

Erasmus+ and Youth work – “Relationship status: It’s complicated”

YES Forum’s Position on Erasmus+ Youth – Feedback from the field, October 2016

In the roughly 25 years since Erasmus+ first emerged as a whole series of European programmes, the fulfilment of its ambitions has always relied on its relationship with youth and social work ... a rather complicated relationship.

Why Erasmus+ isn’t Youth work’s Prince Charming ... yet

Erasmus+ and youth work aren’t very far from the perfect love story. Together, they have achieved incredible changes, offering more and more opportunities to young Europeans, improving their lives for the better. The Youth strand of Erasmus+, like its predecessors, provides youth organisations with innovative tools to achieve such a change. A much needed change, considering the current social and political context.



Erasmus+ and youth work need each other. Their relationship, however, still involves a lot of drama. Having faced budget cuts for many years, youth and social work has had to make the “Do more with less” motto its own. Austerity measures across Europe have worsened the position of young people and also led to more fragile organisations working with young people.

In the meantime, however, and despite its original objective of simplification, Erasmus+ has on the contrary become more complicated and financially challenging for youth organisations.

This development is a major obstacle for European youth projects with high quality.

On the front line of Erasmus+

This is why this position paper aims at taking part in the European effort to improve the Erasmus+ programme.

Erasmus+ and youth work should move together toward unconditional love. To pave the way for such a perfect love story, YES Forum member organisations gathered the following recommendations during dedicated workshops in 2016. As a consequence, these recommendations come from professional youth workers who have a long field experience in international youth work.

We hope this paper will help making Erasmus+ more accessible for youth organisations, so that they can achieve a greater change among the European youth, especially for youngsters with fewer opportunities.



1. Make the programme more accessible

- **Simplify and shorten the programme guide:**

This very large and complex programme guide will put off small grass root organisations and youth initiatives. A more user-friendly programme guide with accessible tutorial for the application process is needed.

- **Extend the time frame between accessibility of application and deadline:**

In the day to day work of social work organisations unforeseeable things can occur and might contradict with the time needed for finishing an application before deadline. While the efforts for application are not funded, the organisations still have to tend to their young people and their own local organisational work.

- **Application forms should concentrate on 4 key aspects:**

As mentioned above the application itself is very time-consuming. The administrative effort for projects within KA1 and KA2 is disproportionate to the financial support available. Application forms should concentrate on 4 key questions only concerning the organisations taking part in the project, the objectives, the implementation and the impact.

- **Support the great diversity of actors in the youth field**

Due to the high administrative burden the programme favours bigger institutions and excludes smaller organisations and truly youth led initiatives.

- **Install a standard that is used by all national agencies:**

Some National Agencies are late in releasing the correct application forms, in selecting the projects, preparing contracts of approved projects, transferring the money to the coordinating organisation, and in granting the final 20% of the grant. National agencies should have a common approach concerning costs, budget and deadlines.

2. Make project implementation easier

Erasmus+ projects are easy to access for well-educated young people, already aware about European transnational cooperation. However, this group already has the resources, skills and self-confidence necessary for an active and valuable participation. Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds show interest, but struggle with other challenges in their daily life, which prevent them from applying.

- **Recognise professional added work:**

Youth and social work practitioners prepare the young people and support them through the whole process. This effort is needed to implement high quality projects, but not supported by the funding programme KA 1 and KA2. Organisations have to invest a lot of human resource and finance before starting European projects and throughout the implementation. Following the inclusion and diversity strategy, it should be possible to financially support professional youth and social worker (either subcontracted or employed staff).

- **One portal for all project relevant tasks:**

All application, implementation and reporting issues should be dealt with in one portal.

It would be less time consuming and more efficient (each of the portals require different password, using different interfaces), if the mobility tool is a tool for everything concerning Erasmus+ projects: the application, the reporting, to issue certificates, and to promote the impact.

- **Orientate on the real costs of implementation:**

Traveling grants for a distance of 500-1999 km are in all areas 275 EUR except for the youth strand where it is 170 EUR. Why young people spend less money on travel for the same distance is not explained in the programme guide. People coming from rural areas are excluded in taking part. The real costs have to be taken into account and specifically the grants in the youth sector should be the same as in the other areas of Erasmus+.

- **Extend flexibility in the programme:**

Youth social work organisations operate in different settings with vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals. When projects evolve and unfold unforeseeable things may happen. For these things occur, strict guidelines can be hard to fulfil. There should be a lump sum for risk or a specific procedure which can be applied in case of unforeseen situations, changes after the project started.

- **Grant lump sums in every key action:**

Lump sums for the project management within the project budget in KA2 are a way to a professionally implement the project. It gives the organisations the needed flexibility of allocating the budget according to their organisational structure. This flexibility is really essential for making European projects interesting for organisations.

3. Reduce projects' follow up efforts

- **Clarify what needs to be reported before application:**

The questions and information required for the reporting need to be available and easy to access during the project implementation. There should be one section to report about the follow up and sustainability of the project.

- **Make creative reporting possible:**

Implementing a project with young people gives the opportunity to be creative in many ways. This creativity should be used to make the content of the report more accessible e.g. films, booklets, websites etc.

4. Taking member states into responsibility

The EU plays a crucial role in promoting cross-border youth and social work. There are member states without any infrastructure in this area and in other countries the organisational support of national, regional and local institutions is fading. But national governments have to be aware of the added value of European cooperation and need to see the important role non formal and informal education plays in the transition to adulthood in a young person's life. Organisations are being squeezed between two problems: more workload and reduced, more uncertain funding. Therefore many organisations retreat from European projects to focus on their core duties which themselves are in danger to maintain. This is a danger for European cooperation.

5. General role of the EU

The overall budget allocated for Erasmus+ is handled by the different National Agencies in the member states, which allows easier communication between applicants and administration. Budget that is not allocated for projects, however, should be easily transferred to other NAs who have to refuse high quality projects applications. A European wide budget should be accessible European and allocated where the money is really needed.

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