

Inclusive Youth and Education Programmes

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recommendations towards inclusive Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes

For the civil society organisations subscribing to this position paper, inclusion is an essential part of their daily work - be it as a welfare or youth association, Church or social and educational institution. We are committed to truly inclusive education programmes at the European level. This includes a comprehensive, diversity-friendly inclusion strategy for all European funding programmes that addresses multiple discrimination.

The following recommendations are intended to provide concrete practical suggestions for an inclusive implementation of the European youth and education programmes Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps. These recommendations are based on the experience of implementing the programmes in the areas of youth work, adult education, vocational training as well as school education and voluntary services.

1. Involve persons with fewer opportunities and special needs as experts, implementing organisations and civil society structures in programme planning, implementation and evaluation
2. Directly address target groups experiencing disadvantage and discrimination and provide structured information
3. Use accessible programme documents
4. Apply flexible rules in the support of additional expenses for participants with fewer opportunities and qualified professionals
5. Ensure awareness among evaluators and decision-makers about the special needs of disadvantaged target groups
6. Fund supporting structures for interested volunteers and avoid additional burdens in the application process
7. Ensure equal application of the rules across all programme countries and all national agencies
8. Accompany participants with fewer opportunities more closely during their stay abroad
9. Provide target group-specific support for language learning

The following recommendations towards inclusive Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes are supported by:

<p>➤ Federation of Protestant Youth in Germany</p>	 <p>Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Evangelischen Jugend in Deutschland e.V.</p>
<p>➤ Association of German Social Welfare Organisations</p>	<p>Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Freien Wohlfahrtspflege</p> 
<p>➤ Bavarian Youth Council</p>	 <p>Bayerischer Jugendring</p>
<p>➤ COMECE</p>	 <p>40th anniversary COMECE</p>
<p>➤ Don Bosco Youth-Net</p>	 <p>DON BOSCO YOUTH-NET</p>
<p>➤ EAEA</p>	 <p>EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS</p>
<p>➤ EKD EU Office</p>	 <p>Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland Dienststelle Brüssel</p>
<p>➤ Eurodiaconia</p>	 <p>Connecting faith and social justice through action</p>
<p>➤ European Office for Catholic Youth and Adult Education</p>	 <p>EUROPABÜRO FÜR KATHOLISCHE JUGENDARBEIT UND ERWACHSENENBILDUNG</p>
<p>➤ Catholic Youth Social Work</p>	 <p>Katholische Jugendsozialarbeit</p>
<p>➤ NEVSO</p>	 <p>Network of European Voluntary Service Organisations</p>
<p>➤ YES Forum</p>	 <p>YES FORUM</p>

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Recommendations towards inclusive Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes

European Heads of State and Government have repeatedly stressed the importance of education and culture as *"key to building inclusive and cohesive societies"*. In 2017, they called for *"stepping up mobility and exchanges, including through a substantially strengthened, inclusive and extended Erasmus+ programme"*.¹

For the civil society organisations subscribing to this position paper, inclusion is an essential part of their daily work - whether as welfare or youth organisations, youth social work, Churches or social and educational institutions. We are committed to truly inclusive education programmes at the European level. According to figures of the RAY network², a leap in personal and professional development can be observed after participation in a European education programme, particularly among persons who have experienced disadvantage and discrimination.³

As implementers of inclusive education projects, we concentrate on practical recommendations with the aim to improve the new generation of programmes. While placing the users in the focus of our reflection, we wish to make a "hands on" contribution to the discussion. These recommendations are based on the experience gained in implementing the programme in the areas of youth work, adult education, vocational training as well as school education and voluntary services.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities postulates in Article 24 the right to inclusive education. In this sense, inclusion means a holistic approach that empowers people with physical and mental disabilities to actively participate in life, education, work and society. To this end, disadvantages of all kinds must be compensated for. In our view, inclusion in EU education programmes refers to the opening of the programmes to all people, taking into account their individual needs, strengths and circumstances. We especially focus on social disadvantages such as a difficult family environment, experience of poverty, migration and displacement, educational disadvantages, stressful housing conditions, etc.⁴

In order to meet these challenges, **all EU funding programmes must be designed in such a way that all people in their individual diversity can take part in EU projects, by compensating for possible disadvantages.**

¹ See Council conclusion of 14 December 2017: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/32204/14-final-conclusions-rev1-en.pdf>

² Research based Analysis of Erasmus+ Youth in Action (RAY) is a European research network of national agencies and research institutions from 34 countries. More information: <https://www.researchyouth.eu/>

³ Cf. Tony Geudens, Wolfgang Hagleitner, Francine Labadie and Frank Stevens (SALTO Inclusion Resource Centre): International youth projects benefit most those with fewer opportunities: <https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-3230/ImpactOfMobilityOnYPFO.pdf>

⁴ In principle, we support a broad definition of "fewer opportunities" in the Erasmus+ Programme Guide. At the same time, we would like to point out that some groups of people, for example in youth social work, have significantly more serious disadvantages. We are therefore particularly committed to opening up programmes for severely disadvantaged (young) people in terms of youth social work

The latest research results⁵ show that (young) people across all socio-cultural milieus are interested in formats of international exchange. Depending on the environment, they live in, however, there are different approaches to the topic, preferences for specific formats and diverse forms of communication. While in terms of content underrepresented target groups do not differ from other target groups, empirical facts indicate that access barriers arise through structural selection mechanisms. We therefore call for a **comprehensive, diversity-friendly inclusion strategy for all European funding programmes that address multiple discrimination**.

In the programme period 2014-2020, the EU has already introduced numerous measures to make its youth and education programmes more inclusive and to include people with fewer opportunities or disabilities in the programme activities: the European Commission has already included, for instance, horizontal priorities for inclusion in the programme guides, inserted provisions that allowed for reimbursement of extra costs for the participation and additional needs of people with fewer opportunities, and introduced special trainings for national agencies and application evaluators. In the "*Youth in Action*" programme area of Erasmus+, there is also an inclusion and diversity strategy, which can be used as a model for an inclusion strategy for all youth and education programmes.

Despite all efforts, projects aiming to involve all people still face major difficulties. **As practical measures to improve inclusion in EU youth and education programmes in the new generation of programmes from 2021, we therefore recommend:**

1. Involve persons with fewer opportunities and special needs as experts, implementing organisations and civil society structures

Political decision-makers and the programme administration usually do not have direct access and experience with the (partly overlapping) target groups of persons with fewer opportunities. The EU Commission, the implementing ministries and national agencies therefore run the risk that their measures regarding more inclusive programmes fail to meet the actual needs of the target groups. Instead of promoting inclusion, it happens that decision-makers unintentionally create new access barriers or introduce discriminatory or segregative measures.

→ Recommendation

Organisations of the target groups and civil society structures such as youth or welfare associations and Churches know the actual needs of the target groups and have direct access to affected persons. The EU and its Member States should involve these stakeholders in programme planning, implementation and evaluation from the very beginning. Planning and evaluation processes should be designed to be barrier-free (easy-to-read language, sign language and induction loops, Braille, barrier-free as well as barrier-free accessible rooms, etc.). Civil society organisations can help to address the target groups, uncover barriers, seek solutions and ensure participation. The "*European Code of Conduct for Partnerships in the European Structural and*

⁵ See "Warum nicht? Studie zum Internationalen Jugendaustausch: Zugänge und Barrieren". Forschung und Praxis im Dialog – Internationale Jugendarbeit (FPD) transfer e.V. ["Why not? Study on International Youth Exchange: Access and Barriers". Research and Practice in Dialogue - International Youth Work (FPD) transfer e.V.]; Conducted by *Institut für Kooperationsmanagement (IKO), Regensburg, SINUS-Institut Heidelberg, Technische Hochschule Köln, Forschungsprojekt Freizeitenevaluation.*

*Investment Funds*⁶ is a good practice on the involvement of civil society, and we call to make the code binding for European youth and education programmes.

2. Directly address target groups experiencing disadvantage and discrimination and provide structured information

Obtaining concrete information on EU education programmes and opportunities for participation is difficult for both, interested participants and implementing organisations. Information on possible support (such as personal assistance, therapeutic support, medical material, etc.) from the host organisation is often lacking and the search for accessible accommodation and facilities is difficult. In addition, the relevant target groups often use other communication and information channels.

→ Recommendation

The target group and its needs must be addressed directly in the promotion of the programmes. The European Commission and national agencies should make use of existing civil society structures and simultaneously look for new access points to the target groups in order to reach out to as many people as possible. Access barriers must be removed to enable everybody to participate. Information on support services for people with fewer opportunities must be clearly structured, easy to find and understand. Organisations that are particularly suitable for participants with fewer opportunities (e.g. because of wheelchair-accessible rooms, trained staff, etc.) should be immediately visibly marked in databases with an appropriate symbol. A filter function must be added to the search mask of the PASS-Tool to enable persons with fewer opportunities and funding agencies to search for these organisations in a targeted manner. Implementing organisations should designate contact persons for people with fewer opportunities who can provide information on the possibility to participate in regular programmes. Hosting organisations of the European Solidarity Corps should be required to present the relevant information in a concise manner. Since many of the target groups are closely accompanied and advised by social work agencies, these organisations should be directly addressed and informed. In cooperation with experts in their own field, additional alternative communication channels such as ambassadors or musicians should be identified and used. In this way, target groups that are particularly difficult to reach can be sensitised to the educational programmes and motivated to participate.

3. Use accessible programme documents

Programme documents such as programme guidelines, application forms, but especially templates for end users such as the “Mobility Tool” and the questionnaires for participant reports are not suitable for people with cognitive impairments, learning or concentration difficulties, but also for persons with another mother tongue. The texts are extremely complex and contain numerous technical terms that are difficult to understand even for experienced applicants. Forms and questions are too difficult and too complicated.

→ Recommendation

In principle, the EU should use accessible formats and better structure all information documents (the programme guide, calls for proposals, funding strategies, etc.), application and accounting forms as well as other relevant documents. At least, the EU should translate all documents addressed and targeted to participants (the

⁶ Delegated Regulation (EU) No 240/2014 of 7 January 2014 on the European Code of Conduct for Partnerships in the framework of the European Structural and Investment Funds (OJ L74, 14.3.2014, p.1).

“Mobility Tool”, questionnaires, etc.) in easy-to-read language.⁷ We therefore suggest that the EU applies the *European Standards For Making Information Easy to Read and To Understand* in all translated documents.⁸ The European Commission should also provide the documents in all programme languages at the latest when the call for proposals has been published. The national agencies should provide all relevant information on their websites in easy-to-read language. Digital information should always be made available in an accessible form (WCAG standard, e.g. readable for screen readers). Supporting videos in official sign languages and the availability of printed materials in Braille would also help people with special needs to collect information about the programmes.

4. Apply flexible rules in the support of additional expenses for participants with fewer opportunities and qualified professionals

Activities with people with fewer opportunities require more socio-educational effort in preparation, implementation and follow-up. This must be reflected in higher financial support. It is true that the EU already subsidises up to 100 percent of the additional costs for participants with fewer opportunities. However, applicants are required to indicate the exact amount of the additional expenditure in the application. This is particularly difficult to estimate in advance, when working with participants with psychosocial or mental impairments.

→ Recommendation:

In order to make inclusion of all people possible, the EU should allow to adjust the amount for the additional expenditure during the action and, in addition, credit special support for people with disabilities against the maximum support amount. The additional expenditure for preparation and follow-up must be reflected in the funding of staff and material costs.

5. Ensure awareness among evaluators and decision-makers about the special needs of disadvantaged target groups

Assessing whether the requested additional expenditure for inclusion is reasonable requires particular sensitivity on the part of the evaluators, national agencies' staff and other decision-makers. In particular, additional expenditures that are not evident to all partners (e.g. travel, accommodation, care personnel for people with cognitive and psychological impairments, etc.) can only be calculated with a lot of experience by the implementing organisations. Cuts in additional expenditure, some of which have already been made by the national agencies without consulting the implementing organisation, lead to considerable problems in the implementation or even to the cancellation of the project. The EU and national agencies should generally advise promoters on inclusion with particular sensitivity in order to avoid discrimination or unintentional misunderstandings.

→ Recommendation

Evaluators, employees of the national agencies and other decision-makers should be made aware of the situation of differently disadvantaged people e.g. through regular trainings or visits to local institutions. This should enable them to develop a better understanding of the needs of the target groups, in order to provide specific and

⁷ Easy-to-Read language aims to enable people with reading difficulties to participate in society and politics. It is characterised by, among other things, short main sentences, the extensive avoidance of subordinate clauses and the use of familiar words while difficult words are explained.

⁸ The European standards for easy-to-read language as well as the quality label were developed by the organisation *"Inclusion Europe"*. For further information please consult: <https://easy-to-read.eu/european-standards/>

individual counselling. The EU should generally strengthen the inclusion component in the evaluation process and treat it as an independent criterion. In the event of doubts regarding the recognition of costs arising from inclusion, national agencies should be obliged to consult with the providers before cutting any financial support.

6. Fund supporting structures for interested volunteers and avoid additional burdens in the application process

People willing to participate in the European Solidarity Corps have to create a profile on the official online platform by following various steps (including setting up an EU login) and then search the database for suitable hosting organisations. Likewise, organisations can search the database for suitable participants. If interested, participants and organisations can contact each other. A purely online platform does not offer individual advice for interested persons on the possibilities and chances of a voluntary service or help with the technical requirements. Especially for volunteers who need additional support and assistance, this form of online matching is not suitable. When applying for the quality label for the European Solidarity Corps, organisations have to deal with a considerable amount of additional work, as they have to provide detailed answers to numerous additional questions in the application form. This actually discourages interested organisations from accepting volunteers with disadvantaged background.

→ Recommendation

In order to enable disadvantaged target groups to participate in voluntary service, direct and individual contact with people is crucial. Organisations and counselling structures in which qualified socio-educational professionals look for suitable facilities together with young people and support them in their application must be structurally strengthened and financially supported. In the online tool, participants should have the possibility to search not only for projects, but also for organisations that offer additional support structures. When applying for the quality label, the application form must be revised, so that organisations willing to host volunteers with fewer opportunities, are not deterred from applying.

7. Ensure equal application of the rules across all programme countries and all national agencies

Across the EU, national agencies interpret the rules for funding inclusion differently. While, for example, the costs of financing accompanying persons are often approved in some countries, other national agencies in our experience tend to reject similar requests. In addition, within a country, national agencies provide different information and advice regarding funding requirements etc.

→ Recommendation

All national agencies in each programme country must be subject to the same rules on inclusion. These rules must be published and applied according to the same scheme. In order to avoid different interpretations of the funding rules, the EU Commission should provide clear and common definitions. These must be developed in a participatory manner in close cooperation with (European) stakeholder organisations and civil society structures. In order to prevent different interpretations of rules and definitions, the EU Commission should create structures such as regular exchanges between national agencies, training courses or a quickly accessible help desk.

8. Accompany participants with fewer opportunities more closely during their stay abroad

Persons with fewer opportunities often require close socio-educational support during their stay abroad. In particular young people and young adults who cannot live in their families for various reasons and are instead looked after by educational institutions and services don't have an emotional and social place that provides support from afar. This is aggravated by the fact that in many cases participation in e.g. a voluntary service means the end of the support under the youth welfare scheme. These young people are left to their own with typical problems such as homesickness, dissatisfaction, lack of a suitable place of work, etc.

→ Recommendation

People with fewer opportunities should be able to contact socio-educational professionals at home and in the host country at all times, in order to compensate for emotional disadvantages, e.g. due to a lack of family support structures. The EU should structurally strengthen and adequately finance sending organisations in supporting and counselling participants.

9. Provide targeted and group-specific support for language learning

Recent studies⁹ show that worrying about the language barrier is always an obstacle to participation in an international exchange or a stay abroad. While for "typical" participants the language barrier during their stay abroad turns out to be less severe than feared, participants with fewer opportunities actually face greater difficulties. According to a SINUS survey, participants who are underrepresented in international youth exchanges - compared to participants that have received formal higher education - experienced much more communication difficulties than other participants. This is a barrier that poses a particular challenge to young people who are already struggling with language learning or who are taught fewer foreign language classes at school.

→ Recommendation

Sending organisations that work with participants with fewer opportunities must be able to offer language courses for specific target groups, in order to reduce real language barriers and dispel fears and anxieties about participation. A further methodological development of mobility-oriented language learning offers is needed that is tailored to the target group. These language courses must be funded by the EU as part of the preparation. Pure online language courses are not suitable for these target groups. In the medium term, target-group specific digital tools should underpin analogue language courses.

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⁹ See "Warum nicht? Studie zum Internationalen Jugendaustausch: Zugänge und Barrieren". Forschung und Praxis im Dialog – Internationale Jugendarbeit (FPD) transfer e.V. ["Why not? Study on International Youth Exchange: Access and Barriers". Research and Practice in Dialogue - International Youth Work (FPD) transfer e.V.]; Conducted by *Institut für Kooperationsmanagement (IKO), Regensburg, SINUS-Institut Heidelberg, Technische Hochschule Köln, Forschungsprojekt Freizeitenevaluation.*