accuracy of the mid-term evaluation, but rather to complement it with additional and more specific information on the perspectives of an important user group.

The key findings and messages emerging from this effort are:

- Similarly to its predecessors, the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter is a unique and important support measure for youth organisations and youth work, without whose funding much of the work being done would be impossible. Nevertheless, the emphasis of the Youth Chapter has shifted away from the role of collective learning in the direction of individual learning, and away from funding for the achievement of the diverse missions of youth organisations towards funding projects responding to specific institutional priorities;

- The outcomes and benefits of participation in the programme for individuals are extensive and wide-ranging, and are even more pronounced for young people with fewer opportunities. There are some natural spillover effects for the competence and capacity of organisations, but systemic-level impact on national-level policies

supporting youth work development, the development of youth associative life and the sustainability of youth organisations in Europe are not as apparent. Although this is a specific objective of the Youth Chapter, youth organisations do not see the programme as sufficiently well equipped (in terms of resources, in terms of structure and in terms of formats eligible for funding) to achieve it at scale;

- The overall level of funding available through the Youth Chapter is unprecedented, yet its action is not yet achieving critical mass. Youth organisations are finding it harder than ever to access this funding due to what they experience as a not entirely level playing field. Youth organisations feel at a disadvantage in comparison with public and private bodies, with more staff, resources and capacity to develop large-scale projects, manage diverse cross-sectoral consortia and work with the complex administrative procedures. Paradoxically, having the opportunity to engage with the Erasmus+ programme in that way would entail significant capacity development gains for youth organisations, and bolster the contribution of the programme to their sustainability;

- While the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme may have improved overall with the integration and decentralisation of the programme, youth organisation beneficiaries still struggle with the lengthy application process, the complexity of the procedures, with the administrative burden implied in applying for and receiving a grant from the Youth Chapter and with the many different ICT tools that are involved in the project management process. Specific procedural simplifications have been helpful, notably the lump sum system. Nevertheless, and overall, there is a sense that the programme is overly bureaucratic, not user-friendly enough and requires significant further simplification to make it attractive and usable (in an equitable manner) for youth sector stakeholders, especially less established youth organisations or those youth and other organisations working with young people with fewer opportunities. Technical and administrative challenges around communication and available support are also at the heart of why some youth organisations feel that Erasmus+ is not operating with sufficient transparency;

- The accessibility of the programme for the widest possible range of young people across Europe and even beyond, continues to be an important concern for youth organisations. While the Youth Chapter does well, especially on inclusion, in comparison with the results of other sectors, youth organisations are concerned about its capacity to meet its inclusion targets with the project formats currently in

place and with its current financial envelope, which they feel do not sufficiently take into account the barriers to participation experienced by young people, especially those with fewer opportunities;

- The relevance of the Youth Chapter is undisputed in many respects. It promotes a wide range of issues that are important to youth organisations, to youth work development and even to youth policy development, it provides substantial funding and it targets those with fewer opportunities. If anything, there is a sense that there could be more emphasis on the 'traditional' mission of the youth work that has emerged through the European institutional programmes - (European) citizenship and civic engagement, civil society development, participation of young people and non-formal education in their service, rather than labour market readiness and the skills agenda - especially at a time when many countries are no longer investing in those issues. At the same time, there is an acknowledgement that both of these sets of issues could be accommodated in the Youth Chapter with some recalibration;

- While the overall coherence and complementarity of the programme has been improved (alignment with various EU policy agendas, etc.), and it appears that more cross-sectoral cooperation with other sectors addressed by the programme would be welcomed, it remains challenging for youth organisations and is still something of an exception. Furthermore, the opportunities for youth organisations to engage with other funding mechanisms promoted by the EU or other institutions are limited. Specific measures to foster cross-sectoral cooperation and synergies are felt to be missing;

- The added value of the Youth Chapter funding is undisputed - there is no equivalent funding available in most countries nor from other international donors. However, in the same vein as the concerns around relevance, the question youth organisations are posing is what is the European added value - the added value European funding brings or the added value that the programme brings to the European project. Youth organisations would like to see the programme putting renewed emphasis on a European dimension that has more to do with enhancing a new narrative for the European ideal, which many of them see as their core business. European learning mobility among young people takes place in a completely different context than it did when Erasmus+ programme was conceived. At least in the EU 28, many of the young people participating in Youth Chapter funded projects have known nothing else than freedom of movement and low-fare airlines. What kind of Europe do they want to see emerging? Our findings show that

projects with this kind of reflection as their main concern are not necessarily being funded as a priority in the Youth Chapter;

- In terms of the contribution of the programme to the sustainability of youth organisations and youth associative life/civil society in Europe, there is a strong sense that without Erasmus+ things would be much worse, but currently the programme is not delivering to its potential for this specific objective of the Youth Chapter. Youth organisations point to a complex of factors, not least of which are those structural issues mentioned above, but which also extend to what we infer as a gap in perception regarding the primary purpose of the programme - between those who believe the programme is about supporting youth organisations as key actors of a European civil society and those who believe the programme is about promoting European cooperation to enhance learning mobility. In the same vein as the discussion regarding the European added value of the programme, more structured and diverse and inclusive opportunities to discuss and imagine new purposes for the Youth Chapter across this perception gap would be much appreciated by youth organisations.

Overall, and on the basis of our findings, including a close reading of the mid-term evaluation itself, we can conclude that the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter is an unprecedented and unique opportunity for young people in Europe and even beyond. And yet it could be so much more than that. The overriding impression that we can gain from our enquiries is that the potential of the Youth Chapter, as perceived by youth organisations, i.e., not only for institutional objectives but also for the flourishing of youth participation in the development of a European civil society and their co-creation of a civic space, is yet to be achieved.

An extensive variety of measures of a practical and of a political nature is needed to re-orient the programme's current development in that direction. These range from the development of a truly participatory approach to programme governance, as well as a stronger focus on promoting young people's active participation in political decision-making at all levels of governance across the EU and in partner countries, through the recalibration of funding for the Youth Chapter and its constituent parts in line with real demand, to the radical simplification of the programme to make it truly accessible to any youth organisation and especially those working with the most needy among young people.

ABOUT THE SHADOW REPORT

The European Youth Forum is the platform of youth organisations in Europe. It currently includes 104 youth organisations, both National Youth Councils and International Non-Governmental Youth Organisations. The European Youth Forum promotes the role and visibility of youth organisations as instruments of youth empowerment, involvement, representation, outreach and support for young people. In times of political, social and economic uncertainty, which inevitably negatively affect young people's life chances, youth organisations are powerful catalysts for positive change and contributors of innovative solutions to Europe's challenges.

As such, the European Youth Forum seeks to represent the interests and concerns of both youth organisations and young people around Europe, and advocates around three main goals: greater youth participation, stronger youth organisations and increased youth autonomy and inclusion. In this role, the European Youth Forum aims to contribute constructively to the field of youth affairs, to maximise the impact of its member organisations' expertise and to enforce a rights-based approach in the European youth sector.

With a view to substantiating its position with specific evidence, and to influencing relevant inter-institutional negotiations on the future of the Erasmus+ programme, especially its Youth Chapter, the European Youth Forum decided to prepare a shadow report on the European Commission's mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+/Youth in Action programme.

The main focus of the shadow report is the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+, and the way youth organisations and young people using it experience its implementation, and what benefits they see in it. The shadow report also seeks to highlight perceived shortcomings and points for improvement, specifically in the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+.

The European Commission mid-term evaluation

Article 21.2 of the Erasmus+ legal basis required the Commission to submit a mid-term evaluation by the end of 2017. This mid-term evaluation was expected to take into account the results of an evaluation of the long-term impact of the predecessor programmes. According to Article 21.3 of the same Regulation, the report should be submitted to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.

The Erasmus+ mid-term evaluation was conducted to:

- assess the effectiveness of the Erasmus+ actions to achieve the programme's objectives and evaluate the efficiency of the Programme and its European added value. The report also addressed the Programme's internal and external coherence, the continued relevance of its objectives, and the scope for simplification;
- assess the long-term results and impact of the predecessor programmes (Lifelong Learning, Youth in Action, Erasmus Mundus, ALFA, Tempus, Edulink, Sport preparatory actions).

The mid-term evaluation[1] was conducted by ICF International Incorporated during 2016 and 2017.[2] The evaluation was prepared in view of the requirements of the Better Regulation Guidelines[3] in addition to some criteria defined by the legal basis.[4] The results of the evaluation shall be used to improve the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme during the current Multiannual Financial Framework (MMF) period, and shall also inform the development of a successor programme for Erasmus+.

The mid-term evaluation addresses the following issues:

- efficiency of Erasmus+, including an assessment of the simplified grants and the scope for further simplification;
- cost-effectiveness of Erasmus+, including a comparison with the alternative actions or clusters of actions (relative efficiency);
- effectiveness of Erasmus+, including its contribution to the realisation of its general objectives and to the broader policy agenda of the Union including some conclusions on the likely impact of Erasmus+;
- European value added of Erasmus+ (including sustainability and strategic role);
- Internal and external coherence of Erasmus+ (including complementarity);
- continued relevance of Erasmus+ objectives;

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[1] https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents.evaluations_en

[2] https://www.icf.com/

[2] https://www.icf.com/

[3] http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/guidelines/toc_guide_en.htm

[4] Commission Staff Working Document: Mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme (2014-2020) - Annex 5e, Indicators of the Erasmus+ Legal Base. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/swd-e-plus-mte.pdf, p. 136.

- an assessment whether the transition to an integrated programme and the decision to discontinue some actions under older programmes has attained its intended effects.[5]

The mid-term evaluation drew on a wide variety of already conducted impact assessments, in addition to specific information-gathering activities and analysis of data collected about and within the programme since its roll-out in 2014.[6]

These included:
- an open online public consultation to collect general assessments of the performance of the programme, be it from beneficiaries and participants of Erasmus+ or from people or institutions that did not participate. This consultation contained forward-looking questions to access perspectives of respondents regarding perceived possible impacts, and perspectives regarding a new programme;
- targeted consultations of beneficiaries and participants of the programme and other key stakeholders (e.g., national and European policy-makers, staff of National Agencies and of EACEA) to collect their assessments of the programme and the effects it has on individuals (e.g., on their skills and competences), on institutions and on national or EU policies;
- an extensive literature review including a series of national reports prepared by national authorities, and other relevant documentation;
- analysis of data available about the programme from ongoing monitoring activities and collected specifically within in the evaluation process.

Furthermore, it was important for this mid-term evaluation to collect information that would permit an assessment of the value added of the programme. Therefore, attention was given to target a sufficient number of institutions and individuals that did not participate in the

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[5] Evaluation Roadmap: http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/roadmaps/docs/2015_eac_014_evaluation_erasmus_en.pdf.

[6] For example, Interim evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme (February 2011), Interim evaluation Youth in Action Programme (February 2011), Interim evaluation of external cooperation agreements in higher education, training and youth with the US and Canada (April 2011), Evaluation of Preparatory Actions and special events in the field of sport (July 2011), Interim evaluation of Erasmus Mundus II (March 2012), Interim evaluation of Tempus IV (November 2012).

programme, as well as participants in other programmes, in order to establish a counterfactual reference group.

THE SHADOW REPORT - OBJECTIVES, METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

Objectives

The objectives of the European Youth Forum Shadow Report on the mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme are to:

- present the views of youth organisations on the current implementation of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter, highlighting any aspects youth organisations are particularly concerned about;
- capture the state of the implementation of the Erasmus+ Youth in Action report highlighting its shortcomings and points for improvement from the perspective of a wide range of youth organisations;
- highlight experiences of youth organisations and members of the European Youth Forum relevant to the future development of the programme, especially in view of a new programme generation from 2020 onwards.

Given the integrated nature of the Erasmus+ programme, there was some concern that the European Commission's mid-term evaluation would not be explicitly tasked with the presentation of sector-specific information or data. The open public consultation asked respondents to qualify their evaluations in relation to the sector in which they are most active, sectoral stakeholders were targeted for their sector-specific experiences, and some sector-specific issues/challenges/situations are highlighted in the report. Nevertheless, the mid-term evaluation of the European Commission draws more general conclusions about the functioning of Erasmus+ rather than a comprehensive range of issues reflecting the sector-specific concerns of specific stakeholder groups. Therefore, one of the key motivations for the European Youth Forum in undertaking the shadow report project was to highlight the specific experiences of youth sector stakeholders, notably youth organisations, in the first three years of implementation of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter, including any issues which may only affect them.

Approach and methods

This shadow report has been elaborated in an iterative manner, using a review of literature available about the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+, as well as information publicly available about the European Commission mid-term evaluation, to develop a survey of youth organisations. The results of this survey were then used to establish further directions for enquiry through interviews with a wider group of youth sector stakeholders using and working on the implementation of the Youth Chapter and a focus group with a select group of youth organisations (see Annex 3). Empirical data about the programme (financial information, information about success rates, information about rates of participation, etc.) was then sought from relevant empirical research projects or from the statistical database of the European Commission, so as to have a basis for comparison and eventually corroboration of survey and other findings. Finally, with the publication of the ICF mid-term evaluation, we were able to access additional data about levels of participation and scale of resources, and to make some comparisons of perceptions and perspectives with its findings. With each new stage of enquiry, the team was in a position to specify more targeted avenues for further enquiry.

Nevertheless, the shadow report has been developed in accordance with a predefined enquiry framework, and the structure of our report has been developed accordingly. The enquiry framework had four main themes of focus, for each of which a series of specific questions and indicators were developed, as follows:

- outcomes of the Erasmus+ programme to date, focusing on its significant achievements at its different levels of intended impact;
- functioning of the programme according to the standardised indicators used in Member States' reports, notably effectiveness and efficiency, relevance, internal/external coherence and complementarity and European added value and sustainability;
- contribution to the sustainability of youth organisations and youth civil society;
- structure of the programme and its intervention logic.

Further, we have enquired into the extent to which youth sector stakeholders considered the European Commission mid-term evaluation comprehensive, as a means of identifying issues that for youth sector stakeholders, and especially youth organisations, are important to evaluate but that were not necessarily covered by the mid-term evaluation. Overall, stakeholders who could answer the questions (not everyone who answered our survey participated in the mid-term evaluation through the Open Public Consultation or key stakeholder interviews) felt that while the mid-term evaluation was comprehensive in

general, some key issues that are important for them were not addressed. Therefore, we compare some aspects presented in the mid-term evaluation documents (notably, the EC working document) to the findings of the shadow report. These comparative reflections focus particularly on any specific issues that are important for youth organisations, but that might not be addressed in as much detail in the mid-term evaluation, or for which results might not converge. These reflections are presented at the relevant moments of our report, rather than in one specific chapter.

The complete enquiry framework can be consulted in Appendix 4.

Sources of information

We have sought to access information and data from a variety of sources and using a variety of methods, as follows:
- specific youth-related programme documentation containing data collected on the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ by the European Commission, National Authorities in the member states, National Agencies, the RAY Network, the European Lifelong Learning Platform, Eurodesk, the European Parliament, etc.;
- information about the mid-term evaluation conducted by the European Commission and, where this was available to us, data and literature on which it was based (e.g., National Authority reports developed for the mid-term evaluation);
- general documentation about the Erasmus+ programme and its Youth Chapter (e.g., user guide, information in the public domain, etc.);
- a specific survey directed at youth organisations using the programme;
- interviews with a wider group of stakeholders engaging with the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ as users or implementers/managers, including National Agencies, staff of MEPs presiding over relevant oversight committees, representatives of the European Commission, representatives of other bodies funded through Erasmus+ (CoE/EC Partnership on Youth, Eurodesk), and so on.

We have used the standard social science research method of triangulation to ensure that our findings form a comprehensive and rich account.

Stakeholder participation

An important dimension of this study was stakeholder involvement. With the shadow report, the European Youth Forum seeks to present evidence of the functioning of the programme from the perspective of a wide range of users and beneficiaries of the Erasmus+ Youth

Chapter, not only its members. Hence, particular efforts were made to include as many and as diverse a range of Youth Chapter users and other stakeholders, although the emphasis of the report remains on the perspectives of youth organisations. Other stakeholders' perspectives have been included to demonstrate the breadth and variety of opinion, to corroborate the perspectives of youth organisations, and to point out any significant differences

Stakeholders involved in the elaboration of this report were:
• youth organisations (irrespective of membership of the Youth Forum) that have a track record of using the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter to run projects for a variety of purposes relevant to their own missions, as well as in consideration of the objectives of the programme, from local through European levels;
• representatives of other bodies involved in the programme in implementation, management and decision-making roles;
• representatives of bodies/partners funded through Erasmus+ programme with the aim of supporting the quality and recognition of the work being done through the programme and/or the availability of information about the programme.

It was important that persons participating in our information-gathering activities did so based on their own direct experience of using the programme. Hence, we targeted respondents who could speak to the full range of experiences of working with the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter from the perspective of youth organisations, including first-hand knowledge of:
• the structure and functioning of the programme;
• benefits of using programme funding for both the organisation and the young people engaging with it as members, volunteers, activists, etc.;
• challenges of working with available programme funding;
• writing applications for Erasmus+ Youth Chapter funding, whether these have been successful or not;
• managing and running Erasmus+ Youth Chapter projects (financial, administrative, programmatic and educational aspects);
• cooperation/working with National Agencies and the Brussels-based management structures;
• implementing activities with young people using Erasmus+ Youth Chapter funding, i.e., direct (educational) work with youth participants.

As evidenced by the profile statistics of the organisations that have responded to the survey, most participants of our enquiries combine several of these experiences. Please

refer to Appendix 7: Statistical Annex, for the full range of information about the survey respondent profiles.

Approach and limitations

The initial concept for achieving the objectives of the shadow report project was to conduct a true shadow of the European Commission evaluation, and to enquire into how its results match up or not with the perspectives of youth sector stakeholders actively using and working with the programme. This proved not to be possible as the timing of the two projects could not be brought into alignment - the European Youth Forum report was prepared in the second half of 2017, and although the mid-term evaluation was expected by end 2017, it was not published until the end of January 2018, and it was not possible for us to have access to any of the raw material (datasets, summary of National Authority reports, etc.). This meant that we were not able to make use of the empirical analysis conducted through the EC evaluation, nor the full range of literature specifically prepared by National Authorities about programme implementation. Furthermore, a significant portion of the information available about the programme is either of a general nature (i.e., not Youth Chapter specific) and quite some information of relevance was not available to the public at the time of elaborating our study.

Hence, our shadow report project had to adapt to the availability of information about the Youth Chapter of the Erasmus+ programme, either in the public domain, or that was shared with us voluntarily by relevant authorities and partners of the European Youth Forum or that we could collect with our own efforts and resources, which were significantly limited (especially in comparison to the EC-commissioned evaluation).[7]

It should be noted that only some of the numerical data that would be necessary to corroborate certain findings through qualitative analysis of survey responses and literature was available to us, or is available in general. On the one hand, we did not have access to any of the data prepared under the mid-term evaluation of the European Commission during our process. On the other hand, some of the data we would need is not being collected as part of the standard dashboard of indicators for the monitoring of the

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[7] We had access to 11 National Authority mid-term evaluation reports. In addition, two of the countries whose reports we had access to produced specific Youth Sector/National Agency reports. We have also used these. Refer to Appendix 4 for the complete list of reference documents we consulted in the literature review and generally to prepare the shadow report.

programme and some indicators on which information is being collected have proved to be less informative than initially hoped (e.g., type of organisation). With the publication of the ICF report, we gained access to a wider range of data about the programme, including the Youth Chapter.

As concerns the above-mentioned emphasis on the involvement of a wide variety of Erasmus+ Youth Chapter users and stakeholders, and despite our best efforts, it was a challenge for this project to access suitably qualified respondents in sufficiently large numbers in each/many programme countries. The resources and time available were not sufficient for large-scale empirical data collection involving representative samples of implementers or beneficiaries. The online survey was, therefore, designed to explore and gather different perspectives from various youth organisations to understand better their experiences of working with the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+.

Our survey yielded 92 discrete responses from youth organisations actively using the programme in different countries and for different purposes (see Appendix 7: Statistical Annex for the full profile statistics on participating organisations). Furthermore, we were in a position to conduct a focus group with 11 youth organisations working at both European and national levels (all of which also took the survey).

It should be noted that beyond engagement with National Agencies, and a review of National Authority mid-term evaluation reports available in the public domain, our study did not have sufficient capacity to engage with National Authorities.

In addition, we have reviewed the 11 reports prepared by the National Authorities and submitted to the European Commission as part of its mid-term evaluation process that we could access. Altogether these involved 700 pages of documentation. We reviewed and consulted an additional 65 documents, running to several hundred more pages of documentation, from a wide variety of sources (see the bibliography of literature consulted in the Appendices). And we have been able to speak to a wide variety of other concerned stakeholders involved in the programme, including National Agencies, representatives of the European Commission, MEPs, National Youth Councils and other stakeholders actively cooperating with the programme (EU-CoE Youth Partnership, Eurodesk, European Lifelong Learning Platform).

A more detailed description of our information-gathering activities can be consulted in Appendices 1- 5, and the complete list of literature consulted can be found in Appendix 6.

This document

This document is organised in 3 main sections. First we present our findings regarding youth organisation perspectives on four main areas of interest: outcomes of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter; functioning of the programme (using similar indicators applied during the mid-term evaluation); contribution of the Youth Chapter to the sustainability of youth organisations and youth civil society and the structure of the programme and its intervention logic. The second main chapter of the report addresses our main conclusions and the implications we can infer from them. And the third presents our suggestions for improvement of the current programme during its remaining operations and eventually for the successor programme. These three sections are supplemented by a series of Appendices presenting more information about our information-gathering activities and the overall framework within which the shadow report was developed, as well as the blank survey we used and the Statistical Annex.

FINDINGS

Introduction

This part of the report lays out the information we have collected from a variety of sources on several key themes from the perspective of youth organisation stakeholders in particular, as follows:

- Outcomes of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter to date
    - focusing on key achievements and benefits for youth organisations and young people

- Functioning of the programme focusing on the indicators used in Member States' reports:[8]
    - effectiveness & efficiency
    - relevance
    - internal/external coherence and complementarity
    - European added value

- Contribution to the sustainability of youth organisations and youth civil society

- Structure of the programme and its intervention logic

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[8] These were adapted from the OECD standard criteria for development assistance. For more information, consult the following website: http://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm.

Each of these sections has been written as a more or less standalone chapter. As much of the information we have collected overlaps between chapters, it makes sense to present what we have collected for each issue separately. The final section of the study attempts to weave together the different lines of thought outlined in this part, and to present ideas about what our findings might mean for the further implementation of the current programme till the end of the programme period, and for the next generation programme.

For each range of perspectives, from positive through ambivalent to negative, we have attempted to come to an evidence-informed conclusion about what might be termed a 'general consensus' regarding each point, based on the information and stakeholders to which we have had access. When speaking about a 'general consensus' we can only do so based on the salience any given perspective had among respondents to our survey, among interviewed stakeholders, in the focus group discussion, and on its presence in the available literature and aggregate evaluation materials. Of course, this cannot be considered a representative consensus. Nevertheless, it presents relevant perspectives on how the programme is doing, and provides a view of the spread of opinion across different stakeholder groups.

We have chosen a discursive approach for the presentation of our findings, relating positive and negative aspects and considering all the different opinions and perspectives collected. In order to provide readers with a sense of the importance of a given event, we indicate where specific issues have been emphasised by many or most stakeholders, and found to be important in the literature consulted. Conversely, when some perspective or another is found to represent the perspectives of only a few stakeholders, we make explicit that this is an 'outlier' perspective. At the same time, and in conformity with the chosen discursive approach, we have attempted to point out any significant convergences and discrepancies between the perspectives of the stakeholders involved regarding specific issues. This approach helps us to avoid the presentation of subjective perspectives and opinions as facts, at the same time as offering these perspectives the legitimacy of an airing and full consideration.

1/ Outcomes of the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+

The shadow report set out to gain an understanding of the perspectives of a wide variety of youth organisations, in particular, but also of other youth sector stakeholders. While the major focus has been on trying to understand whether the programme responds to the expectations of stakeholders, and where they see room for improvement regarding how the programme functions, an assessment of their perspectives on if/how the Youth Chapter of the Erasmus+ programme achieves its specific objectives was also an important area of enquiry. This yielded a lot of information about how youth sector stakeholders view the achievements of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter, especially as these relate to their concerns, issues and needs, and those of the young people around Europe they claim to represent.

Our enquiries in this relation focused on two main issues:

- first, we were interested in the achievements of the Youth Chapter of the Erasmus+ programme in relation to its specific objectives, and in relation to the different levels at which it is expected to bring benefits, as established by ongoing research and evaluation activities (notably the RAY Research Programme);[9]
- second, we wanted to find out more about which key outcomes and benefits of the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ are most important for youth organisations' concerns and needs.

On the first issue, achievements of the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+, the results of our enquiries can be summed up in relation to the three main levels at which it is expected that the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ should produce benefits.

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[9] http://www.researchyouth.eu/

Table 1: Levels at which the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ is expected to have benefits[10]

Level	Benefits expected by stakeholders
Beneficiary level	Improvements in the situations, competences, prospects, etc., of • Individual young people • Priority communities of young people (young people with fewer opportunities; young migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers; young people experiencing disadvantage; young people living with disabilities; among others) • Youth workers and other volunteers/professionals working with young people
Institutional level	Development of youth organisations' capacities and sustainability
Systemic level	Quality and effectiveness of the European & national youth sectors Contribution to cohesion in the society/ies in which the participants live

It should be noted that Youth Chapter official documentation mainly refers to beneficiaries in two categories - young people and 'youth workers' or staff - whereas research projects on the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ more often than not address surveys to youth participants and 'project leaders' when seeking evaluative input.[11] This is an important distinction, as project leaders are often youth workers, but it is by no means their sole profile. Noteworthy here is the fact that

• there are many countries participating in the Erasmus+ programme where the profession of youth worker is not regulated and does not exist as such;

• a large group of youth organisations using the Youth Chapter are both youth-led and volunteer managed and, therefore, have no staff per se; and

• many project leaders have so-called hybrid profiles, working in a variety of roles in the project (conducting face-to-face work with young people like a youth worker would, but also managing the project, like a staff member of an organisation would) at the same time as being a volunteer in the organisation and taking some form of leadership role.

It is important to make this distinction early on, as we are attempting to understand the Youth Chapter's benefits for several other profiles of beneficiary, as well as its wider impacts. We had only a limited empirical evidence base for assessing the Youth Chapter's benefits at our disposal, i.e., that which could be extracted from the RAY-MON surveys of

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[10] Erasmus+ programme guide: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/programme-guide_en.

[11] For example, the RAY Studies: http://www.researchyouth.eu/

participants and project leaders, and the European Commission Annual Report Statistics, and we have tried to avoid projecting successes that apply to specific groups onto others whose perspectives have not been explicitly researched, or onto the impact of the whole Youth Chapter.

The following table provides a general and synthetic summary of the benefits of the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ explicitly raised across all sources of information consulted, based on the empirical evidence available, and supplemented by stakeholder perspectives.

Table 2: Benefits of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter [12]

Beneficiary-level benefits of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter	
Benefits for individual young people	Improvements in competence, confidence and life skills European and international experiences and encounters International/intercultural friendships and experiences Subsidised opportunities for international learning mobility
Benefits for priority communities of young people (young people with fewer opportunities; young migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers; young people experiencing disadvantage; young people living with disabilities; among others)	As per other participants, and • access (often first) to international mobility • greater improvements in personal development, competence and confidence • sense of inclusion, belonging, being valued, integration • internationalisation • social inclusion • addressing marginalisation • reaching diverse target groups
Benefits for project leaders, youth workers and other volunteers/professionals working with young people	Access to international standards, practices and approaches in youth work Opportunities to innovate through international exchange of good practice International partners and networking Access to programme funding relevant to their target groups International/intercultural competence Competence development in NFE, youth work, youth policy, project management, etc.
Institution-level benefits of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter	

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[12] This table was established based on a review of literature, survey responses and the transcripts of the interviews conducted with stakeholders.

Benefits for youth organisations	Internationalisation of their work with young people/projects
	Capacity development of volunteers and project leaders
	Financial resources for different kinds of activities not financed at the national level
	Opportunities for international partnership, networking and exchange of good practice within and outside Europe
	Opportunities for cross-sectoral partnership, networking and exchange of good practice (for example, with formal education sector, etc.)
	Long-term development projects, new methods, learning from experiences of other
System-level benefits of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter	
European & national youth sectors	Examples of good practice
	New standards
	Some methodological innovation
	In some specific cases, catalysing the application of youth policy standards or changes to some policy provisions (mostly in the area of recognition of youth work or non-formal education)
	In some specific cases, encouraging more inclusive/participatory youth policy processes
Societies in Member States and participating countries	European values and attitudes acquired by participants of projects and project leaders are multiplied in a variety of ways

The results of the 2015-2016 transnational analysis conducted under the auspices of the Research-based analysis and monitoring of Erasmus+: Youth in Action project (RAY-MON) provides more detail and nuance regarding the impacts of the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ in relation to four of its specific objectives, as follows:

- to improve the level of key competences and skills of young people;
- to promote active citizenship and participation in democratic life in Europe;
- to strengthen social inclusion and social solidarity in Europe;
- to strengthen the role of youth organisations as support structures for young people.[13]

In terms of the strengthening of the level of key competences, respondents were overwhelmingly positive about the impact of their participation in the programme[14]

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[13] RAY data are based on information acquired from 16,373 participating young people and 2,951 project leaders around Europe through the RAY-MON survey conducted in October 2015 and in April 2016.

Competence development of project participants (PP) and project leaders (PL)

(PP) 11. and (PL) 10. Through my participation in this project I improved my ability ...
Sum of 'agree' and 'strongly agree'
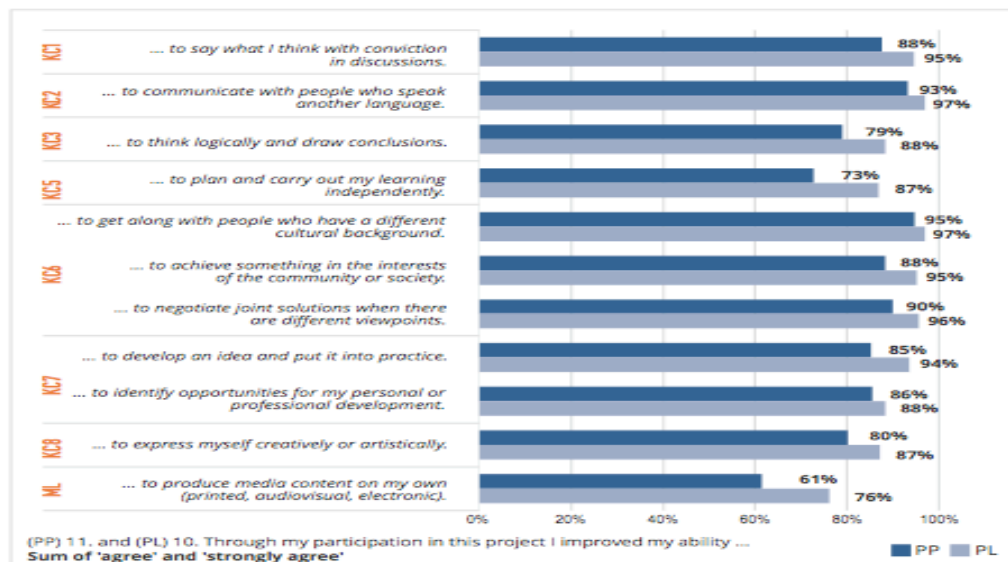
All the above-mentioned results can be said to be confirmed by the extensive research conducted by ICF during the mid-term evaluation.15 Notably, a comparison of results for Erasmus+ participants and results for the control group that did not participate (as beneficiary learners) points to the specific benefits that participants of Erasmus+ accrue. A short transition to employment (0-3 months) appears to be among those aspects which achieve a large positive difference. It should be noted, however, that these ICF results do not refer specifically to youth beneficiaries but to all categories of learner that participated.[16]

On the promotion of active citizenship and participation, RAY results show the extent to which various aspects of active citizenship and participation were strengthened or

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[14] RAY Transnational Analysis 2017, Executive Summary, p. 5. Available to download: http://www.researchyouth.eu/results-erasmus-youth-in-action.

[15] ICF Main Evaluation Report, Section 6: Effectiveness, pp. 207-407. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/icf-volume1-main-report.pdf

[16] Commission Staff Working Document, p. 24: Comparison of results for learning beneficiaries and control group. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/swd-e-plus-mte.pdf.

emphasised through the projects and programme (in the opinion of project participants and project leaders).[17]

The figure below shows, among other results, that participants and project leaders testify to having developed skills relevant and helpful for participation and citizenship.

Effects on participation and citizenship of project participants (PP) and project leaders (PL)
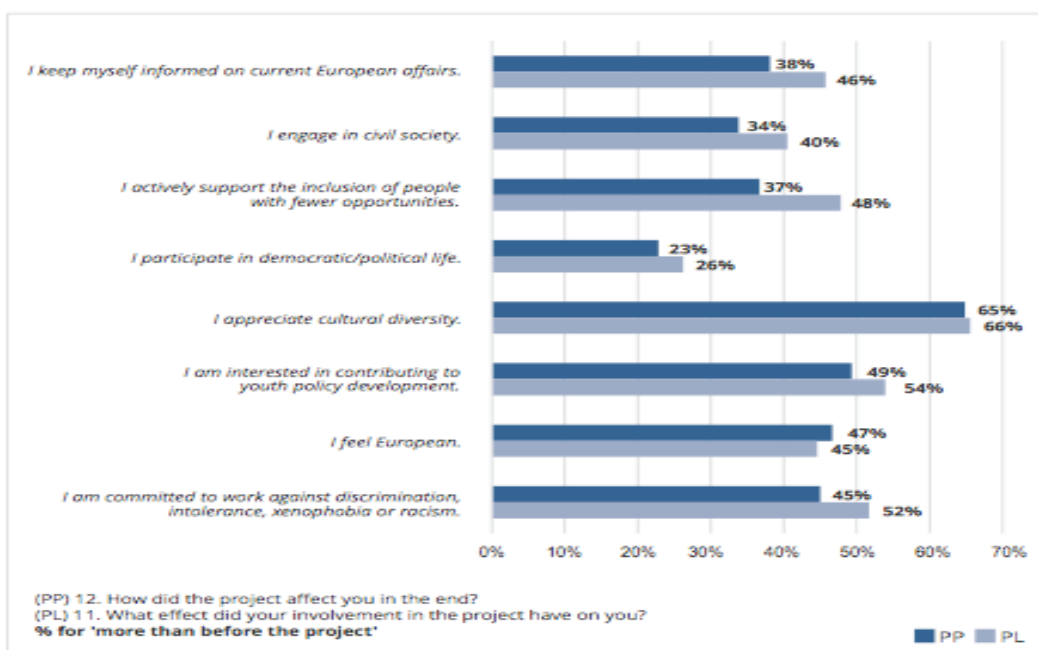
The mid-term evaluation points to the fact that the youth sector is one of the strongest sectors in relation to the citizenship objectives of the programme. Through its mapping of selected projects, it shows that for the youth sector, social inclusion, fostering and volunteering and active citizenship are the three most frequently encountered topics for projects. The same analysis shows that active citizenship is not among the top topics for any other sector. Furthermore, it is estimated that 19% of projects under all mobility actions and 9% of projects under all cooperation actions treat 'EU citizenship'.[18]

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[17] RAY Transnational Analysis 2017, Executive Summary, p. 6. Available to download: http://www.researchyouth.eu/results-erasmus-youth-in-action.

[18] ICF Main Evaluation Report, pp. 109-111. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/icf-volume1-main-report.pdf.

From these findings it is plausible to surmise that the Youth Chapter is contributing comparatively strongly to addressing the active citizenship objectives of the programme.

As regards the strengthening of inclusion and solidarity in Europe, RAY respondents were asked a number of questions regarding obstacles they may face in society (participants), and about the involvement of young people with fewer opportunities or with special needs in the programme (project leaders).[19] Noteworthy is that 47% of the respondents indicated that they experience some obstacles to participation. Participant-respondents see 'access to work and employment' as the most important obstacle and barrier to participation they experience. When asked to specify from a list, 50% indicated 'not having enough money', 16% cited 'living in a remote area', 15% indicated 'social background', 13% indicated 'low educational attainment' and 11% indicated family responsibilities and health problems (respectively). 61% of project leaders stated that their projects involved young people with fewer opportunities or with special needs, and 83% agreed with the statement that their 'project contributed to supporting the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities or special needs in the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme'.[20] When asked 69% of project participants and 76% of project leaders say that they feel their chances on the job market have improved. 73% of project participants and 81% of project leaders say that they got a clearer picture of what they want to do professionally.[21]

On the last objective, strengthening the role of youth organisations, RAY research points to multi-faceted possible impacts. Noteworthy here is the phrasing of the questions in the RAY research approach. Respondents (participants and project leaders) are asked to assess the impact of their participation in the programme for their organisations, rather than the impact

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[19] It should be noted in this relation that there has been some discussion and even criticism of the methods used in the context of RAY-MON and other European Commission monitoring for developing the statistics on inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities. See ICF Main Evaluation Report: Section 6.3 on Participation Patterns and Annex 2, section 2.2.3 on the reliability of data. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/icf-volume1-main-report.pdf and Commission Staff Working Document, p. 24: Comparison of results for learning beneficiaries and control group. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/swd-e-plus-mte.pdf.

[20] RAY Transnational Analysis 2017, Executive summary, p.7. Available to download at: http://www.researchyouth.eu/results-erasmus-youth-in-action.

[21] RAY Transnational Analysis 2017, Executive summary, p.5. Available to download at: http://www.researchyouth.eu/results-erasmus-youth-in-action.

of the programme on their organisations per se. This may seem like a nuance, but the distinction needs to be made, as these two are rather different. The former speaks to the standard intervention logic of grant-making schemes - that of multiplication - where the assumption is that by improving the competence of those working in the organisation, the organisation becomes stronger. The second speaks to another logic - that of sustainability - whereby the programme actively seeks to invest in the strengthening of organisational structure and capacity, not only through competence development but through organisational development, specific capacity-building measures and financial support. As such the RAY results provide only a partial view on how the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ functions for the strengthening of youth organisations.

The most commonly cited impacts relevant for strengthening the respondents' organisations include:
- increased competence for the provision of non-formal education;
- increased participation of young people in the organisation;
- increased appreciation of cultural diversity;
- a more intense involvement in European issues;
- subsequent interaction with European organisations and colleagues;
- increasing the number of new participants.[22]

The following table sums up how stakeholders participating in our shadow report enquiries see the benefits and achievements of Erasmus+ in relation to its specific objectives and expected outcomes of its Youth Chapter.

Table 3: Erasmus+ Youth Chapter achievements (in the view of participating stakeholders)

| Erasmus+ Youth Chapter promotes	- the European dimension in youth work - the quality of youth exchange and of non-formal education, as well as their recognition - innovation in the work of youth organisations (because of the rigorous application - process and the necessity to work in new constellations) - the visibility of the youth sector and of youth work

[22] RAY Transnational Analysis 2017, Executive summary, p.8. Available to download at: http://www.researchyouth.eu/results-erasmus-youth-in-action.

Erasmus+ Youth Chapter contributes to	• the development of a culture of dialogue and inclusion of young people in decision-making at the national and European levels • the structural development and institutionalisation of youth organisations, notably because it provides some structural funding to youth organisations • the internationalisation of youth work and youth activities • the development of a stronger European identity among young people • the development of policy change to a small extent
Erasmus+ Youth Chapter provides opportunities for	• young people with fewer opportunities to experience international mobility - for many this is their first experience of Europe • youth organisations to develop cooperation with other kinds of organisations and build more diverse and viable partnerships • conducting projects with non-programme countries • youth organisations to broaden the scope of their activities to different spheres like public health or for the mobility of young people with fewer opportunities (cross-sectoral cooperation)

The results of our survey of youth organisations provide more detail and nuance on this point.

Our survey of youth organisations asked for the three most important advantages of the Erasmus+ programme for youth organisations. Many respondents cite 'practical' aspects (for example, the lump sum system). Some, however, refer to more fundamental questions about the purpose of the programme. We take these issues up later in this section.

Another dimension of our enquiry about outcomes relates to the access that youth organisations have to funding for their own missions and the intended outcomes that they find important, including but also beyond those that the European programmes are promoting. The following graph shows the extent to which youth organisation stakeholders surveyed feel it is possible for them to access funding for a range of outcomes explicitly and implicitly targeted by the Youth Chapter.

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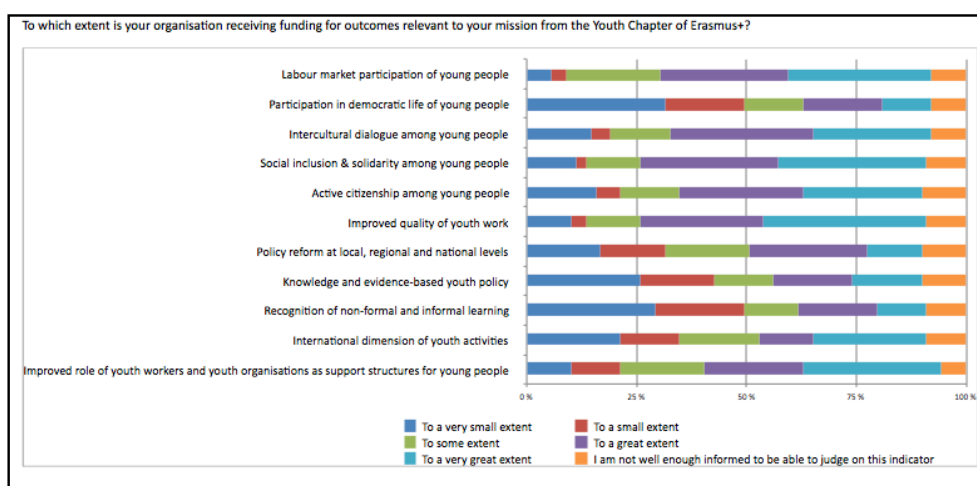
Although these results cannot be considered representative, because the missions of organisations vary considerably and this graph can only show a partial overview of issues that are important for youth organisation missions, it does show an interesting spread of opinion regarding the mission-related issues for which youth organisation stakeholders feel it is possible to access funding. If we only take the highest-ranking (to a very great extent - turquoise bar), then labour market participation, social inclusion and improved quality of youth work come out on top.

In relation to outcomes, it is not unimportant to think about the numbers of people involved in the measures granted under Erasmus+, i.e. the scale of action and extent of reach that this funding has. According to the Commission annual report for 2016, 2 million people have already used the programme so it is on target for its overall objective of 4 million mobilities for the entire programme period[23] In the current programming period (2014-2016) alone, at the time of the mid-term evaluation (i.e., without taking into account full 2016 data), the programme has benefited over 1.4 million learners and 400,000 practitioners. Approximately 67,000 projects have been contracted in the same period.[24]

Table 4: Key Data 2014-2016[25]

Key data, 2014 - 2016

	KA1	KA2	KA3	Jean Monnet	Sport
Projects received	108,904	34,298	4,456	2,425	1,325
Contracted projects	49,073	6,936	2,127	762	238
Amounts allocated (in million EUR) *	3,798.9	1,469.4	205.9	126.2	67.3
Participants	2,049,140	1,231,267	184,403	944,245	-

Source: Erasmus+ Programme Annual Reports 2014-2016 (taking into account fully 2016 data)

*Amounts not only for project grants but including also operating grants

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[23] European Commission, Erasmus+ Annual Report 2016. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents/erasmus-annual-report-2016_en

[24] Commission Staff Working Document. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/swd-e-plus-mte.pdf.

[25] Commission Staff Working Document. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/swd-e-plus-mte.pdf.

It must be noted here that It is often difficult to assess the overall scale of involvement of young people in Erasmus+, even under its Youth Chapter, as in its current integrated format individual young people can take part in a variety of measures across sectors. Theoretically, the programme is open to any person meeting the eligibility criteria for the project format. Hence, many young people are also Erasmus students studying abroad, or take part in a vocational education mobility.

However, in the context of a discussion of the outcomes and achievements of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter, and assessment of the scale of participation on the part of young people, we really must focus on only those programme formats that can be considered dedicated Youth Chapter activities, such as European Voluntary Service and Youth Exchanges.

In so doing, the 2016 statistics look like this:

- For European Voluntary Service: 2,000 projects, with 51.7 million euros of granted funding, involving 10,000 organisations and almost 11,000 volunteers, of which almost 30% are counted as young people with fewer opportunities. Turkey, Italy and France lead in sending and Italy, Poland and Spain lead in receiving EVS volunteers.[26] In total in 2016, 51,778,754 euros were invested in EVS;[27]
- For Erasmus+ Youth Exchanges: approximately 100,000 young people, of which 55% were female and 45% were male, and 30% are considered to be young people with fewer opportunities. Exchanges averaged 8.5 days in duration.[28] Overall in 2016, 50,500,847 euros were invested in Youth Exchanges.[29]

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[26] Infographics on Erasmus+ Youth Exchanges and European Voluntary Service, European Commission, Erasmus+ Annual Report 2016. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents/erasmus-annual-report-2016_en.

[27] Statistical annex 2016 EC Annual Report p. 44, Annex 19 - KA105: Youth mobility - projects contracted under call 2016. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/sites/erasmusplus2/files/annual-report-2016-stat-annex_en.pdf.

[28] Infographics on Erasmus+ Youth Exchanges and European Voluntary Service, European Commission, Erasmus+ Annual Report 2016. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents/erasmus-annual-report-2016_en.

[29] Statistical annex 2016 EC Annual Report p. 44, Annex 19 - KA105: Youth mobility - projects contracted under call 2016. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/sites/erasmusplus2/files/annual-report-2016-stat-annex_en.pdf.

The overall figure given for youth learning mobility opportunities funded in the first three years is 209,000 (this covers European Voluntary Service and Youth Exchanges). The overall number of youth practitioners supported by the programme in the first three years is 101,437.[30] No comparison can be made with the predecessor programmes. In terms of the number of organisations funded, the figure quoted for the Youth Chapter is 11,268. It is estimated that in the first three years of the new programme, 21,101 young people participated in European Voluntary Service, which represents a small decrease in comparison to the predecessor programmes. 1,043 projects were funded with the intention of supporting cooperation between organisations. Both of these figures represent a strong decrease in comparison to the predecessor programme.[31] The fact that fewer organisations and projects have been funded is not necessarily surprising, however, given that Erasmus+ was designed to fund fewer, but more multifaceted projects with a larger average number of participants.[32]

These results are of course impressive, and our enquiries with youth organisation stakeholders demonstrate great appreciation for the fact that in absolute terms there has never been more funding in the Youth Chapter of any previous European programme. Indeed, our survey shows that youth organisation stakeholders are overall satisfied with the scale of funding theoretically available to them through the projects for which they are eligible to apply.

In answer to the question: 'Regarding the following indicators, how would you rate the extent of relevance of scale of funding provided by the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+?', almost 50% of respondents answered, 'relevant to a great extent' or 'relevant to a very great extent'.

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[30] ICF Main Evaluation Report, pp. 223-224. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/icf-volume1-main-report.pdf.

[31] ICF Main Evaluation Report, pp. 228-230. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/icf-volume1-main-report.pdf.

[32] European Commission, Erasmus+ Annual Report 2016: http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about/statistics_en

How would you rate the extent of relevance of the scale of funding available in the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter?

I am not well enough informed to be abl...
3.4%

5: Relevant to a very great extent
15.7%

3: Relevant to some extent
28.1%

3.4%

15.7%

28.1%

20.2%

4.5%

28.1%

2: Relevant to a small extent
20.2%

1: Relevant to a very small extent
4.5%

4: Relevant to a great extent
28.1%
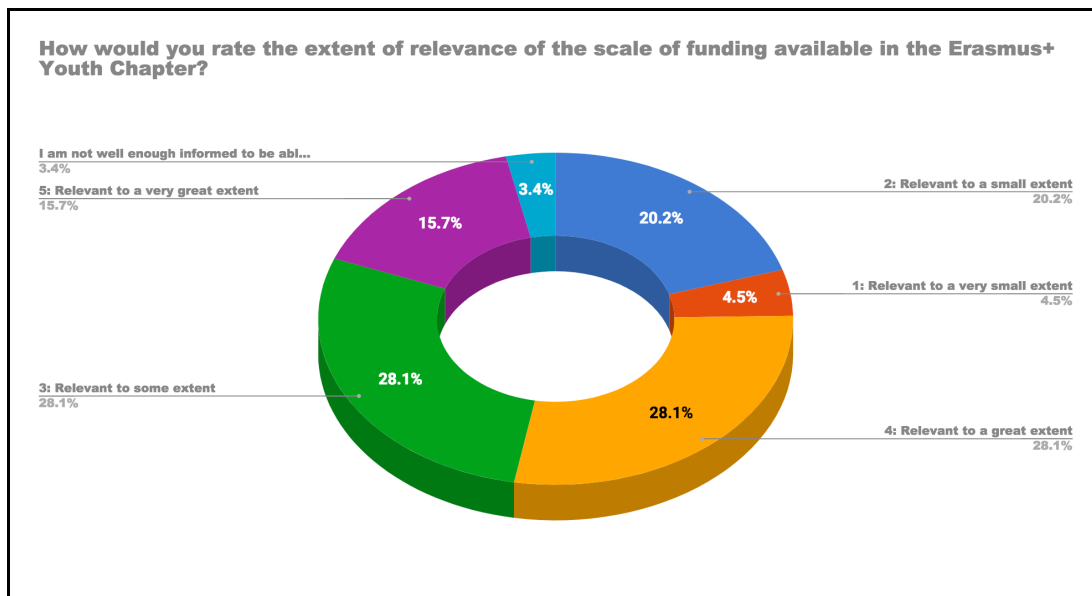
Nevertheless, it is important to put these figures into their rightful overall context. If we compare the available figures on funding for youth specific measures to the overall funding available for Erasmus+, and the other sectors it funds (notably Higher Education), and if we compare the overall funding allocated to Erasmus+ within the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), the level of investment in youth looks very different.

Erasmus+ was allocated circa 14.8 billion euros for the 2014-2020 period.[33] Within Erasmus+ the allocation to Youth is approximately 10% of the whole. To contextualise this, Higher Education alone receives 33.3% of the overall Erasmus+ budget. Together, all actions related to education and training (without youth) amount to 77.5% of the budget.[34] Furthermore, despite the overall significant budget increase compared to the previous programming period (which was funded with 9 billion euros), the draw-down on the budget increase is only foreseen to happen in the period from 2017-2020.[35]

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[33] The Programme has an overall indicative financial envelope of 14.774 billion euros under Heading 1 of the EU Budget and of 1.680 billion euros under Heading 4 and the EDF for the seven years (2014-2020), EU-28 appropriations. Source: Commission Staff Working Document, p. 12, footnote: 39. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/swd-e-plus-mte.pdf.

[34] European Youth Forum "Policy Paper on the Erasmus+ successor programme", Cascais 2017 Council of Members. Online at: http://www.youthforum.org/assets/2017/11/0119-17_PP_ErasmusPlus_Successor_Programme.pdf.

[35] Commission Staff Working Document. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/swd-e-plus-mte.pdf.

These figures link to many of the more critical positions of stakeholders regarding the outcomes and benefits of the programme. Our findings point to several key issues of convergence across respondents and the evaluative literature reviewed.

First, and while stakeholders across the board acknowledge the value of the Youth Chapter of the programme for the personal development and even for the eventual employability of young people, many participating youth organisation stakeholders feel the 'skills agenda' is too dominant as a criterion for the evaluation of the programme's impact, and therefore also as a criterion for the differentiation between project applications. An interesting nuance can be brought to this reflection by the most recent data from the RAY studies on Erasmus+ Youth Chapter outcomes in terms of the promotion of participation and active citizenship. As mentioned above, a very high proportion of project leaders and project participants indicate that they have become clearer about what they would like to do professionally and feel their chances on the labour market have been improved. RAY also shows that participation strengthens key values, like appreciation for cultural diversity or commitment to combating racism or intolerance. However, the same analysis shows that only 34% of participating young people have been motivated to engage more in civil society and only 24% participate more in democratic/political life. For citizenship 'agency', in other words for developing the capacity to act on newly acquired attitudes and values, participation in the programme appears to be less effective.[36]

Linked to this is that our findings point to differences of opinion and emphasis regarding what participating stakeholders perceive as the 'higher purpose' of the programme. In particular, the youth organisations and National Agencies participating in our enquiries place more emphasis on the political and social objectives of the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+, a position they feel is justified because these objectives are so explicitly outlined in specific political declarations and programme documents that also include clear normative value orientations (notably, but not limited to, specific articles of the Erasmus+ founding documents, and the recent Paris Declaration).[37] These stakeholders perceive such documents as the framework within which the 'bigger picture' the Youth Chapter should

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[36] RAY Transnational Analysis 2017, Executive summary. Available to download at: http://www.researchyouth.eu/results-erasmus-youth-in-action.

[37] For example, Articles 2(f) and 11.1.a of Erasmus+, Article 2 of the Lisbon Treaty and Declaration on 'Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non - discrimination through education' made in Paris by the EU Ministers of Education on March 17, 2015, available at: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus/news/promoting-citizenship-and-common-values-freedom-tolerance-and-non-discrimination-through-education_en

serve should be interpreted. Other stakeholders continue to place more emphasis on the contribution the programme is making to learning mobility, employability and skills development in line with the European Youth Strategy and the wider competitiveness agenda of the European Union.

Notably, the idea that a key purpose of the Erasmus+ programme is to support youth organisations is a point of dissent among different categories of stakeholders consulted. Some are more inclined to see youth organisations as one among many vehicles the programme uses for supporting young people, and for achieving the wider objectives of the programme and of the Youth Chapter. Others are more inclined to see the role of the programme in terms of the development of youth work with a European/international dimension. Others again are more likely to conceptualise the programme's primary role as a support mechanism for the sustainability of youth civil society and associative life. Of course, none of these perspectives can be considered wrong. All three aspects are present in the Youth Chapter specific objectives. This said, there has clearly developed a gap in perception between different categories of stakeholders using, implementing and also managing the programme, which might also account for the reported gaps in communication and trust that have been raised during our enquiries. The specific point of trust will be discussed in a later section of this report.

Some perspectives collected, especially through the survey and focus group with youth organisations, were particularly critical as concerns how the objectives of the Youth Chapter are being put into practice. Notably, there is a sense among some that the 'real' objectives of the Youth Chapter are being subverted by the approach to implementation, especially the integration of this programme. Here it is clearly important to factor in that a large number of youth organisations, especially the larger and established ones, have long-standing relationships with the EU youth programmes that preceded Erasmus+. Their previous experiences of a dedicated Youth in Action programme necessarily colour their experience of an integrated programme that has changed their positioning and access as applicants and beneficiaries. This issue and the challenges associated with it will be elaborated upon further in the section on the functioning of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter.

A further point of importance concerning Erasmus+ outcomes relates to issues of access to the programme. There were two layers to this issue for participating stakeholders.

The first relates to the accessibility of the current Erasmus+ programme. According to almost all stakeholders, the integrated implementation of this programme makes it especially hard for newcomers and less established and professionalised organisations to engage with the Youth Chapter. Input from stakeholders testifies to the Youth Chapter no

longer being seen as an opportunity for such organisations, because they experience the barriers to entry as too high. The combination of factors creating this situation is complex and appears to relate to both the new access that other kinds of more professionalised organisation (e.g., higher education establishments, for-profit companies, etc.) have to Youth Chapter funding and the increased competition for the limited funding available in the Youth Chapter that this implies. This makes the chances of success relatively low even with an excellent project. Furthermore, youth organisations testify that the level of funding of accepted projects is often not adequate to the actual costs. This is experienced as discouraging by new and less experienced/under-staffed youth organisations wishing to internationalise their work and to develop European partnerships. A number of stakeholders pointed out that organisations are making the conscious decision not to attempt applications because the cost benefit ratio does not make sense for them. We shall come back to this point in more detail in the section on the functioning of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter, as it is also quite bound up with the administrative and bureaucratic challenges faced by youth organisations in using the programme, as well as a number of other obstacles to making best use of the programme for their own missions.

The second dimension of the access question in relation to outcomes is linked to the priority given by the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter to young people that have fewer opportunities, as well as those that are harder to reach. On the one hand, this continues to be understood by all stakeholders as a really important priority for the programme, and there is definitely pride in the community of practice that the Youth Chapter is doing comparatively well in integrating young people with fewer opportunities into programme activities. Those young people are known to gain a lot from their experiences, which they would not usually have access to, and which have great impact on their learning and inclusion.[38] This said, there continues to be a sense that the programme remains far too inaccessible for the vast majority of young people around Europe, and especially those with fewer and fewest opportunities, as a result of many factors and regulations. Furthermore, the ICF report researched this in some depth, and found that the methods for establishing the statistics on how many young people with fewer opportunities are actually engaged through the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter are not entirely reliable.[39]

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[38] RAY Transnational Analysis 2017, Executive summary. Available to download at: http://www.researchyouth.eu/results-erasmus-youth-in-action.

[39] ICF Main Evaluation Report, p. 152. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/icf-volume1-main-report.pdf.

In addition, stakeholders across the board pointed to the fact that reaching young people with fewest opportunities to engage them in the programme is an extreme challenge, especially as active youth information measures are reported to be rather under-funded. There is a strong sense that the young people with fewer opportunities whom the Youth Chapter actually manages to reach are in fact those that are already 'back on track' for mainstream participation in formal and non-formal education, labour market and leisure time opportunities. Young people whose structural inclusion is hardest for the mainstream providers are also those who have least access to the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter, i.e., young people living with disabilities or illnesses, youth living without parental care or in state care, young people not in education, training or employment and young people with minority religious, ethnic and/or other backgrounds, to name but a few. In this context, stakeholders feel that even with the research being conducted by RAY, not enough is known about the 'real' scale of participation of young people with fewer opportunities, noting that efforts to assess how many young people with fewer opportunities are involved in Youth Chapter funded projects can be problematic, however well-meaning. Some National Agencies prefer to work with the promotion of inclusion projects, through enhanced assessment criteria in this relation, rather than trying to count how many young people could be defined as experiencing fewer opportunities. These questions of access will be taken up again from a different perspective in the section on the functioning of the programme and in the section on its European added value.

In this context, the main ICF report states:

> Against this background emerges a rather critical assessment provided by the expert panel assessment regarding the project outputs' ability to address disadvantaged and hard-to-reach groups under Erasmus+. It suggests that, while a good share of projects viewed considered different disadvantaged groups, this was often not substantiated with concrete actions. On the contrary, it remained an ambitious but unaddressed objective from the proposal without developing suitable outputs specifically for the disadvantaged. Additionally, the expert assessment found that some projects lacked a narrow focus on a clearly identified group (i.e. young people with disadvantages), making it unlikely to identify and meet their probable needs. Overall, while the efforts of Erasmus+ in this aspect are being recognised by a majority of interviewees, there is a shared perception among all groups of respondents that there are still important flaws or limitations in the programme design in terms of disadvantaged and hard-to-reach groups.[40]

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[40] ICF Main Evaluation Report, p. 152. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/icf-volume1-main-report.pdf.
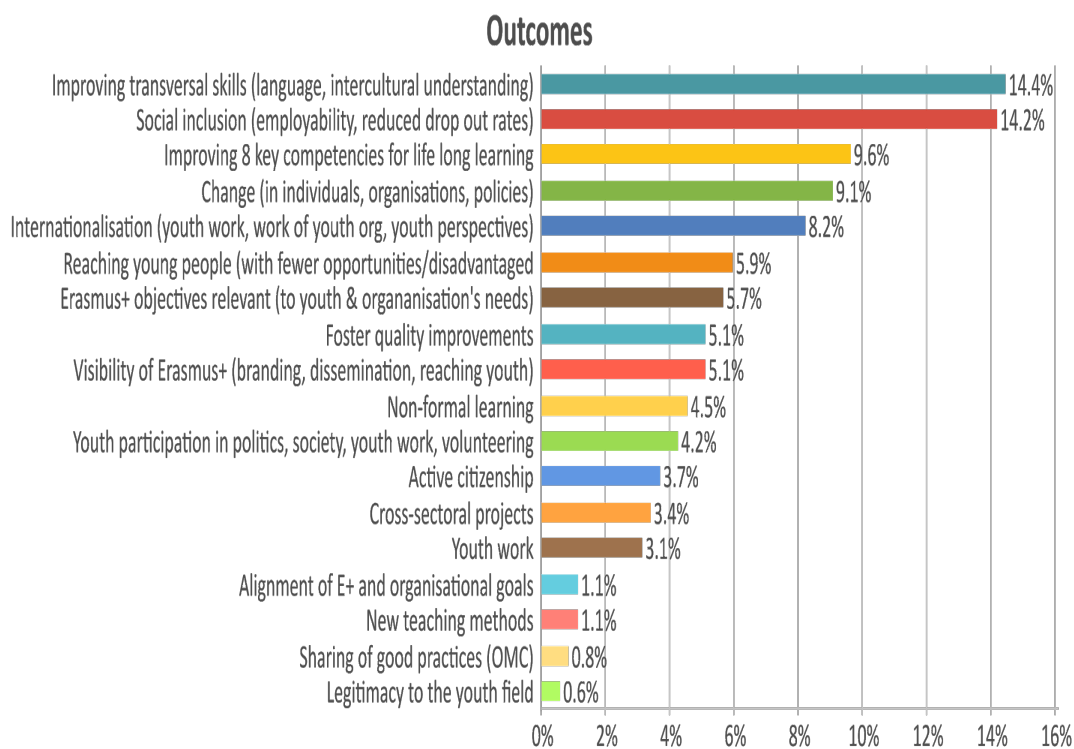
Another major point of criticism relating to the outcomes of the programme that we can discern from our findings concerns the balance between scale of impact and quality of impact. As outlined above, the Erasmus+ programme came with the ambitious target of giving 4 million people a mobility experience by 2020. The numerical results on participation so far are, of course, impressive. It would indeed appear that the demand for individual mobilities is growing. In the first three years of the programme, the number of youth mobilities funded has grown substantially, and is well over the targets.[41] So usage is growing, but supply is not necessarily keeping up with demand. Indeed, practically every stakeholder involved in our enquiries pointed out that the funding available for the Youth Chapter is below what would be needed to meet apparent demand, especially in Key Action 1. Specifically, regarding the Youth Chapter, participating stakeholders, including some National Agencies, pointed to the challenges that are inherent in spreading the budgets available too thin to meet the demands of numerical targets. More mobilities with less money may raise the numbers of individuals participating, but stakeholders pointed out that this has an impact on who can participate, how participation is organised, and the quality of the learning experience that mobility can deliver.

Hence the educational quality of the mobilities currently funded was also questioned by some stakeholders during our enquiries. There are concerns among some youth organisations, especially those most invested in the co-development of quality standards for the practice of European Voluntary Service and youth exchange over many years of engagement, that the integration of the programme, and therefore the eligibility of for-profit companies to access Youth Chapter funding, has created something of an 'EVS Market'. Such companies have sufficient professional capacity to be able to absorb large-scale funding and are organising multiple mobilities, but are criticised for not giving sufficient attention to the educational and learning quality. Many youth organisations feel they cannot compete, although they may well deliver better quality learning mobility experiences to young people. These organisations are, therefore, also concerned that the overall success rate for projects presented by youth organisations is going down. The question of the competition for funding created by the integration of the programme, and therefore, its inclusiveness, shall be taken up under the section on functioning.

Our analysis of the National Authority reports demonstrates that they assess the most important outcomes of the programme from their point of view, as follows. This ranking has been established on the basis of the frequency with which each outcome has been

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[41]ICF Main Evaluation Report, pp. 223-224. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/icf-volume1-main-report.pdf.

discussed in the reports, based on the detailed coding of the reports. The horizontal bar chart below shows percentages corresponding to the absolute frequency of all sub-codes within an analysed outcome.[42]

Outcomes

Outcome	Percentage
Improving transversal skills (language, intercultural understanding)	14.4%
Social inclusion (employability, reduced drop out rates)	14.2%
Improving 8 key competencies for life long learning	9.6%
Change (in individuals, organisations, policies)	9.1%
Internationalisation (youth work, work of youth org, youth perspectives)	8.2%
Reaching young people (with fewer opportunities/disadvantaged)	5.9%
Erasmus+ objectives relevant (to youth & organanisation's needs)	5.7%
Foster quality improvements	5.1%
Visibility of Erasmus+ (branding, dissemination, reaching youth)	5.1%
Non-formal learning	4.5%
Youth participation in politics, society, youth work, volunteering	4.2%
Active citizenship	3.7%
Cross-sectoral projects	3.4%
Youth work	3.1%
Alignment of E+ and organisational goals	1.1%
New teaching methods	1.1%
Sharing of good practices (OMC)	0.8%
Legitimacy to the youth field	0.6%

Percentages based on frequency of coded segments within each outcome mentioned in analysed NA reports

An interesting view on the findings discussed above is provided by comparing the spread of opinion on outcomes of the programme between National Authorities and youth organisations involved in our enquiries. The following chart does exactly that.

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[42] More information about the specifics of the method can be found in Appendix 3.

Outcomes

Percentage difference between coded segments of National Authorities reports (red) and youth organisations perspectives (blue)
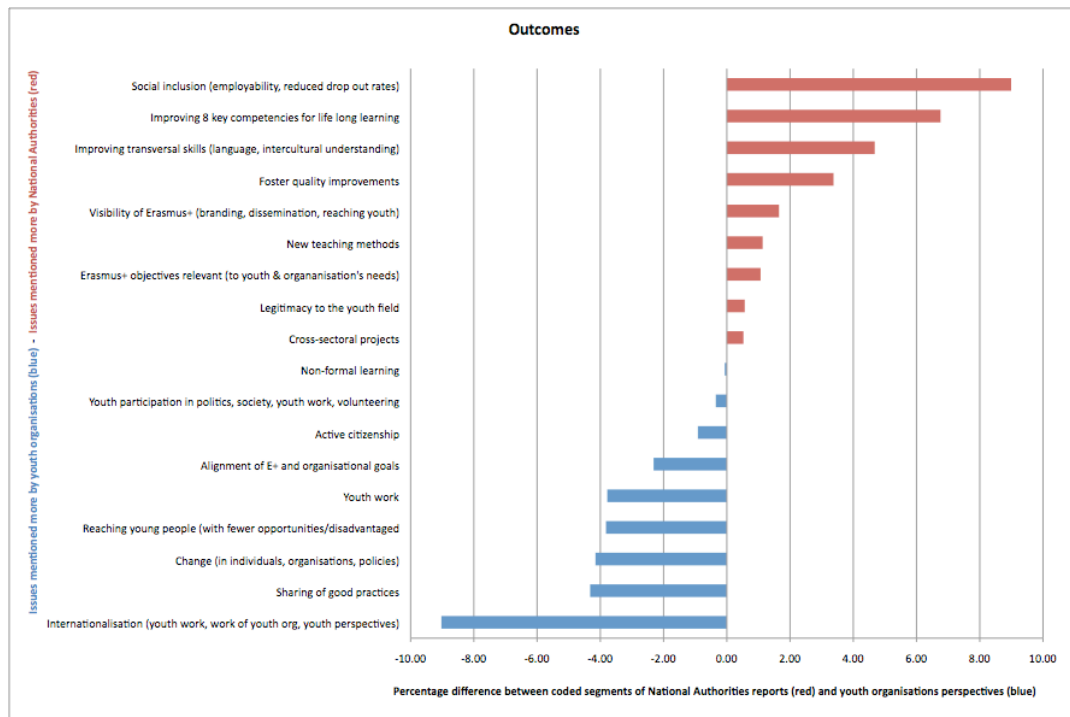
Using the same method of coding textual material at our disposal (11 National Authorities reports and narrative responses to our survey of youth organisations, transcripts of focus group and interviews with youth organisation representatives) as for the previous chart, we calculated frequencies of coded segments and their corresponding percentages for each analysed outcome of the programme, and compared the results between National Authorities and youth organisations. We can notice divergence between stakeholders in how much some outcomes are mentioned and how much relevance they assign to these outcomes. To emphasise these differences in perspective and to present them in chart form, we have simply deduced percentage values for each of the coded outcomes as presented in the chart.

As revealed by the chart, and comparison to youth organisations, the National Authorities whose reports we had access to (red results) place more emphasis on social inclusion (9% more), improving 8 key competencies (6.8% more), and improving transversal skills (4.7% more). In contrast and in comparison to National Authorities, youth organisations (blue results) place more emphasis on internationalisation (9% more), sharing of good practices (4.3% more) and changes the programme makes in individuals, organisations and policies (4.2% more).

From this we can deduce that the National Authorities whose reports we had access to place more emphasis on outcomes that relate to the improvement of individual skills as a

contribution to social inclusion and by extension labour market readiness. For their part, youth organisations are more concerned with the relationship between individual and collective/organisational outcomes, and see the internationalisation and exchange of good practices that the programme entails for them as a positive change. Here as well, we can observe a tension between how different stakeholders perceive the inherent purpose of the programme - between skills agenda and the promotion of European values. Of course, these goals are not mutually exclusive, however, greater emphasis on either or unrealistic expectations regarding what the programme is for, can lead to unfulfilled expectations.

In terms of systemic outcomes, the specific objectives of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter hope to support the development of an enabling (youth) policy environment, as a contribution to supporting the development of youth participation, youth work and youth civil society. If and how the programme achieves this will be taken up in more detail in the later chapters of the report. Suffice it to say at this point that while the impact of participation in those offers of the programme available to individuals is extremely valuable for their own personal and even professional development, our enquiries do not indicate a strong sense on the part of youth sector stakeholders that the programme is having a strong systemic impact on the policy and programmatic conditions in which youth organisations are developing their work - at European level or at the level of participating countries. This finding is also confirmed by the mid-term evaluation. The Commission Staff Working Document states that, '… for the youth sector … it is difficult to evaluate to what extent the programme succeeds in reaching a critical mass', and that critical mass is seen as having the best potential for systemic impact.[43] Furthermore, the overall conclusion regarding system-level impacts in the European Commission Staff Working Document states that not all KA3 case studies could identify system-level effects, although this is the action that is specifically designed for that purpose.[44]

Here, the perspectives of the National Agencies that participated in our enquiries are most interesting. Although this must be considered a generalisation, and there are certainly exceptions, it is reported that the position and attitude of the responsible Ministry and the National Agency is a key determining factor for the way in which the systemic impact of the programme functions (or does not). This finding is also confirmed by the mid-term

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[43] Commission Staff Working Document. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/swd-e-plus-mte.pdf.

[44] Commission Staff Working Document, p. 37. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/swd-e-plus-mte.pdf.

evaluation, which indicates that '... the further involvement of decision-makers is required' to ensure systemic impact.[45]

2/ Findings in relation to the functioning of the programme

A second main area of interest for our study was how youth organisations and other youth sector stakeholders perceive the functioning of the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+. For this issue, and in order to achieve some level of comparability with the European Commission evaluation (once it finally became available) it was decided to use indicators close to those suggested to the Member States for the preparation of their national reports for the European Commission's mid-term evaluation, which are based on the OECD Development Assistance Committee criteria for assessing development assistance.[46]

Using the public information that was available to us about the mid-term evaluation framework (which was quite limited), we developed a series of definitions for the indicators so survey respondents had a number of prompts for their reflections.

Our definitional framework was as follows:

Effectiveness and efficiency	Efficiency and effectiveness are the degree to which the desired effect is achieved with an appropriate investment of effort and resources (e.g., time, money, etc.).
Relevance	Relevance is the alignment of the programme objectives and funding opportunities with current needs of young people and youth organisations in Europe and partner countries.
Coherence and complementarity	Coherence and complementarity is the existence of synergies between actions within Erasmus+ (internal) and between Erasmus+ and other interventions of the European Commission and other institutions with similar objectives: international, European, national, etc. (external).

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[45] Commission Staff Working Document, p. 37. Source:
https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/swd-e-plus-mte.pdf.

[46] For more information see:
http://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm and
http://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/50584880.pdf.

European added value	European added value is the additional benefits that would not accrue if it was not for Erasmus+.

It should be noted that these categories are not entirely coherent with those used in the mid-term evaluation. Furthermore, our analysis does not focus on the same issues as presented in the ICF report. Rather, we sought to raise the issues that are most important to youth organisations. Nevertheless, and after a retrospective reading, we find much convergence between our results and those presented in the ICF report.

Our enquiries with stakeholders focused on the following issues:
- youth organisations' experiences of their relationships with National Agencies and other implementing agencies;
- National Agencies' and other implementing agencies' experiences of their relationships with youth organisations;
- aspects of the way the programme functions best and worst for youth organisations;
- how youth organisations rate their experience of the programme against the standardised indicators used by the EC Member States in the National Reports (effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, internal and external coherence and complementarity, European added value and sustainability);
- how youth organisations rate their experience of the current programme in comparison to the previous Youth in Action programme.

Our enquiry provided us with a wide variety of experiences and perspectives on these questions, not always revealing common trends. Rather, on many of the specific issues raised by youth organisation stakeholders regarding the functioning of the programme, their experiences tend to be both positive and negative in different respects, and to be determined by context-related factors including the country where they apply, their direct relationship (or lack thereof) with the National Agency through which they apply, their size and form (national or local organisation, large or small organisation, institutionalised/professionalised or volunteer-led/managed, international, federated and/or networked or not), to name just some.

In the following discussion, we will attempt to tease out how these factors play out, influence each other and influence the perception of youth stakeholders regarding the functioning of the programme. We, therefore, present the entire range of perspectives shared with us irrespective of their salience across stakeholder groups or among specific

stakeholders. However, we do indicate explicitly when an opinion was held by many or only a few respondents.

a/ Issues related to efficiency and effectiveness

Considering the indicator of efficiency and effectiveness, our enquiries revealed a number of issues of concern especially to participating youth organisation stakeholders. Interestingly, several of the implementing and managing stakeholders confirmed that they are not entirely satisfied about several of those specific concerns as well.

Our survey, and our discussions with stakeholders in regard of the functioning of the Youth Chapter, defined efficiency and effectiveness as the degree to which the desired effect is achieved with an appropriate investment of effort and resources (e.g., time, money, etc.) and considered experiences of user-friendliness, support available, effort required for benefits gained, scale and distribution of resources, financial mechanisms, building your international project team/consortium and decentralisation.

This section takes a synthetic approach to the issues raised, and therefore, covers
- administration, bureaucracy and technical aspects;
- support available and received for using the programme;
- approach to prioritisation and scheduling in grant-making; x
- trust and recognition related issues.

In this particular section, it has been very important for us to differentiate between the different types of stakeholders that have participated in our enquiries. The information contained in this section in particular is sourced mostly from the information-gathering activities we have conducted with youth organisation stakeholders. In presenting this information, we have tried to be as fair as possible to implementation and management stakeholder perspectives, which necessarily see issues of efficiency and effectiveness differently, and tend to be less critical. In the end, this section presents an evaluation of the quality of their procedures and work, and makes judgements on their competence and success. It is only fair, therefore, that they should be asked to comment on whether they feel such criticism as has been levelled is justified and factually accurate. Wherever there has been significant divergence in opinions between different types of stakeholders, we have tried to point this out and show different sides of the same issue. At the same time, it is interesting to note that many of the implementing and management stakeholders were quite ready to admit that there are aspects of the programme's functioning that require

improvement. We also found quite a strong degree of convergence between our findings and those presented in the mid-term evaluation.

a.1 Administration, bureaucracy and technical aspects

Our enquiries find that stakeholders' experiences and perceptions of the programme's administrative functioning are quite polarised, but that it is difficult to establish trends in the factors that determine specific positions as positive or negative. In most cases, stakeholders have had both positive and negative experiences with the administration of the programme, and have mixed impressions to share about one and the same issue. For this reason, we shall address each aspect raised by participating stakeholders from both perspectives. These include, among others: the financial procedures; the technical aspects of the application process; the flexibility of the administrative procedures to account for changes (or lack thereof); the coherence (or lack thereof) with which the project evaluation process is conducted by the National Agencies; the reporting requirements, including financial reporting; the functioning of technological tools; etc.

Financial procedures

Most of the participating youth organisation stakeholders acknowledge that there have been some practical advantages to the introduction of the integrated administrative system. Some procedures have been simplified, and some mentioned that aspects that could assist their management capacity, such as the availability of training for EVS volunteers, had become better.

Notably, the lump sum system has been greeted with positive feedback, because it makes managing project finances much easier. This said, there have been some significant issues with the amounts defined by the lump sum system. Although for some countries the same kind of activity at the national level would not be funded to the same level or extent, and it is appreciated that the sums offered for daily subsistence, for example, in Erasmus+ Youth Chapter youth exchanges are generous in comparison, it is also reported that in some countries they simply do not reflect the real costs involved. Hence, the unified approach to the lump sum system is evaluated as unhelpful. It is also questioned by many why in a fully decentralised programme, the lump sums applied are defined and applied in a unified manner. A similar criticism applies to the travel costs lump sum, which are reported to not cover the real costs of travel in the case of several combinations of countries involved in the programme. Furthermore, even when 100% of costs are eligible to be covered because of special needs (which is much appreciated), it is reported that it is very difficult to ensure that differences between foreseen and actual costs are actually covered, because it is

imperative that all 'real' costs are known in advance and there are often changes that cannot be avoided. While youth organisations sympathise with the need for National Agencies to adhere to strict rules on financial rectitude, youth organisations feel a more 'realistic' calculation of the lump sums for travel would be needed, and that this should take into account the potentially more expensive combinations of countries that can be involved in exchange projects.

This issue has also been discussed in relation to the objective of engaging with young people with fewer opportunities. It is reported that organisations serving or wishing to engage young people with fewer opportunities, who in addition to lower social capital, face significant financial barriers to participation in any kind of non-formal education or mobility activities, feel that the lump sum system and the general financial regulations applying to the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ are not sensitive enough to the special situation of young people with the fewest opportunities. This is one factor that is seen as having an adverse impact on the accessibility of the programme both for individual young people and for youth organisations. Such regulations make the financial barriers to entry into the programme onerous for youth organisations without significant backup resources that cannot cover gaps in funding by charging participants more for participation.

The continuation of the Operating Grant has been welcomed by youth organisation stakeholders. Operating grants allow beneficiaries to conduct their transversal tasks that cannot be achieved through project funding, among others enabling them to play a role in the dialogue that takes place between EU institutions and civil society, as well as in EU policy development. Some youth organisation stakeholders report that the introduction of the lump sum for project management and implementation costs offers them non-bureaucratic financial support for small but nonetheless important initiatives, and it is our impression that these initiatives would not likely find funding elsewhere. Furthermore, some stakeholders felt that it added to their management capacity.

From an administrative point of view, the integration of the programme has been experienced even by long-standing youth sector users as a major upheaval, although the intention was that it would streamline and simplify procedures. It is reported that with the introduction of the integrated programme the procedures from the Higher Education sector were applied across the board. Most youth organisations experienced this change as overwhelming, because of the complexity of the procedures in comparison to the procedures in place in the Youth in Action programme, which many youth organisations already felt were too complex. Especially at the beginning of the new programme, this was experienced by youth organisations as a structural disadvantage, and many still feel that

the playing field on which they compete with other types of organisation has still not been levelled out.

Furthermore, while the decentralisation of the programme has contributed significantly to the simplification of procedures for national and local organisations, a fact that is acknowledged as both important and valuable by stakeholders across the board, it has also had adverse effects for some types of organisations, notably the international non-governmental youth organisations (INGYOs). Since the decentralisation, all organisations have to apply in the country where they are legally established, whereas previously INGYOs could apply centrally for different kinds of projects. Given the high concentration of INGYOs and other INGOs based in Brussels, the demand on the budgets of the Belgian National Agencies became more significant, and there were concerns about INGYOs 'crowding out' local and national youth work organisations doing international projects. A compromise was found, in that the Belgian National Agencies receive 10% additional funding to cover projects of internationals. INGYOs have started to use the alternative approach of applying through organisations established in countries other than Belgium to find a way around this limitation.

No single stakeholder that participated in our study is satisfied with the current situation in this regard, and many do not feel that the additional funds allocated to the Belgian National Agencies is an adequate solution. The INGYOs feel they are at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to the allocation of funds by National Agencies, although it is impossible to substantiate this empirically, because the statistics collected by the European Commission in the monitoring database do not allow for disaggregation by type (for example, youth organisation). Regarding this point, the European Commission database does collect data on 'type of organisation', but according to representatives of the European Commission, most organisations tick the box for 'Other' on the online application form. This de facto eliminates the possibility of assessing in a more systematic manner which types of organisation are receiving or not receiving grants, and therefore to substantiate the impression of INGYOs that they are at a disadvantage. The Belgian National Agencies feel that they have been put in an impossible position, and that they are being unfairly judged by INGYOs for just doing their job. Representatives of the European Commission, although acknowledging that this was an unexpected effect of decentralisation, do not recognise that the current situation is sub-optimal.

Some rules and procedures are experienced as complicating the situation of youth organisations in accessing funding from the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter. Examples specifically cited include:

- project consortia that are 'diverse' are judged more favourably in the evaluation of projects, which de facto means that applications of federated organisations which include more than one or two of their own members are judged unfavourably. INGYOs report this as problematic because it has a negative impact on the quality and stability of the partnerships underpinning their projects and ongoing mission-related work, leading to adverse situations that are challenging to manage within a short project life-cycle and within the rules and regulations, especially when partners drop out or turn out to be unreliable. The flexibility or lack thereof of the programme to cater for such situations will be discussed in a further section;

- regulations applying to the Legal Entity Appointed Representative (LEAR)[47] are not sensitive enough to the fact that youth organisations experience a higher rate of staff turnover than other sectoral applicants because they are often staffed by volunteers. It is reported that changing the LEAR for a running project grant is extremely difficult and in some cases has not been possible;

- regulations applying to EU applicant countries make it difficult to involve participants from the Western Balkans and other applicant countries. This work is financed under other budget lines in the MFF, and the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter only has limited funds for it. It is reported that the National Agencies do not publish data on the budgets available for the participation of Western Balkans participants on a regular basis, and this makes it difficult to track the development of this challenge;

- regulations regarding the project life-cycle are felt to be counter-productive for quality results, notably the time allowed for the implementation of projects (12 months) is considered too short;

- regulations applying to how the 'own contribution' of organisations is calculated, cf. volunteer work is not accepted as an own contribution and neither is there any consideration of the value of the work that it takes to make the application, cf. compensation within the project budget, etc.

Our enquiries also revealed some issues around the changes to activity types eligible for funding under the Youth Chapter that have come into effect with the onset of Erasmus+. It is

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[47] The LEAR is a person, usually an administrative staff member in the central administration, appointed by the legal representative of the organisation (CEO, rector, Director-General, etc.). His/her tasks are to manage the legal and financial information of the organisation in the Beneficiary Register on the Participant Portal and to provide and update the list of persons in his/her organisation who are authorised to sign grant agreements (LSIGN) or financial statements (FSIGN). Source:
https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/support/faqs/faq-232.html.

reported by participating stakeholders that simple projects (i.e., without complex cross-sectoral partnerships and multiple levels of impact) have very little chance of success in this integrated programme. While acknowledging that there is added value in complex projects, stakeholders question whether the one must exclude the other, especially as regards some specific objectives of the Youth Chapter, notably the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities, the internationalisation of youth work, and the development of youth work and youth civil society.

Furthermore, funding for local activities focusing on European issues but without a mobility dimension, is no longer part of the programme. National Agencies and youth organisations alike recognise that the support mechanism for youth participation that was inherent in the Youth Initiatives and Youth Democracy Projects under Youth in Action is now obviously missing. They also point out that, in their experience, the support available for this kind of youth work is for the most part not receiving significant support through national and local programmes. In addition, it is reported that there is a lack of funding for large-scale youth activities, events and campaigns in the current Erasmus+ programme. While KA2 and KA3 projects are much appreciated, it is noted that these tend to be more directed towards the development of expertise and do not usually involve a large number of young people. The funding allocation to large-scale projects through KA1 is considered insufficient taking into account the perceived demand.

Finally, the current move to establish the European Solidarity Corps programme has been received with some scepticism and concern by youth sector stakeholders, and not only those representing youth organisations. At the time of writing (February 2018), the situation regarding the final form and the final legal basis of the European Solidarity Corps has not yet been decided upon. While the idea of focusing voluntary service more on solidarity is welcomed, and many organisations are happy to receive such an endorsement by the European Commission for the solidarity-based volunteering they are in any case promoting, the proposal to subsume EVS wholesale under a new programme was not well understood at the moment of its introduction. EVS continues to be a successful brand, one which it has taken 20 years to develop, which stands for quality in learning mobility and which has been promoting solidarity through youth volunteering since its introduction. The reasons why the European Solidarity Corps may not be introduced as a complementary route for more people to engage in voluntary solidarity actions, are not felt to be well enough justified by many.

It is reported that there have often been significant delays in issuing calls and the provision of information to applicants about grant acceptance and grant rejections and delays in the payment of grants and other transactions, that are important for the smooth running of

projects on the side of grantees. This has led to frustration and problems for youth organisations, and they report that many young people get demotivated if they have to wait a long time to get going with their projects. Furthermore, it can create additional project costs (costs involved in the postponement of contracts with accommodation providers, for example).

Finally, but not unimportantly, there continue to be internal national legislative and administrative barriers to receiving grants and implementing Erasmus+ projects in some participating countries. Several of these (not least, one member state of the European Union) have introduced legislation that regulates the receipt and usage of foreign grants by non-governmental organisations, and subjects them to strict controls. NGOs receiving funding from international sources have been stigmatised as foreign agents.[48]

IT tools and application procedures

The introduction of the new programme brought with it the introduction of a new application process and new technological tools, including a new online application form, reporting templates and various other information gathering and provision tools. These were supposed to simplify the application process and streamline the administrative burden involved in making applications for both applicants and implementation and management stakeholders. It is reported that at the time of introduction many of the tools concerned were either not fully ready, nor fully tested or debugged, nor fully functional for purpose, creating a lot of uncertainty, especially for applicants and National Agencies.

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[48] Notably, this has been the case in Russia whose law "*On Amendments to Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation regarding the Regulation of the Activities of Non-profit Organisations Performing the Functions of a Foreign Agent*" that requires non-profit organisations that receive foreign donations and engage in 'political activity' to register and declare themselves as foreign agents. Azerbaijan and Belarus both have similar laws. In June 2017, Hungary approved legislation on foreign-funded non-governmental organisations, which requires groups receiving more than 26,000 USD per year in foreign funding to register as a 'foreign-supported organisation' or to risk closure. Non-governmental organisations also will be required to list any foreign sponsors providing them with more than about 1,800 USD per year. The European Union has criticised this legislation and is pursuing legal action against the government of Hungary. Sources: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_foreign_agent_law, https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-hungary-ngo-law/hungary-tightens-rules-on-foreign-funded-ngos-defying-eu-idUKKBN19417T; https://www.theatlantic.com/news/archive/2017/06/hungarys-anti-foreign-ngo-law/530121/; http://www.osce.org/odihr/105996?download=true.

These technical problems have made the first phase of the programme very difficult for applicants. Many stakeholders feel that it was not appropriate to roll out online tools and application forms which did not function properly, even at the time of the application deadline, considering that testing is a standard step in the implementation of online tools. Furthermore, many stakeholders felt that there was a lack of clear information and communication about these challenges from the side of the European Commission, which only exacerbated the uncertainty experienced by stakeholders.

Over time, the fundamental problems with the technical tools have been ironed out. All the same, stakeholders across the board raised the fact that there are too many online platforms that have to be used during the project life-cycle, and especially as regards reporting. It was reported that there are up to seven different platforms into which information has to be entered about any given project during its life-cycle, and that for organisations running and/or partnering in multiple projects, there is no option of having one unified login that allows the management of project tasks through one dashboard. Stakeholders question whether this is the most efficient and effective approach. Some further integration and streamlining of the reporting tools would be welcomed, although it is acknowledged that this could cause confusion at this stage of the programme period, as most users are just getting used to the existing tools after all the initial issues and challenges experienced with their introduction. Some reflection on how to achieve such streamlining would be relevant for the preparation of the next programme generation.

There have also been complaints to the effect that the now functional tools are not as user-friendly as they should be, and that this is having an impact on the attractiveness of the programme to newcomers. The currently lengthy and complicated online applications are deemed unnecessary for some of the types of activities for which funding is available. The time and effort required to develop the application is not always considered worth the return in terms of funding. The user guide is huge and not easy enough to work with - Youth Chapter related information spread throughout, the language is too difficult and includes too much institutional jargon, and it is considered visually unattractive. Stakeholders feel this kind of result is inappropriate for the Youth Chapter, which should be more in-tune with the specificity of the capacity of youth sector applicants, including the challenges posed by the high turnover of staff, a largely volunteer workforce, and so on.

The fact that the grant does not include compensation for the project development phase and the work involved in the application, is reported as making the application procedure onerous and as representing a barrier to entry into the programme for many newcomer and less established organisations. Even if some organisations use the application process as a means of developing projects, and in this way their capacity, many youth organisations have

existing projects or projects that are not specifically developed within the parameters of the programme, but which rather focus on the mission of the youth organisation itself. Adapting those to the application form and approach of the programme is very difficult, and many organisations feel that the level of effort required is too large for the funding that might be gained if the application is successful. The dilemma is that many organisations face difficulties to find funding to sustain their 'core business', i.e., their mission-oriented activities. The previous programme generation was seen as better adapted to supporting this kind of work. This issue shall be further reflected upon in the section on the contribution of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter to the development of youth civil society below.

Flexibility

The question of the flexibility of the programme was raised by many youth organisation stakeholders during our enquiries. Some survey respondents cited flexibility as an advantage of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter, but this was most often referred to in connection with new measures that have simplified procedures, and especially the lump sum system.

The more critical voices reflect experiences of situations where it has not been possible to find an adequate solution for some particular challenge, often seen as resulting from the specificity of being a youth organisation. To exemplify the concern, we can cite the current regulations governing the LEAR and the difficulties that arise when there are real cost changes in comparison to what was budgeted, even for projects in which 100% cost coverage has been granted.

It is quite clear from our enquiries that there are significant differences in the way National Agencies implement the programme, and interpret administrative responsibilities as executors of the programme, and other bodies have collected specific evidence of differences in the way that National Agencies in different participating countries interpret certain regulations and procedures. In some respects, such differences are understandable given that this is a fully decentralised programme, and National Agencies are not only bound by the programme guidelines, i.e., the rules of the European Commission, but very often also by the rules and regulations of public financial administration procedures in place in the participating state concerned.

For their part, some National Agencies also criticise that youth organisations do not always take the time or give enough importance to reading the rules and regulations and preparing their projects within the parameters provided. On the other hand, youth organisations rightly question why some National Agencies appear to be more willing to communicate on and seek solutions for challenges of the type mentioned above than others. Our results give the

distinct impression that smaller and youth-specific National Agencies are doing better on this point of 'flexibility' than the larger ones or those that are responsible for the whole programme. At the same time, this appears to be a question of the quality of information, communication and trust between National Agencies and their grantees. The themes of the coherence in approach between National Agencies, the experience of users of the support they receive and a variety of trust-related issues will be addressed in later sections of this report.

Some National Agencies feel that the budget regulations under which they have to operate do not allow them to respond in a flexible manner to changes in the projects of grantees, and to trends in demand from the field for certain project types. Any reallocation of funds, both between items within the programme and within projects, appears to be quite challenging. These stakeholders point out that this kind of flexibility would simplify the administrative burden of National Agencies with positive knock-on effects for grantees.

Finally, some stakeholders also criticised the European Commission regarding the lack of flexibility of the programme. Youth organisation stakeholders, in particular, feel that considering there was a specific Youth in Action programme preceding the introduction of Erasmus+, and the results of its evaluation, the European Commission's knowledge of the specificities and challenges of youth organisations and the youth sector more broadly should have been better taken into account in the development of the procedures for the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+.

Coherence of National Agency administrative practice and project evaluation

That National Agencies have to work in different ways in a fully decentralised programme is understood and not contested. They are not only bound by European Commission rules but also by national regulations. That said, our enquiries and other research [49] point to discrepancies between how National Agencies interpret and implement some rules and procedures of the programme as laid down by regulations. This is challenging for youth organisation stakeholders.

The first point in this context relates to how projects are evaluated using the standardised criteria by the evaluators recruited by National Agencies. With the decentralisation, and the fact that INGYOs have to apply with local partners to National Agencies in different

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[49] European Lifelong Learning Platform: Erasmus+ Survey 2016. Source: http://lllplatform.eu/lll/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/erasmus-survey-2016_final_lllplatform.pdf

countries, the evaluation practices of different National Agencies have come under more direct scrutiny. The ICF report confirms this, stating that '… decentralisation through management by National Agencies may result in differences in the implementation of programme rules and criteria.'[50] On the one hand, youth organisation stakeholders report cases of discrepant assessments of the same project by evaluators working in one country either to the same or different deadlines. On the other hand, they report cases of discrepant assessments of the same or very similar projects, by evaluators working for different National Agencies (i.e., high number of points in one application round to one National Agency and significantly lower number of points in a repeat application with the same project to the same or another National Agency). For many organisations participating in our study, there is frustration and a sense of injustice regarding this issue. The experienced lack of coherence is concerning for youth organisation stakeholders, who feel the discrepancies between the practices of the National Agencies disadvantage their chances of receiving funding, as they are unable to draw conclusions about how to improve their project applications with lasting effect when they are refused.

Furthermore, the quality of assessment information received as feedback justifying the points allocation received from some National Agencies (more than others) is perceived as poor and discrepant, demonstrating a lack of attention to the application or a poor understanding of the work, values and missions of youth organisations on the part of the evaluators concerned. It is reported that the level of feedback given by National Agency evaluators varies. Youth organisations report that they do not always receive sufficient or relevant information to have a basis on which to improve their new or repeat applications.

Lastly regarding evaluations, there are some criteria which are felt to be systematically interpreted to the disadvantage of certain kinds of youth organisations' applications, notably those concerning the 'diversity of consortia'. Some stakeholders went as far as stating that they feel there is prejudice about the diversity of membership-based INGYOs. Although these often bear the same name and have the same overall mission, more often than not they have significantly different histories, traditions, ways of working, organisational characters and even priorities from their members in different countries. Hence, evaluating the diversity of a partnership as poor just because it involves several national branches of a federated organisation is viewed as questionable by a number of youth organisation respondents.

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[50] ICF Main Evaluation Report, p. 174. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/icf-volume1-main-report.pdf.

A second point raised in this regard is a perceived overlap between the intellectual outputs (tools, manuals, etc.) of KA3 projects accepted and implemented across participating countries, with duplication being perceived as a disadvantageous effect of the decentralisation. The question of the extent and quality of coordination between National Agencies in this regard was raised by multiple youth organisation stakeholders. Considering that KA3 projects are intended to yield systemic results, a lack of coordination in this relation is felt to be short-sighted from a strategic point of view. However, the ICF report rather contradicts this perception. Key stakeholder interviews referred to potential duplications (e.g., very similar projects funded under Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020) and potential overlaps with the ESF (Strategic Partnerships could happen under ESF through transnational cooperation).[51] However, there is no evidence in the ICF report to indicate that there would be significant duplication between projects funded under the Youth Chapter.

While it is acknowledged that some margin for differentiation between evaluations is inevitable in a decentralised programme, many youth organisation stakeholders feel the current level and frequency of discrepancies in assessment is not satisfactory. Overall, it is felt that a more standardised approach to the definition of the criteria, how assessments are translated into points, and the quality of the justificatory arguments presented in feedback to applicants within and across National Agencies, would be both needed and warranted. There are National Agencies that have instituted good practices to address the need for evaluators to 'sing from the same song sheet'. In at least one country, evaluators are networked, receive orientation and have the opportunity to clarify how and on which basis they shall assign points to the projects collectively, and they have the opportunity to confer during the evaluation process. It is proposed that some of the good practices being instituted by individual National Agencies could be piloted network-wide. In so doing, it is felt that the cause of transparency would also be served.

There is also a perceived lack of transparency around the results of the project selection process (both regarding successful and rejected applications) on the part of some National Agencies, which apparently do not all publish the results of their grant-making in the same way. As the competition in the Youth Chapter for project funding has risen, but the success rate has dropped due to the inadequacy of funds to meet overall demand, youth organisation stakeholders are concerned that their applications are being side-lined. However, as some National Agencies do not publish any information on who received a grant and who did not, and on the type of organisation receiving grants, they are unable to

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[51] ICF Main Evaluation Report, p. 159. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/icf-volume1-main-report.pdf.

find out if this is actually the case. This situation is greeted with a lack of comprehension. Considering that such grant-making involves the disbursement of public funds it is felt that publishing these results should be standard practice.

Finally, it must be noted that in discussing this issue, some youth organisation stakeholders raised perceptions of politically motivated selection processes on the part of National Agencies in some participating countries. We are patently aware that any accusation of politically motivated selection is serious and must never be made lightly. The statements made in this regard are problematic for our study, as there is no way for us to substantiate them. Nevertheless, we must be true to the perspectives shared and reflect them all. Hence, we raise this here without any claim to being able to provide legitimate evidence for it, beyond the perspectives shared by several stakeholders during different moments of our study. More cannot and should not be said here. It is, however, hoped that the fact that such perceptions exist and have been shared will be taken seriously and will motivate the competent authorities to consider why they are being raised. Ignoring such destructive perceptions can only be harmful to the legitimacy of the programme.

Financial and other reporting requirements

Reporting procedures are an important part of the workload involved in any Erasmus+ grant, and naturally they have also been raised as part of reflections about the administrative and procedural dimension of our enquiry. Again, perspectives of stakeholders on this issue varied widely. On the one hand, some youth organisation stakeholders find that for some stakeholders the reporting requirements have become less onerous with this programme. Some procedures have indeed been simplified (e.g., it is now theoretically possible to apply for more than one project in the same application, which can mean less paperwork). Some reporting requirements have also been simplified, and for many organisations with longer-standing experience of using European funding and of running projects under Erasmus+ or its predecessor programmes, these are acceptable. This is expressed as one of the efficiency gains of the new programme that youth organisations can identify for applicants.

However, this is not a universally held view. Quite a few stakeholders evaluate the reporting procedures as too complicated (too many questions, requests for information that youth organisations have difficulty to provide, etc.), and therefore as off-putting, especially for newcomers with little or no experience of working with the programme. Youth organisation stakeholders also acknowledge that they often lack capacity in evaluation and monitoring, and that is one of the reasons they find it difficult to conduct meaningful evaluations that would make reporting easier. This is also reflected in their sense that the reporting

requirements are too complicated, or demand information that they are not well placed to provide.

Several stakeholders reported that the requirements in terms of documentary evidence of spending differ from National Agency to National Agency, and that this is confusing and time-consuming for grantees to deal with. Among those National Agencies that participated in our enquiries, some are clearly more concerned about 'dotting their i's' when it comes to the financial administration and justification of costs than others, and readily admit that this is the case. This situation is experienced as quite onerous by some youth organisations, which are still being asked to collect original boarding passes by some National Agencies. Considering the digitalisation of the programme, this kind of practice is also experienced as an unnecessary duplication of work and an over-bureaucratisation of what otherwise could be a relatively straight-forward financial reporting system. It would be appreciated if some harmonisation and further simplification of such procedures would be possible for the remainder of the programme, or under the new programme generation.

Proportionality

In relation to the administrative dimension of the efficiency and effectiveness question, it is reported that the principle of proportionality regarding the administrative burden of working with the Youth Chapter is not being applied adequately in all contexts. Youth organisations and even National Agencies point out that de facto a very small grant involves more or less the same level of administration as a very large one. This administrative burden not only affects applicants adversely. National Agencies report that it interferes with their capacity to support applicants more effectively.

Extent of efficiency and effectiveness of the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ regarding the following indicators? [Effort required for benefits gained e.g. time and workload involved in applying vs. financial or capacity gains)]

I am not well enough informed to be able...
4.5%

1: Efficient & effective to a very small ex...
12.4%

4: Efficient & effective to a great extent
27.0%

4.5%

12.4%

28.1%

5.6%

22.5%

27.0%

3: Efficient & effective to some extent
28.1%

5: Efficient & effective to a very great ex...
5.6%

2: Efficient & effective to a small extent
22.5%

The 'bureaucratisation' of the programme and of the grant-making process is considered by all stakeholders to be a major barrier to access and as a significant problem. There are some stakeholders who deliberately do not apply for funding, because the level of effort required is not worth the level of funding that they can acquire.

a.2 Support available and received for using the programme

We also received a lot of feedback about the support available to those wishing to use the programme in response to our enquiries about the effectiveness and efficiency of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter. Our questions in this regard focused on communication with the relevant parties, the availability of information and its clarity/relevance/usefulness, the responsiveness of the relevant parties, and the general 'youth-friendliness' of those providing information and support.

In general, our enquiries reveal a very mixed picture regarding the experience of the support received by users for engaging with the programme from the different stakeholders responsible for providing it.

As can also be inferred from previous sections, some National Agencies are considered to be performing much better than others in this respect. Stakeholders across the board acknowledge that the level, quality and availability of information and the extent of communication and nature of communication with the users of the programme depends a lot on the resources of the National Agencies, which are also acknowledged as being

limited, even inadequate in some cases. Yet even with limited resources, some National Agencies are clearly felt to be giving more attention to this dimension of their role.

Our enquiries show that those National Agencies considered to be performing well on supporting users to make use of the programme are evaluated positively for:

- maintaining close relationships with their grantees and for 'knowing the youth sector';
- providing their information in a youth-friendly manner;
- the clear effort they make to reach out to youth organisations and young people;
- answering enquiries in a timely manner (i.e., their responsiveness);
- providing relevant and useful information; and
- demonstrating flexibility when dealing with the challenges that youth organisations lay on their tables.

Overall, youth organisation stakeholders appear to distinguish between National Agencies that are 'youth-friendly' in their approach, and those that are 'bureaucratic' in their approach.

Our enquiries yielded mixed evaluations of the level of competence, helpfulness and service-orientation of the staff of National Agencies, the EACEA and the DGEAC when it comes to interactions with youth organisation stakeholders. Many complain that they do not receive responses to their questions that help them or that move them beyond what they could get out of the user guide, when they actually manage to reach someone who feels responsible for answering their questions. It is furthermore reported that enquiries often go unanswered, or that staff responsible are on sick leave and there is no one to replace them for long periods of time. Specifically on the performance of the EACEA, youth organisation stakeholders are critical of the delays with which the issuing of calls takes place, and they report that the accuracy and the clarity of information they received about these calls was not always at the level they expected.

The support and information needs of programme users were particularly acute during the introduction of the new programme. Our enquiries reveal that this was also the phase during which youth organisation stakeholders felt least supported. There appears to have been a lot of confusion. To some extent there is understanding for why this was the case. It also took staff of National Agencies, the EACEA and the DGEAC some time to adjust to the new procedures and tools. This finding is confirmed by the mid-term evaluation.[52] However,

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[52] Commission Staff Working Document, p. 37. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/swd-e-plus-mte.pdf.

our enquiries reveal that the attitude of the staff concerned during their interactions with youth organisation stakeholders was/is the decisive factor for whether youth organisation stakeholders evaluate their experience positively or negatively.

The way in which the programme is being promoted to young people and youth organisations is another dimension of support for its use, according to our enquiries. We did not survey or make specific enquiries with stakeholders about Eurodesk's performance, however, its services were mentioned on a regular basis, for the most part with much appreciation.[53]

For the most part, it was reported with some concern that of all the elements of the Erasmus+ programme important for the youth sector, Eurodesk is one of the most obviously under-resourced, considering the scale of its tasks and the importance of its remit for access to the programme.[54] It is also reported that there are significant differences in the financial support available for Eurodesk and the additional information and support functions for using the programme conducted by National Agencies across countries participating in the programme. Some national authorities provide additional funding for programme promotion and youth information, but it would appear that most do not.

Eurodesk itself researches which approaches to information are most effective with a view to improving its own effectiveness. According to its 2017 survey, nearly 40% of respondents considered the availability of information about mobility opportunities to be limited or non-existent. And 46% of respondents who had not yet undertaken a mobility indicated that their

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[53] There was one very critical exception to this general view. This was found in one of the 11 National Authority reports we had access to. It states that Eurodesk's services in their country now overlap considerably with what the National Agency does itself or what other youth information services are doing, and that as it no longer adds value in this context, it would be more efficient to reallocate the finances to the National Agency directly for their own information and promotion efforts. This was the only such statement, we have no basis on which to corroborate its accuracy, and therefore, we can only highlight it as an exceptional minority opinion.

[54] The 2017 annual work programme for the implementation of Erasmus+ (September 2016) indicates that 1.85 million euros are allocated for the Eurodesk Network, and 600,000 euros are allocated for Eurodesk Brussels Link. Source: 2017 annual work programme for the implementation of 'Erasmus+': the Union Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport (C(2016)5571), September 2016, Budget Line 3.44. See: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/sites/erasmusplus/files/library/c-2016-5571_en.pdf.

reason for not doing so till now was that they did not know about the opportunity. Furthermore, while the 'best way to receive information about mobility opportunities' appears to be websites (nearly 80%), it is interesting to note that next-generation participants (those under-15 at the time of response) prefer face-to-face encounters over Internet for accessing information[55] Interviews revealed that promotion of the programme can be significantly more effective where National Agencies and Eurodesk have access to more traditional means of information and communication, such as television. Yet only a small minority of National Agencies and Eurodesks are using it, usually because it is unaffordable.[56]

Another point in this regard, and one which is frustrating for both youth organisation stakeholders and National Agencies, relates to proximity to the field. Many National Agencies are organised in a centralised manner, commensurate with their status as part of a national public administration, and with national traditions of administrative organisation. However, this is often experienced by grass-roots organisations as keeping them at a distance to the youth field. In terms of information and promotion, many of the National Agencies are not felt to be present enough at local and regional level. This appears to be irrespective of how well Eurodesk and the multiplier organisations it works through in the country concerned are managing to perform their tasks. National Agencies complain that they lack sufficient resources to provide adequate user support and to conduct more outreach in the field. This appears to be a greater challenge in very large countries. Smaller countries also grapple with outreach, but speak more to the challenges of reaching new potential applicants to widen the pool of engaged organisations. This finding regarding outreach to newcomers and organisations so far not engaged with the programme is confirmed by the findings of the mid-term evaluation.[57]

Not all support measures require face-to-face intervention by National Agencies or other implementation partners. With Erasmus+, online learning courses were introduced. Youth organisation stakeholders acknowledge these as a valuable and helpful support measure. However, it is reported by youth organisation stakeholders participating in our enquiries that

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[55] Eurodesk, Survey 2017. Mobility and the Role of Youth Information:
https://eurodesk.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/eurodesk_survey-2017-01.pdf
[56] Eurodesk, Survey 2017. Mobility and the Role of Youth Information:
https://eurodesk.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/eurodesk_survey-2017-01.pdf
[57] ICF Main Evaluation Report, Section 4.4, and footnote 129 on p. 140. Source:
https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/icf-volume1-main-report.pdf

many of these have not been made available in a timely manner and are not adequately available/accessible.

One very specific challenge regarding information and support was raised by a minority of stakeholders. This relates to a perceived absence of accurate and complete information about how programme countries can safely and successfully include partner countries, be it as full or as associate partners. Youth organisation stakeholders report that consortia aiming for international cooperation have to invest more resources to find out the relevant details, especially about good practice examples for successful integration of participants from a partner country.

A last issue raised in regard of support and information is the user guide. We discussed this in some depth in a previous section, however, it was raised in relation to this issue as well. Suffice it to say that from the perspective of participating stakeholders, the user guide is considered neither youth-friendly nor user-friendly enough, and this is felt to be counter-productive for the overall visibility and credibility of the programme.

It may be worth to note that the information provided online through the European Youth Portal and other IT based sources were not raised or discussed at length by participating stakeholders.

a.3 Approach to prioritisation and scheduling of grant-making

It is reported that National Agencies take different approaches to how they organise their grant-making in terms of what gets funded as a priority and the scheduling of draw-down on their funds.

On scheduling, it is reported that some National Agencies are spending their entire annual budget for one category of activities (for example, youth exchanges) in one funding cycle (i.e., with one deadline). Although there is understanding for the fact that National Agencies have limited budgets, this situation is met with quite some consternation, as many youth organisations rely on KA1 funding especially to sustain regular activities. When this is the policy, youth organisations find it difficult to conduct their annual planning, and to plan a series of projects. For the stakeholders that raised this issue, it is an unnecessary measure that is counter-productive for the objectives of the Youth Chapter that relate to the strengthening of youth civil society and the sustainability of youth organisations. Furthermore, with three deadlines per year, volunteers have to wait a long time to find out if their projects have been accepted and even longer before they can actually go on their mobility. This creates insecurity for the young people and is considered demotivating. It is

also reported that the scheduling of deadlines can create barriers to participatory project development with young people.

On prioritisation, youth organisation stakeholders report that some activities that are important for them are under-funded in comparison with other categories. For example, youth worker mobilities and operating grants for networks do not receive enough funding, whereas the priority given to EVS in funding terms is very high. Our enquiries reveal that youth organisation stakeholders would appreciate a more balanced approach that takes into account activity formats that are important for them. For example, competition for KA2 calls is very high (in 2016, 1,946 applications were received, with only 264 projects contracted, a success rate of just 14%)[58], and it is felt that there is too little funding for the demand. Hence, even project applications that are evaluated with a high number of points are being rejected.[59] These findings are consistent with the findings of the mid-term evaluation. In relation to respondents' perception of the quality of applications, the ICF report states that 'Comparing the main results … with those gathered for predecessor programmes, the analysis presents an improvement under Erasmus+ with regard to the quality of the applications. The development is most remarkable concerning the share of high-quality applications whereas the predecessor programmes represented 18% (as opposed to 32% under Erasmus+). Importantly, this change did not lead to a drop in average quality applications, thus moving towards a programme with elitist characteristics.'[60] In the footnote to this statement a programme with elitist characteristics is defined as 'A programme where the group of successful applicants is rather restrictive, leaving only little chance for the less experienced to successfully apply for a grant.[61]

Another important point for participating stakeholders is that with this programme, more emphasis has been put on the individual learner. In previous incarnations of the Youth part

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[58] European Commission, Erasmus+ Annual Report 2016. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents/erasmus-annual-report-2016_en

[59] In 2016, just under 28.5 million euros was disbursed to Strategic Partnerships involving 1,248 organisations, not all of which are youth organisations, of course. European Commission, Erasmus+ Annual Report 2016. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents/erasmus-annual-report-2016_en.

[60] ICF Main Evaluation Report, p. 140. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/icf-volume1-main-report.pdf.

[61] ICF Main Evaluation Report, p. 140, footnote 129. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/icf-volume1-main-report.pdf.

of the programme, the collective dimension of learning through groups was more prominent. Many stakeholders think this does not correspond well enough to the reality of the youth sectors across Europe. Our enquiries reveal that funding for simple activity formats where groups of young people can develop a good idea into a project and realise it together, such as the Youth Initiatives within the predecessor Youth in Action programme, are sorely missed, and that there are few alternative sources of funding (European or national) to cover this kind of youth work activity. Some progress on addressing this gap has been made with the 2016 introduction of the Strategic EVS, and it appears that this new format is much appreciated. However, and for the moment, there are few other opportunities in the Youth Chapter. This aspect of activity formats and their suitability to the needs of the field shall be addressed in more depth in a later section of the report.

a.4 Trust and recognition related issues

Although we have not enquired into this issue specifically, a side effect of asking other questions has been that we learned something about issues related to how stakeholders experience their relationship with the programme and each other in terms of trust and mutual recognition.

On the theme of recognition, there is a definite sense among stakeholders that although the integration of the Erasmus+ programme has conferred visibility on the Youth Chapter it might not otherwise have benefitted from, the treatment of the Youth Chapter within the integrated programme leaves a lot to be desired. The fact that voluntary organisations cannot include the value of the work of their volunteers in the financial construction of their projects, as part of their own contribution towards the budget of a project, was given as an example for how the recognition rhetoric appears to be at odds with the recognition practice.[62] Organisations feel this is a lack of respect for their tradition and values, and that it has reverse effects, i.e., it actively discourages the sustainability of youth organisations and civil society. Although a small minority, some stakeholders complain about what they perceive to be differences in treatment of youth sector experts and consultants, in comparison to those from other sectors, and notably Higher Education, who are thought to receive higher fees when working on Erasmus+ projects. These situations make for a sense

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[62] Youth organisation stakeholders cited examples of how this has been addressed by other institutions providing financial support for youth projects. The European Youth Foundation has a specific key for calculating the financial value of voluntary work within project applications. See the following:
https://www.dropbox.com/s/xnyt6n4jwm3obpv/Volunteer%20time%20recognition%20PC30.pdf.

that the political rhetoric on recognition of non-formal education, which has had a lot of political attention in recent years, is disingenuous.

Our enquiries also reveal that youth organisation stakeholders often feel ill at ease with the way their relationships and communication with other stakeholders involved in the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter play out. In the first place, it is clear that many youth organisation stakeholders feel that their opportunity to communicate about their issues and concerns with programme stakeholders that have the relevant level of responsibility and knowledge to provide them with correct and useful information, or to whom they can simply air current concerns, is limited. Moreover, many of the statements youth organisation stakeholders made in the course of our enquiries demonstrate that the level of trust of youth organisations in some countries towards those in positions of responsibility for the programme at national and European level leaves a lot to be desired.

Especially as a result of what are experienced as discrepancies within and between the approaches of different National Agencies, and as a lack of responsiveness on the part of the European Commission to concrete enquiries and specific sectoral concerns, some youth organisation stakeholders question the intentions, and even the integrity, of other stakeholders with responsibility for management and implementation of the programme. In acknowledging that there are questions about the impartiality, independence, professionalism and coherence of project evaluations and actions of some stakeholders, and the transparency with which information about the process is being handled, we take no position on whether these questions are justified. We can only infer that there is a trust gap, question how this might be influencing the way the programme works towards its objectives, and suggest that some confidence-building measures be considered to address what has the potential to be a negative dynamic.

b/ Issues related to the relevance of the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+

Overall, our enquiries reveal that the relevance of the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ is not put into question by participating stakeholders. The mid-term evaluation confirms that the programme is well aligned with a variety other EU policies and thematic priorities, and also responds to interests of beneficiary organisations.63

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[63] ICF Main Evaluation Report, Section 4.2., pp. 100-123. Source:
https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/icf-volume1-main-report.pdf.

Exemplary of this is that the relevance of the scale of funding available was rated relatively highly in our survey, with the majority of respondents ranking the scale of funding as relevant to some extent or relevant to a great extent.

How would you rate the extent of relevance of the scale of funding available in the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter?

I am not well enough informed to be abl... 3.4%
5: Relevant to a very great extent 15.7%
3: Relevant to some extent 28.1%
2: Relevant to a small extent 20.2%
1: Relevant to a very small extent 4.5%
4: Relevant to a great extent 28.1%

3.4%
20.2%
15.7%
4.5%
28.1%
28.1%
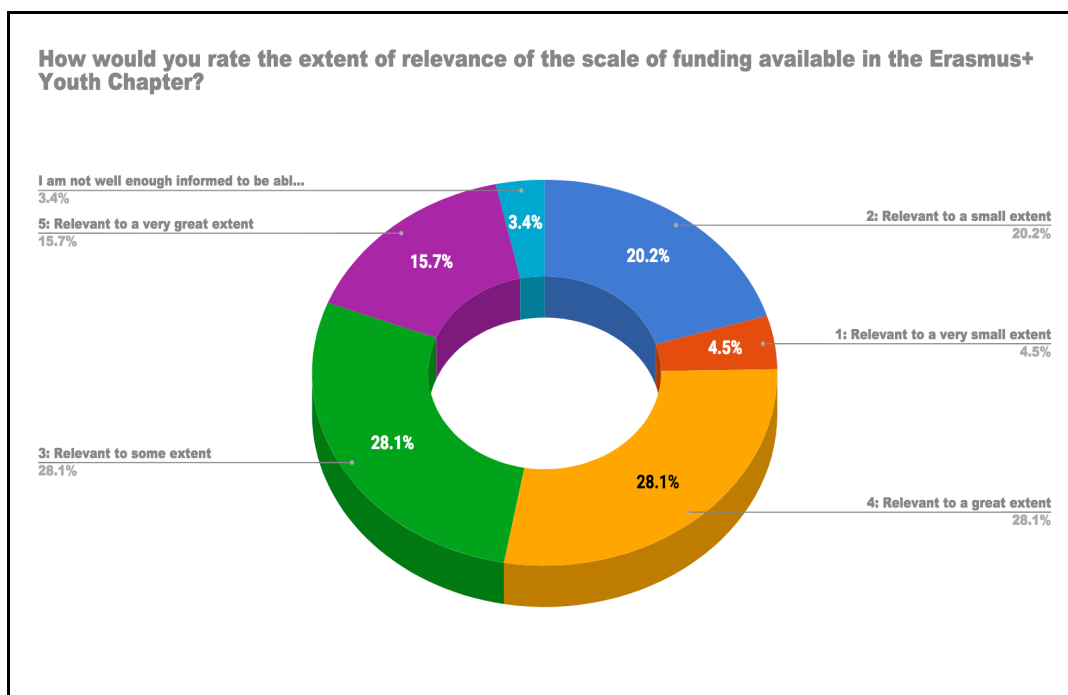
Nevertheless, the numerical results yielded in the survey appear to contradict the narrative responses to the survey and our face-to-face enquiries. Almost all stakeholders raised issues around gaps in resources, and the limited financial support available for the Youth Chapter in comparison to perceived demand and in comparison to the perceived level of funding given to other sectors covered by Erasmus+. This was obvious in relation to both the level of resourcing of some specific actions over others and in relation to the overall availability of funding for the Youth Chapter (see our previous treatment of this point above, under functioning of the programme. As discussed, in comparison to predecessor programmes the success rate in the Youth Chapter has dropped, although we have no specific figures for the success rate of youth organisations). A good example are the KA2 grants. In 2016, the total amount of resources disbursed to KA2 applications across all sectors was almost 382 million euros. Of this, the KA2 grants for Youth totalled just under 28.5 million euros. This represents 7.4% of the overall budget for KA2[64] While it is now

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[64] European Commission, Erasmus+ Annual Report 2016, Statistical Annex p. 53. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/sites/erasmusplus2/files/annual-report-2016-stat-annex_en.pdf

expected that the large rise in funding announced with the introduction of Erasmus+ will begin to come on stream, stakeholders demonstrate concern that the limited financial capacity of the Youth Chapter in the first three years of the programme has had negative effects on the relevance of the programme for the achievement of its specific youth sector sustainability objectives.

For their part, National Agencies and the literature we have from National Authorities, present a similarly positive view of the relevance of the objectives of Erasmus+ in the youth sector, with the one caveat that they would appreciate more scope for identifying and working on some national priorities in respect of the Erasmus+ objectives. However, it is also noted that the spread of interest on the part of National Agencies and National Authorities regarding different issues and objectives of the programme differs widely. Some take their starting point from the demand they observe in the field, or from the challenges of the youth sector they work with. Others place more emphasis on one or other specific objective, interpreting the primary role of the programme in that context. We shall discuss this in more depth below.

b.1 Issue coverage

Our enquiries revealed interesting results regarding how different stakeholders view the level of coverage the programme achieves in relation to the issues that youth organisations and, more broadly, the European and national youth sectors, find important. In our survey we asked about how well the programme serves the needs of youth organisations in terms of funding for their mission-related issues and we also asked about what they consider to be missing.

Overall, our findings indicate that the Youth Chapter of the programme offers support for a wide range of issues, and that to the greatest extent these are relevant to youth organisations. Our survey results show that in general, youth organisations feel that they can access funding for their mission-related issues and target groups from the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+, and they consider the opportunities it offers to be relevant. Indeed, the mid-term evaluation confirms these results. The ICF report states that 'Overall the needs of stakeholders are addressed well by the programme. Satisfaction is especially high in mobility actions'.[65] While these positive evaluations refer mostly to satisfaction with the experience of the projects conducted under specific actions, like mobilities, rather than to

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[65] ICF Main Evaluation Report, p.124. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/icf-volume1-main-report.pdf.

issue coverage, the results of the ICF research regarding alignment of Erasmus+ with different stakeholders' priorities also show that many important issues of concern for youth organisations are covered by the programme.[66]

Nevertheless, when asked to specify, youth organisation stakeholders feel that some of their issues are not getting enough attention, although they are important issues for young people. The following issues were specifically cited by survey respondents as examples:

- social entrepreneurship;
- political participation;
- building peaceful societies;
- rural-urban divide and inequality;
- media-related issues and competencies - media production, media literacy; critical thinking; online security; quality of media (professionalism, independence, impartiality);
- intergenerational issues;
- justice-related issues;
- synergies between formal and non-formal learning;
- youth rights;
- gender equality and empowerment of young women;
- diversity;
- combating poverty;
- minority rights (language, etc.).

It is noteworthy that among the issues listed in the survey as considered 'missing' was 'inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities'. This view must be challenged, however. Inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities has been a priority not only of Erasmus+ but also of several predecessor programmes. Research activities of National Agencies show increased attention to this dimension among applicants, in the selection of projects and the RAY transnational studies show very positive effects for the learning of young people who self-evaluate as having fewer opportunities on one or more commonly cited criteria.[67] Erasmus+ does place importance on this dimension, even if it is also

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[66] ICF Main Evaluation Report, pp. 110-112. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/icf-volume1-main-report.pdf.

[67] RAY Transnational Analysis 2017. Available to download at: http://www.researchyouth.eu/results-erasmus-youth-in-action.

important to acknowledge the programme's limitations in this regard.[68] The ICF report does explicitly state, 'Still, some stakeholders have suggested that socio-economic inclusiveness of these actions for youth from all backgrounds has to be improved'.[69] The section of this study on access to the programme (below) takes up the issue of how well the programme is currently performing on the access of young people with fewer opportunities from the perspective of youth organisations especially.

Our findings also show that youth organisation stakeholders believe that the main emphasis in the Erasmus+ programme, even the Youth Chapter, continues to be on employment and competence development objectives, and that they feel the citizenship dimension gets less attention. It is obvious from our enquiries that individual National Agencies and Member States place a differing level of emphasis on the different objectives of the Youth Chapter, and some are more concerned with the skills agenda than others, which is understandable considering the differing situations regarding youth unemployment in Member States. Indeed, according to the ICF report, 'the Youth in Action programme put much more emphasis on the objectives of youth participation and the citizenship dimension of the youth programme than the current programme'.[70] Under Erasmus+, mobility projects with a citizenship dimension increased in number, and other types of projects with a citizenship dimension decreased compared to Youth in Action.[71]

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[68] ICF Main Evaluation Report, Section 4.2., pp. 100-123. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/icf-volume1-main-report.pdf.

[69] ICF Main Evaluation Report, p. 124. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/icf-volume1-main-report.pdf.

[70] ICF Main Evaluation Report, pp. 109-110. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/icf-volume1-main-report.pdf.

[71] ICF Main Evaluation Report, pp. 109-110. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/icf-volume1-main-report.pdf.

Table 5: First 10 topics of cooperation projects under the Erasmus+ and LLP

First 10 topics of cooperation projects under the Erasmus+ and LLP

	LLP		Erasmus+	
1	EU citizenship	22%	ICT - new technologies - digital competences	20%
2	Teaching and learning of foreign languages	18%	Curricula/teaching methods	18%
3	Creativity and culture	18%	Creativity and culture	11%
4	Environment / sustainable development	17%	Teaching and learning of foreign languages	11%
5	ICT - new technologies - digital competences	15%	Skills and labour market issues	10%
6	Health and wellbeing	7%	EU Citizenship	9%
7	Reinforcing links between education and working life	7%	International cooperation, international relations, development cooperation	9%
8	Comparing educational systems	5%	Entrepreneurial learning - entrepreneurship education	9%

However, and even in view of the above, the impression that citizenship is not as important for Erasmus+ cannot be credibly substantiated by the data collected by current research. The Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ is the only sector in which there was a majority of projects with active citizenship as their focus. Furthermore, RAY research shows that 95% of young people participating in an Erasmus+ project develop at least one skill relevant to citizenship and participation.[72] While it is certainly true that employability-related concerns were significant drivers of the political discourse at the time when the programme was introduced, the citizenship agenda is an explicit objective of the Youth Chapter. Several of the National Authority reports we had access to include substantial discussion of how the citizenship dimension has been an important outcome of the programme in the country, and that it is a political priority for the countries concerned, especially in view of a successor programme.

Implementation and management stakeholders point out that latest developments in the European Union mean that citizenship objectives have been put front and centre of the political agenda. Statements like the Paris Declaration are clear in reinstating the importance of citizenship outcomes and the role of Erasmus+ and its Youth Chapter for achieving such outcomes, and they question why the two sets of outcomes (i.e., citizenship and employability) are seen as mutually exclusive.

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[72] Research based analysis of youth in action (RAY), Factsheet: Erasmus+ Youth in Action EU Programme Promotes Active Citizenship and Participation. 2017. Source: http://www.researchyouth.eu/erasmus-youth-in-action-promotes-active-citizenship-and-participation.

Yet, youth organisations' fears that their issues do not find enough space in the programme are also expressed in their discussions of such recent political developments. Stakeholders interpret the need to engage with political statements like the Paris Declaration in different ways. These priorities are being promoted very actively by the institutional powers that be. The Erasmus+ programme objectives were adjusted to take into account the Paris Declaration. The ICF Report states that 'the Commission and the Council decided in November 2015 to adapt their policy cooperation in the fields of education and training (ET 2020) and youth to give priority attention to the implementation of Paris Declaration related priority objectives. Since then, explicit reference has been made to those across various EU reference documents (e.g. Erasmus+ annual work programmes, ET2020 joint (2015) report that also sets other types of priorities Erasmus+ aligns with, etc.).'[73]

This has an important impact on how the youth sector interprets the need to engage with them. The current level of competition for funding is a strong motivator for youth organisations to adapt their applications to 'fit the mould' (whatever that might be determined by at a particular point in time) to ensure that they have the best possible chance of getting the grant. Our youth organisation stakeholders all mentioned refugees, violent extremism and radicalisation as two such current priorities, and that they believe their chances of getting a grant are higher if they address such issues.

Youth organisations especially worry that this kind of 'bandwagoning' is causing organisations without any relevant expertise or experience to attempt projects addressing such sensitive issues, with problematic results. Although they acknowledge the value for innovation that this kind of priority-led funding can have, they are also concerned that between the concerns and priorities of the National Authorities, the various political priorities emanating from the European Institutions, the issues the National Agencies find important, the specific objectives of the programme, the formats of work that are eligible/not eligible for funding, the issues that filter up from the field through their members and the young people they work with are getting lost. The space in the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter for participatory project development with young people is rather limited in comparison to previous incarnations of the programme and this reflects negatively on the relevance of the programme for youth organisations.

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[73] ICF Main Evaluation Report, p. 94. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/icf-volume1-main-report.pdf.

A further point in relation to issue coverage, and therefore relevance, is scale of funding. As mentioned previously, youth organisations generally appreciate the scale of funding that is brought to bear by the programme for the projects for which they receive grants. Indeed, several stakeholders even reported that compared to the financial conditions for similar activities funded by national sources, Erasmus+ Youth Chapter funding, for example for youth exchanges, is quite generous.[74]

Nevertheless, some stakeholders raised the fact that the money available is a drop in the ocean for the kind of challenges the organisations are trying to address. This finding is reflected in our discussion about the categories of funding and how they are prioritised. It is also reflected in the concern of all stakeholders that the overall financial envelope available to the Youth Chapter of the Erasmus+ is insufficient to meet the overall demand on the part of the youth sector. It has been consistently reported across the entire range of stakeholders that despite excellent point scores, many projects have to be rejected simply because there is not enough funding to cover them all.

There are also concerns regarding the expectations placed on the projects receiving funding in terms of what they can realistically achieve in relation to the priority issues of the day. In addition to personal development, civic engagement and employability, youth work is now being promoted by the institutions as a long-term preventative measure against challenges such as radicalisation and violent extremism, and this is seen as unrealistic. Stakeholders do not deny the potential of youth work as an inclusion measure. Rather, they question the capacity of the programme, and their own projects, to reach those most likely to be on the path to radicalisation and violent extremism. And, furthermore, the project formats included in the programme are not considered to be well adapted to such prevention objectives, another finding supported by the mid-term evaluation results.[75]

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[74] The comparison was with Germany-France bilateral youth exchanges under the auspices of the Franco-German Youth Office, which was referred to as covering significantly less than Erasmus+ for daily accommodation and subsistence costs for youth exchanges. Some information about the costs that can be covered by this promoter is included here on this website: https://www.dsj.de/handlungsfelder/international/foerderung/dfjw-frankreich/.

[75] ICF Main Evaluation Report, pp. 111-112, in reference to the ambitions of the programme in comparison to its budget and types of action supported, especially in relation to the Paris Declaration objectives and other over-arching EU-priorities, and the perception of the programme as having an socio-economic focus, etc. Footnote 108 on p. 111 also refers to a lack of specification in the programme guide as to which specific challenging situations the

Finally, on the question of issue coverage and relevance, our enquiries revealed that many stakeholders, and not only the youth organisation stakeholders, question whether the needs of young people per se can really be considered the major driver of the programme. There is a whole 'intermediary' cadre - including youth organisations, youth workers, trainers, policy-makers and researchers (to name just some) - that use the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter to support young people in different ways, but the extent to which they can act on young people's own perspectives and aspirations can credibly be considered limited, given the strict framework within which projects can be proposed and accepted under the Youth Chapter, and given the extent of competition for funding. Participating National Agencies also raised this dilemma around young people's needs.

b.2 Issues with specific activity formats

The previous point links well to the considerations raised by stakeholders about the relevance of the specific activity formats being funded under the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+. Stakeholders across the board raised questions and concerns in this regard, in view of the objectives of the Youth Chapter, and the utility of the programme for the young people they seek to represent and/or support.

Our survey of youth organisation stakeholders demonstrates that the activity formats that are currently funded under the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter are considered relevant to a great extent.

How would you rate the extent of relevance of the youth Chapter of Erasmus+ in terms of the types of activities supported (eligible for funding)?

- I am not well enough informed to... 1.1%
- 1: Relevant to a very small extent 3.4%
- 2: Relevant to a small extent 7.9%
- 3: Relevant to some extent 25.8%
- 4: Relevant to a great extent 38.2%
- 5: Relevant to a very great extent 23.6%
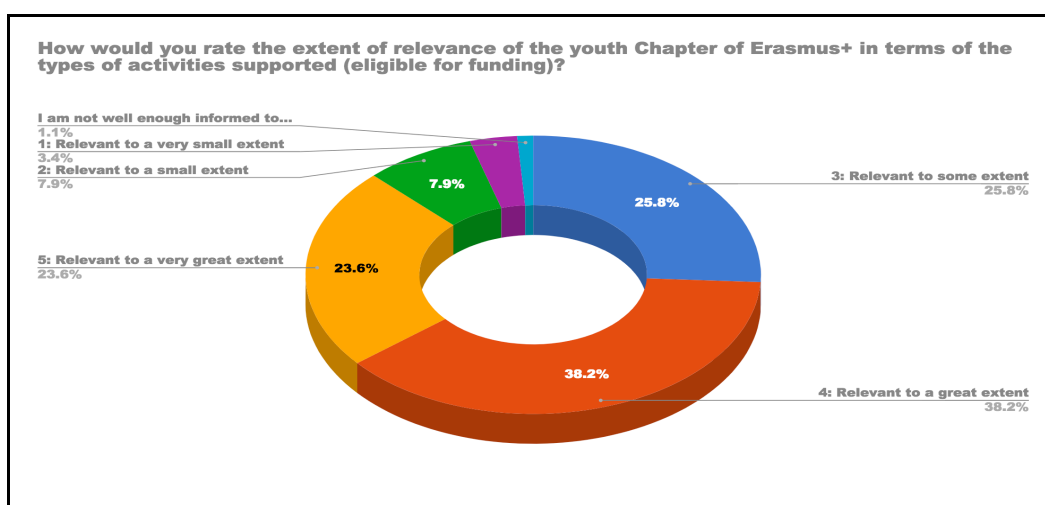
programme actions (in this case EVS) should actually address. Source:
https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/icf-volume1-main-report.pdf.

However, the narrative responses and our face-to-face enquiries revealed that for many there is an issue with what might be called the 'over-regulation' of the activity formats that are eligible for funding. For these stakeholders, it is problematic that there is no space for the 'free' initiative of young people regarding the priorities set by the programme, or other issues young people think are important that may not correspond to those priorities so clearly. Essentially, as they see it, the Youth Chapter tells youth organisations and all other potential users what it will fund and they can decide to apply for funding if they so wish. This assumes on the one had that there are other sources of funding available for the free initiative of young people and youth organisations to pursue their own aims, which is known not to be the case in many countries participating in the programme. Further, it assumes that access to the programme is equitable for all, a question we will address in a later section of the report.

One of the common examples given regarding how this can play out is that of the internationalisation of youth work being done by different kinds of organisations working with youth at local and national levels. In many countries, by virtue of their history or geography or because of the traditions of the youth sector/youth care sector, there has been little tradition of international youth work and youth activities. Several National Agencies have mentioned that it is one of their aims to develop a more strategic approach to the internationalisation of youth work, and specifically to develop the European dimension. However, this is extremely challenging when the programme is unable to respond to the interests of those organisations, and when in order to participate they have to 'fit' their activities to formats and approaches with which they are not familiar or of which they cannot see the value for their target group.

For several National Agencies, this manifests itself in the absence of certain potential users from the applicant pool and their inability to convince them to participate. Especially as regards the question of access of the programme for vulnerable or harder-to-reach young people, or of first-time users, this appears to be a big issue. Some stakeholders believe this is also to blame for a lack of innovation in the methods and practices being applied in the educational work supported by the Youth Chapter. In their opinion, the lack of opportunities for groups of young people to freely think up and plan a project with their peers based on their own analysis and understanding of the priorities targeted by the programme is a real barrier to youth work development and the promotion of youth associative life. We shall come back to this question in a later section of the report.

Closely linked to this point is the fact that with the introduction of Erasmus+, two key categories of projects for groups of young people were discontinued, the national Youth Initiatives and the Youth Democracy projects. It is, of course, acknowledged that there was

a rationale for discontinuing these activities. This said, they have been acknowledged as an important vehicle for supporting the active participation of young people on issues of concern to themselves, for participatory project development, and for the development of the European dimension in youth work in the local context. In addition, those project formats were attractive because they offered opportunities for working on European issues and themes of relevance to the youth field as identified by young people themselves, without the necessity of mobility.

So far, these have not been replaced with any other similar opportunity. Both National Agencies and youth organisations pointed out that they feel this dimension is no longer well enough represented in the programme. This is indirectly confirmed by the mid-term evaluation.[76]

Stakeholders also discussed specific activity formats and how they evaluate them.

In regard of the Structured Dialogue, and much as it is appreciated that there exists an opportunity for young people to engage with policy and decision-makers, stakeholders criticised it for not being a sufficiently effective method of participation in national or European decision-making. In this regard are mentioned specific challenges that can be observed in many countries, notably that the process is often too vague, that the choice of issues is rather arbitrary, that the cycles are too short, that there is far too little preparation of the young people and of the dialogue rounds and finally, that there is far too little follow-up by the national authorities, and even the European authorities.

Our enquiries also revealed interest in and appreciation for Key Action II (KA2), which is understood as having a lot of potential, also for youth organisations. At the same time, youth organisations experience challenges to engage with KA2, something which the National Agencies also picked up on during our enquiries. Specifically mentioned from the perspective of the youth organisations is the issue of coalition and partnership-building, which due to the emphasis put on diversity and pluralism in the evaluation of projects, are entered into with more risk-taking than youth organisations feel comfortable with. This is the cause for dissatisfaction, as for such large-scale projects, youth organisations feel that established partnerships based on solid track records of working together would be more effective, even if that means that one less country or organisational profile is represented. There are also scale and capacity issues. Many youth organisations are not sufficiently

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[76] ICF Main Evaluation Report, p. 136. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/icf-volume1-main-report.pdf.

established, nor do they have adequate staff or resource absorption capacity to develop attractive KA2 scale projects. The KA2 approach, including the cross-sectoral dimension, is yet to be internalised in the acquired knowledge of the community of practice, after only three years of operation, and with the speed of turnover in the youth field. National Agencies recognise the potential value of this format, but feel that they do not have sufficient resources to bring KA2 funding to scale, which as was mentioned previously have only a 14% success rate. The ICF report discusses this issue in some detail.[77]

National Agencies are very much interested in the opportunities presented by Key Action III (KA3), and would like to see more such calls. Nevertheless, a small minority of stakeholders think that the KA3 funding would be used to better effect, given the objectives of this action, in the hands of civil society organisations closest to the field of expertise the projects are supposed to develop. For these stakeholders, the National Agencies are not the most suitable platform through which to push forward the development of a given field of work, even if they acknowledge that these projects help the National Agencies to develop their expertise and their networks, and to bring them closer to the field, and that this is also a useful outcome. Stakeholders point out that Erasmus+ does not have sufficient in-built opportunities to capitalise on the learning from large-scale projects. Many stakeholders cannot see how the systemic effects the programme wishes to achieve can be achieved without specific activities for integrating the knowledge developed into the work of the programme and specific funding to ensure that. The same point was also made in relation to KA2 results. The mid-term evaluation indirectly confirms these results. The European Commission Staff Working Documents states under key findings on effectiveness and European added value that '... the impact of funded projects on National Systems could be more systemic if there were more cooperation projects and further efforts were made for mainstreaming these at National level.'[78]

Finally, and in terms of taking a more strategic approach, it is felt that there is a lot of funding in some parts of the programme and too little in others. In particular, there appears to be a gap in funding for large-scale EVS, and youth organisations pointed out that youth worker mobility is also under-funded, whereas individual EVS mobilities get a lot of financial support. In 2016, which admittedly was its first year of operation, just 3 out of 13 large-scale EVS projects were funded with just over 345,000 euros, involving just 3 organisations and 235 participants. The Strategic EVS approach is considered by many of the stakeholders we

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[77] ICF Main Evaluation Report, Section 7.2.2. pp. 417-420. Source:

https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/icf-volume1-main-report.pdf.

[78] Commission Staff Working Document, p. 2. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/swd-e-plus-mte.pdf

consulted to be a model of good practice for other parts of the programme. Its introduction acknowledges that there was too little opportunity for beneficiaries to plan ahead, including over calendar years and deadlines, and to develop longer and more complex projects, with impacts not only for their participants but also for the organisations promoting them. Some stakeholders think that this approach could enhance the quality of the current youth exchange format, which is criticised for being too focused on the fact of mobility, and not enough focused on the contents being addressed or the learning taking place during the mobility.

c/ Issues related to internal/external coherence and complementarity of the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+
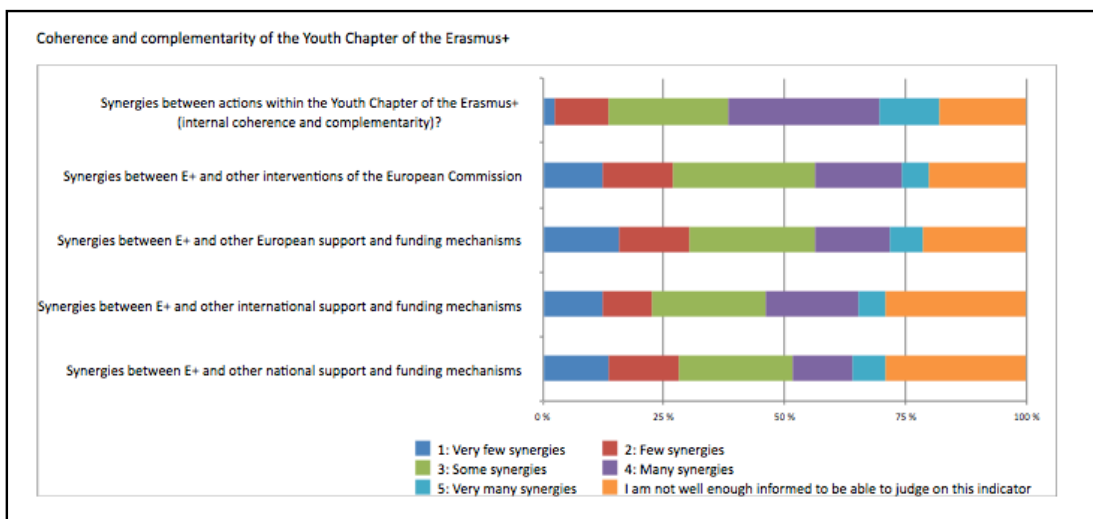
The above graph shows the spread of opinion among youth organisation stakeholders regarding how they see the coherence and complementarity of the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ along with a variety of desired synergies - within the programme between actions, with other EU funding opportunities and actions, and with the actions of other institutions. The results are positive, but it should also be noted that many respondents did not feel well enough informed to respond.

In the narrative responses and in our face-to-face discussions, youth organisation stakeholders stated that they had hoped the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter would make it possible to organise 'transversal' (i.e., multi-measure and multi-sector) but that so far this has not come to pass. One obstacle mentioned in this connection was decentralisation, and the fact that there is no longer a centralised application process for large-scale and complex project applications.

We have already addressed the question of the challenges of coordination and harmonisation in approaches among the National Agencies under the section addressing the administrative experience of the programme on the part of youth organisation stakeholders. Clearly, those considerations also have a bearing on the experience of youth organisations regarding the internal coherence of the programme.

Our analysis of the literature from the National Authorities and youth organisation opinions show mixed evaluations of the internal coherence of Erasmus+, considering it is an integrated programme. It is reported that cross-sectoral cooperation between Youth and Higher Education actors (which is seen as one of the most obvious possible synergies within Erasmus+) remains very challenging. The European Commission Staff Working Document points to these difficulties: '... A majority of respondents asked are either not interested or not convinced to take part in cross-sectoral projects ... '.[79] At the same time, our analysis testifies to the fact that there have been visibility gains for the youth sector within Erasmus+ as a result of the programme integration. Indeed the mid-term evaluation confirms that cross-sectoral cooperation has increased also in the youth sector.[80] National Agencies consulted point out that they can now specifically fund projects with a cross-sectoral dimension, which they find positive. Some stakeholders feel it is too soon to expect significant impact in this relation at this point, considering the actions targeting this kind of cooperation are new. Notably, the European Commission Staff Working Documents state that 'The systemic impact of the actions of a new kind introduced only in 2014 (KA3, Alliances, etc.) is meant to be evaluated at final stage, after 2020'.[81]

In relation to synergies between the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter and other interventions/funding opportunities of the European Union, respondent stakeholders reported that while desirable, this is far from easy. Several suggested that currently it is very difficult to combine funding under the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter and other funding programmes with a specific thematic focus, specifically environmental protection, agriculture and democracy. In addition, stakeholders commented that they cannot observe specific measures being taken to support the emergence of synergies with other EU funding mechanisms. Although less prominent in the discussion, youth organisation stakeholders are aware that their capacity for engaging in such projects is also limited to an

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[79] Commission Staff Working Document, p. 57. Source:
https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/swd-e-plus-mte.pdf
[80] Commission Staff Working Document, p. 3. Source:
https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/swd-e-plus-mte.pdf
[81] Commission Staff Working Document, p. 3. Source:
https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/swd-e-plus-mte.pdf

extent. Furthermore, and as already discussed above, many concerns have been raised about the transition to the European Solidarity Corps, notably why it is likely absorb EVS, rather than being introduced as a complementary measure.

In relation to synergies with other European support and funding mechanisms (i.e., non-EU), respondent youth organisation stakeholders have significant concerns about the dimension of co-funding. As these stakeholders experience it, receiving co-funding from the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter is no longer possible. It is reported that evaluators view Erasmus+ Youth Chapter projects as standalone activities, and that applications that apply only for co-funding receive a very negative evaluation. Some respondents were very critical on this point, stating that the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter application and evaluation process is designed to discourage a synergetic approach to the use of available funding at European level. Others reported that there are some synergies possible between Erasmus+ and the European Youth Foundation, but the differences in their requirements and procedures are an obstacle.

Some stakeholders point out that while the programme is supposed to support opportunities for the development of European-national-local synergies, many of them experience significant difficulties in accessing funding from national/local authorities, even if it is occasionally possible for them to use local or other funding to co-fund Erasmus+ activities, and it is unclear for many stakeholders how such synergies are supposed to emerge with the current formats of work eligible for funding, a finding indirectly confirmed by the mid-term evaluation. Notably, in this connection the European Commission Staff Working Document states: '… the evidence of the exploitation of project results by policy makers and the effective engagement of the latter when they are not included in the project itself is not always clear'.[82] The Open Public Consultation conducted during the mid-term evaluation also confirms that there is room for improvement with regard to system-level effects of the programme. Less than half of respondents (46%) reported that the Programme had been effective in modernising and supporting policy reforms at national level and supporting the modernisation of education and training systems and youth policies (n=1,206).[83]

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[82] European Commission Staff Working Document, p. 2. Source:
https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/swd-e-plus-mte.pdf

[83] ICF Main Evaluation Report, pp. 215-216. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/icf-volume1-main-report.pdf.

Regarding the potential for synergy, Strategic Partnerships are much appreciated, both by youth organisations and national stakeholders, but are still felt to be underfunded. We have discussed the challenges perceived around Strategic Partnerships in a previous section.

d/ Issues related to the European added value of the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+

We have addressed the outcomes and benefits of the programme in the first chapter of our report. Of course, these benefits and positive outcomes form part of the European added value that this programme can realise. We will not develop on these further here. Rather, we will focus on a number of other dimensions of European added value that participating stakeholders found important to raise in the course of our enquiries, notably

- the positive image of the EU among young people;
- the development of European values in the wider society;
- the development of national policy frameworks supporting young people.

The impact of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter for the sustainability of youth associative life and civil society will be addressed in the next section of the report.

The following graph shows the overall spread of opinion regarding aspects of European added value enquired into during our survey.

To which extent does the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ add value in relation to the following aspects?
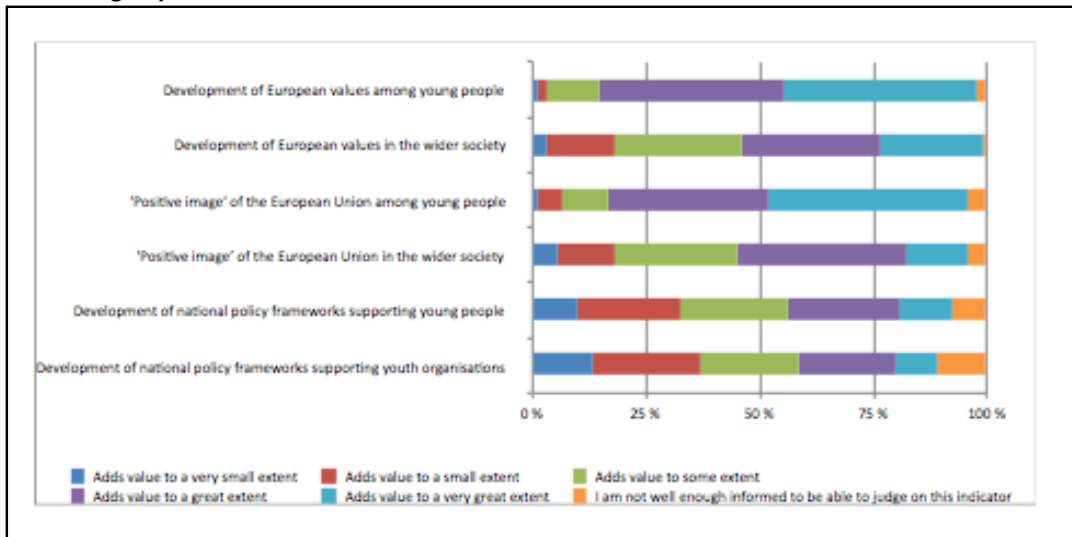
The results of our survey show that stakeholders believe that participation in the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter has significant added value for the positive image of the EU among young people.
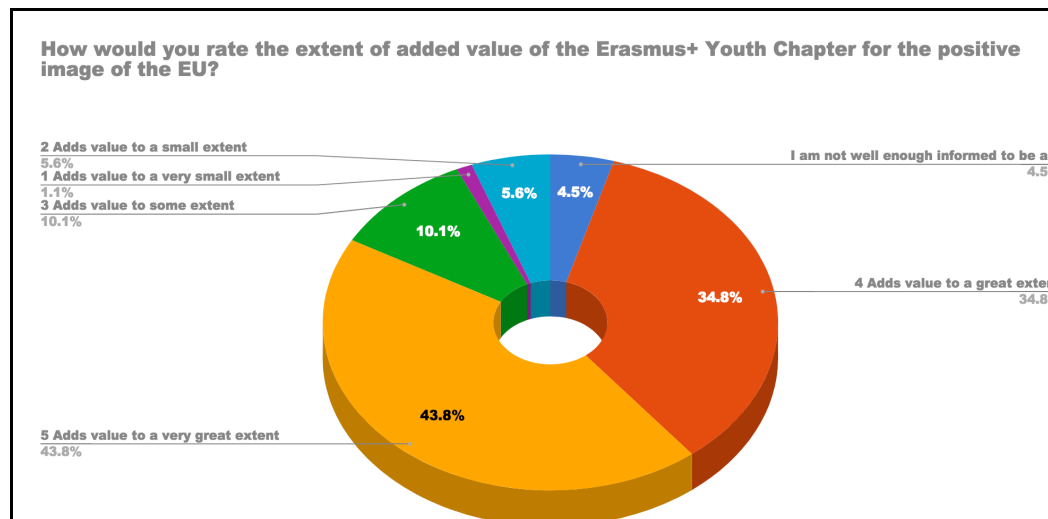
RAY research confirms this finding. According to RAY, 47% of young people participating in Erasmus+ Youth Chapter projects believe that their sense of 'feeling European' has increased in comparison to before participation in the project.[84]

However, some other results show a nuanced picture. For example, the ICF report states: '... Like for other sectors, in the youth sector participation in Erasmus+ is associated with stronger willingness to work or study abroad than within the control group (see Figure 6.17 - Youth Sector: Areas with statistically significant difference between beneficiaries and control group for learners - breakdown by type of learners). However, interestingly, the participation for this target group is not associated with stronger attachment to the EU'.[85] This finding also needs to be put into perspective though, as the target group of young people engaged in youth organisations generally expresses highly positive attitudes towards the EU – i.e., the scores of the control group are also strongly positive[86] Qualitative research conducted in the context of RAY also shows that the development of positive attitudes towards Europe includes a broader range of ideas than positive feelings towards the EU and its institutions - Europe as an ideal, as a representation of values, as a project of international cooperation, are also included in positive feelings towards Europe.[87]

While it would be remiss to overstate what can be expected from short-term educational exchange and learning mobility activities with young people in terms of the development of wider societal awareness, youth organisation stakeholders participating in our enquiries also evaluate the effects of Erasmus+ Youth Chapter on the development of European values in the wider society positively.

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[84] Research based analysis of youth in action (RAY), Doris Bammer, Andreas Karsten, Sandra Müller, Exploring Erasmus+ Youth in Action - The impact of the programme on youth worker's competences. Research project on competence development and capacity building in Erasmus+ Youth in Action. Transnational analysis of module A: Self-perceived competence of project participants (youth workers/youth leaders). 2017, p.11. Available to download at: http://www.researchyouth.eu/results-erasmus-youth-in-action.

[85] ICF Main Evaluation Report, pp. 285-286. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/icf-volume1-main-report.pdf.

[86] ICF Main Evaluation Report, p. 284. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/icf-volume1-main-report.pdf.

[87] RAY Transnational Analysis 2017. Available to download at: http://www.researchyouth.eu/results-erasmus-youth-in-action.

How would you rate the extent of added value of the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ for the development of European values among young people?

- 2 Adds value to a small extent — 2.2%
- 1 Adds value to a very small extent — 1.1%
- 3 Adds value to some extent — 11.2%
- 4 Adds value to a great extent — 40.4%
- 5 Adds value to a very great extent — 42.7%
- I am not well enough informed to be abl... — 2.2%

RAY research into the effects of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter on the active citizenship and participation of young people also underscores these results.

How would you rate the extent of added value of the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ for the development of European values in the wider society?

- I am not well enough informed to... — 1.1%
- 1 Adds value to a very small extent — 3.4%
- 2 Adds value to a small extent — 14.6%
- 3 Adds value to some extent — 28.1%
- 5 Adds value to a very great extent — 22.5%
- 4 Adds value to a great extent — 30.3%
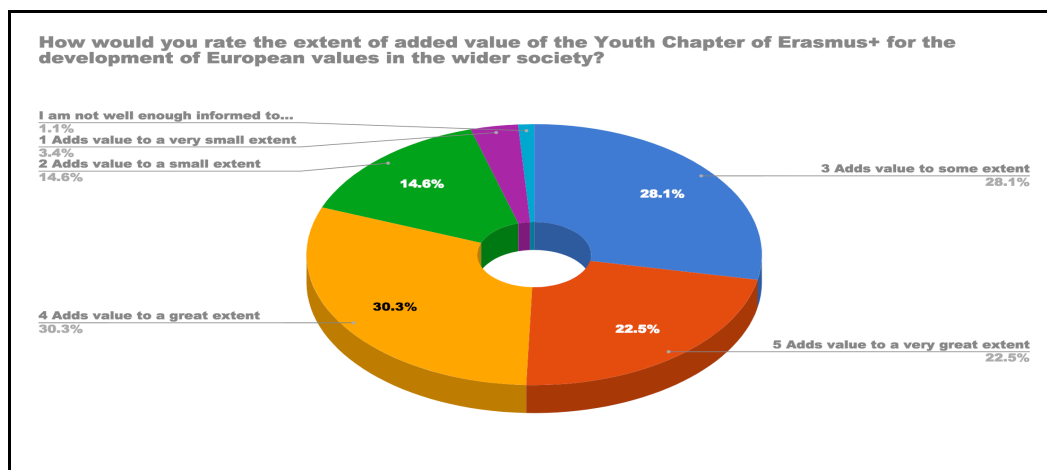
The following graph shows the spread of opinion on the added value of the programme for the development of national policy frameworks supporting young people. Overall, the results are positive.

How would you rate the extent of added value of the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ for the development of national policy frameworks supporting young people?

1 Adds value to a very small extent
10.1%

2 Adds value to a small extent
22.5%

3 Adds value to some extent
23.6%

4 Adds value to a great extent
24.7%

I am not well enough informed to be abl...
7.9%

5 Adds value to a very great extent
11.2%

10.1%

22.5%

24.7%

23.6%

7.9%

11.2%

However, participating stakeholders' narrative responses in the survey and discussions during both interviews and focus group add nuance to this result. With notable exceptions, most stated that at this point they cannot identify a high level of systemic impact as a result of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter for national youth policy frameworks, despite the existence of the Structured Dialogue. We have discussed the challenges associated with the Structured Dialogue in a previous section. Suffice it to say here that those challenges are seen to hinder the evolution of deeper systemic impact on the part of the programme in relation to national policy development.

This has been underscored by statements made by interviewees from across the stakeholder categories participating in our enquiries, including National Agencies, who point out that desired spillover effects regarding policy in the countries where they are active are yet to emerge. National Youth Councils pointed out that even in countries where the youth sector structures are strong (i.e., both on the governmental and non-governmental side), it is a long and hard process to connect national and local youth policy priorities and development with the programme.

In terms of why this might be the case, stakeholders mentioned the fact that the programme has only been up and fully running for a short time (3 years). It is also attributed to the fact that KA2 and KA3 activities have only had limited time to get going, and are yet to yield significant impact.

On the other hand, it has also been reported that there are too few opportunities for strategic capitalisation on knowledge and expertise development in the programme as it is currently structured and with the current range of eligible formats. Hence, stakeholders also

identify structural barriers to the development of added value in relation to more systemic objectives.

An interesting dimension of added value that was raised especially in the interview process is the effects the introduction of Erasmus+ has had on international cooperation with neighbouring regions and on the participation of young people from wider geographies. Changes in the internal rules governing participation in the programme have made some aspects of cooperation with non-EU partner countries easier, although the fact that they still do not have National Agencies remains an issue. Furthermore, embassies of EU countries will soon be obliged to provide visas to all EVS volunteers whose applications and files are complete and correct. The positive impact of this development should not be underestimated.[88]

Participating stakeholders also perceive access to the programme as a particular challenge for the added value of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter. Across the board, this was a major theme for all the stakeholder groups that participated in our enquiries. There are two levels on which this particular issue was discussed - the individual level and the organisational level - and they are very much linked to each other.

At the individual level, and as discussed previously in relation to the outcomes of the programme and to the functioning of the programme, there is significant concern across the majority of stakeholder groups that the programme is still not accessible enough to young people with fewer opportunities and special needs to be able to add significant value in terms of their inclusion, although there were notable exceptions raised in the National Authority reports. This is perceived as something of a double bind by stakeholders. It has been shown by research that once in the programme, such young people gain much more than their more privileged peers, because the social capital gap is so large and the programme is clearly well placed to support the development of social capital.[89] However, and as demonstrated by the mid-term evaluation, such needy young people are the hardest to reach for the programme, and they are the ones for whom the programme is

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[88] For the legal basis regulating this development, see: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32016L0801&from=EN. For more information on the Visa Directive adopted in May 2016 and how it affects EVS, see: http://eee-yfu.org/visa-directive/.
[89] RAY Transnational Analysis 2017. Available to download at: http://www.researchyouth.eu/results-erasmus-youth-in-action.

most likely to be least visible and the least obvious choice in terms of what to engage with among any other measures that might support their inclusion.[90]

This is a problem of structural exclusion, even if it is not a deliberate or intended one. Young people with the highest level of social and financial capital are most likely to use the programme. Young people with fewer opportunities need more support for doing so. It is the opinion of many stakeholders consulted that the programme is not appropriately calibrated, in a structural sense, to be able to provide the kind of support the most needy young people would need to be able to participate. In their opinion, measures for achieving outreach to such individuals or groups are either insufficient or missing altogether, and even when such outreach has been possible and succeeds, the conditions imposed by the programme make it difficult for project carriers to work with the young people concerned in a manner suitable to their situation and conditions. These stakeholders raise the fact that involving the most needy young people takes longer, requires more in-depth preparation, involves higher real costs because participants cannot cover the costs of participation, are subject to more frequent changes and demand a degree of flexibility that is often beyond the capability of most public administration actors - national or European.

Furthermore, a complementary European intervention bound by the regulations of subsidiarity cannot replace specialised youth work provision for such young people by National Authorities. Nevertheless, several stakeholders have pointed to the fact that in a time of austerity this is de facto what is happening, because practically all sources of indigenous funding for youth work with an inclusion focus have dried up. Therefore, this question is also a political one, and one that is important for policy. The way National Authorities deal with the level of priority and recognition given to youth work as an instrument of inclusion is an issue that stakeholders feel should be higher up on the agenda of the political decision-makers in charge of the programme.[91] These findings are confirmed by the mid-term evaluation.[92]

The reflections above on the question of access at the individual level, and specifically the structural and political ones, are intimately bound up with the question of organisational

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[90] European Commission Staff Working Document, p. 2-3. Source:
https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/swd-e-plus-mte.pdf
[91] European Commission Staff Working Document, p. 2-3. Source:
https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/swd-e-plus-mte.pdf
[92] European Commission Staff Working Document, p. 2-3. Source:
https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/swd-e-plus-mte.pdf

access. Some aspects have been discussed previously. However, regarding European added value, it seems important to reiterate that some potential grantees are making conscious decisions not to engage with the programme. National Agencies involved in our enquiries confirmed that they struggle with how to enlarge their pool of grantees beyond the 'usual suspects' to include new organisations. Underscoring this, the ICF report shows that the youth sector has a very high level of repeat applicants among practitioners.[93]

Conclusion regarding the functioning of the Youth Chapter programme
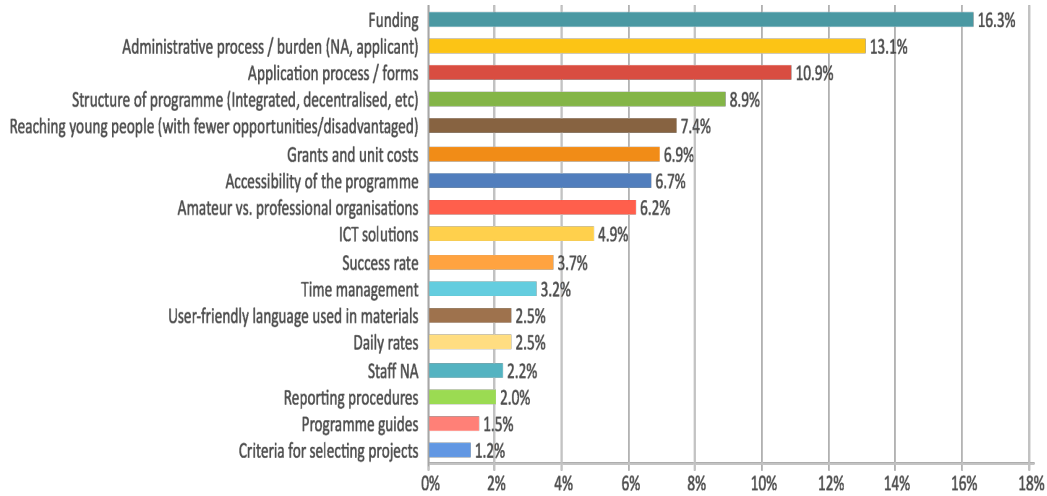
To conclude this section, we feel it is valuable to mention that we find quite some convergence between the overall results of our enquiries regarding the perspectives of youth organisation stakeholders and those of the National Authorities whose reports we had access to (in total 11).

The following graph shows the overall importance given to the different challenges and aspects requiring improvement explicitly mentioned in the National Authority reports we reviewed. This ranking has been established on the basis of the frequency with which each issue has been discussed in the reports, based on the detailed coding of the reports. The horizontal bar chart shows percentages corresponding to the absolute frequency of all subcodes within an analysed issue. In this example, percentages represent number of coded segments within challenges/aspects requiring improvement.[94]

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[93] ICF Main Evaluation Report, p.143. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/icf-volume1-main-report.pdf.

[94] More information about the specifics of the method can be found in Appendix 3.

Challenges / aspects requiring improvement

Challenge	
Funding	16.3%
Administrative process / burden (NA, applicant)	13.1%
Application process / forms	10.9%
Structure of programme (Integrated, decentralised, etc)	8.9%
Reaching young people (with fewer opportunities/disadvantaged)	7.4%
Grants and unit costs	6.9%
Accessibility of the programme	6.7%
Amateur vs. professional organisations	6.2%
ICT solutions	4.9%
Success rate	3.7%
Time management	3.2%
User-friendly language used in materials	2.5%
Daily rates	2.5%
Staff NA	2.2%
Reporting procedures	2.0%
Programme guides	1.5%
Criteria for selecting projects	1.2%

Percentages based on frequency of coded segments within each challenge mentioned in analysed NA reports

Interestingly, the information at our disposal as a result of the textual analysis of the National Authority Reports and of the narrative responses to our survey of youth organisations allows us to compare the issues which youth organisations find most important and those which National Authorities find most important. The following graph shows the percentage difference between the frequency with which youth organisations and national authorities mention certain challenges and/or aspects requiring improvement in their respective views.
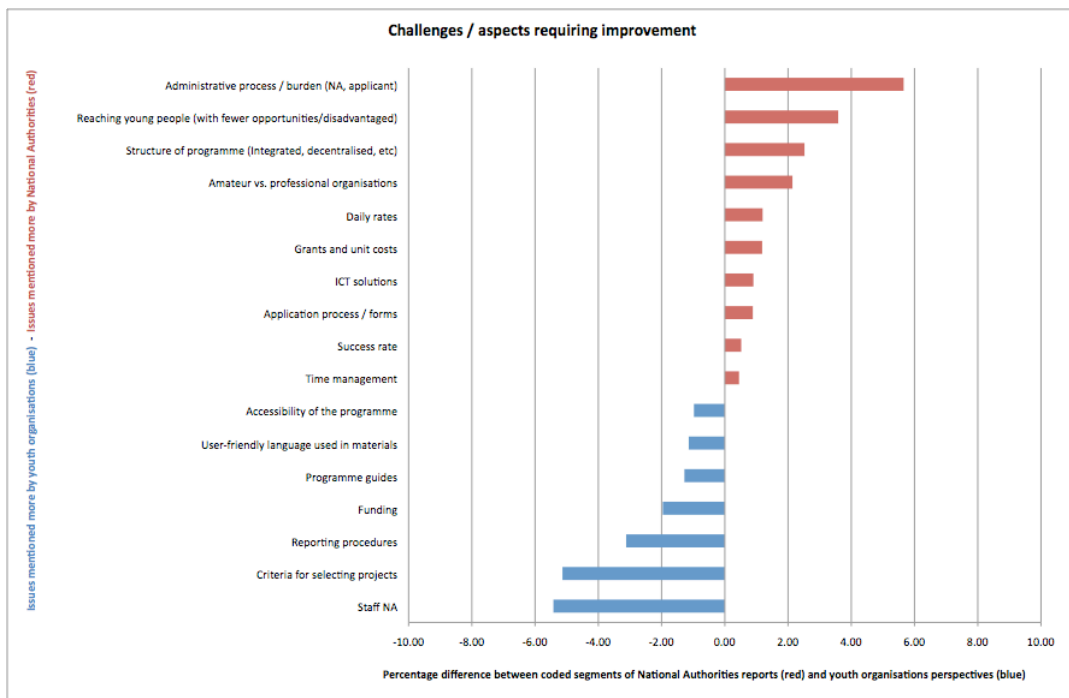
As for the results presented in the section on outcomes above, both sources of information (National Authorities reports and narrative responses to our survey of youth organisations, transcripts of focus groups and interviews with youth organisations' representatives), were coded in the same manner, with codes assigned to a portion of the text following principles of coding qualitative data and analysis.95 Based on the frequency of coded segments within each theme and for each data source, we calculated corresponding percentages (as presented in the chart above). Afterwards, we compared the percentages of how often each code was mentioned in material from National Authorities and material from youth organisations. We can see that some issues were mentioned more than others and that differing levels of importance were assigned to them by the different stakeholders. To emphasise these discrepancies, i.e., to see which issues are more relevant to National Authorities and which to youth organisations, we deduced percentage values for each of the coded issues as presented in the chart.

While National Authorities' reports discuss the administrative process/burden and problems in reaching young people with fewer opportunities more often (5.7% and 3.6% more, respectively), youth organisations are concerned more about what they experience as non-transparent criteria for selecting projects (5.1% more), challenges in accessing National Authority staff support (5.4% more) and difficult reporting procedures (3.1% more). This is not to say that youth organisations think the challenges of the administrative procedures are not relevant, only that for them, it does not rank as highly as some others. The issues in the middle of the chart, indicating a small discrepancy between the two stakeholders, are those for which we can observe coherence between National Authorities' and youth organisations' perspectives, in terms of how relevant those issues are. Lack of funding is by far the number one issue for both National Authorities and youth organisations, even if youth organisations refer slightly more often to it than National Authorities. Youth organisations are concerned about the funding available for their core activities and about the fact that it is becoming more difficult to win a project in an increasingly competitive environment. National Authorities see this as a challenge as well.

Furthermore, we feel it is valuable to add some insight into how the current Erasmus+ Youth Chapter fares in comparison to the previous Youth in Action programme in the view of youth organisation stakeholders and in relation to the standard indicators discussed above.

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95 More information about the specifics of the method can be found in Appendix 3.
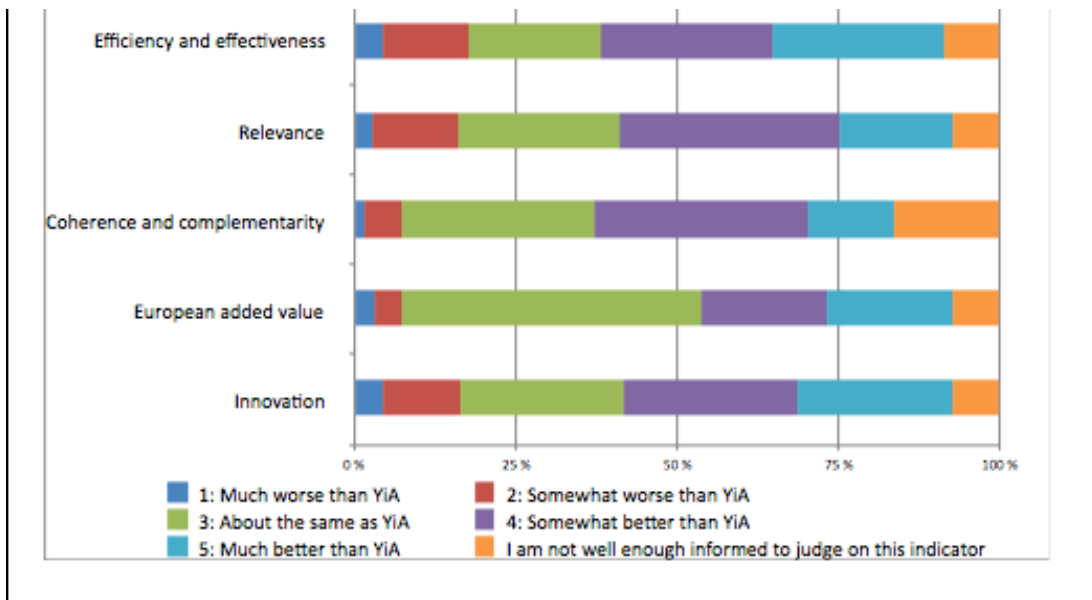
Overall, and as is visible from the graph above, Erasmus+ is rated 'about the same as YiA' and 'somewhat better than YiA' by the majority of respondents on all indicators. This might seem a little incongruous with many of the previous considerations discussed, as on many specific items youth organisation stakeholders have been quite critical. However, as we did not evaluate predecessor programmes per se, we can only assume that these are 'standalone' results, in other words, that respondents have evaluated Erasmus+ without thinking in comparative terms until actually asked.

Nevertheless, this graph does show that even for the most critical among the stakeholders, and despite the many challenges apparent in the functioning of the programme, it is experienced as making an important contribution.

3/ Contribution of the programme to the development and sustainability of youth associative life/civil society in Europe

In line with the specific objectives of the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+, our study tried to find out more about if/how the programme contributes to the development and sustainability of youth organisation and youth associative life in Europe. We focused enquiries in this relation on two general questions, as follows:

- How does the programme help youth organisations to develop, grow and sustain their efforts to meet their objectives?
- In which way is the programme supporting the sustainability of youth associative life/civil society?

Before embarking on the substantive exploration of this issue, it is important to outline one significant caveat. In some of our exploratory discussions, including on this theme, we asked respondents to reflect not only on what the programme adds in terms of value, but what the situation of the field would be like if there was no Erasmus+. These discussions revealed disappointment that many National Authorities do not take over more responsibility for

providing support to the development of youth civil society and a wide range of youth organisations and their youth work. At the same time, they revealed great appreciation for Erasmus+, which they see as filling many gaps, even if by rights it is not its role. During these discussions, youth organisation respondents were often of the opinion that without Erasmus+ (in the sense of a European-level programme, rather than in its current incarnation) there would be almost no funding at all for their activities and their structural survival would be in jeopardy.

Nevertheless, and as much as it is important to raise awareness about such situations, they cannot be the 'essence' of an exploration of the contribution of a given programme to the sustainability of youth organisations and youth civil society. The fact is the programme does exist, and irrespective of the overall situation of civil society in any region or country, it should be possible to make an assessment of the extent and quality with which the programme responds to its specific objective in this regard. At the time of writing, and to the best of our knowledge, no in-depth contribution analysis has been conducted regarding the role of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter for this dimension, which it must be reminded is one of its stated specific sectoral objectives. This makes any discussion of sustainability effects extremely difficult, and therefore our further exploration of this theme is based primarily on the perspectives we have collected from our respondents and other opinion and attitude-based research (primarily RAY), as well as what we have learned from results of the ICF research presented in the section on organisational effects in the main ICF report.[96]

The following graph summarises the ratings of youth organisation stakeholders participating in our survey on the contribution of the Erasmus+ programme to the sustainability of youth organisations and youth civil society. As in previous instances, the numerical values are positive, with most stakeholders rating 4 or 3 out of maximum 5 on the extent to which the programme adds value in this regard.

**How would you rate the added value of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter for the following aspects?**

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[96] ICF Main Report, Section 6.5.1, Organisational effects, pp. 312-349. Source:
https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/icf-volume1-main-report.pdf.
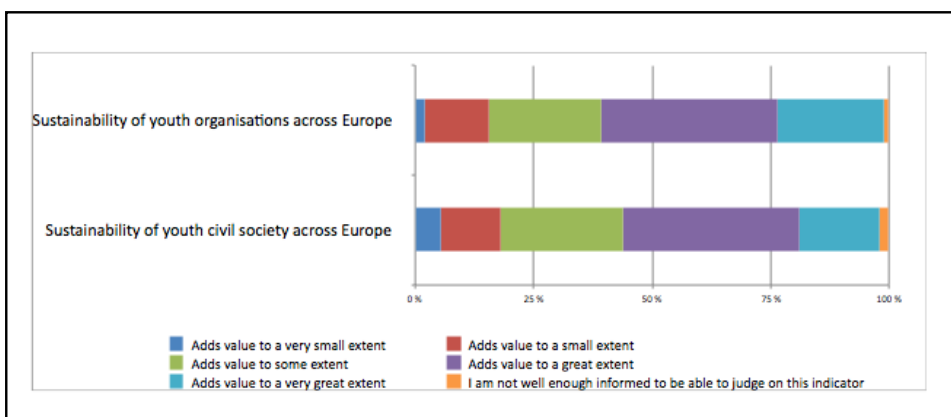
Again, RAY research underscores this point, stating that the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter is strengthening the role of youth organisations.[97] RAY enquired into 'effects on organisations' of participation in the programme by group and project leaders, along with a typical 'competence transfer' concept, i.e., that the learning of an individual, whether in the context of explicit training or learning by doing, accrues positively for the structure within which s/he is working/active naturally.

The following graph shows aspects of the effects of participation of project participants and project leaders that could be considered to strengthen organisations. As in the case of individual competence, the effects for project leaders are stronger than for project participants.[98]

Effects on organisations of participation by project participants (PP) and project leaders (PL)

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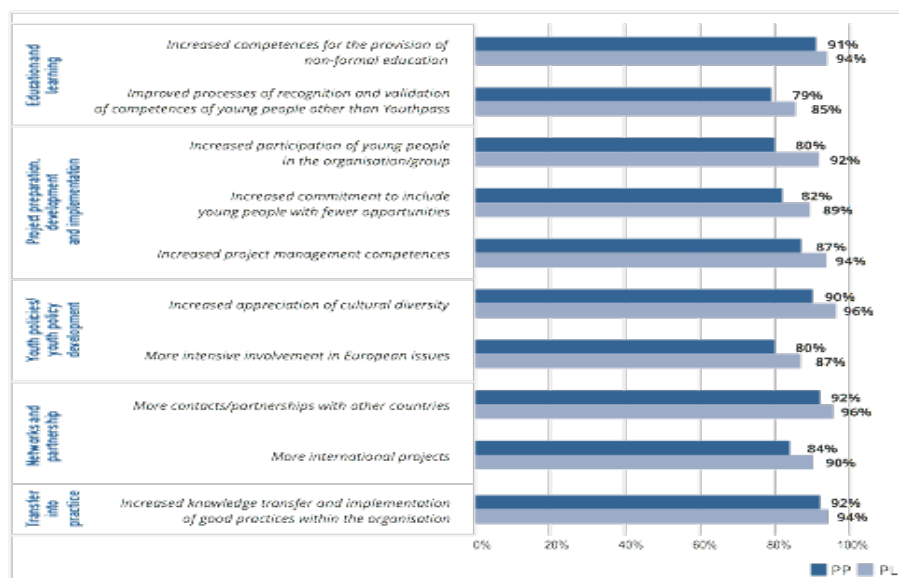
[97] RAY Transnational Analysis 2017, Fact Sheet: Effects on Organisations. Source: http://www.researchyouth.eu/effects-on-organisations

[98] RAY Transnational Analysis 2017, Executive summary, p. 8. Available to download at: http://www.researchyouth.eu/results-erasmus-youth-in-action.

Certainly of great importance is the fact that the vast majority of project leaders believe that as a result of their participation, they have increased their project management competencies (94%); there is increased knowledge transfer and implementation of good practices (94%); and the participation of young people in the organisation/group has increased (92%). These are impressive results.

Nevertheless, these positive results are based on an aggregation of individuals' perceptions, and are based on all data for all countries. They do not take into account the specific structural issues that are often at play in the extent and quality of sustainability in youth organisations and youth civil society, nor do they take into account significant differences in the situation of youth civil society in different countries. These especially include the high rate of turnover among voluntary and even salaried staff in youth organisations and initiatives, through which trained youth and project leaders take their skills with them to other sectors, not always anchoring them through knowledge transfer within the organisation before they depart. Practitioners in youth work and trainers in the youth sector speak to the fact that the transfer dimension in non-formal education is particularly difficult to ensure.

In our enquiries, youth organisation stakeholders see the programme as not well enough adapted to the purpose of strengthening youth organisations: there are no funding formats for small-scale projects that would help youth organisations and initiatives to reach out to young people and increase their membership; there are no funding formats that allow youth organisations to develop projects that speak to their own Europe-related missions and concerns, but without specific reference to pre-defined priorities and formats, without necessarily including mobility provisions; there is very little space for strategically oriented projects to develop the European dimension of the organisations' work or for follow-up activities and continuation projects. Several National Agencies speak to the challenges of knowing the field and the needs of youth organisations, but of not being able to respond in ways that make sense with the formats they have at their disposal or with the level of resources they can invest. (In previous sections we outlined some important facts that support this perspective.) Youth organisations claim that their general rate of success has fallen with the integration of the programme and increased competition from organisations and institutions with more capacity. As already outlined above, the ICF report testifies to

there being issues of access to the programme for newcomers, smaller and less 'established' organisations.[99]

In line with these reflections on what constitutes sustainability and how the Youth Chapter does or does not support its emergence, the narrative responses received in the survey and our face-to-face enquiries tend to be more critical than the numerical ratings found in our survey and in the RAY results. Furthermore, and similarly to the section on outcomes, we can see quite some difference in perspectives between the different stakeholder groups that participated. As far as we can surmise, the most important cleavage in this relation concerns the emphasis that each of the different stakeholder groups places on the different purposes of the programme and its Youth Chapter.

For obvious reasons, and when asked about how they perceive the purpose of the programme, youth organisation stakeholders place more emphasis on the specific objectives of the Youth Chapter that relate to supporting youth organisations. To some extent this perspective is supported by the way the National Agencies speak to this theme, with the slight difference that they tend to emphasise the development of national youth work provision. For its part, the European Commission tends to emphasise learning mobility and supporting European cooperation, citing subsidiarity and the responsibility of the Member States and national youth policy to support the development of youth work. Nevertheless, youth organisation stakeholders, especially the international non-governmental youth organisations, claim specific legitimacy regarding the promotion of the European dimension and the values it represents. They feel that some recognition through a relevant funding format of their special track record and role regarding the promotion of a European civil society is warranted.

In relation to this issue, youth organisation stakeholders raised some specific issues regarding the financial dimension of sustainability. Erasmus+ was expected to bring new financial opportunities to the youth sector, and indeed on paper the programme does have more money overall. However, so far the increase in funding has not come on stream in a way that youth organisation stakeholders expected or have been able to absorb.

A good example is how youth organisations see their situation regarding KA2. This action is conceptualised for organisational sustainability gains. Yet, the consortia that are best able to

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[99] ICF Main Report, Section 4.4. - The programme's suitability for attracting different target audiences, pp. 137-143. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/icf-volume1-main-report.pdf.

present KA2 projects and to absorb such large-scale funding are not necessarily made up of youth organisations, even if their projects are addressed to a youth sector issue or even to strengthening the youth sector. Hence, such projects may develop materials, resources, knowledge and practices that are relevant, but the additional institutionalisation effect of absorbing large-scale funding, managing a large-scale project, engaging in a large-scale partnership, etc., is just not feasible for many youth organisations, because they feel, and are objectively, unable to compete in the same league as other applicants (especially higher education and private sector applicants).

Furthermore, youth organisation stakeholders testify to some confusion about the way the announced funding increases have been implemented. In their experience, the first three years of Erasmus+ have been characterised by a lower success rate and no substantial increase in the overall availability of funds for the formats that are most important to them. Some National Agencies also referred to the approach taken to phasing in funding increases with limited understanding, as they also struggle to meet the demand that there apparently is for funding and are concerned that repeated rejections will be counter-productive for the general credibility of the programme. Those National Agencies that raised this point are happy that the next phase of the programme will likely be better from this point of view.

Overall, our findings show that while the programme is appreciated and that without it the situation of youth organisations wanting to do international/European projects would be significantly worse, if not impossible, many stakeholders are concerned that the programme is not sufficiently in tune with the realities of youth organisations and of young people's participation and engagement in civil society at the grassroots level, with the notable exceptions of those National Agencies that maintain very close relations with the youth organisations in their country.

It is important to mention here that even youth organisations see it as the responsibility of the Member States to put in place suitable conditions for the sustainable development of youth organisations and youth associative life, and they feel it is problematic that many Member States do not see the need to invest beyond what they contribute to Erasmus+. In some countries, a strong relationship between the National Authorities and the National Agency is seen as a contribution to addressing this, and to the development of an enabling environment for youth civil society. However, in some participating countries, domestic political developments are increasingly seen as limiting independence in project selection, with potentially negative effects for the capacity of youth civil society to express itself freely regarding government and European-level policies.

4/ Programme structure and intervention logic

Another important dimension of our enquiry related to the programme structure. The new Erasmus+ Youth Chapter is structured differently from its predecessor, and quite significantly so. The changes have not only been cosmetic but have fundamentally altered the ways in which youth organisations interact with the programme, and absorbing this change has not been without its difficulties for stakeholders, both grantees and grant-makers.

Hence, it was important for us to find out more about how this change of structure has been experienced, whether it has produced the announced advantages and what is felt might be improved, etc., notably from the perspective of youth organisation stakeholders.

The following two diagrams explain the 'intervention logic' of the new programme - the first related to the intended outcomes and impacts of the programme in terms of process and the second related to the role of the different elements of the programme in that process. Together, these two diagrams demonstrate how the programme is supposed to achieve the different changes enshrined in its objectives.

Diagram 1: Outcomes and impacts[100]

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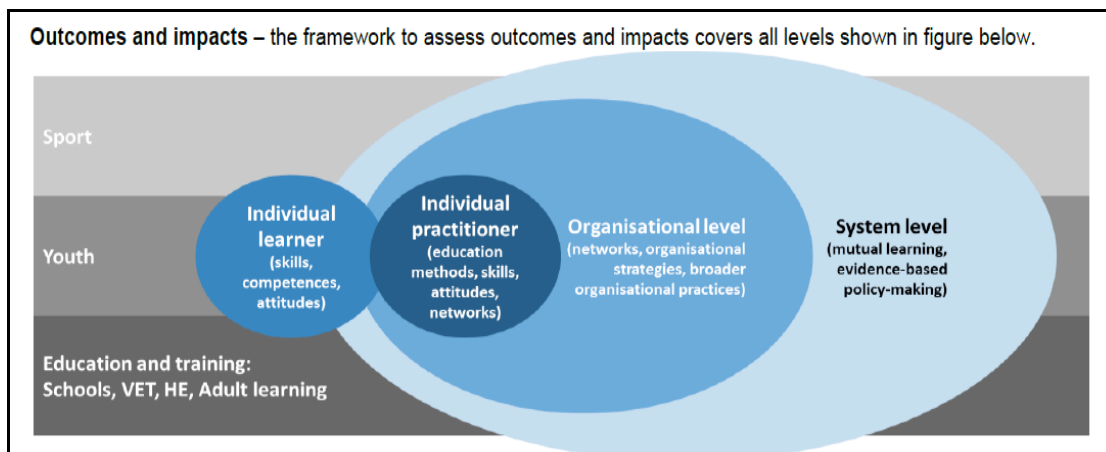
[100] Evaluation of Erasmus+ and predecessor programmes – Overview, Document distributed to NAs about the evaluation. European Commission reference: Ref. Ares(2016)6169366 - 28/10/2016.

Diagram 2: How the objectives were supposed to be achieved[101]
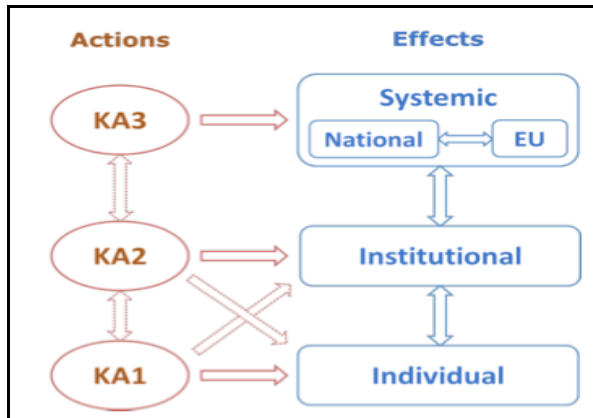
Important to note here is that both of these diagrams have been sourced from materials about the mid-term evaluation commissioned by the European Commission, rather than from the programme guide or from information available to potential beneficiaries in the public domain prior to the rolling-out of the evaluation. Furthermore, only some stakeholders we spoke to were aware of these representations of how the programme is intended to make its impact, and for the most part these were not youth organisation stakeholders. Lastly, if stakeholders were aware of any diagram at all, it was the first ('outcomes and impacts - the framework to assess outcomes and impacts') rather than the second.

Our enquiry in this regard focused on the following aspects:

- level of understanding of the structure and how the process of delivering outcomes and impacts by the programme is conceptualised;
- challenges of understanding the structure, if any;
- how youth organisation stakeholders feel about working in this structure - i.e., has it produced the desired advantages, is it practical for their needs, etc.;
- whether (all) stakeholders feel it is working in the intended sense;
- and for those stakeholders that can speak from experience, a comparison with the predecessor Youth in Action programme.

In the first place, it is important to mention the significant practical and administrative challenges experienced by all stakeholders in the transition from the old programme to the

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[101] European Commission Document, Evaluation Roadmap: http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/roadmaps/docs/2015_eac_014_evaluation_erasmus_en.pdf.

new one. This has had important impacts on the way youth organisation stakeholders perceive and feel about the structure of the programme and its practicality for their needs. We have addressed these challenges in quite some depth under the section addressing the functioning of the programme, and therefore we will not repeat those considerations here.

Secondly, when we speak about the structure of the new programme, we need to identify what was actually new. Here three important dimensions have been raised again and again through our enquiries. The first was the complete decentralisation such that there exist no centralised actions any longer to which youth organisations can apply and all funding formats have to be applied for through a National Agency and include a national partner from that country. The second was the full integration of the programme such that any legal entity irrespective of form (youth organisation or public body or company, etc.) can apply for Youth Chapter funding as long as they meet the criteria, and that application procedures and administrative requirements (financial, reporting, presentation of legal documentation, registration in the administrative system, etc.) have been harmonised, making them the same for all applicants. The third was the introduction of an obligatory mobility dimension in most Key Actions, such that there is only exceptional provision for activities that do not involve mobility (KA3 Structured Dialogue being one such exception).

It appears, however, that the intervention logic underlying Erasmus+ has remained relatively similar to previous youth-specific incarnations of the programme. In essence, the idea is for the programme to capitalise on the learning and competence development of individuals for the development of the organisational and system levels. Relevant literature and our face-to-face enquiries point to the fact that the programme's new structuring around the three large key actions was supposed to simplify the programme's intervention logic significantly such that it would be easier to discern impacts at the different levels at the European level, but also within the Member States. The mid-term evaluation also states this clearly.[102]

To some extent our enquiries touched upon all of these aspects, and discussions with the different stakeholder groups revealed different ways of seeing and assessing these changes - not only in binary positive/negative terms. There are many differentiated results of the changes, which can only really be discussed as more negative for some and more positive for others, or as both positive and negative.

The following graph shows the results of our survey regarding the programme structure.

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[102] European Commission Document, Evaluation Roadmap: http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/roadmaps/docs/2015_eac_014_evaluation_erasmus_en.pdf.

How do you rate the structure of the Erasmus+ Programme?
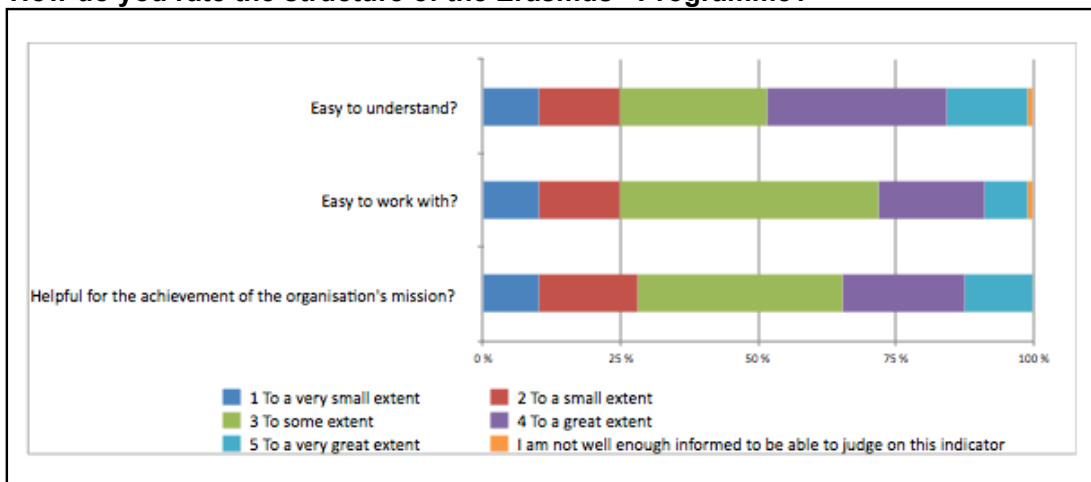
Our survey of youth organisation stakeholders revealed that in relation to the above representation of the programme structure and intervention logic, Erasmus+ is considered to be relatively easy to understand (the largest number of respondents chose 'to a great extent'). On the question of whether the programme structure is easy to work with, the results are less positive, with the largest number of respondents choosing 'to some extent'. And the result is similar when asked about the extent to which they experience the programme as helpful for the achievement of the mission of the organisation.

An interesting point raised by youth organisation stakeholders in our enquiries relates to innovation, although somewhat counter-intuitively because the transition to the new programme has been very challenging for them. Many welcomed the integration of the programme, with all the changes it has entailed in terms of structure and implementation, because it brings them into more regular contact with other sectoral actors (the challenges of cross-sectoral cooperation mentioned above notwithstanding). This has been an impulse for their learning and forces them to think about what they do in new ways, taking them beyond their existing assumptions and formats of work, catalysing experimentation.

Nevertheless, many of the narrative responses point to the new structure being experienced as more to work with. The narrative responses of stakeholders who responded to this question (admittedly only a minority), pointed out that the diagrammatic presentation of the structure and intervention is easy to understand and in theory makes sense, but in reality, it is hard for youth organisations to make it work the way it is intended. For example, international youth organisations often take the form of networks, with lightly centralised management structures, but in addition to what their members do and what they do for their members, they work for specific aims and missions. So, they find themselves falling

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into what they perceive as a gap between the levels of the intervention logic of the programme. Specifically, it is hard to work as an international organisation and provide opportunities for young people and youth workers active in the network (KA1 and KA2), while only having direct access as an applicant to KA3. These respondents feel that the work that INGYOs do to support their members across Europe, which strengthens youth participation and also the level of local/national activity in the programme, is not at all taken into account in the current intervention logic. They would also need direct access to funds to be able to sustain this dimension of their work, and the natural source for that is a European programme, as their missions are European and Europe-oriented.

Another important point raised in this context is that youth organisations find KA3 extremely important, and would like to use it much more actively. This said, the application process is experienced as very difficult, and there appears to be very high competition such that youth organisation consortia do not have good chances of getting funding. As a result, youth organisations find themselves in something of a bind and are put in the position of having to make choices about whether it makes sense to make applications at all - because the effort required to make a good application is so high. For many INGYOs that have been using the European funding programmes for many years to make their special contribution to the development of youth participation, European associative life and civil society, this feels strange and incoherent with the history of the programme, which they have always experienced as supportive of this dimension of their work.

Specifically regarding impact, and consistent with their assessment of the coherence and synergy effects produced by participation in the Youth Chapter, youth organisation stakeholders feel it is probably too soon to assess spillover effects and the systemic developmental effects that their engagement with the programme could have. This finding is confirmed by the mid-term evaluation.[103] Respondents even demonstrated optimism. They believe that by supporting projects, but also by supporting the organisations doing them, the programme can have some wider impact on policy and society.

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[103] ICF Main Report, pp. 15-16. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/icf-volume1-main-report.pdf.

The effects on individual beneficiaries of the projects we run using Erasmus+ funding have positive spillover effects at other levels
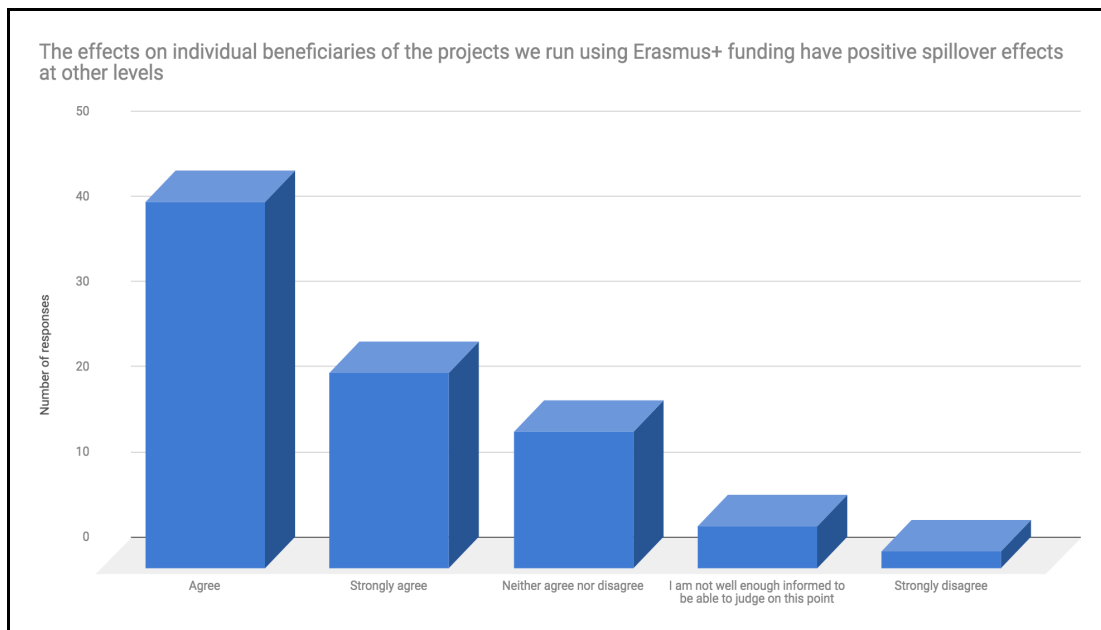
Furthermore, and as indicated by the above graph, they are convinced that the individual effects and impacts do not only stay with the young people and project leaders who have participated directly, because the projects also generate motivation and initiative to go further, and there are some natural knowledge transfer dynamics within organisations.

On the other hand, and as discussed previously in the outcomes section, most stakeholders are of the opinion that there are too few opportunities to strategically harness the impact participation has on individuals, and those that do exist are anchored in actions that are hard for youth organisations to use or for which youth organisations feel they cannot compete. From a structural point of view, stakeholders see space for more specific measures within the actions to ensure spillover impacts between them. Specifically, the option of more strategic projects running over deadlines and even years, of multi-measure projects, of new/freer project proposals that do not correspond to the highly regulated formats that are currently on offer, and of activities that can more comprehensively consider the special circumstances of engaging young people with least opportunities, for many of whom obligatory mobility is a barrier to participation.

On a more practical level, the most significant point raised is that the simplified structure, decentralisation and integration of the programme has not actually made it easier/simpler to engage with for youth organisations, with the exception of some specific aspects such as the streamlining of some financial procedures. In fact, and as mentioned previously, youth organisation stakeholders find some aspects simpler but other aspects more complicated, and often they conclude that the determining factor is their status as an INGYO, or as a

newcomer, or as a 'not so well established' organisation. And all stakeholders pointed out that irrespective of structure, bureaucracy would have to be significantly reduced and administrative procedures significantly reviewed to ensure real impactful simplification of the programme. While the mid-term evaluation places less emphasis on this conclusion, it does also clearly state that there is plenty of room for improvement.104

Finally, several stakeholders pointed out that including the kind of diagrammatic presentation above with a more in-depth explanation and a legend for the different interactions that are being presented in the user guide would be a helpful support measure for current youth organisation users and newcomers - on the one hand to understand the overall intervention logic of the programme, and on the other, to ensure that the projects they present are relevant to it. Several asked why this has not been the case until now.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Our discussion of the findings point clearly in the direction of some conclusions and implications for how the current programme is continued and can be improved, and even for the development of the new programme generation. These are necessarily an interpretation of the information we have been able to gather and verify in a variety of ways. As externals, we are trying to provide a 'disinterested' perspective, and look at the issues raised with new eyes, even dispassionately. The points made in the following do not reflect the opinions and positions of any specific stakeholder group. They are the author's reading of what the findings could (maybe even should) mean for the further development of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter in the remainder of the current programme period and the new programme generation still to come. It will be noted that these are youth organisation perspective-specific, and therefore, do not always cohere with the findings of the mid-term evaluation about the programme as a whole.

In general, our sense from the findings we have gathered and presented is that Erasmus+ is doing well on meeting its stated objectives, and to some extent this also applies to the Youth Chapter. It is very difficult to make accurate comparisons, but in the end, there is hardly any country or institution that invests so much in youth-related objectives and consistently gives so much political attention to youth-related issues and concerns. This is

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[104] European Commission Staff Working Document, p. 4. Source:
https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/swd-e-plus-mte.pdf

also acknowledged by many youth organisation stakeholders. The opportunities that this programme is offering to individual young people are in many respects unique and extremely valuable for those young people. On this point, there is no disagreement among stakeholders involved in our enquiries.

Nevertheless, Youth Chapter stakeholders (and not only youth organisations) point to some significant ways in which the Youth Chapter and the Erasmus+ programme overall could be doing better on its youth-specific objectives. Indeed, there a sense that the programme has more potential, even without significant changes or additional resources, and that this potential is not being exploited to the maximum at the current time for certain aspects of importance for youth organisations especially - the European civil society, youth citizenship and participation agenda being first and foremost. Some stakeholders necessarily feel that their expectations have not been met, and this is justified given the communication that took place around the transition to the new programme. This focused on advantages that the decentralisation and integration of the programme would have for applicants and grantees, especially in terms simplification of procedures and reductions in the administrative burden associated with the receipt of a grant. While this may have been the case for other categories of applicants, it is clear it was not for many youth organisations. On this point, our findings demonstrate significant room for improvement.

In the following, we shall try to summarise the points for which our findings indicate that there is more potential in the Youth Chapter, and where there is room for improvement. We do this along with each of the issues we addressed in more detail in the findings section of the report. The reflections below reflect the conclusions we can draw, implications we see and the ideas we have for the improvement/development of the current programme during its lifetime, as well as aspects that could be relevant for the new programme generation.

In terms of objectives and intended outcomes, our findings lead us to reflect that:

- the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter lacks sufficient clarity of emphasis in terms of its intended outcomes in the youth sector. The Erasmus+ intervention logic focuses more on the process through which outcomes are achieved, and does not sufficiently specify what those outcomes should be, such that there have emerged gaps in perception between different stakeholders regarding what the programme is for. Given the level of regulation of the project formats, some further specification of outcomes beyond numerical targets might be useful for addressing quality issues and for ensuring the Youth Chapter is meeting its potential;

- among youth organisation stakeholders, there is an assumption that this should mean youth policy development in favour of an enabling environment for the development of youth work, stronger and more sustainable youth organisations and the development of youth civil society, whereas other stakeholders see other long-term and systemic outcomes as more important, for example mobility, employability and labour market readiness. However, given our findings, we consider this to be a false dichotomy, as it is perfectly valid for such a programme to yield a variety of outcomes and for different actors to be more concerned with one or the other dimension;

- a key point in relation to the objectives and intended outcomes of the programme is actually about expectations. There need to be opportunities for these to be made explicit and to be addressed in a credible manner, on an ongoing basis, so that programme users are satisfied that their realities are being addressed, and not only pre-defined political priorities of the institutions;

- in this context, youth organisation stakeholders and some other youth sector stakeholders feel that the primary emphasis in terms of outcomes of the Youth Chapter should be on participation, civil society, citizenship and solidarity in a European perspective and the role that non-formal education can play in this, rather than on the market skills agenda, for which there are objectively other support mechanisms with greater resources. This is an inherently political question, as internal alignment of the programme with other policy agendas of the EU and the Member States has been actively pursued with the introduction of Erasmus+ (and the mid-term evaluation shows that this has been achieved to a satisfactory extent);

- the Youth Chapter's utility in terms of the outcomes it can deliver (i.e., relevance) would be significantly enhanced by a more participatory approach to the identification of what the programme is and should be for, including periodic European and even national priorities that support the overall purpose of the Youth Chapter. It is acknowledged that some participating countries do implement the programme with a co-management dimension, and the Structured Dialogue is appreciated, but these measures are apparently not sufficient to ensure that there is a good match between the needs of young people, of the youth sector/s and what the Youth Chapter is offering, at both the national and European levels;

- the recent emphasis on increasing the number of participating young people, while justified, may be being achieved at the cost of the quality of some formats of

learning mobility. Youth organisation stakeholders are particularly concerned that programme implementers and managers remain mindful of the need to deliver not just a great number of learning mobility experiences, but high-quality ones. In this connection, the scale of funding available for the Youth Chapter overall, and for some particular formats of activity specifically, is not considered adequate and there is a clear consensus that more resources are needed for the Youth Chapter to achieve its full potential in relation to its own and the wider objectives of Erasmus+, as well as more recent political statements such as the Paris Declaration;

- even if Erasmus+ and Youth Chapter opportunities are acknowledged as being a unique opportunity for many individual young people, it may no longer be possible to say this is the case for youth organisations, especially as regards the diverse ways in which these have traditionally pursued their 'European' missions. Our findings point to a situation in which too few of the project formats allow youth organisations to take a strategic approach to the achievement of those European missions, a significant difference to previous incarnations of the programme;

- on the other hand, it would appear that most stakeholders believe the kind of European 'added value' they have come to expect from the dedicated EU youth programmes could relatively easily be re-established with adjustments to existing formats, the reinstatement of some others that fell away with the introduction of Erasmus+, and with some additional thought being given to how better to exploit and capitalise on funded projects' results for organisational, policy and social development;

- a stronger and more qualitative involvement of young people and their representatives in the governance of the programme than is currently guaranteed by existing measures is warranted at European level, and in participating countries where this is not the case, in order to address the clear trust gap that exists between those using the programme and those running the programme and to ensure that the Youth Chapter can credibly achieve its objective of fostering youth participation;

- capitalisation on project outcomes needs to be further developed to ensure that the funding invested does not stop with a one-time experience. Enhancements to the role of strategic support initiatives, within and related to the programme, such as the introduction of strategic capitalisation grants and/or multi-measure projects, and

the strengthening of the role of the Partnership, the role of SALTO and Eurodesk, could be avenues to pursue.

In terms of the <u>functioning of the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+:</u>

Our findings on *efficiency and effectiveness* lead us to reflect that:

- the integration and decentralisation of the programme have not led to the hoped-for simplification of procedures and financial regulations for youth organisations, and with the exception of the lump sum (even if it is not completely without challenges itself) the Youth Chapter has become more complex and difficult to use for a number of categories of current and potential users in comparison with Youth in Action. This is perceived as creating barriers to access and, by implication, to participation of young people, and especially of young people with fewer opportunities;

- the user-friendliness of the Youth Chapter leaves a lot to be desired, especially as regards administration and bureaucracy - this applies to the user guide (too long, language too complex), to the online portals (too many, too many bugs, too much information requested), to the flexibility of the National Agencies in dealing with unexpected challenges (too little), to the support available to users and potential users (not enough, not sufficiently adapted to needs) and to the time applicants have to wait for procedures to be completed (too many delays in payments, communication, etc.);

- differences and discrepancies in the approach of National Agencies to financial administration and to reporting further complicate the financial procedures for youth organisations that have to work with more than one National Agency;

- not all financial regulations are adapted to the real costs involved in running projects in different countries around Europe, leading to some unexpected effects - very high demand for certain kinds of project in some countries because it is where the costs of running such projects are low and can be managed with the lump sums available; organisations not applying at all for funding because the return on the investment required is not financially viable, or the absence of some types of organisation and target group because they cannot make up the differences in costs;

- the principle of proportionality between the scale of project funding received and the scale of administrative burden to manage the project is not working in the Youth Chapter. De facto, and irrespective of how much or how little funding an organisation receives, the administrative burden is in most cases very high;

- youth organisations that have few staff and experience a high turnover of staff feel they are at a disadvantage in comparison with other potential applicants, especially for profit-companies and universities, because they lack administrative and managerial capacity for producing applications that are convincing and running large-scale projects;

Our findings on *support available and received for using the Youth Chapter*, lead us to reflect that:

- in many countries the level and quality of support that youth organisation stakeholders can expect to receive for engaging with the Youth Chapter is limited, and it does not always 'hit the mark' (i.e., does not actually end up being helpful in the way that youth organisations would need it to be);

- when it comes to providing support to youth organisations using the Youth Chapter, and exceptions notwithstanding, National Agencies often grapple with gaps in resources, distance from the field and with traditional bureaucratic practices of public administration in the countries where they are located, leaving too little time and money for substantial and regular direct outreach to youth organisations and other potential beneficiaries working with young people, especially the least advantaged;

- with notable exceptions (e.g.,, issues communicated through Eurodesk enquiries; RAY monitoring on project administration and management), a systematic approach to seeking, analysing and using information about user experiences with the financial and administrative procedures with a view to improving service does not appear to be in place across the network of programme implementation and management stakeholders. This is clearly more a matter of gaps in resources, capacity/expertise and time for actually making good use of the results, than an issue of will.

Our findings on the approach taken to *prioritisation and scheduling in grant-making*, lead us to reflect that:

- the spacing of application deadlines can be challenging for youth organisations' motivation to participate. Youth organisations report that there are often delays and that young people are discouraged by having to wait for long periods of time. There is mileage in considering whether all activity formats need to be tied to a specific deadline, and about any other measure that would reduce the waiting time and eliminate delays in communicating grant acceptance;

- some decisions of National Agencies regarding what and when shall be granted make it difficult for youth organisations to conduct the planning of their regular activities over the entirety of a given year. This is particularly the case when a National Agency decides to grant all funds for a specific type of project format on one rather than several deadlines;

- furthermore, and generally speaking, the funding allocation for individual mobilities appears to be significantly greater than for other types of projects, which significantly limits youth organisations' options in terms of the projects they can realistically plan with Erasmus+ Youth Chapter funding and, therefore, the opportunities they can offer young people, in terms of participation.

Our findings in relation to *trust and recognition* issues lead us to reflect that:

- there exists a sense that the contribution of the youth sector (and specifically the contribution of youth organisations) to the achievement of the objectives of the Erasmus+ programme do not get the recognition they deserve - especially in political and financial terms - and this despite the fact that more than ever is known about the potential positive impacts of the projects young people are conducting;

- there are very different levels of comfort and satisfaction with the transparency approach of different implementation and management stakeholders, especially as regards the publication of grant-making results;

- there are discrepancies between the way youth organisations experience National Agencies' implementation of certain procedures;

- a trust gap has emerged between youth organisations using the programme and other stakeholders involved in the implementation and management of the Youth

Chapter. This has been caused by difficulties in communication, the sense that youth organisations are neither adequately recognised as rightful partners in decision-making nor consulted sufficiently when it comes to decisions that affect their capacity to achieve their missions, as well as the objectives of the programme;

- the trust gap significantly colours relationships and communication around the Youth Chapter, and the evaluations of youth organisations of the Youth Chapter, not always for the better;

- some confidence-building measures would be warranted to address gaps in mutual perception, communication and trust.

Our findings on the *relevance of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter* lead us to reflect that:

- in general, the Youth Chapter of the programme is acknowledged as being relevant to the issues that youth organisations find important for their missions and how they interpret the concerns and issues of young people in Europe. Yet, it remains unclear from our enquiries whether programme implementers and managers are fully aware of trends in demand on the part of users. Moreover, there are clearly different interpretations of how the Youth Chapter should respond to those issues and concerns and some significant differences of opinion about what should be the top priorities for the programme. This makes for different expectations about what the Youth Chapter can deliver, about which there is also clearly not sufficient communication, and it colours the ways in which the relevance of the Youth Chapter is being evaluated - not necessarily to the advantage of the programme. The programme would certainly benefit from a more in-depth understanding of convergences and divergences between users' priority issues and those prioritised by the institutional promoters of the programme;

- from a youth organisation perspective, there are important gaps in the activity formats that the programme will fund, such that many do not find space under the programme for what they believe to be their European missions. Youth organisation stakeholders would like to have the opportunity to develop more strategically-oriented projects, both with regard to priority themes and to their own missions. In this context, they feel it is important to include some new formats in the successor programme, and, if possible, to adapt some existing formats still during the current programming cycle;

- more emphasis, priority and financial resources are needed to ensure that the Youth Chapter is accessible to the widest range of potential users. The work being done by Eurodesk and National Agencies is very important, but they lack resources to be able to conduct the outreach that would be needed to scale. As confirmed by the mid-term evaluation, the programme is not yet managing to engage young people with fewer opportunities and the organisations that work with or represent them sufficiently well;

- it is often difficult for such organisations to see what might be relevant in the programme for the young people they work with, and it is a significant challenge for the relevant support structures in charge of doing outreach and communication to adapt their approach and communication in ways that make the programme and its opportunities make sense for those organisations;

- there are clear challenges to be addressed in order to adapt current activity formats, measures and procedures in place in the Youth Chapter so that they support access of organisations that work with young people with fewest opportunities, rather than perpetuating barriers to their participation. Even if the Youth Chapter pays significant attention to the issue of inclusion, and the number (and quality) of inclusion-oriented projects has been rising continuously with each successive programme generation (which is certainly an achievement), there remains a problem of inequality of opportunity. Although not intentionally so, many specific characteristics of the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ and its modus operandi make it difficult for young people with fewer opportunities to engage with it. These also make it an unattractive proposition for the organisations that support them. Most important examples raised include obligatory mobilities, insufficient funding levels, project time-frames that are too short to ensure adequate preparation of young people with fewest opportunities, rigidity and lack of flexibility in relation to funding rules and changes (more common when working with young people with fewer opportunities) and overly complicated and onerous application and financial reporting procedures considering the scale of funding available and the level of competition for the grant.

Our findings on *internal and external coherence* of the Youth Chapter lead us to reflect that:

- there are some discrepancies between the approaches and practices of National Agencies, both in terms of how they evaluate projects and in terms of administrative procedures. With the integration of the programme, INGYOs have to apply to

different National Agencies with national partners located in that country, and can now compare how they go about project evaluation and administrative procedures. This has created a sense that the Youth Chapter lacks internal coherence, and that harmonisation would be necessary to level what has come to be experienced as a playing field which is no longer level for all applicants;

- within Erasmus+, youth organisations struggle with inter-sectoral cooperation. Although the integrated nature of the new programme theoretically promotes inter-sectoral cooperation, and many youth organisations feel positively encouraged to innovate and try out new things, it remains a significant challenge for them to engage with the structures active in other sectors. It is noteworthy that more cooperation with the higher education sector would be welcomed, and many organisations feel it would make sense to work on the links between formal and non-formal education specifically. Youth organisations would welcome specific support for this dimension, and feel this would make it more likely that inter-sectoral cooperation becomes a norm within Erasmus+ Youth Chapter projects;

- youth organisations do not experience the Youth Chapter as allowing for significant synergies with other funding programmes of the European Union or of the other European institutions. In their experience, Youth Chapter funding is for one-off standalone projects, applications for co-funding are not favoured and follow-on or multi-measure strategic projects are hardly possible;

- there is definitely scope for developing synergies between the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ and the funding and support programmes within the European Union for other thematic sectors that are relevant to Youth Chapter objectives, as well as the more general situations and concerns of young people in Europe. However, specific measures would be needed to ensure such synergies can emerge. Notably, a special focus on youth within other thematic sectors was mentioned as a potential approach. Specifically mentioned were links between non-formal learning and higher education, between youth and labour/employment and youth environmental protection and agriculture;

- of special concern to youth stakeholders at the current time is how the European Solidarity Corps shall be defined and how the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps shall be linked so that they reinforce each other. There are concerns that the European Solidarity Corps could just end up being a 'rebranding' of the European Voluntary Service without additional funds and a clear

intervention logic that is complementary but also unique, and that this would de facto entail a hollowing-out of the Youth Chapter, because EVS is its largest action. At the time of writing, the final format of the European Solidarity Corps remains unclear and discussions are ongoing. However, youth organisation stakeholders feel strongly that irrespective of the final decision on the European Solidarity Corps, the current Youth Chapter and the new programme generation should remain focused on supporting non-formal education, volunteering, and the development of youth civil society.

Our findings *on European added value* of the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ lead us to reflect that:

- the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter is offering often unique participation opportunities to young people, and notable exceptions aside, there are few countries whose own national provision in terms of international exchange, voluntary service or learning mobility rival the opportunities available through the European programmes;

- despite this, from a youth organisation perspective, the European added value of the programme is no longer as clearly understood in terms of the development of youth associative life in Europe, something that in previous programme generations was experienced as a given. Despite being a unique opportunity for young people, youth organisations are concerned about the drop in the Youth Sector success rate, and their ongoing challenges in using the programme;

- furthermore, the broader question has been raised of what the 'European' dimension in the added value of the Youth Chapter is. Is the European dimension only predicated on the fact that the European Union is providing the funding, or is it also about what added value the Youth Chapter can bring to the European project? In an era of low-cost travel, Internet and freedom of movement, and considering the profile of the typical Youth Chapter beneficiary, it is questionable whether the (pure) mobility dimension of the European youth programmes can be considered their significant added value. Rather, youth organisation stakeholders point to quality learning experiences about, in and around European values and cooperation, as a strong contribution to the promotion of a democratic and just European integration project as being the necessary essence of the added value of the Youth Chapter. It is not always obvious to these stakeholders whether all Youth Chapter stakeholders are working under these same assumptions;

- innovation is also seen as an aspect of European added value. Youth organisations acknowledge that the integration of the programme and changes to its modus operandi and eligible activities have pushed them out of their comfort zones into new and more diverse consortia for new and different projects, welcoming this development. However, innovation is always also a risk, and youth organisation stakeholders acknowledge that they can be quite risk-averse. They feel they are developing their tolerance of ambiguity with each new project that they undertake, but still feel they lack adequate support for engaging in innovative projects. Furthermore, the opposite opinion was also expressed by some stakeholders. They feel that although the new programme had high potential for innovation, the Youth Chapter has not introduced any new formats of funding that have not been present before, and no longer includes any 'free' project application formats. The scope for educational innovation in the Youth Chapter beyond what can be achieved through inter-sectoral cooperation is limited, and to date inter-sectoral cooperation within Youth Chapter projects remains limited as well. Overall, we can conclude that there is more scope in the Youth Chapter for fostering innovation and any specific measures to do so would be welcomed;

- also in relation to innovation as European added value, stakeholders across the board expressed the concern that opportunities and notably dedicated measures for exploiting and capitalising on the products and results of projects funded by the Youth Chapter remain too limited. This was contextualised in discussions around funding formats, and the fact that 'strategic' approaches, multi-measure projects, follow-up plans and other more future-oriented projects have little or no space to be funded under the current Youth Chapter. However, it was also discussed in the context of raising participation numbers with limited budgets. Hence, when push comes to shove, priority is given to ensuring the programme's numerical participation targets are being met by 2020. Despite the continuation of SD, TCA, and the recent introduction of strategic EVS and KA3 calls for National Agencies, there remains a sense that the exploitation of results would need to be better thought through and more explicitly implemented through dedicated funding and/or specific activity formats.

Our findings regarding the contribution of the programme to *the strength and sustainability of youth organisations and civil society* lead us to reflect that:

- the Erasmus+ programme is acknowledged to be contributing positively to the overall competence and capacity of youth organisations to conduct relevant and

quality youth work projects with a European or international dimension. The amount and quality of training and opportunities to learn by doing available to youth sector workers, voluntary and professional, is unprecedented, as are the opportunities for those to be recognised and even certified. The current Erasmus+ Youth Chapter places even stronger emphasis on competence development for intermediaries conducting youth work (project leaders, youth workers and activists/volunteers in youth organisations) than previous programmes, and its intended outcomes focus strongly on organisational development. At the same time, many stakeholders feel that measures to explicitly capitalise on such competence development are missing, and that in a sector with higher than average staff and volunteer turnover, some specific support for youth organisations to ensure 'knowledge capture' even when they lose experienced staff and volunteers, would be needed;

- although it is understood that it is primarily the responsibility of National Authorities to provide support for the development of youth work and youth associative life in participating countries, and that a complementary European programme which is subject to subsidiarity cannot replace such provision, it is felt that this position does not take enough into account the realities of the youth sectors in Erasmus+ participating states. In many Member States and participating countries, 10 years of austerity have decimated youth work provision. In others, there has never been significant state youth work provision, and whatever provision there is, is done largely by NGOs and charities that rely on donors to conduct youth work. In others again, successive moves on the part of increasingly authoritarian governments have weakened or eliminated altogether the enabling environment for NGOs and civil society, of which youth organisations are an integral part. Historically, the European programmes have represented a lifeline for youth organisations and youth work when hard times hit. And while it is impossible to generalise on this point, because National Agencies function differently in each country, many youth organisation stakeholders, both national and international, are not satisfied with the priority that is given to this objective of the Youth Chapter. In their opinion, other measures would be needed (e.g., multi-measure projects, institutional funding for youth organisations, co-funding of projects with other donors, centralised measures for pan-European work, projects, campaigns, etc.), or current measures would have to be endowed with more significant resources for the Youth Chapter to contribute significantly to the achievement of this objective. Furthermore, many feel that a strong political statement needs to be made on this point, vocally and visibly re-emphasising that the sustainability of youth associative life and the strength of organisations is an important objective of the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+;

- further, a minority of youth organisation stakeholders raised the need to ensure the political independence of the National Agencies and that all decisions regarding the selection of projects are taken in an equitable manner, and that the highest standards of transparency are maintained. These stakeholders call for measures to be taken to address their concerns in this regard, starting with more transparency about the results of grant-making, better training for evaluators and more harmonised approaches within and across project evaluation processes conducted by National Agencies, more participatory governance of the Youth Chapter at the European and national levels and even enquiries into the integrity of practices in some participating countries.

Our findings regarding *programme structure and intervention logic* lead us to reflect that:

- the current programme intervention logic is not difficult for youth sector stakeholders to understand or even to work with. Rather, it is not considered to be adequate or adapted enough to the realities of youth organisations and the youth sectors they inhabit or to the nature of youth work. Youth organisation stakeholders mention especially the fact that there are too few 'natural' causal links and effects between the individual, organisational and systemic levels, and that the current Youth Chapter does not include measures for ensuring the capitalisation on individual learning, especially;

- some activity formats were discontinued with the introduction of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter, notably youth initiatives and youth democracy projects, both formats not requiring mobility and focusing on participatory project development and implementation on the part of self-organised and youth-led groups. With three years of implementation on the basis of which to evaluate, stakeholders across the board are convinced the absence of such project formats is negatively affecting the impact of the Youth Chapter, especially if one thinks in terms of the stated intervention logic. Stakeholders point to the fact that there is hardly any space any longer for participatory and youth-led project development, because the formats of activities eligible for funding are too highly regulated, the project durations are too short, and the priority themes are largely predefined. Furthermore, multi-measure projects and projects with a strategic approach to a given theme are largely impossible. Stakeholders feel that mobilisation, outreach and participation impacts that were characteristic of the youth initiatives and youth democracy projects are

not guaranteed by the projects usually granted under the current Erasmus+ Youth Chapter;

- furthermore, and in relation to structure, the complete decentralisation of the programme has had some advantages in terms of the simplification of procedures and processes, but it has brought with it other challenges. Notably, the absence of any centralised measure for youth organisations (especially, internationals) to be able to apply for European-level work. The compromise solution found to address this special case has not proved to be satisfactory to any of the stakeholders concerned. Stakeholders would welcome the opportunity to rethink this sub-optimal practice and to look for a better solution.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Based on the input of stakeholders, and on our more conclusive reflections in the previous section, we have identified a number of very practical suggestions for improving the functioning of the current Youth Chapter and support it to reach its full potential.

Administration and bureaucracy

- Simplify and 'lighten' all administrative procedures and harmonise approaches to administration considerably, from applications through reporting, eliminating any requirements that are not strictly necessary to ensure financial rectitude;

- take measures to implement the principle of proportionality in earnest, such that the smaller the scale of funding, the smaller the administrative burden;

- consider ways to ensure that the programme can respond flexibly to some of the specific challenges of Youth Chapter applicants, especially youth organisations that have special needs cases;

- consider the introduction of rolling deadlines for specific activity formats (notably those under KA1);

- eliminate the practice of disbursing all funds for any specific activity format on one deadline;

- re-introduce centralised application procedures for certain kinds of applicants (notably, INGYO-led consortia);

- re-work the current user guide so that it is significantly shorter and the Youth Chapter relevant information is easy to find and easy to understand for youth organisations (youth friendly/simple language);

- reflect on how to improve the 'service orientation' of National Agency and other staff providing support to applicants, developing and providing relevant training on the basis of feedback on user experiences received;

- study discrepancies between evaluation processes across National Agencies with a view to developing a more harmonised approach;

- provide more in-depth orientation to project evaluators for using the 'standard' approach; facilitate networking between evaluators working inside any given country and even between countries to ensure exchange of good practice;

- resolve specific difficulties/challenges experienced by youth organisations with the Participation Identification Code (PIC) registration and changes to the Legal Entity Appointed Representative (LEAR);

- take measures to reduce the time it takes for enquiries to be answered and other procedures to be completed (informing applicants about the grant acceptance, etc.), eventually introducing standards that should be followed by relevant staff.

Funding and allocations
- Adapt financial regulations to explicitly recognise the value of youth volunteering as part of the 'own contribution' of applicants to the project budget, learning from the good practice of other grant-making institutions;
- reflect on ways to ensure that the Youth Chapter reaches critical mass without sacrificing quality of learning in the mobility experiences, i.e., by progressively increasing the number of mobilities being funded on the same budget;
- increase the overall financial envelope for the Youth Chapter in line with recorded demand and considering the level of financial investment it would take to cover all projects that have received a high level of points in their evaluations;
- increase the financial envelope for those Youth Chapter activity formats that are currently significantly under-funded according to current demand.

Eligibility criteria for accessing funding
- Reconsider the eligibility of for-profit companies to access Erasmus+ Youth Chapter funding;
- re-consider selection criteria that might be disadvantaging certain types of applicant organisations; notably, the definition of the criterion 'consortium diversity' should be re-evaluated and possibly adjusted.

Activity formats
- Re-introduce activity formats from previous incarnations of the programme that have proved effective for fostering participatory youth-led project development around issues of concern to young people themselves and for youth organisations, notably youth initiatives and youth democracy projects;
- introduce activity formats that youth organisations can use to capitalise on previous projects' experiences and results as part of a wider strategy (multi-measure projects, projects running over several years, follow-up projects, etc.)
- re-introduce the option for youth organisations to submit 'free' projects that do not correspond to any specifically regulated format, but that are designed to promote a specific European mission, including those of youth organisations; for this purpose, a centralised pool of funding for international activities could be established;
- explore the opportunities for introducing new project formats that are designed for the achievement of strategic goals relevant to the pursuit of European values,

cooperation and integration, involving multiple measures, longer periods of time, etc.

Transparency

- Make it mandatory for National Agencies to publish the results of their grant-making (successful and unsuccessful projects) immediately after applicants have been informed of the decision;
- address the perception of some youth organisations that project evaluation on the part of some National Agencies is politicised;
- remove any barriers to access to information regarding all Youth Chapter processes, including those conducted by the European Commission and National Authorities.

Access to the programme

- Simplify procedures in order to increase and improve access to the programme, especially for first-timers and for young people with fewer opportunities;
- introduce new activity formats that are intended to address the specific aim of bringing more organisations working with and supporting young people with fewer opportunities into the programme, including adapting the regulations and procedures to ensure that administrative barriers are overcome and that the programme is attractive for them;
- significantly increase resources for inclusion projects of a more strategic nature;
- significantly increase resources so that an inclusion-friendly adaptation of existing formats can be achieved;
- significantly improve the promotion of the programme to young people and provide more support to applicants and prospective applicants.

Quality in the Youth Chapter

- In view of the ambitious target for the Erasmus+ programme to deliver 4 million mobilities within the programme period, address concerns on the part of youth organisations that there is too much focus on reaching the numerical targets for individual mobilities to the detriment of other important targets (such as ensuring the quality of the learning experiences provided and providing a wide range of learning mobility opportunities to the widest range of young people);
- reconsider the structuring of mobilities funding to ensure that youth exchanges especially are being conducted at an acceptable level of quality (at-home preparation, post-exchange activities, etc.);

- foster educational innovation and the effective use of relevant products and outputs of the large-scale projects for the quality development of the programme.

Synergies with other EU programmes and other funding mechanisms

- Review funding regulations and procedures in view of enhancing potential co-funding synergies between Erasmus+ Youth Chapter and other youth-related project funding schemes;
- explore the potential for mainstreaming youth through other sectoral funding and support programmes, and for integrating other sectoral priorities into Youth Chapter projects.

Cross-sectoral cooperation

- Encourage the development of support mechanisms and incentives for youth organisations and other sectoral partners to engage in cooperation with each other.

Research and data

- Adapt and enhance the data-collection dashboard in use to monitor the statistics on the Youth Chapter of the programme with a view to improving the accuracy of monitoring and evaluation and so that questions regarding access to the programme and quality of educational interventions can be usefully assessed on a more continuous basis. It would be useful if the monitoring of the programme included disaggregation of grants accepted or rejected according to organisation type, among others. This requires adaptations to how data on organisation type are collected, which in turn may require adaptations to the application forms and other online tools;
- widen the scope of Youth Chapter programmatic evaluation to include indicators of impact beyond individual competence development and ongoing evaluation of functioning (among others).

Open questions

- Take measures to ensure the compatibility of the European Solidarity Corps with Erasmus+ and its successor programme. The introduction of the European Solidarity Corps should not be detrimental to the non-formal education and informal learning dimensions of the current and successor programme. Concerns of youth organisations about the future of the European Voluntary Service should be addressed.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Dragan Mihajlovic is a policy analyst and research expert. He is passionate about higher education, youth and social science research, especially about revealing deeper meanings through qualitative research and innovative methods. He firmly believes that good evidence can contribute to better policy, and that it can make a difference in the lives of individuals. Based in Berlin, Dragan is completing his Doctorate in Political Science.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Information-gathering activities undertaken during the study

Which activity was done?		Who was involved?
Document review	Key sources of information included national reports to the EC developed for the mid-term evaluation (only 10 made available by national authorities; the remainder were embargoed); youth sector-specific reports on the basis of which youth-related content for the national reports to the EC was developed; RAY research studies and products about Erasmus+ and the achievements of previous programme generations; LLP Surveys on Erasmus+ for 2014, 2015 and 2016; initial results of the 2017 survey; Eurodesk survey of stakeholders regarding Erasmus+ experiences.	Evaluation team and staff of the European Youth Forum
Online survey	Among others, the survey requested information about youth organisations' specific experiences of working with the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter, their assessments of its first 3 years of functioning, and their perspectives on issues covered by the European Commission evaluation.	92 youth organisations
Workshop	A 1-day workshop was held with a group of youth organisations attending the European Youth Forum expert group on Erasmus+ in October 2017 to discuss initial results of the online survey.	11 youth organisations
Meetings with the European Youth Forum	Kick-off meeting in June 2017; 5 October 2017; 10 November 2017; Regular remote check-in meetings between July 2017 and January 2018.	Alfonso Aliberti Manuel Goncalves Gil
Interviews	The team attended meetings in Brussels in October and November 2017. These interviews sought to reflect on and corroborate results of the survey and impressions collected from the review of literature available about the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+.	The following stakeholders participated in conversations: - National Agencies; - International youth organisations; - National Youth Councils; - Staff of the European Parliament; - Staff of the European Commission; - Staff of the CoE-EU Partnership; - Staff of the European Lifelong Learning Platform; - Staff of Eurodesk; (see full list of interviewees below)

Appendix 2: Interviews conducted

Institution/organisation	Interviewee
Koen Lambert	Director, JINT National Agency for the Erasmus+ Youth in Action Programme Belgium, Flanders
Robert France	European Commission, DG EAC
Ellen Durst	European Commission, DG EAC
Andrew Todd	Policy and Advocacy Officer, Lifelong Learning Platform
Polona Kek	Assistant to MEP Dr. Milan Zver, Culture Committee, European Parliament
Charline Cauwe	International Officer, CFWB - Conseil de la Jeunesse de la Communauté Française (French Community Youth Council), Belgium
Davide Capecchi	Partnership on Youth between the Council of Europe and the European Commission
Aleksandra Pilka	Assistant to MEP Mrs. Lybacka, Culture Committee, European Parliament
Jan Raymaekers	VJR - Vlaamse Jeugdraad (Flemish Youth Council), Belgium
Laurence Hermand and Anne Demeuter	Director and Programme Coordinator, Bureau International Jeunesse, Bruxelles
Safi Sabuni and Audrey Frith	Policy and Training Officer and Director (respectively), Eurodesk Brussels Link
Hans Georg Wicke	Director, Jugend für Europa - National Agency of Youth in Action - Erasmus+ in Germany
Sanja Posavec	Head of Department for Strategic Partnerships and Structured Dialogue in Youth Field, Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes
Astrid Weber	DNK - Deutscher Bundesjugendring (German National Youth Council)

Appendix 3: Presentation of MAXQDA Textual Analysis Software and Method used in the literature review[1]

What is QDA Software? – Using software for qualitative data analysis

Qualitative social research relies on various methods for systematising, organising and analysing qualitative data. Today, researchers increasingly make use of computer software for their qualitative data analysis (QDA). This type of software is referred to as QDA software. MAXQDA is one of the pioneer software programmes in this field: the first version of MAXQDA was released as early as 1989.

QDA software serves to provide insights into qualitative data sets without suggesting interpretations. Based on a content analysis, the researcher can draw conclusions about the respective object of research (e.g., interview data). Software tools for qualitative data and text analysis allow for easy sorting, structuring and analysing of large amounts of text or other data and facilitate the management of the resulting interpretations and evaluations.

In MAXQDA, this can be done by sorting materials into groups, using a hierarchical coding system, defining variables, and assigning colours and weights to text segments. Easy access of analysis results and a variety of visual tools are further advantages of MAXQDA. QDA software is used in many academic fields, such as sociology, psychology, political science, medicine and educational science, and it is also a popular tool for businesses and market researchers.

Qualitative Data

In addition to the traditional use of textual data in the social sciences, there is a trend toward the inclusion and analysis of image files as well as of audio and video materials. Therefore, state-of-the-art QDA software ideally supports the analysis of texts as well as of media files (images, videos, audio recordings) and other types of documents.

The software should also allow for various methodological approaches, such as qualitative content analysis, Grounded Theory, discourse analysis, group discussions, and case or field studies. While QDA software, in general, does not itself suggest or require a specific method of qualitative data analysis, it provides a broad choice of tools to facilitate a profound, systematic analysis of the above-mentioned types of media, regardless of the chosen method of analysis.

MAXQDA relies on traditional methods of analysis, such as those used in Grounded Theory, qualitative content analysis, and discourse analysis. The program's central elements are the systematic assignment

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[1] Source: http://www.maxqda.com/products/maxqda-standard/what-is-qda-software.

('coding') of text segments to major themes ('codes') and the possibility to make notes of references, ideas, etc., directly in the text ('memos').

QDA is a method for systematically describing the meaning of qualitative material.

We have followed the standard steps in QDA:

- deciding on the research question;
- selecting the material;
- building a coding framework;
- segmenting the material;
- trial coding – quality control – discussion among coders;
- main coding, and;
- interpreting and presenting the findings.

The advantage of using QDA is that it helps to classify and describe the content, specify the relevant meaning and provide insight into human thought. This is done by classifying sections of the material as instances of the categories in a coding framework. The large number of documents that we had at our disposal for the document review meant that we had to find, select and sort the relevant material for analysis. For that purpose, we developed a coding framework by combining concept-driven and data-driven strategies.[2] The main categories are defined using the concept-driven strategy based on the knowledge we had about schools and topics covered in the survey, while the sub-categories are developed using a data-driven strategy, combining subsumption[3] and the principles of Grounded Theory.[4]

The main purpose of QDA is to organise and code the relevant textual segments of the material for further analysis.

Coding System Used

In coding we have followed the principles laid out by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña.[5]

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[2] Margrit Schreier, *Qualitative content analysis in practice* (London: Sage, 2012).
[3] Philipp Mayring, 'Qualitative content analysis,' *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 1, no.2 (2000).
[4] Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss. *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research* (New Brunswick: Aldine, 2008).
[5] Matthew B. Miles, Alan M. Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña, *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2014).

Appendix 4: Enquiry framework development for the Shadow Report

Theme	Questions/issues to be studied	Possible indicators	Sources of information
Outcomes of the programme	What are the achievements of the programme in relation to its objectives at different levels as established by research? Which specific outcomes of the programme are most important for youth organisation needs/concerns including YFJ priorities?	Benefits/results/impacts of the E+ programme (so far) for Beneficiary level * individual young people's competencies and prospects * situation and prospects of specific communities of young people of interest to the programme (disadvantaged youth/hard-to-reach groups of young people/vulnerable young people, etc.) Institutional level * youth organisations' development and capacities Systemic level * the European & national youth sectors * society/ies more broadly (inclusion-related priorities/civic education functions)	Survey Document review * mid-term evaluations of the Member States * other evaluations * other impact studies * surveys conducted by independent/stakeholder organisations Workshop to understand some specific points in more detail
Structure of the programme	Structure Do youth organisations understand the current programme structure as it is intended (see simplified generic model and theory of change ideas expressed in evaluation roadmap)? * Does the programme structure make sense to them? If not, what doesn't make sense/what poses a challenge for them? * Which aspects of the programme structure are most complicated/challenging for youth organisations to deal with? Why? * Do they feel the structure of the programme is practical for their needs? Comparison old (LLP/YiA)	Experiences of youth organisations with old and new programme structure * desired simplification and streamlining in comparison to the previous project achieved?	Survey Periodical implementation reports and surveys by independent/stakeholder institutions Workshop to understand some specific points in more detail

	vs. new (E+/YiA) programmes		
	Past: What was the experience of the youth organisations in the transition from the 'old' to the 'new' E+/Youth in Action programme * was there confusion? * if so about what? * why?		
	Present: How do they feel about it now? * 'new' E+/Youth in Action more or less complex than 'old' programme? * what is different? what is similar?		
	Future: What kinds of structural changes would youth organisations recommend?		
Functioning of the programme	How do youth organisations experience their relationships with National Agencies and other implementing agencies? How do National Agencies and other implementing agencies experience their relationships with youth organisations? What aspects of the way the programme functions work best for youth organisations? And worst? How do youth organisations rate their experience of the programme against the standardised indicators used by the EC Member States in the National Reports (effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, internal and external coherence and complementarity, European added value and sustainability)?	Standardised indicators used in Member States' reports: * effectiveness * efficiency * relevance * internal/external coherence and complementarity * European added value and sustainability Make sure to cover: * coordination * relationships * information * communication * partnerships * bureaucracy * coherence * streamlining * simplification	Document review of Member States' reports in comparison to survey results Review of any EC results available and comparison to youth organisation specific perspectives

	How do youth organisations rate their experience of the current programme in comparison to the previous LLP /YIA programme?		
Contribution of the programme to the development and sustainability of youth associative life/civil society in Europe	How does the programme help youth organisations to develop, grow and sustain their efforts to meet their objectives? In which way is the programme supporting the sustainability of youth associative life/civil society? Added value in comparison to LLP/Youth in Action?	Things that the programme allows youth organisations to do which they would not be able to do if the programme didn't exist Comparison to LLP / Youth in Action	Document review Workshop Interviews
Satisfaction/dissatisfaction of youth organisations using the programme	What are beneficiaries most satisfied with, why? What are beneficiaries most dissatisfied with, and why? Where do they see most room for improvement? What are they most concerned about for the future of the programme?	Available support vs. actual needs (overall, but also in relation to specific actions)	Survey Workshop
The comprehensiveness or not of the EC evaluation	What might be missing from the evaluation framework from the perspective of youth organisations (in view of future evaluations)	For example, coordination or lack thereof on the part of NAs (i.e., points raised by E+ Coalition representatives)	
Comparison with findings of the EC evaluation	If available, comparison of any results of the EC evaluation available with the perspectives of youth organisations gathered		Any ICF findings available

European Youth Forum: Shadow Report on the Erasmus+ Mid-Term Evaluation

Hello!

What is this?
In 2017 the European Commission is conducting the mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme. This will influence how the next programme will look and work. The European Youth Forum is creating a Shadow Report. We want to hear the perspectives of youth organisations around Europe about the Youth Chapter of the Erasmus+ programme, and about how it is working for them. The report will have a special focus on the opinions of youth organisations in order to compliment the official mid-term evaluation. The report will be available towards the end of 2017 from the European Youth Forum.

Spread the word!
Please, let others from your and your partner organisations who have experience in the Erasmus+ Programme know about this survey and ask them to fill it out as well no later than 19th October 2017. Your input matters! The Shadow Report has the potential to influence the further development of the Erasmus+ programme and its successor programme from 2020.

Want to find out more?
- You can visit our website www.youthforum.org for more information about our work.
- If you have any questions or comments regarding this survey, you can email us at: shadowreport@youthforum.org

* Required

Instructions for filling in the survey

Thank you for taking the time to answer our survey.

Who is it for?
- This survey is for representatives of youth organisations who have some experience and knowledge about Erasmus+ and its predecessor programmes.

What is it about?
- The questions cover a range of topics relevant to the shadow report. To some extent these mirror the EC mid-term evaluation (i.e. using key indicators also used in the EC mid-term evaluation). Mostly, we seek to understand the specific perspective of youth organisations that are using Erasmus+ on how it is working for them.

How do I get started?
- By clicking "next" below, the survey will start.
- The survey has 26 questions, some of which are made up of several parts. Specific instructions are provided for each question as necessary.
- The survey will take approximately 30 mins to fill in.
- If you close the window, you will not be able to continue.
- The survey will be open through October 19th 2017 inclusive.

Who will see my answers!
- This survey is anonymous. Your personal information will not be visible to anyone viewing this questionnaire. Our evaluation team of 2 persons will be interpreting the results of the survey and these will be shared with members of staff of the European Youth Forum. It is possible that the shadow report will quote some phrases from the narrative answers given in the survey. In general, however, the shadow report will be a synthetic report. The final shadow report will be available from the European Youth Forum towards the end of 2017.

Question 1: Do you represent a youth organisation?
By youth organisation we mean any organisation that:
- is youth led and / or

- is youth serving and / or
- has a majority of members who are 'young people' (for example, as defined in Erasmus+ - 13 - 30 years of age)
- is democratically organised
- is non-governmental and not-for-profit
- and / or which seek to represent young people's interests

1.
Do you represent a youth organisation? *
Mark only one oval.

◯ Yes, our youth organisation is youth led, serves young people and/or has a majority of members who are young people, etc.

◯ No, thank you for your interest, but this survey is only intended for youth organisations
Stop filling out this form.

Question 2: Is your organisation a member of the European Youth Forum?
(choose one)

2.
Is your organisation a member of the European Youth Forum? *
Mark only one oval.

◯ Yes

◯ No   *Skip to question 4.*

◯ We are a candidate member

◯ Observer member

Question 2a: What kind of YFJ member organisation?
(choose one)

3.
What kind of YFJ Member organisation? *
Check all that apply.

☐ National Youth Council

☐ International non-governmental youth organisation

Skip to question 5.

Question 2b: How would you describe the 'type' of your organisation?
(select all that apply)

4.
How would you describe the 'type' of your organisation? *
Check all that apply.

☐ Youth network or movement

☐ Informal youth group

☐ Social / charitable organisation

☐ Other: _____

Question 3: At which level are the MAJORITY of the activities of your youth organisation implemented?

5. **At which level are the MAJORITY of the activities of your youth organisation implemented?**
   *

   If the organisation is active at multiple levels, please choose the level at which it is MOST active
   Check all that apply.

   ☐ Local

   ☐ Regional

   ☐ National

   ☐ European (EU or Geographical Europe)

   ☐ International / Global

   ☐ Other: _____

Question 5: What is the scale of your youth organisation's outreach to young people?

By 'scale of outreach' we mean how many direct and indirect beneficiaries your organisation has.

6.
   What is the scale of your youth organisation's outreach to young people? *

   Check all that apply.

   ☐ Small, under 500 young people

   ☐ Medium, between 500 and 5.000 people

   ☐ Large, over 5.000 young people

   ☐ Other: _____

Question 6: Please rank the following target groups by their importance for your organisation?

7.
   Question 6: Please rank the following target groups by their importance for your organisation? Young people 13 - 30 years of age *

   Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Very important

8.
   Question 6: Please rank the following target groups by their importance for your organisation? Intermediaries working with young people (youth workers, youth leaders, project leaders, trainers, etc) *

   Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very important	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Not important

9.
   Question 6: Please rank the following target groups by their importance for your organisation? Civil servants (European, national, municipal) *

   Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very important	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Not important

10.

Question 6: Please rank the following target groups by their importance for your organisation? Policy makers (parliamentarians, governmental representatives/experts, representatives of youth structures, etc) *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very important	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Not important

11.

Question 6: Please rank the following target groups by their importance for your organisation? Other (please specify below)

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very important	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Not important

12.

Which other target group is important for your organisation?

_____

Question 7: Is your organisation working with and/or for young people with disadvantaged backgrounds and/or fewer opportunities?

13.

Is your organisation working with and/or for young people with disadvantaged backgrounds and/or fewer opportunities? *

Mark only one oval.

◯ Yes   *Skip to question 14.*

◯ No   *Skip to question 15.*

Question 7a: Which group(s) of young people with fewer opportunities is your organisation working with/for?

(Please choose all that apply)

14. **Which group(s) of young people with fewer opportunities is your organisation working with/for?** *

Check all that apply.

- [ ] Ethnic and / or religious minority young people
- [ ] Young people living with disabilities (mental, sensory, mobility, etc)
- [ ] Young people experiencing poverty, economic barriers to participation, etc
- [ ] LGBTQI youth
- [ ] Young women
- [ ] Young refugees, asylum seekers and / or displaced people
- [ ] Young people with migrant background
- [ ] Young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs)
- [ ] Young people experiencing difficulties in education (learning difficulties, leaving school early, poor school performance, etc)
- [ ] Young people experiencing serious health problems / illness
- [ ] Young people experiencing geographical obstacles to inclusion (youth in peripheral or rural areas, etc)
- [ ] Young people facing discrimination for any reason
- [ ] Other: _____

Question 8: In which country is your organisation located?

If your organisation is an international network working in multiple countries please check the relevant box in the drop down list.

15. **In which country is your organisation located?** *
Mark only one oval.

○ Our organisation is an international network working in multiple countries   *Skip to question 16.*

○ Non-programme and non-partner third country   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Albania (partner country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Algeria (partner country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Armenia (partner country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Austria (programme country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Azerbaijan (partner country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Belarus (partner country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Belgium (programme country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Bosnia and Herzegovina (partner country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Bulgaria (programme country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Croatia (programme country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Cyprus (programme country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Czech Republic (programme country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Denmark (programme country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Egypt (partner country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Estonia (programme country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Finland (programme country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ France (programme country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Germany (programme country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Greece (programme country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Hungary (programme country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Iceland (programme country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Ireland (programme country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Israel (partner country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Italy (programme country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Jordan (partner country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Kosovo (partner country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Netherlands (programme country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Latvia (programme country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Lebanon (partner country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Libya (partner country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Liechtenstein (programme country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Lithuania (programme country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Luxembourg (programme country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Georgia (partner country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (programme country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Malta (programme country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Moldova (partner country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Montenegro (partner country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Morocco (partner country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Norway (programme country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Palestine (partner country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Poland (programme country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Portugal (programme country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Romania (programme country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Territory of Russia as recognised by international law (partner country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Serbia (partner country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Slovakia (programme country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Slovenia (programme country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Spain (programme country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Sweden (programme country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Syria (partner country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Tunisia (partner country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Turkey (programme country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ United Kingdom (programme country)   *Skip to question 17.*

○ Territory of Ukraine as recognised by international law (partner country)   *Skip to question 17.*

Skip to question 17.

Question 8a: If your organisation is an international network operating in a number of countries, in which country does it have its seat?

16.
If your organisation is an international network operating in a number of countries, in which country does it have its seat?
Check all that apply.

☐ Belgium

☐ Other: _____

Question 9: How would you describe the level of experience your organisation has with the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ (Youth in Action), since 2014?

17.
How would you describe the level of experience your organisation has with the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ (Youth in Action), since 2014? *
Mark only one oval.

○ A lot (we have applied several times, were successful in receiving funding and have run several projects)   *Skip to question 20.*

○ Some (we have applied a few times, but did not receive funding)   *Skip to question 20.*

○ None (we did not apply for funding)   *Skip to question 18.*

Question 9a: What were your organisation's reasons for not applying to the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ (Youth in Action)?

(choose all that apply)

18.
What were your organisation's reasons for not applying to the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ (Youth in Action)?
Check all that apply.

☐ the application process was too complicated

☐ our organisation was not eligible

☐ our organisation could not raise the co-funding needed

☐ our organisation could not find partners

☐ our organisation did not receive enough support from the National Agency to manage the process

☐ our project idea did not fit into any of the priorities

☐ our project activities are not supported

☐ Other: _____

19.
(9a) If you wish to elaborate on your answer, please do so here

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Skip to question 24.

Question 10: In which Key Actions of the Erasmus+ programme does your organisation have experience with 'youth projects'?
(Please check all that apply)

20.
In which Key Actions of the Erasmus+ programme does your organisation have experience 'youth projects'? *
Check all that apply.

☐ Key Action 1: Mobility projects in the field of education, training and youth

☐ Key Action 1: Mobility project for young people and youth workers

☐ Key Action 1: Large-scale European Voluntary Service events

☐ Key Action 2: Strategic Partnerships in the field of education, training and youth

☐ Key Action 2: Knowledge Alliances

☐ Key Action 2: Capacity Building in the field of youth

☐ Key Action 3: Structured Dialogue: meetings between young people and decision-makers in the field of youth.

☐ Other: _____

Question 11: Has your organisation received financial support from Erasmus+ Programme (since 2014)?

21. **Has your organisation received financial support from Erasmus+ Programme (since 2014)?**
    *

    Mark only one oval.

    ◯ Yes

    ◯ No   *Skip to question 24.*

Question 12: How large were projects/activities for which you received funding from the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+?

22.
    How large were projects/activities for which you received funding from the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+?

    Check all that apply.

    ☐ Small scale, under 25.000 eur

    ☐ Medium scale, between 25.000 and 100.000 eur

    ☐ Large scale, more than 100.000 eur

    ☐ Other: _____

Question 13: Was your organisation a main beneficiary or a partner in the projects for which you received funding?

23.
    Was your organisation a main beneficiary or a partner in the projects for which you received funding?

    Check all that apply.

    ☐ A main beneficiary

    ☐ A partner in the project

    ☐ We were both main beneficiaries and partners in the projects

    ☐ Other: _____

Question 14: Objectives and desired outcomes of Erasmus+ Programme (Youth in Action)

Consider the objectives of the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ Programme (Youth in Action):

Objective A: Provide learning mobility opportunities for young people, youth workers, youth leaders and staff of youth organisations; Strengthen the links between the youth field and the labour market.

Objective B: Enhance cooperation between organisations in the youth field and/or other stakeholders.

Objective C: Enhance policy cooperation, using Union transparency and recognition tools better, and disseminate good practices.

Objective D: Promote mobility, cooperation, and capacity building, among stakeholder in the Union, partner countries and international organisations (in complementarity to the Union's external action).

The following questions will ask you to evaluate the extent to which you think the intended outcomes associated with the objectives of the programme are important for your youth organisation; the extent to which you receive funding for projects dealing with them; and the extent to which this funding is helping your organisation achieve its aims.

24. **To which extent are the following intended outcomes important for the mission of your youth organisation?** *

Mark only one oval per row.

	1: To a very small extent	2: To a small extent	3: To some extent	4: To a great extent	5: To a very great extent	I am not well enough informed to be able to judge on this indicator
Improved key competence & skills of young people	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Labour market participation of young people	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Participation in democratic life of young people	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Intercultural dialogue among young people	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Social inclusion & solidarity among young people	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Active citizenship among young people	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Improved quality of youth work	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Policy reform at local, regional and national levels	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Knowledge and evidence-based youth policy	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Recognition of non-formal and informal learning	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
International dimension of youth activities	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Improved role of youth workers and youth organisations as support structures for young people	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

25. **To which extent is your organisation receiving funding for these outcomes from the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ (Youth in Action)?** *

Mark only one oval per row.

	1: To a very small extent	2: To a small extent	3: To some extent	4: To a great extent	5: To a very great extent	I am not well enough informed to be able to judge on this indicator
Improved key competence & skills of young people	○	○	○	○	○	○
Labour market participation of young people	○	○	○	○	○	○
Participation in democratic life of young people	○	○	○	○	○	○
Intercultural dialogue among young people	○	○	○	○	○	○
Social inclusion & solidarity among young people	○	○	○	○	○	○
Active citizenship among young people	○	○	○	○	○	○
Improved quality of youth work	○	○	○	○	○	○
Policy reform at local, regional and national levels	○	○	○	○	○	○
Knowledge and evidence-based youth policy	○	○	○	○	○	○
Recognition of non-formal and informal learning	○	○	○	○	○	○
International dimension of youth activities	○	○	○	○	○	○
Improved role of youth workers and youth organisations as support structures for young people	○	○	○	○	○	○

26. **To which extent has the funding received helped your youth organisation to achieve these outcomes?** *

Mark only one oval per row.

	1: To a very small extent	2: To a small extent	3: To some extent	4: To a great extent	5: To a very great extent	I am not well enough informed to be able to judge on this indicator
Improved key competence & skills of young people	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Labour market participation of young people	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Participation in democratic life of young people	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Intercultural dialogue among young people	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Social inclusion & solidarity among young people	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Active citizenship among young people	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Improved quality of youth work	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Policy reform at local, regional and national levels	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Knowledge and evidence-based youth policy	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Recognition of non-formal and informal learning	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
International dimension of youth activities	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Improved role of youth workers and youth organisations as support structures for young people	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

27.
(14) If you wish to elaborate on your answers, please do so here

_____

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_____

Question 15: Other issues important for your organisation

28. **In case your organisation is working on other issues and outcomes for/with young people that are not covered in the previous question, please specify the issues here:**

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

29.
Is funding available for these youth issues and outcomes?
Check all that apply.

☐ Yes

☐ No

30.
(15) If you wish to elaborate on your answer, please do so here

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_____

Question 16: Efficiency and effectiveness of the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ (Youth in Action)

Efficiency and effectiveness are defined as the degree to which the desired effect is achieved with an appropriate investment of effort and resources (e.g. time, money, etc)

31. How would you rate the extent of efficiency and effectiveness of the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ (Youth in Action) regarding the following indicators? *

Mark only one oval per row.

	1: Efficient & effective to a very small extent	2: Efficient & effective to a small extent	3: Efficient & effective to some extent	4: Efficient & effective to a great extent	5: Efficient & effective to a very great extent	I am not well enough informed to be able to judge on this indicator
User friendliness (e.g. simplicity of the application procedures, application forms, user guide, IT tools, etc)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Support available (e.g. communication with the NA or EACEA, responsiveness of the NA or EACEA, clarity and usefulness of information received from the NA or EACEA, etc)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Effort required for benefits gained e.g. time and workload involved in applying vs. financial or capacity gains)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Scale and distribution of resources (e.g. sufficient resources and appropriate use between Key Actions and types of activities)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Financial mechanisms (funding rules, budgets, lump sum system, etc)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Building your international project team / consortium	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Decentralisation of the programme	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

32. **(16) If you wish to elaborate on your answers, please do so here**

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Question 17: Obstacles

33.
Please name the three biggest obstacles that your organisation has experienced in the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ (Youth in Action) programme so far? Are these obstacles being tackled, and, if so, by whom and via which measures? *

_____

_____

_____

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_____

Question 18: Advantages

34.
Please name the three biggest advantages (positives) your organisation has experienced in the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ (Youth in Action) programme so far? Do you have any suggestions for improvement regarding these? *

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_____

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Question 19: Coordination between National Agencies

35.
How would you evaluate the coordination and harmonisation of practices between National Agencies implementing the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ (Youth in Action), e.g. application of the criteria for grant making, etc? *
Check all that apply.

☐ A. There is a good level of harmonisation and coordination

☐ B. The level of harmonisation and coordination is acceptable but could be improved

☐ C. The level of harmonisation and coordination is poor and urgently needs to be reviewed

☐ D. I am not well enough informed to be able to judge

36. **If you chose answer B. or C., what do you think needs to be improved?**

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Question 20: Relevance of the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ (Youth in Action) Programme

Relevance is defined as alignment of the programme objectives and funding opportunities with current needs of young people and youth organisations in Europe and partner countries.

37.
Regarding the following indicators, how would you rate the extent of relevance of the youth Chapter of Erasmus+ (Youth in Action) for the needs of the young people your organisation works with? *

Mark only one oval per row.

	1: Relevant to a very small extent	2: Relevant to a small extent	3: Relevant to some extent	4: Relevant to a great extent	5: Relevant to a very great extent	I am not well enough informed to be able to judge on this indicator
Erasmus+ objectives	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Types of activities supported (eligible for funding)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Scale of funding	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

38.
(20a) If you wish to elaborate on your answers, please do so here

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39. **Regarding the following indicators, how would you rate the extent of relevance of the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ (Youth in Action) for the needs of your youth organisation? ***

Mark only one oval per row.

	1: Relevant to a very small extent	2: Relevant to a small extent	3: Relevant to some extent	4: Relevant to a great extent	5: Relevant to a very great extent	I am not well enough informed to be able to judge on this indicator
Erasmus+ objectives	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Types of activities supported (eligible for funding)	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Scale of funding	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭

40.
(20b) If you wish to elaborate on your answers, please do so here

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Question 21: Coherence and complementarity of the Youth Chapter of the Erasmus+ (Youth in Action)

Coherence and complementarity are defined as the existence of synergies between actions within Erasmus+ (internal) and between Erasmus+ and other interventions of the European Commission and other institutions with similar objectives: international, European, national, etc (external).

41. **Regarding the following indicators, how would you rate the coherence and complementarity of the Youth Chapter of the Erasmus+ programme (Youth in Action)?** *

Mark only one oval per row.

	1: Very few synergies	2: Few synergies	3: Some synergies	4: Many synergies	5: Very many synergies	I am not well enough informed to be able to judge on this indicator
Synergies between actions within the Youth Chapter of the Erasmus+ (Youth in Action) (internal coherence and complementarity)?	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Synergies between E+ and other interventions of the European Commission	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Synergies between E+ and other European support and funding mechanisms	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Synergies between E+ and other international support and funding mechanisms	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Synergies between E+ and other national support and funding mechanisms	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

42.
(21) If you wish to elaborate on your answers, please do so here

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Question 22: European Added Value

European added value is defined as the additional benefits that would not accrue if it was not for Erasmus+

43. **Regarding the following indicators, how would you rate the extent of added value of the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ (Youth in Action)?** *

Mark only one oval per row.

	1 Adds value to a very small extent	2 Adds value to a small extent	3 Adds value to some extent	4 Adds value to a great extent	5 Adds value to a very great extent	I am not well enough informed to be able to judge on this indicator
Sustainability of youth organisations across Europe	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Sustainability of youth civil society across Europe	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Development of European values among young people	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Development of European values in the wider society	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
'Positive image' of the European Union among young people	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
'Positive image' of the European Union in the wider society	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Development of national policy frameworks supporting young people	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Development of national policy frameworks supporting youth organisations	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭

44.
(22) If you wish to elaborate on your answers, please do so here

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Question 23: Do you have experience of working with the Youth in Action programme (2007 - 2013)?

45.
Do you have experience of working with the Youth in Action programme (2007 - 2013)? *

Mark only one oval.

⬭ Yes

⬭ No   *Skip to question 47.*

Question 23a: Comparison to the Youth in Action programme (2007 - 2013)

46.

Regarding the following indicators, how would you rate the Youth Chapter of the current Erasmus+ programme (since 2014) in comparison to its predecessor, the Youth in Action programme (2007-2013)?

Mark only one oval per row.

	1: Much worse than YiA	2: Somewhat worse than YiA	3: About the same as YiA	4: Somewhat better than YiA	5: Much better than YiA	Spalte 6
Efficiency and effectiveness	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Relevance	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Coherence and complementarity	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
European added value	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Innovation	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Level of decentralisation	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Question 24: Structure of the Erasmus+ Programme

According to the Treaty, EU interventions in the area of education, training and youth aim at contributing to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation and supporting and supplementing Member States' actions. Therefore, it can be challenging to accurately evaluate the impact of the EU interventions.

The programme's objectives can be grouped into three categories, along with their intended level of impact: individual level, institutional level and systemic level.

At the individual level, the programme seeks to increase participants' competences as well as change their attitudes and perceptions;

At the institutional level, the programme seeks to change services, methodologies, content, practices;

At the systemic level, the programme seeks to improve systems in programme and partner countries and to further develop the European dimension.

In this theory of change, there are potential spillover effects between the different levels. For example, the mobility of individual young people, youth workers and trainers contributes to their personal learning and competence development, but can also improve the performance of the institutions they work for, and in the long run have an impact on national systems.

The diagram shows the programme structure, and how it is supposed to work and have impact.

Erasmus+ Programme Structure & Theory of Change

Actions   **Effects**
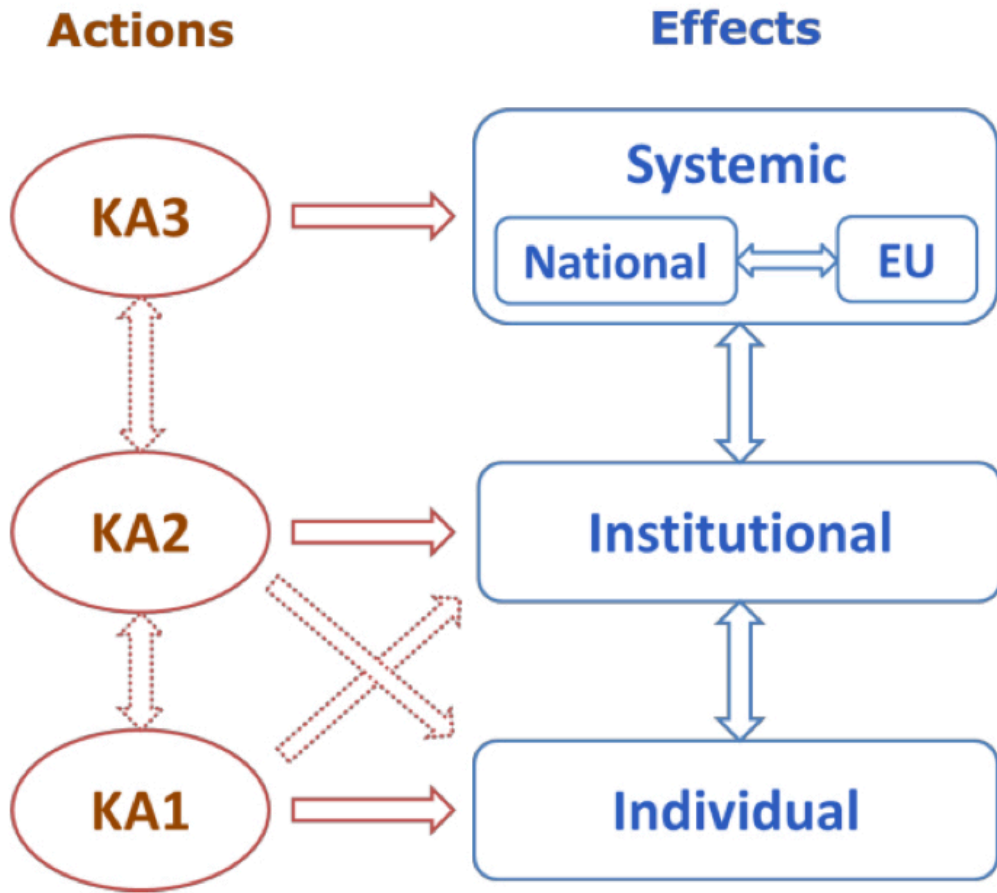
47.

To which extent do you and your organisation find this programme structure *

Mark only one oval per row.

	1 To a very small extent	2 To a small extent	3 To some extent	4 To a great extent	5 To a very great extent	I am not well enough informed to be able to judge on this indicator
Easy to understand?	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Easy to work with?	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Helpful for the achievement of the organisation's mission?	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

48.

(24a) If you wish to elaborate on your answers, please do so here

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

49. **To which extent do you agree with this statement?** *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	I am not well enough informed to be able to judge on this point
'In our experience, the effects on individual beneficiaries of the projects we run using Erasmus+ funding have positive spillover effects at other levels'	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭

50.
(24b) If you wish to elaborate on your answer, please do so here

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

51.
To which extent do you agree with this statement? *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	I am not well enough informed to be able to judge on this point
'Changes to the structure of the programme are necessary for it to meet its objectives'	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭

52.
If you answered 'agree' or 'strongly agree', which changes would you recommend?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

53. **(24c) If you wish to elaborate on your answer, please do so here**

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Question 25: Did you participate in the European Commission Mid-Term Evaluation?

54.
Did you participate in the European Commission Mid-Term Evaluation? *

Mark only one oval.

◯ Yes   *Skip to question 55.*

◯ No   *Skip to question 57.*

Question 25a: The European Commission Mid-Term Evaluation

If you participated in the Open Public Consultation or any other consultation activities conducted as part of the European Commission's mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ Programme, please answer the following questions

55.
To which extent did you find the evaluation questions you were asked comprehensive? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
To a very small extent	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	To a very great extent

56.
If you rated 1, 2 or 3, please elaborate on what you felt was missing from the European Commission's mid-term evaluation

_____

_____

_____

_____

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Question 26: Do you have any other comments on the Erasmus+ programme that you wish to share?

57.
Do you have any other comments on the Erasmus+ programme that you wish to share?
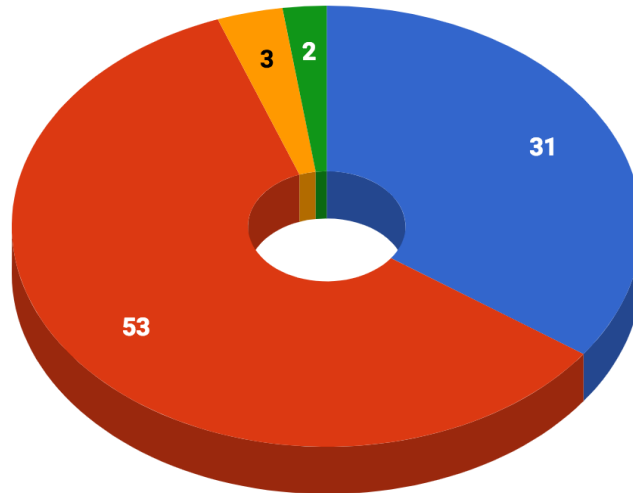
_____

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This is the end! Thank you very much for your time and effort in filling in our survey. The shadow report will be available towards the end of 2017 from the European Youth Forum.

Do you represent a youth organisation?

Is your organisation a member of the European Youth Forum?

- Yes: 31
- No: 53
- Observer member: 3
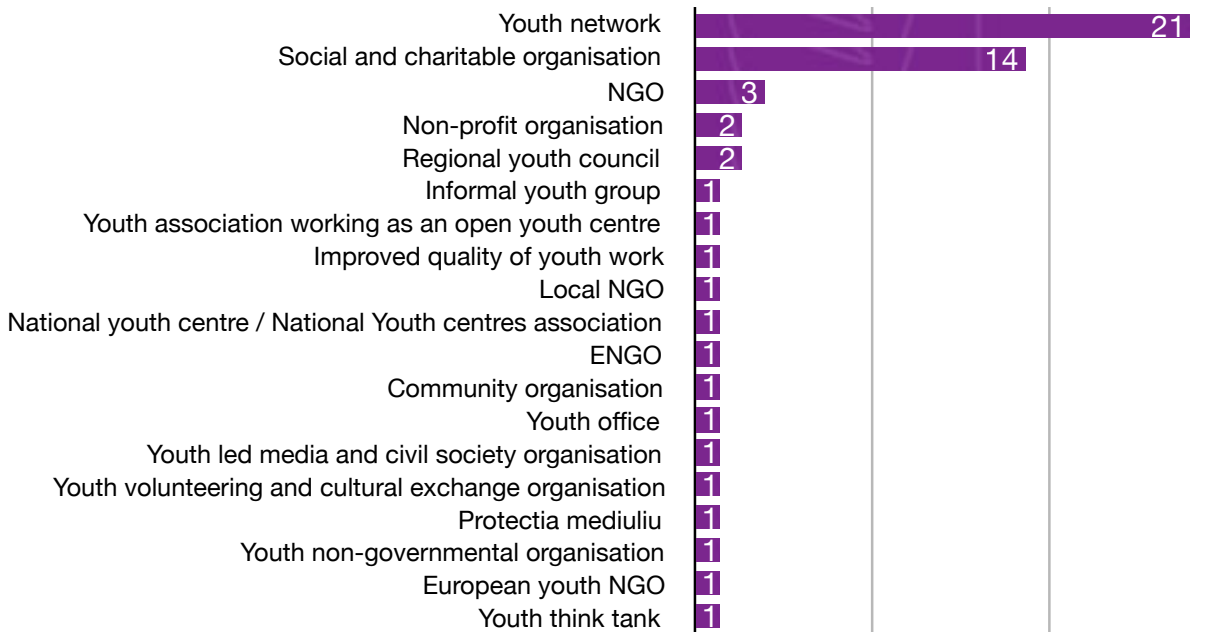- We are a candidate member: 2
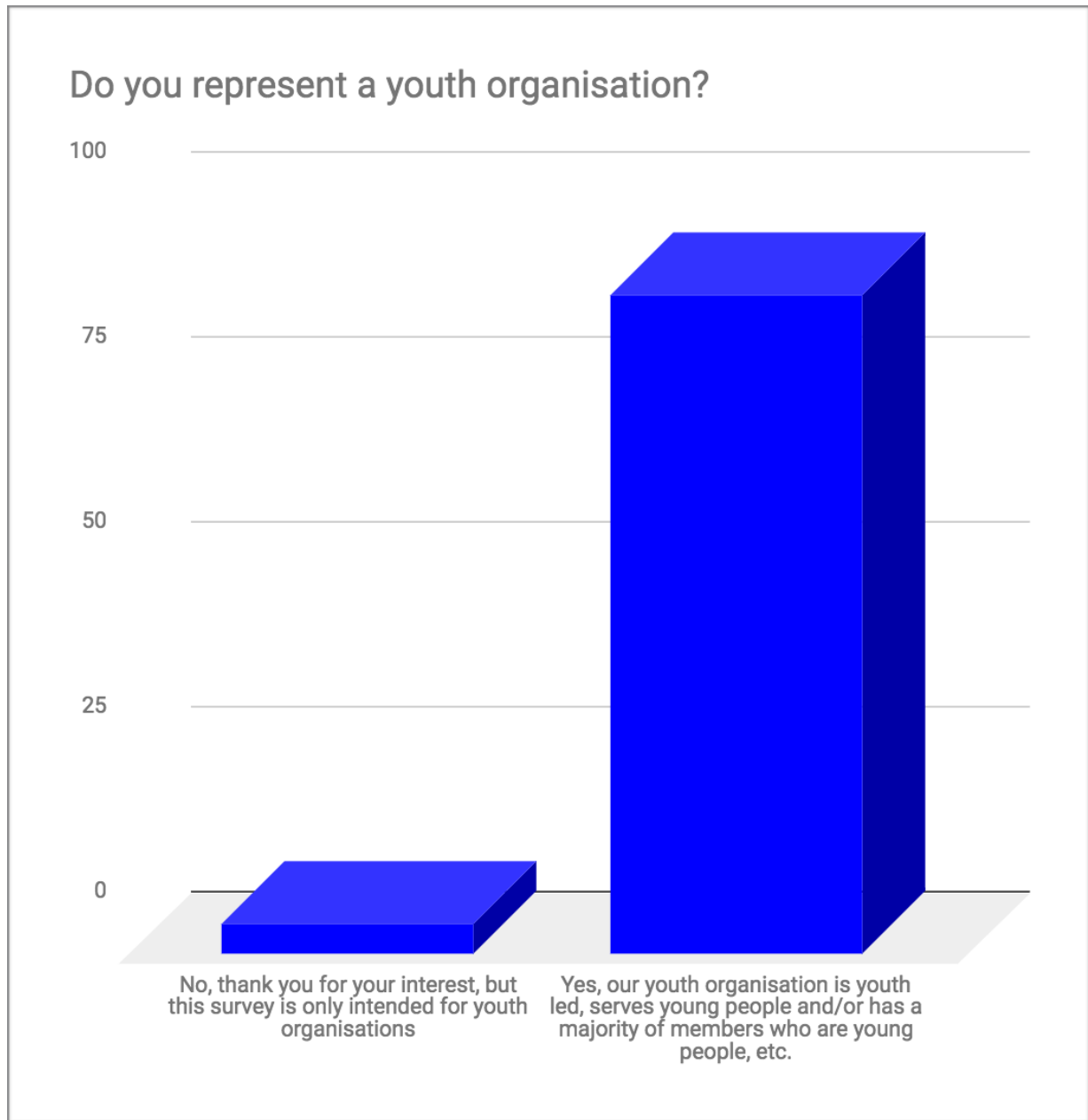
Legend: ● Yes ● No ● Observer member ● We are a candidate member

What kind of YFJ Member organisation?

- National Youth Council: 7
- International non-governmental youth organisation: 29
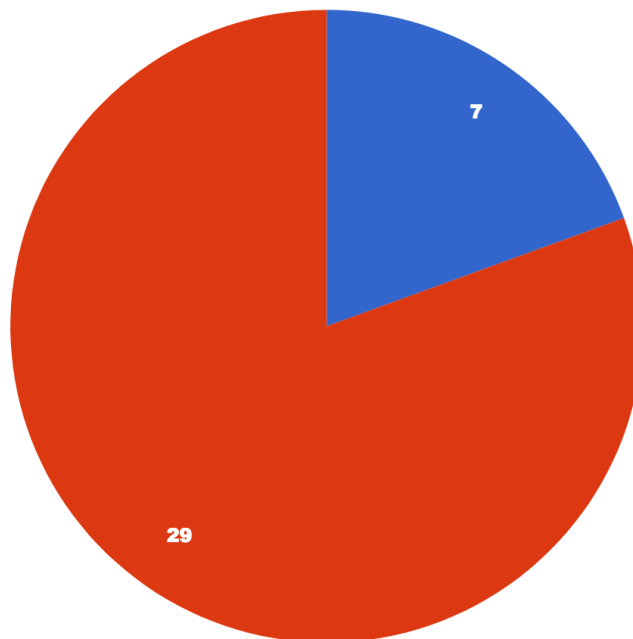
Legend: ● National Youth Council ● International non-governmental youth organisation

How would you describe the type of your organisation?

Type	Number of responses
Youth network	21
Social and charitable organisation	14
NGO	3
Non-profit organisation	2
Regional youth council	2
Informal youth group	1
Youth association working as an open youth centre	1
Improved quality of youth work	1
Local NGO	1
National youth centre / National Youth centres association	1
ENGO	1
Community organisation	1
Youth office	1
Youth led media and civil society organisation	1
Youth volunteering and cultural exchange organisation	1
Protectia mediuliu	1
Youth non-governmental organisation	1
European youth NGO	1
Youth think tank	1

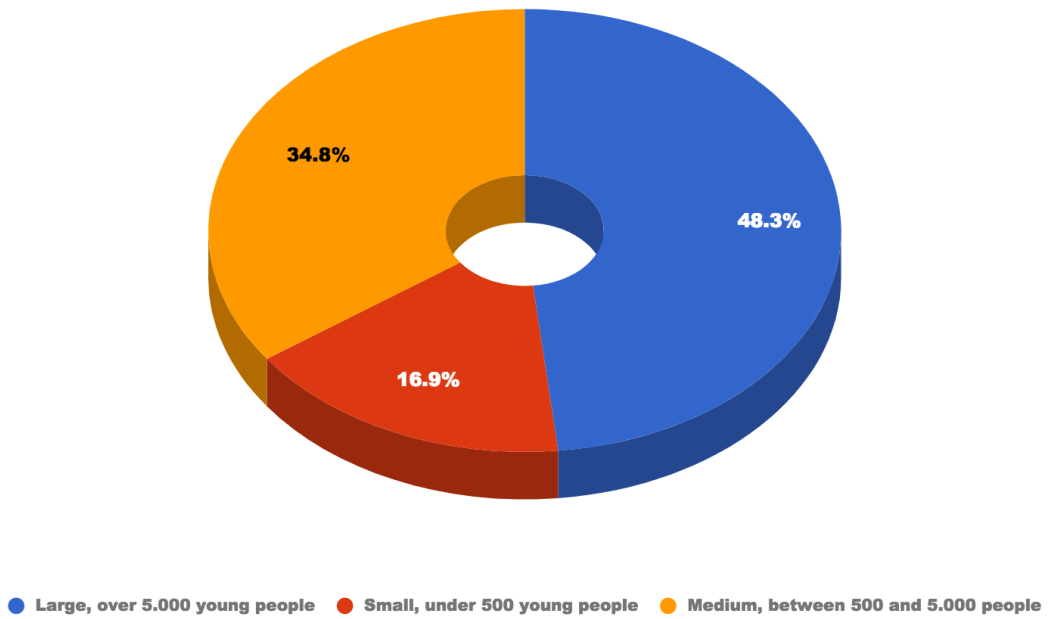■ Number of responses

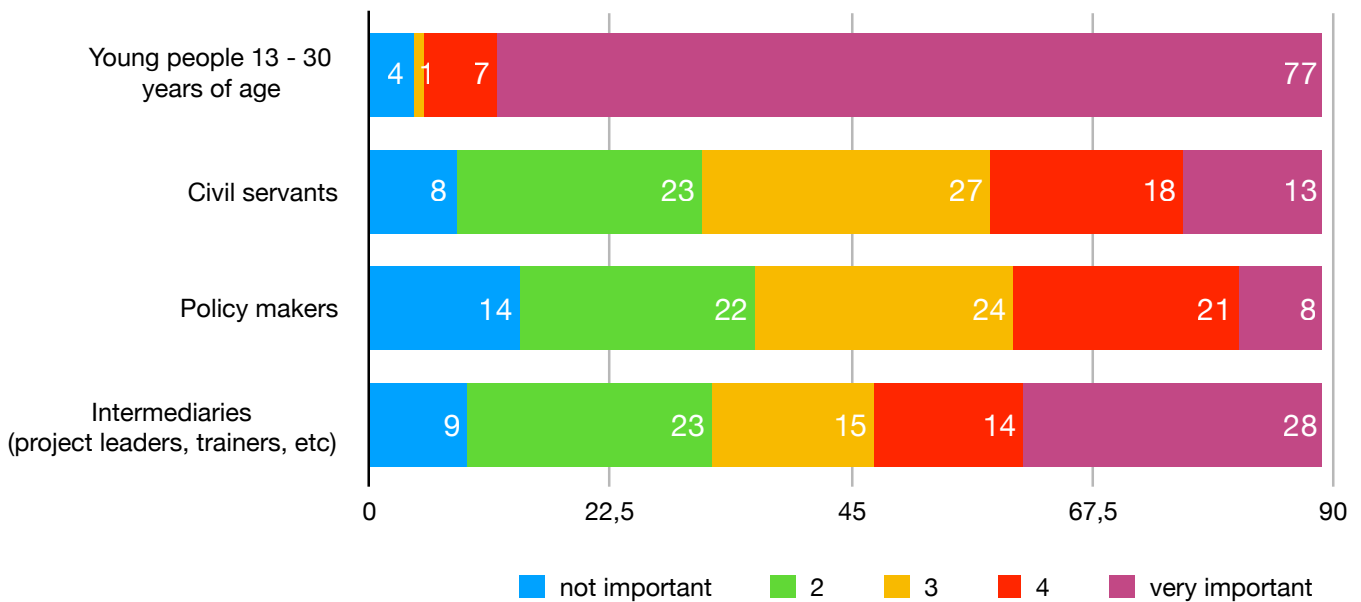**At which level are the MAJORITY of the activities of your youth organisation implemented?**
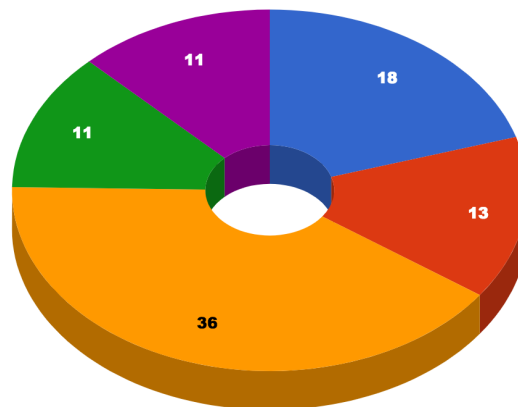
- ● National — 18
- ● Local — 13
- ● European (EU or Geographical Europe) — 36
- ● Regional — 11
- ● International / Global — 11

What is the scale of your youth organisation's outreach to young people?

- 34.8%
- 48.3%
- 16.9%

● Large, over 5.000 young people   ● Small, under 500 young people   ● Medium, between 500 and 5.000 people

How important are the following target groups for your organisation?

Target group	not important	2	3	4	very important
Young people 13 - 30 years of age	4	1		7	77
Civil servants	8	23	27	18	13
Policy makers	14	22	24	21	8
Intermediaries (project leaders, trainers, etc)	9	23	15	14	28

■ not important   ■ 2   ■ 3   ■ 4   ■ very important

Is your organisation working with and/or for young people with disadvantaged backgrounds and/or fewer opportunities?

No
10.1%

No
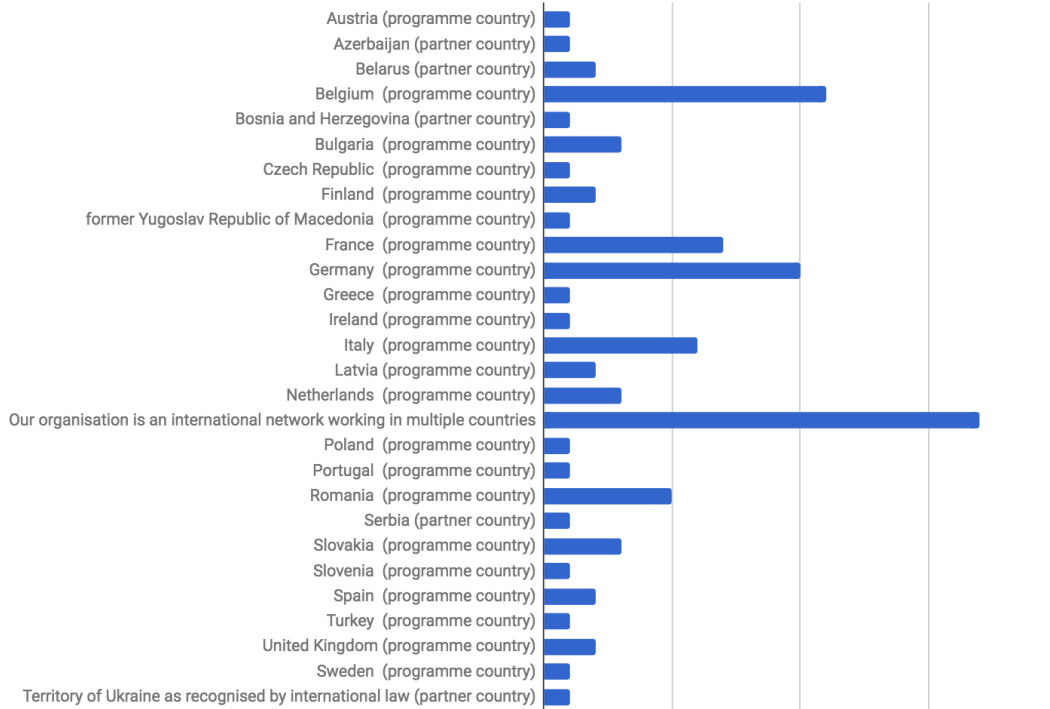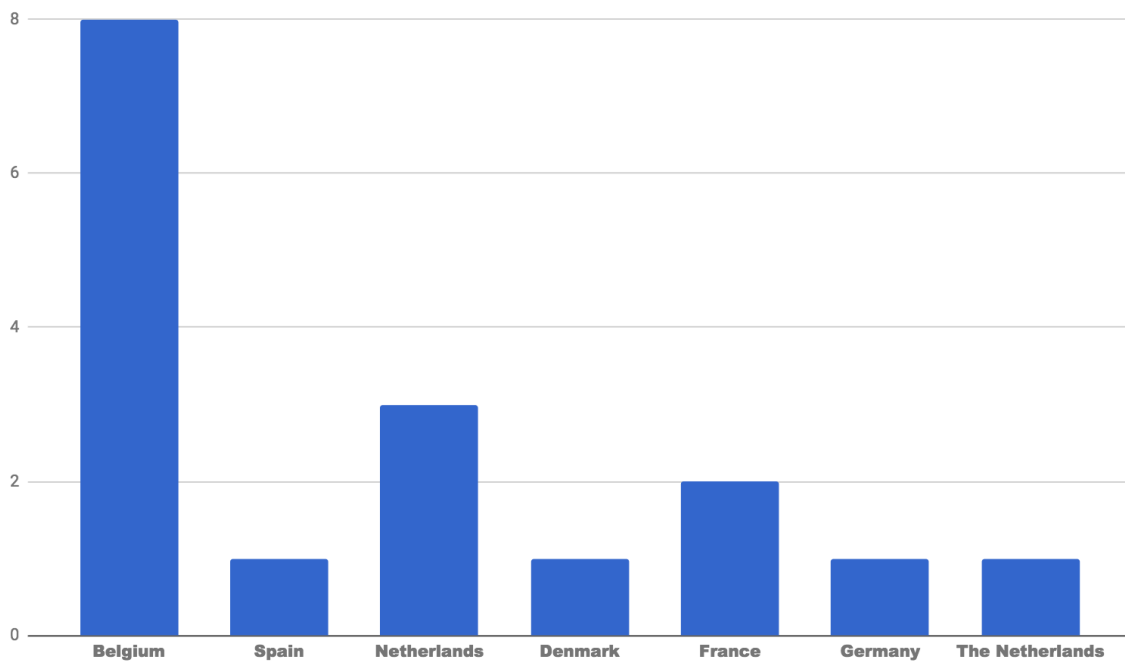
Yes

Yes
89.9%
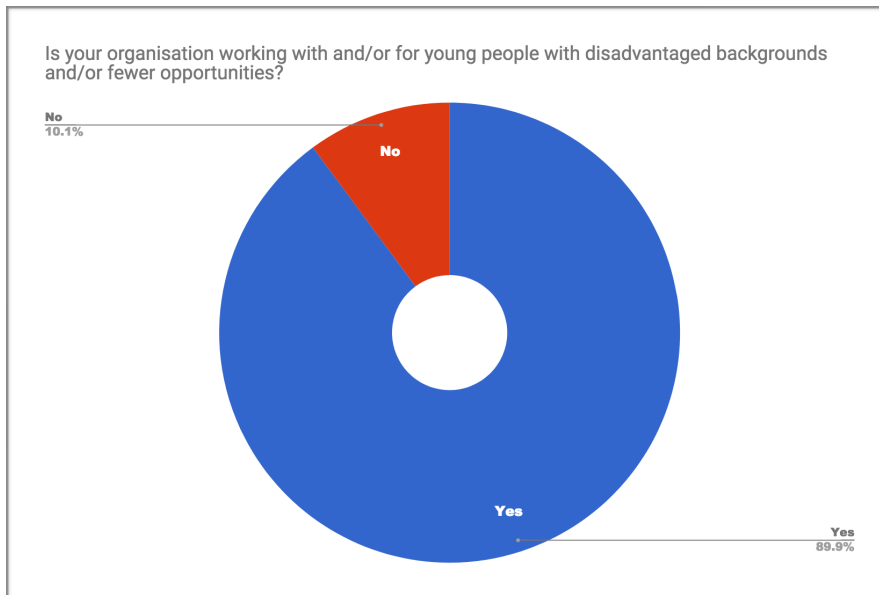
Which group(s) of young people with fewer opportunities is your organisation working for/with (check all that apply)?

Category	Number of responses
Ethnic or religious minority youth	40
Young people living with disabilities	42
Young people experiencing poverty, economic barriers to paricipation, etc	61
LGBTQI Youth	30
Young women	40
Young refugees, asylum seekers and / or displaced persons	39
Young people with migrant backtground	48
NEETs (not in employment, education or training)	43
Young people experiencing difficulties in education (learning difficulties, leaving school early, etc)	40
Young people experiencing serious health problems / illnesses	11
Young people experiencing geographical obstacles to inclusion (youth in peripheral or rural areas)	53
Young people facing discrimination for any reason	42
Other	3

0   17,5   35   52,5   70
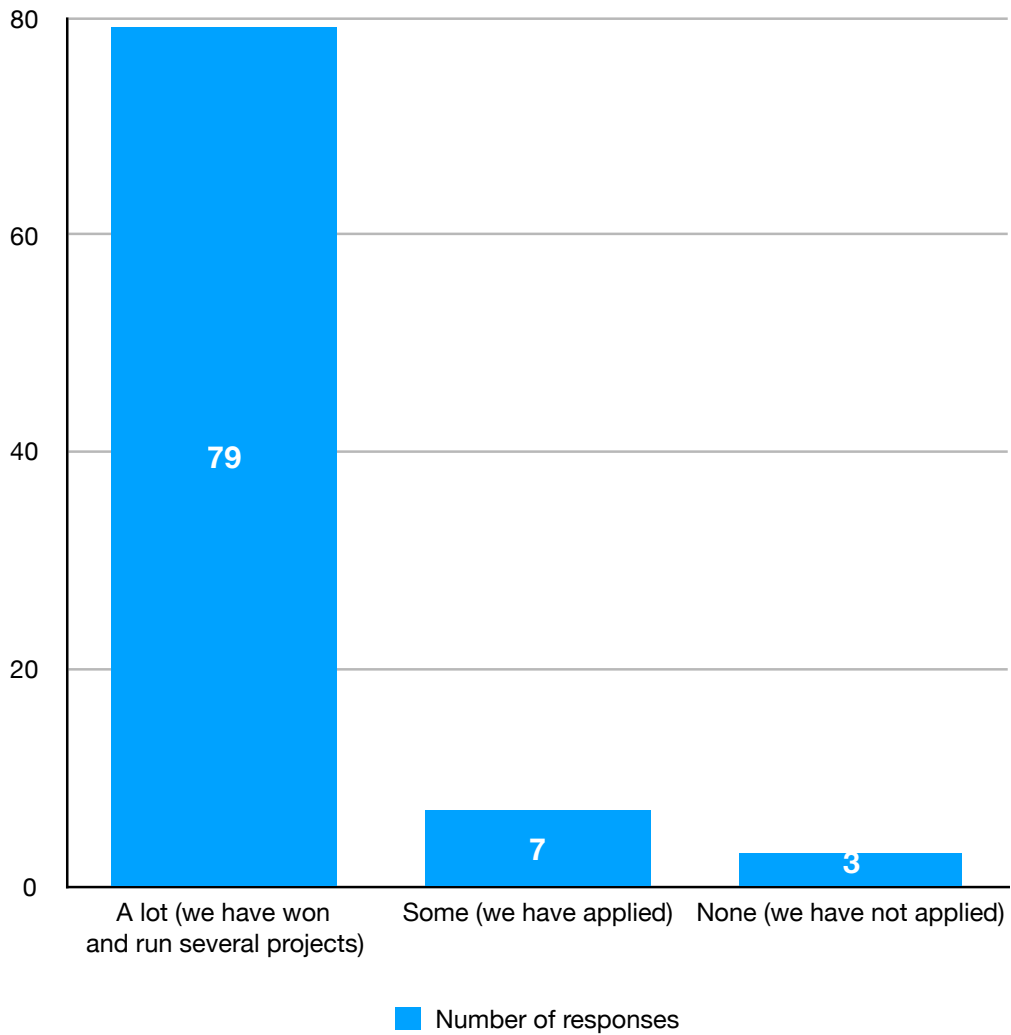
■ Number of responses

5

In which country is your organisation located?

If your organisation is an international network operating in a number of countries, in which country does it have its seat?

How would you describe the level of experience your organisation has with the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ since 2014?

Bar chart showing number of responses: "A lot (we have won and run several projects)" = 79, "Some (we have applied)" = 7, "None (we have not applied)" = 3.

Legend: Number of responses

Has your organisation received financial support from Erasmus+ Programme (since 2014)?

86 responses
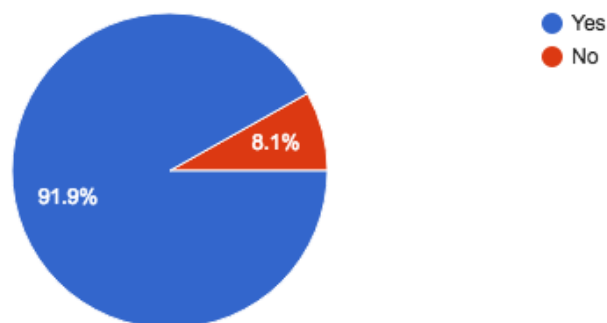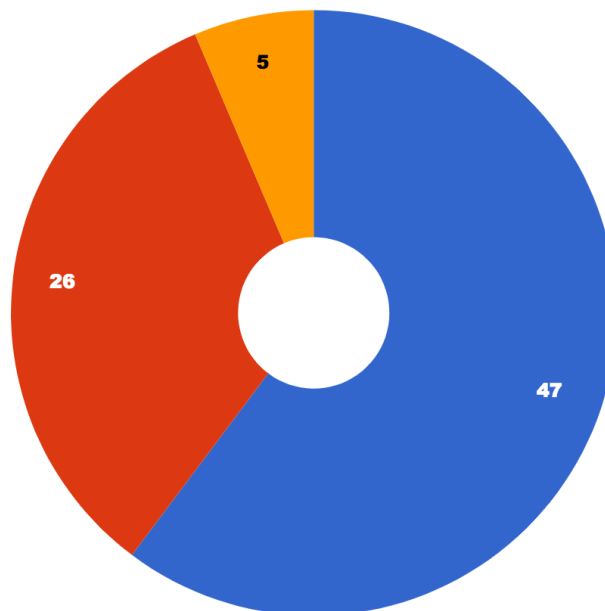

Pie chart: Yes 91.9%, No 8.1%

How large were projects/activities for which you received funding from the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+?

Number of responses
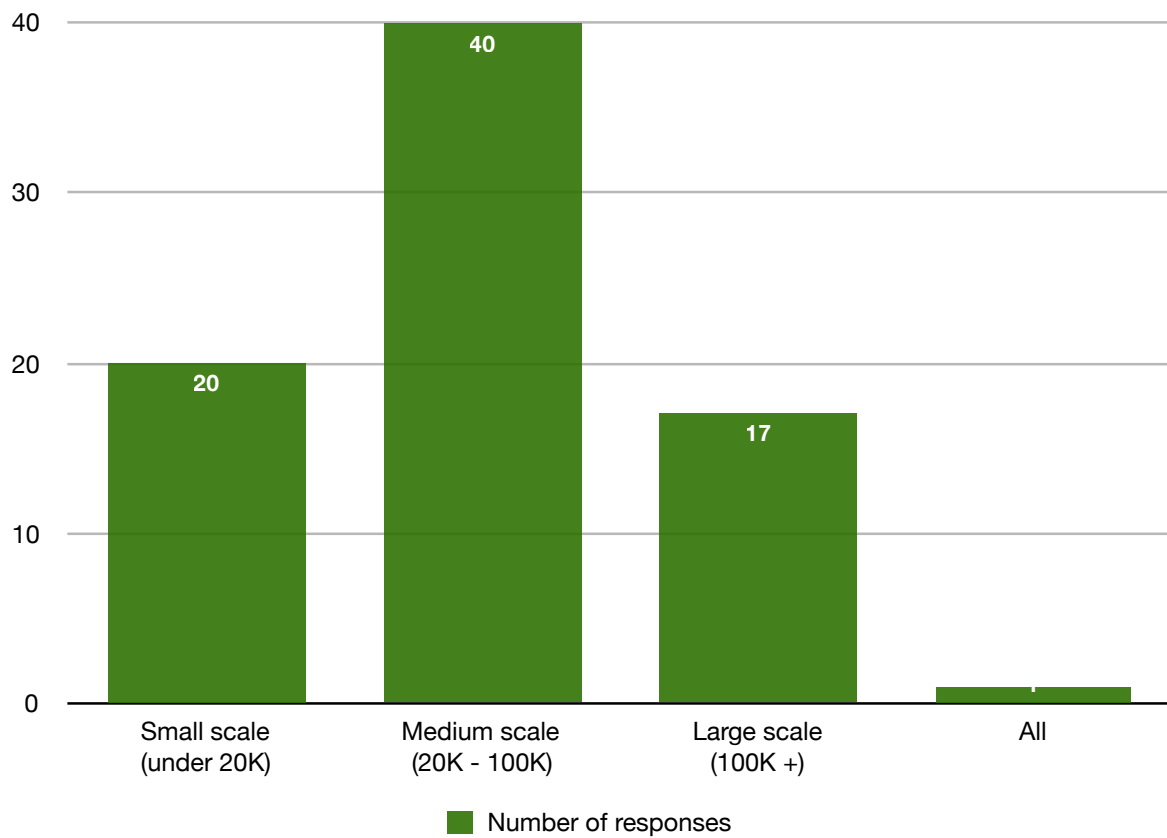
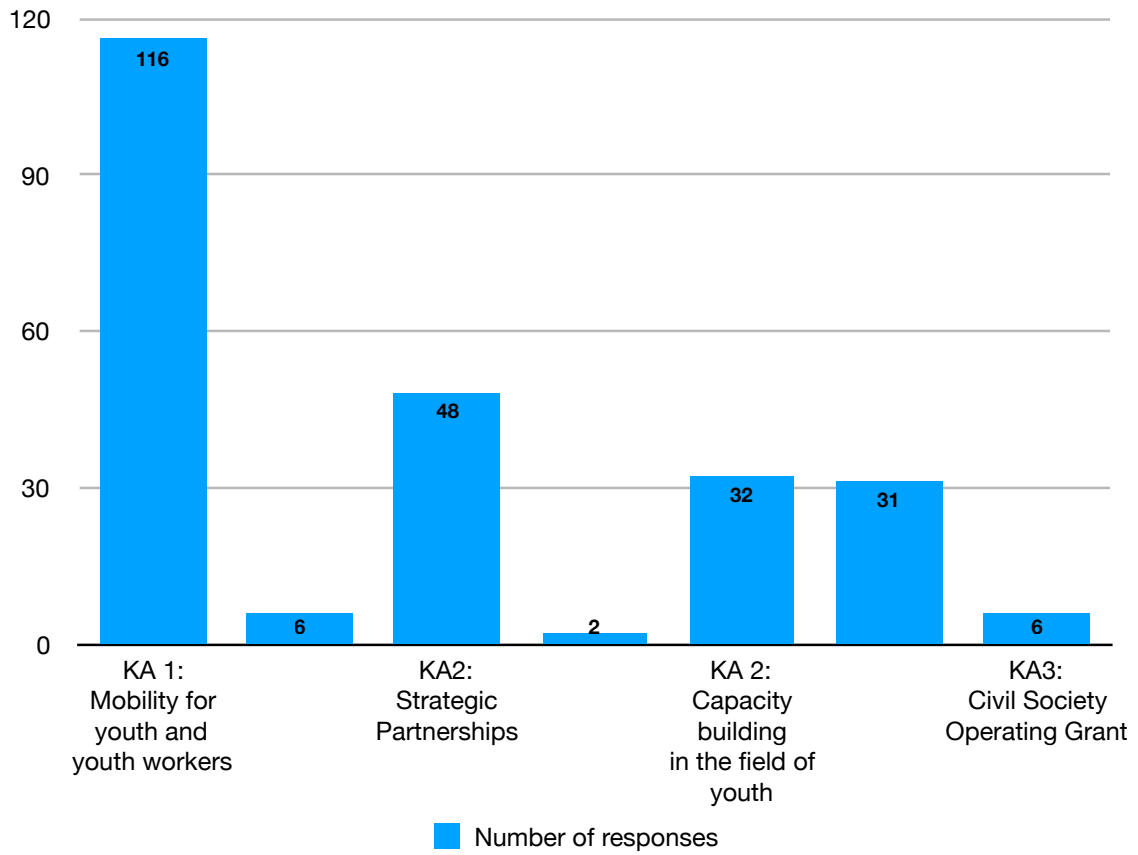Was your organisation a main beneficiary or a partner in the projects for which you received funding?
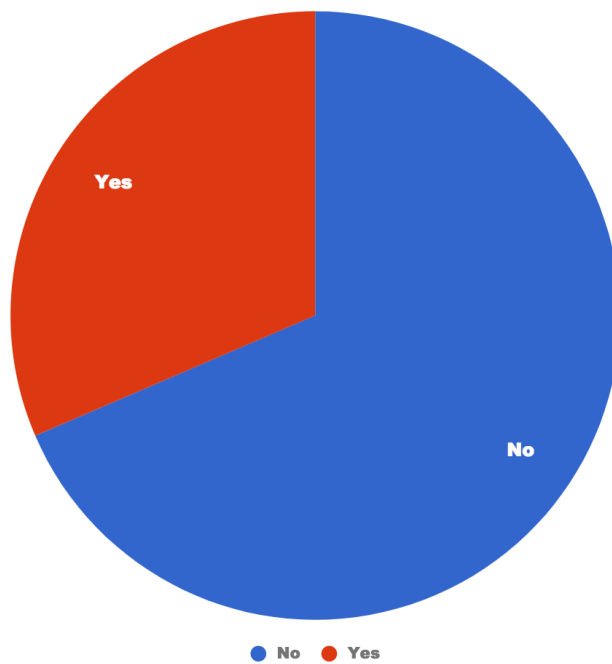
● We were both main beneficiaries and partners in the projects ● A main beneficiary ● A partner in the project

In which Key Actions of the Erasmus+ programme does your organisation have experience with 'youth projects'?

Number of responses

Did you participate in the European Commission Mid-Term Evaluation?

● No ● Yes

How important are the following intended outcomes for the mission of your youth organisation?

	very important (5)	4	3	2	not important at all (1)	don't know
young people's skills	55	25	6	1	1	1
young people's labour market participation	21	23	25	11	7	2
youth participation	47	30	7	2		3
intercultural dialogue	61	21	4	1	2	
inclusion and solidarity	49	28	10	1	1	
active citizenship	55	23	6	2	1	2
quality of youth work	36	32	13	5	1	2
youth policy reform	25	16	30	11	6	1
knowledge-based youth policy	21	23	27	14	3	1
recognition of non- and informal learning	45	22	11	4	3	4
international dimension	55	16	11	3	2	2
support of youth work and youth orgs to young people	37	25	17	4	1	3