

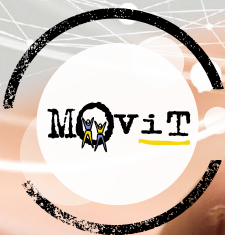


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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ERASMUS+: YOUTH IN ACTION PROGRAMME IN THE PROGRAMME'S PARTNER COUNTRIES IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

Strategic Analysis Including
Recommendations for the EU
Programmes in the Field of Youth



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1. Foreword

The SALTO South East Europe Resource Centre is a support structure for the cooperation with the Western Balkan partner countries in the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme and the European Solidarity Corps. Since the start of Erasmus+ in 2014, we have been asking for and receiving feedback from youth workers, youth leaders and other stakeholders about the Programme and also about the support provided, especially by our Centre, about what has been particularly appreciated and what have been the challenges and obstacles to using the opportunities offered.

Challenges reported by organisations refer, among others, to managing procedures and requirements related to project applications and the implementation process, rejected applications (also for projects submitted by partners in Programme countries) and finding partners in Programme countries. Positive experiences mentioned include, for instance, the opportunity to coordinate a more complex project, peer-learning in national meetings of organisations accredited for hosting or sending volunteers, or the impact of a Youth Exchange on the youth people participating in it.

This study was initiated to explore these issues further by systematically and strategically collecting and analysing data and feedback from beneficiaries, with the purpose to establish a sound basis for future action. As preparations for the new generation of EU youth programmes are ongoing, it is important to take a closer look at how the current Programmes have been implemented, what are the trends and how they can be explained, and what should be considered in the future.

From the perspective of SALTO SEE, we are particularly interested in the further development of adequate support measures, based on the findings of this study, jointly with the different stakeholders involved in the management and implementation of the Programmes in and with the partner countries in the Western Balkans.

The outcomes of this study have already been used before their official publication to inform discussions by the network of National Agencies for the EU youth programmes, leading to recommendations for strengthening the cooperation with neighbouring partner countries in the frame of the Programmes¹.

We hope that the findings and recommendations presented in the following pages will serve as a basis for the further development of the cooperation with the Western Balkan partner countries, in particular within the new generation of EU youth programmes.

Our gratitude goes to the people from all the organisations that took part in the Survey and in the Focus Groups, without whom this study would not have been possible.

The SALTO SEE team



2. Executive Summary

The present study explores how the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme has been implemented in the Programme's partner countries in the Western Balkans, what are the trends and how they can be explained. Based on its findings, the study recommends measures to be taken to further support the cooperation with the partner countries of this region within the EU youth programmes.

The main target group of this study were all Programme beneficiaries in these countries, in particular a sample of around 470 organisations currently identified as active and accessible. The study is descriptive and based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative research design and mixed methods, including desk research, survey and focus groups.

Outcomes, conclusions and recommendations have been grouped into Programme implementation trends, profile of beneficiaries, and elements influencing the Programme implementation: relevance, accessibility and support measures provided.

PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION TRENDS:

This study presents the trends in the number of applications and granted projects involving the participation of Western Balkan organisations between 2014 and 2018.

The findings indicate a significant decrease in the number of applications involving project partners from Western Balkan partner countries submitted to National Agencies in Programme countries in 2017 and 2018 following a low success rate in receiving grants in 2015 and 2016. The number of applications for mobility projects submitted to National Agencies in 2018 is similar to the number in 2014. The low success rate of applications is one of the most quoted reasons for this decline in demand (see further 'Programme Accessibility' below).

The centralised funding opportunities for Capacity Building Projects offered by the Western Balkans Youth Window as of 2015 have partially balanced this sit-

uation, allowing direct submission of applications from organisations in the Programme's partner countries in the Western Balkan region to the Executive Agency of the European Commission (EACEA). However, these grants have mostly benefited experienced organisations with relevant resources, risking to demotivate smaller organisations, in particular those working only with youth, due to the difficult access to funding they have been experiencing through both (centralised and decentralised) channels.

PROFILE OF BENEFICIARIES:

In the Western Balkan partner countries, around 70% of the beneficiaries of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme are youth organisations and NGOs working predominantly with young people, more than half are small organisations or organisations working only with volunteers, and the vast majority are dependent on the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme to a small or very small extent (to less than 25%). Difficulties in accessing Erasmus+: Youth in Action grants and the existence of other funding schemes that more adapted to the ongoing or regular needs of organisations have been reported as main reasons for the preference of other funding schemes.

RELEVANCE OF THE PROGRAMME:

Organisations participating in the survey found the Programme mostly in line with their own work priorities (to 75%). All Programme Actions and types of projects are considered significantly relevant, and their level of relevance is relatively balanced. Looking at the kind of benefits gained through participation in the Programme, the organisations participating in this study consider benefits related to supporting the development and competences of young people and youth workers higher than those related to structural and organisational development. The relevance of the Programme could be increased by targeting different themes or priorities and making more funds available and granting a larger number of projects.

Organisations perceive the priorities of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme also as highly relevant (to 83%) for the priorities of the national youth policies in their countries. However, the role of the Programme in strengthening youth policy frameworks in the Western Balkan region, especially towards better recognition of youth mobility and, to some extent, volunteering, needs to be considered.

Volunteering projects (EVS/ESC) have been less demanded by organisations in the Western Balkan partner countries. The main reasons for the comparatively low demand seem to refer to the overall rather low interest and limited capacity of organisations to host or send volunteers. Exchanging volunteers is one of the Programme benefits quoted with one of the lowest scores in the survey. In particular organisations dominantly run by volunteers, however, mentioned it as relevant and beneficial. The success rate of receiving a grant for this type of project is significantly higher than for the other mobility projects and therefore, accessibility to funding is not perceived as a main obstacle.

PROGRAMME ACCESSIBILITY:

Almost two thirds of the organisations involved in this study estimate that the Programme has become more accessible over the years. There are two main reasons for this development, especially for organisations with larger resources. These include: a) increased access to information and the provision of support measures; and b) the possibility to include more activities under one project (this is dominantly mentioned by bigger organisations). On the other hand, the main obstacles to accessibility mentioned are difficulties to find partners in Programme countries, Programme rules and procedures considered as too complex and, as mentioned above, lack of approved projects. To increase access to the Programme, in particular for smaller organisations, these obstacles need to be addressed at the level of Programme development and support measures provided.

SUPPORT MEASURES:

Services provided by the SALTO South East Europe Resource Centre are perceived as helpful or very helpful, scoring around 80% of satisfaction on average. Support provided by Contact Points in the different Western Balkan countries is the service showing the biggest differences in appraisal by the organisations. In the countries with lower Programme visibility, additional resources for Contact Points are claimed.

In order to implement the recommendations of this study, a strategic approach and adequate resources will be needed for the further development of the Programmes as well as the implementation of additional support measures.



3. Introduction

This study explores how the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme has been implemented in the Western Balkan partner countries, and in particular, what are the trends in the Programme implementation and how these trends can be explained. Based on the outcomes of the study, it identifies measures aiming to further develop the cooperation with the Programmes' partner countries of the Western Balkans within the Erasmus+: Youth in Action Programme and the European Solidarity Corps.

This study is addressed to all the stakeholders involved in the development and implementation of the EU youth programmes, such as the European Commission and its Executive Agency (EACEA), SALTO SEE and its Contact Points in the Western Balkan partner countries, National Agencies in charge of these programmes in Programme countries, the national authorities in charge of youth in the five Western Balkan countries that are subject of this study and, last but not least, the organisations working with young people in and with this region.

The introductory remarks below describe the framework and limitations of this study.

Geographically, the study focuses on the implementation of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme in the Programme's Western Balkan partner countries, including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo², Montenegro and Serbia. Serbia represents a special case, as its status within the Programme changed during the period covered by this study. Serbia started preparatory measures to join the Erasmus+ programme in 2016 and became a Programme country in 2019. At the time of publication of this study (December 2019), it is still a Partner country in the European Solidarity Corps.

The change from the European Voluntary Service (EVS) as an integral part of Erasmus+ to the European Voluntary Service as a separate programme led to some challenges for this study. EVS projects were called Erasmus+ Volunteering

² This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

projects for a transitional period after the launch of the European Solidarity Corps at the end of 2016, until it became an independent programme in 2018. While the collected data used in this study refer only to the period until 2018 (and therefore to Erasmus+ only), Survey respondents and participants in the Focus Groups refer to their experiences with, and expectations from both programmes, which occasionally leads to lack of clarity in naming the programme/s referred to. The recommendations listed in chapter 6 explicitly target both EU youth programmes. However, specificities of the European Solidarity Corps as opposed to EVS have not been specifically investigated in the framework of this study.

In terms of Actions, this study explores the opportunities for cooperation with the Western Balkan partner countries under Erasmus: Youth in Action, Key Action 1 and Key Action 2, Capacity Building, Key Action 3 and, to a very limited extent, Key Action 2, Strategic Partnerships, have also been open for cooperation with partner countries. However, projects granted under these Actions make up only 4% of all granted projects involving Western Balkan partner countries (and involve an even smaller percentage of participants from these countries)³ and have not been further explored in this study.

Finally, looking at overall, contextual developments influencing the implementation of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme, it should be mentioned that the new European Youth Strategy 2019 - 2027, includes less references to relations with countries outside/ neighbouring the European Union, compared to its predecessor, the European Youth Strategy 2010 - 2018. This shift in focus almost exclusively on developments inside the European Union, reflecting the broader European developments and political priorities, has also been noticeable in the implementation of the Programme and influenced some of the questions explored in this study.

Concretely, the study investigates the trends in the implementation of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme in the Western Balkan partner countries, the profile of beneficiaries, and the elements influencing the Programme implementation, which have been grouped under relevance, accessibility and support measures provided. The outcomes and conclusions are described in chapter 5. Finally, the study includes recommendations for further measures to be taken, which are based on the findings and structured in the same way, listed in chapter 6.

Methodologically, the study is descriptive and based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, including desk research, Survey and Focus Groups. The methodological approach is described in chapter 4.

The main findings from the research are presented in this report. More detailed information can be found online in the reports of the different parts of this study. The link to these reports can be found in Annex 9.

³ Source: Working paper: Statistical analysis about cooperation with the four neighbouring partner regions (SALTO SEE and SALTO EECA, October 2018): <https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/see/resources/npcstatistics2014-2017/>

The Erasmus+ programme, now together with the European Solidarity Corps, is the most appreciated programme supporting cooperation in the field of youth between the Western Balkan region and the member states of the European Union. The findings of this study confirm that the Programmes are considered highly relevant by all stakeholders in all partner countries of the region.

However, as the outcomes of this study suggest, challenges, such as success rates for mobility projects of around 20% (with the exception of European Solidarity Corps projects) and administrative procedures and financial aspects perceived as difficult to manage by smaller organisations – which make up the majority of beneficiaries in the region – , risk decreasing the relevance of the Programmes, as many organisations working with young people in the Western Balkan region are struggling to maintain organisational sustainability and to further develop their capacities while many young people are leaving, or want to leave, their country to look for opportunities in countries of the European Union.

The information and recommendations described in the following chapters suggest ways to ensure that the Programmes remain relevant and accessible for the organisations that are already, or consider using them.





4. Methodological Approach

In line with the purpose and aims of this study, the methodological approach was designed to provide knowledge about the composition and profile of the existing (and potential) beneficiaries of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action Programme and the European Solidarity Corps in the Western Balkan partner countries, and to explore their motivation/interest, needs, expectations, benefits and challenges regarding participation in these Programmes.

The methodology of the study followed two main purposes. The first was analytical: learning what aspects of the Programme implementation are 'working' and how, in order to facilitate future improvements. The second was allocative: gathering information about how resources have been distributed to the beneficiaries across the different Programme Actions, in order to facilitate matching between the beneficiaries' needs and future funding as well as the improvement of the existing support measures and activities.

The design of the methodological framework has taken into consideration the following key components:

a. Type of study: This study is descriptive. In order to maximise reliability of the study results, a combination of quantitative and qualitative research design and mixed methods has been used. Quantitative and qualitative indicators have been combined to fully capture the subject being studied. A sequential data gathering has been applied and structured in three different phases under an integrated approach reflected in the structure of this report.

b. Nature of the subject studied: Since this study, inter alia, aims to characterise different aspects of the beneficiaries of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme and the European Solidarity Corps, the fact that these organisations are dynamic and changing over time had to be taken in consideration as well as the diversity of types of participating organisations in terms of their structure, capacity, scope and mission. This situation has been addressed by establishing ex-post categories and clustering the responses accordingly to draw comprehensive conclusions.

c. Existing resources and their limitations: Based on the complexity of the opportunities that are open for cooperation with Western Balkan partner countries – in particular the fact that within Erasmus+: Youth in Action, there are mainly two Key Actions open for cooperation with partner countries (KA1 and KA2, Capacity Building), which are managed at different levels (centralised and decentralised)⁴, and the fact that beneficiaries extend over five countries -, the study faced a number of constraints in terms of availability of resources, which have been addressed by a combination of desk research and interactive methods with a representative sample of organisations from the target group.

The following sections describe the specific methodological approaches applied in the different phases of the data gathering process, which include: data sampling, identification of research questions, data analysis, and specific quantitative and qualitative techniques used.

4.1. Data sampling

Sampling of the organisations participating in this study has been conditioned by the availability of data. Data were originally extracted from lists of organisations and projects provided by SALTO SEE, based on the European database used for the implementation of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme⁵. The data used in this study extends from the starting year of the Programme, 2014, until 2017, which is the year for which all the records should be complete for all Actions of the Programme considered. For those Actions where the data of 2018 are considered complete, additional statistical information has been provided.

Two broad target groups have been considered in this study:

a. Main target group: all beneficiaries of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme in the Western Balkan partner countries (sample of ca 470 organisations currently identified as active and accessible).

b. Other stakeholders: This group includes National Agencies, the European Commission and its Executive Agency (EACEA) (indirectly), since some conclusions of the study relate to their role in the application and selection procedures in cases when Western Balkan applicants or partners are involved. They are considered to be relevant parties in the follow up stage of this study.

⁴ The process of Serbia becoming an Erasmus+ Programme country during the period of this study and granting projects at national level as well as the change from EVS to Volunteering projects to the European Solidarity Corps as a separate Programme are factors adding to the complex structure and related difficulties to collect comparable data.

⁵ Data related to projects submitted to and granted by National Agencies within the Erasmus+ programme and the European Solidarity Corps is stored in a central internal database maintained by the European Commission (EPlusLink). Data are entered by National Agencies at various stages of the project application and implementation process.

Organisations that have not accessed the Programme successfully through a grant, but have attempted to do so, are also considered a relevant target group by this study. They are included in some conclusions indirectly, in particular those related to the success rate of applications and the usefulness of the support services provided by the Programme(s).

4.2. Identification of research questions

The research design includes main and specific research questions developed to investigate various aspects of the Programme implementation. It involves descriptive, causal and evaluative questions in order to provide an in-depth insight into the phenomenon investigated.

The main research questions were the following:

- What trends in the Programme implementation can be identified in the Western Balkan partner countries in the period 2014 - 2018?
- What is the profile of Programme beneficiaries in the Western Balkan region?
- What elements (internal and external) influence the Programme implementation in these countries, including those related to quality?

In addition, a substantial number of specific research questions was created in order to explore particular aspects of the topic investigated, including: characteristics of the trends observed and of the existing funding schemes and behaviours of donors, as well as profile and behavioural patterns of Programme beneficiaries in the Western Balkan partner countries. Finally, a set of specific research questions was focused on quality aspects of the Programme implementation, in particular on relevance, accessibility, and the connection of the Programme implementation in the Western Balkan region with the objectives of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme, priorities of the national youth policy frameworks, and the wider EU framework for cooperation with the Western Balkans in the field of youth.

4.3. Data analysis

Data analysis has been undertaken through quantitative and qualitative approaches, using predominantly primary data analysis. Secondary data analysis has been conducted through desk research. The different phases and methods are described in sub-chapter 4.4 (please see below).

4.3.1. Primary data analysis

This part of the research was focused on the following elements:

- a) identification of variables to be explained;
- b) level of disaggregation of these variables, and
- c) elements ('factors') that may explain the value of these variables.

Elements a) and b) contributed to providing answers to the descriptive questions of the study, specifically to define the existing trends. Element c) contributed to identifying the key 'causal' questions which have been informing the second sequential stage of the data gathering process, notably the Survey.

Main variables: The studied variables are directly related to the key indicators of the Erasmus+ Youth in Action programme implementation in the Western Balkan partner countries, according to the quantitative data available. These are:

- a) number of the projects granted;
- b) funding amount of the granted projects, and
- c) number of participants involved in the projects.

Level of disaggregation: The values of the studied variables relate to individual projects and have been broken down into three transversal levels:

- a) five countries of the SEE region for which data are provided (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia);
- b) four broad types of activities and Actions that all of the projects belong to (i.e. Youth Exchanges, Mobility of Youth Workers, EVS/Volunteering projects – funded by National Agencies – and Capacity Building – funded by the EACEA).
- c) In addition, all of these transversal levels were analysed sequentially, by breaking them down per year of project approval (from 2014-2017, and 2018 when available).

Factors of 'causal' influence: The main factors considered in the desk analysis involve:

- a) origin of the funds, and
- b) experience of the beneficiary organisation.

These factors were further studied in the Survey and extended to other intrinsic factors of qualitative nature.

4.3.2. Secondary data analysis

Secondary data analysis was conducted as one of the components of the desk research. It was focused on the review of existing SALTO SEE (and related) reports and youth policy documents based on the developing realities of the five Western Balkan countries considered by this study. It contributed mostly to the establishment of the existing trends in the Western Balkan partner countries.

4.4. Quantitative and qualitative methods and techniques used

4.4.1. Desk research

The desk research was conducted in two different phases. In the preliminary phase, it contributed to the primary and secondary data analysis through:

- a. quantitative statistical analysis of the data retrieved from the database containing the projects (classified by beneficiary, year, type of activity, and country) granted within the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme in the period 2014 – 2017 (and 2018, when available);
- b. overview of work plans and reports of the SALTO SEE Resource Centre (focusing on background information and trends).

The study combined data from the database and internal records of SALTO SEE regarding projects involving organisations in the Western Balkan region funded by National Agencies of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme, and the data from public records released by the Executive Agency of the European Commission (EACEA) about Capacity Building projects submitted by beneficiaries from Western Balkan partner countries funded directly by the European Commission. The data from both sources are not homogeneous, which required further treatment. The data on participants and budget correspond to the approved proposals and not to the data of the implemented projects, which may differ slightly.

In the second phase, the desk research was based on secondary data analysis of key youth policy documents focusing on comparison of the strategic priorities of the European youth policy and youth work frameworks with those of the national youth policies in the five Western Balkan countries in the period 2014 - 2018. The study also reflects on the relevance of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme for youth policy and youth work in these countries and offers brief concluding remarks regarding future developments.

4.4.2. Survey

The Survey targeted organisations which have participated in the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme, regardless if they were the beneficiary of the grant or not. Around 470 organisations could be accessed via records kept by SALTO SEE and were invited by SALTO SEE by email to participate. In addition, an open call for participation was published on the SALTO SEE Facebook page, and further disseminated via Contact Points, networks and experts in the youth work field in the Western Balkan countries.

The Survey was accessible online and consisted of a questionnaire of some 20 questions, including descriptive, causal and evaluative questions. It combined open and closed (multiple choice) questions. Responses to the questionnaire were received between 22/02/2019 and 11/03/2019.

The Survey obtained 113 responses including an indication of the organisation and the country where the organisation was based. The Survey form was designed in such a way that the respondents could indicate whether any of the causal and evaluative score questions was not relevant for the organisation. This ensured that the 113 data records are complete.

To prevent from outliers in the statistical treatment, the names of the organisations were looked up in the Participants' Portal of the European Commission. Out of 113 organisations responding to the Survey 102 appeared as registered in this portal with an identifier (the so-called PIC number). 7 organisations appeared twice, with responses from 2 different representatives. Only the records from 95 registered organisations were used for statistical purposes.

The score responses from respondents belonging to the same organisation were averaged when the descriptive answers regarding the organisation were the same. Otherwise, they were maintained as different records in the sample, as they may correspond to different realities of the same organisation (involved in different periods, in different Actions or in different departments, for instance).

The results of the Survey have contributed to the primary data analysis mostly by explaining trends and suggesting elements to be elaborated as part of the recommendations.

4.4.3. Focus Groups

Focus Groups were implemented in the period from 5 to 15 May 2019, involving 36 participants (out of 78 who were initially invited): 5 from Albania, 8 from Bosnia and Herzegovina, 6 from Kosovo, 6 from Montenegro and 11 from Serbia. In addition, five representatives who were not able to participate directly in the Focus Groups sent their answers by e-mail.

Each Focus Group was conducted with participants from a single country, aiming to explain some of the national trends identified through the initial data analysis.

In Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, there were two Focus Groups conducted per country, which enabled the facilitators to have separate groups of more experienced and less experienced organisations. For Albania, Montenegro and Kosovo, despite all efforts, in the end, there was only one Focus Group conducted per country. In these countries, the facilitators worked with a mixture of more and less experienced organisations, including those who have been granted once or multiple times by the EACEA, those who have applied once or multiple times, but have never been successful and those who have been partners in one or more projects applied at the decentralised level.

All Focus Groups included organisations currently or previously accredited for EVS/ESC, as well as organisations who have never been accredited, but are planning to apply for the Quality Label (QL) in the future. Participants came from organisations that are currently or were previously (during the last four years) actively involved in the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme and possessed a certain experience, e.g. in volunteering and/or Capacity Building. There were representatives of organisations that have been fully involved in the Programme (i.e. in all Actions) and those only partially involved (e.g. only EVS projects, or only Capacity Building projects).

Participation in the Survey was not a prerequisite for participation in a Focus Group.

Each Focus Group was based on the same set of questions. However, as the participants of the Focus Groups had different experiences with the Programmes, slight differences in formulating the questions to them were made (e.g. in Focus Groups gathering less experienced organisations, there was a bigger emphasis on the introductory questions referring to their personal experience with the Programmes, while in other groups, the emphasis was more on the organisational motivation and experience to take part in the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes).

Participants were very keen on discussing the pros and cons of the Programmes, while they took less time in answering questions related to the Survey.





5. Outcomes and Conclusions

5.1. Programme implementation trends 2014-2018

Trends in the implementation of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme in the Western Balkan partner countries can be identified from 2014 - 2018 according to the treatment of data explained in the methodological approach of the study. Data sources combine projects granted at the decentralised level for three types of Key Action 1 projects: Mobility of Youth Workers, Youth Exchanges and European Voluntary Service/Volunteering projects and projects granted at the centralised level for one single Action: Key Action 2 - Capacity Building. This centralised Action can incorporate activities from one or several of the three aforementioned types of projects.

Capacity Building projects are directly granted to Western Balkan organisations under the so-called Western Balkans Youth Window, which opened in 2015. Capacity Building projects involve, in general, a higher budget and a higher number of participants from Western Balkan organisations than the projects funded at the decentralised level. However, data on the number of participants in Capacity Building projects was not available and, therefore, precise comparisons and determinant conclusions are not possible based on raw statistical data from the project selection rounds only.

At the decentralised level, the budget spent on cooperation with neighbouring partner regions increased by about 12% over the period 2014-2017. At the same time, the number of projects with the Western Balkan region was decreasing continuously since 2015. Also the number of participants coming from partner countries of the Western Balkans was decreasing in projects funded at the decentralised level. This trend has been somewhat compensated by the projects granted under the Western Balkans Youth Window at the centralised level. The following table shows the overall number of funded projects involving participation of Western Balkan organisations.

Table 1. Number of approved projects involving organisations from Western Balkan partner countries (2014 - 2018)

SEE country	YW Mobility*	Youth Exch*	EVS**	CB***	Total
Albania	372	204	109	26	711
BiH	308	294	236	23	861
Kosovo	153	96	45	8	302
Montenegro	136	94	45	24	299
Serbia	605	558	251	82	1496
Total	1574	1246	686	163	

* Data for Youth Worker Mobilities and Youth Exchanges include years 2014 - 2018.

** Data for EVS projects are only available for the period 2014 - 2017.

*** Data for Capacity Building projects are available for the period 2015 - 2017.

The analysis of types of activities implemented through projects funded at the decentralised level shows a steady decrease of Youth Worker Mobility projects, a generally stable level of funding for Youth Exchanges, and a heterogeneous trend of EVS/ Volunteering Activities. The trends related to these projects funded by National Agencies are presented in the following charts.

Fig. 1. Number of projects granted per year, and grants per year, for Mobility of Youth Workers projects, decentralised level

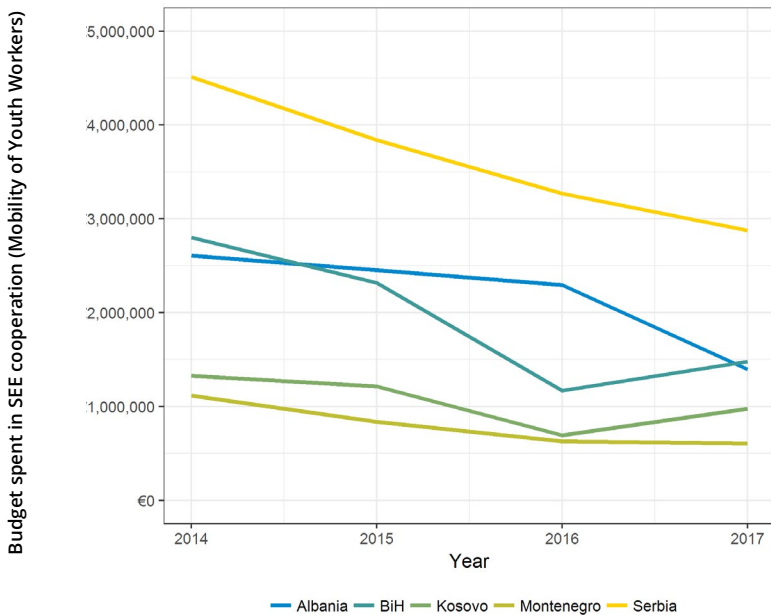
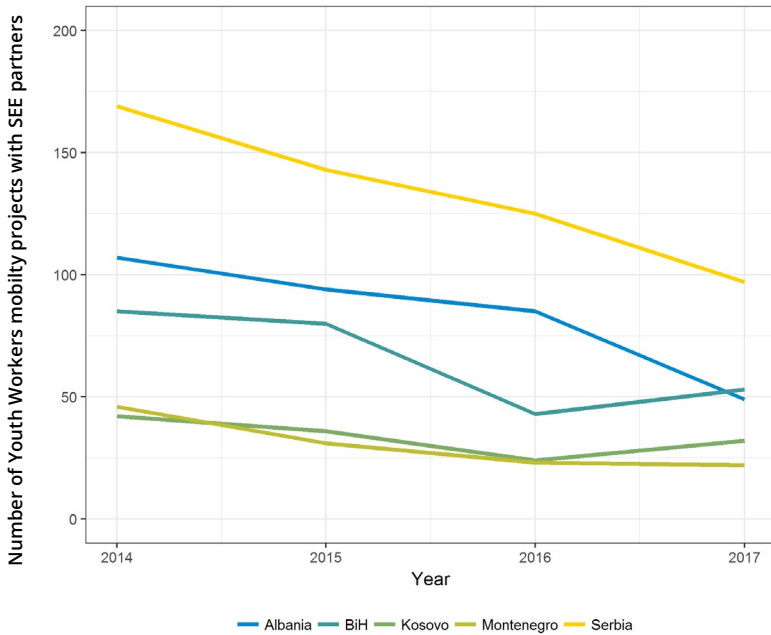


Fig. 2. Number of projects granted per year, and grants per year, for Youth Exchanges, decentralised level

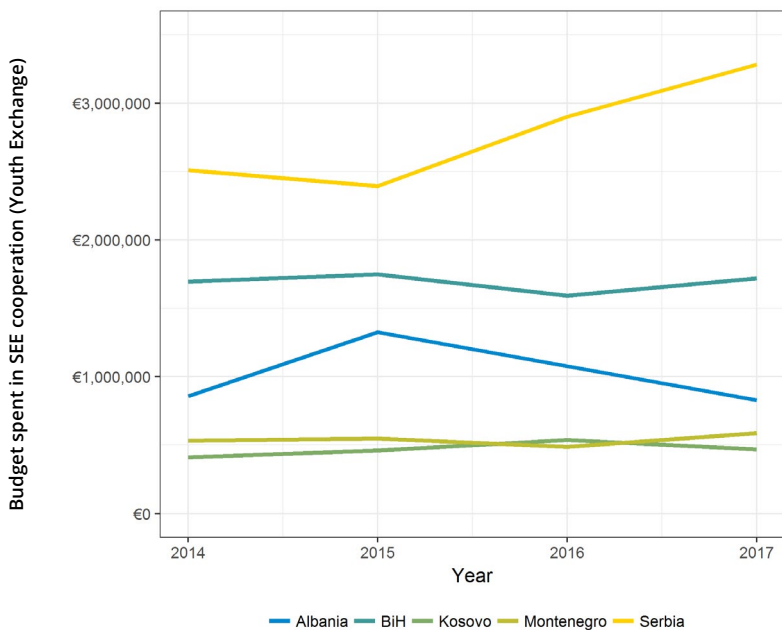
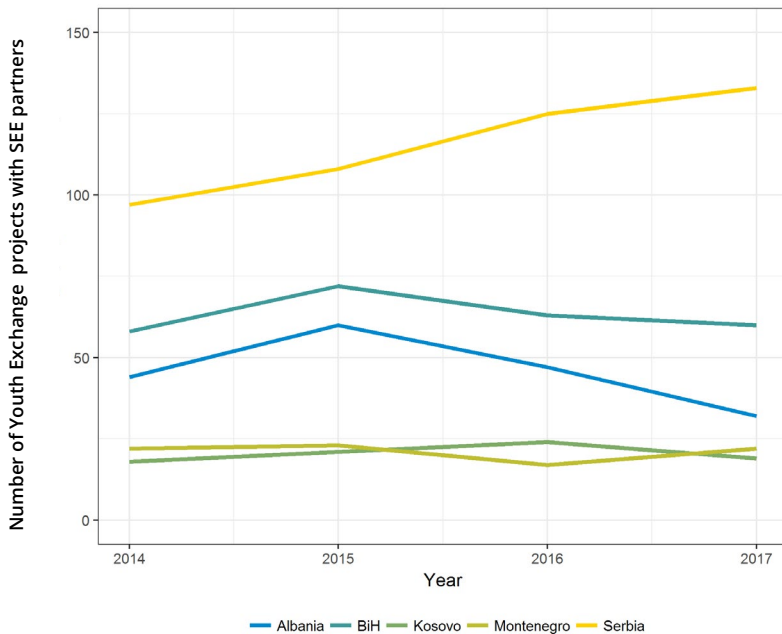
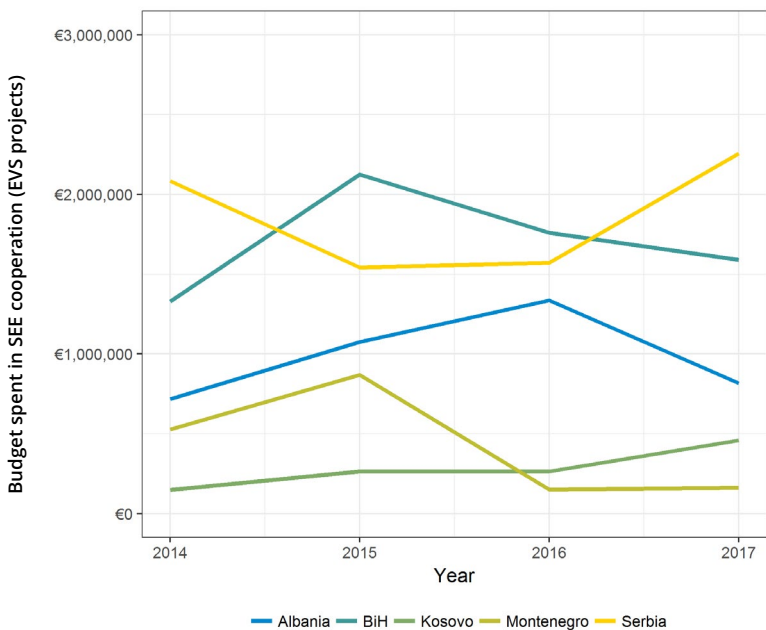
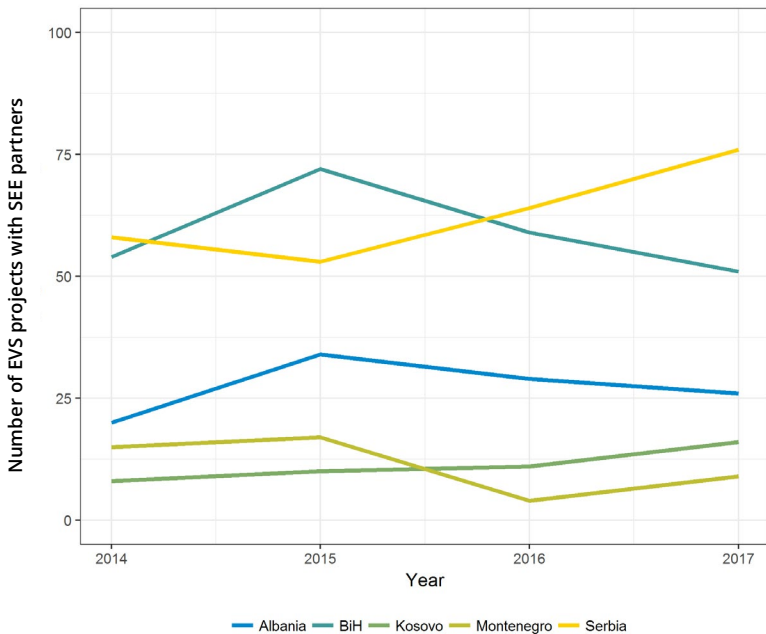


Fig. 3. Number of projects granted per year, and grants per year, for European Voluntary Service / Volunteering projects, decentralised level



In figures 1 to 3, the correlation between number of projects and budget spent on cooperation with each of the countries and types of projects shows similar trends, which is an indicator of robustness of the conclusions.

Two key factors are crucial in explaining these trends:

1. There is a steadily decreasing trend in the success rate of applications selected at the decentralised level, i.e. decisions taken by National Agencies in Erasmus+ Programme countries. This trend is shown in the following tables related to Youth Exchanges and Mobility of Youth Workers:

Table 2. Success rate of applications for Mobility of Youth Workers involving Western Balkan partner countries (2014 - 2018)

SEE country	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
Albania	40.23%	21.56%	19.45%	17.38%	17.05%	22.71%
BiH	44.74%	27.03%	17.92%	24.54%	24.87%	27.23%
Kosovo	36.84%	25.17%	15.00%	22.22%	16.10%	22.53%
Montenegro	45.10%	23.48%	17.56%	20.00%	21.21%	25.14%
Serbia	38.24%	24.96%	20.80%	16.47%	16.25%	22.90%

Table 3. Success rate of applications for Youth Exchanges involving Western Balkan partner countries (2014 - 2018)

SEE country	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
Albania	32.12%	23.26%	19.83%	19.28%	16.80%	22.10%
BiH	46.40%	35.29%	39.13%	32.26%	24.70%	34.92%
Kosovo	37.50%	31.82%	28.92%	25.33%	17.50%	27.27%
Montenegro	43.14%	37.70%	27.87%	34.92%	21.74%	33.33%
Serbia	34.28%	27.98%	28.94%	24.77%	21.16%	26.74%

The declining rate of success since 2014 is due to a severe increase in applications involving WB partners in 2015 and 2016. This reduced rate of success seems to have had a significant impact on the number of applications submitted in 2017 and 2018 (especially for Youth Worker Mobilities). In fact, the number of applications involving partners from Western Balkan partner countries received in 2018 was comparable

to that in 2014, indicating a reactive reduction in the demand from applicants following the decline of the success rate.

Table 4. Applications received for Mobility of Youth Workers involving Western Balkan partner countries (2014 - 2018)

SEE country	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
Albania	266	436	437	282	217	1638
BiH	190	296	240	216	189	1131
Kosovo	114	143	160	144	118	679
Montenegro	102	132	131	110	66	541
Serbia	442	573	601	589	437	2642
Total	1114	1580	1569	1341	1027	6631

Table 5. Applications received for Youth Exchanges involving Western Balkan partner countries (2014 - 2018)

SEE country	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
Albania	137	258	237	166	125	923
BiH	125	204	161	186	166	842
Kosovo	48	66	83	75	80	352
Montenegro	51	61	61	63	46	282
Serbia	283	386	432	537	449	2087
Total	644	975	974	1027	866	4486

2. The trends identified with the support of tables 2 and 4 are consistent with the findings from the Survey and Focus Groups showing that Capacity Building projects granted under the centralised procedure have substituted, at least partially, Youth Worker Mobility projects funded under the decentralised procedure. The most dominant activities in Capacity Building projects also target youth workers as main beneficiaries⁶.

⁶ Capacity Building projects may include different kinds of capacity building and mobility activities. However, "youth work" or "youth worker" appear as key words in the title of 25 out of the 163 granted Capacity Building projects. "Volunteer" or "volunteering" appear as key words only in 2 projects and "youth exchange" or "exchange" only in 1 project.

The reduced demand for Youth Worker Mobility projects and, to a more limited extent, Youth Exchanges involving partners from the Western Balkan region in the decentralised strand observed in the years 2017 and especially 2018 is consistent with the opinions of organisations, especially the bigger ones, in the Survey and Focus Groups. The Survey shows a greater propensity of Western Balkan organisations to participate in the Western Balkans Youth Window instead of decentralised selections, and this was further emphasised in the Focus Groups particularly by participants from larger organisations. The main arguments given in the Survey and Focus Groups are the possibility to apply directly for funds and the perception of better chances to be funded.

The Survey indicates that the size and previous experience of the organisations are key factors determining the preference, which was also confirmed by the findings of the Focus Groups. The participating organisations in the Focus Groups stated that, as one participant expressed it, "less experienced organisations feel they lack capacities to apply directly for funds, whereas more experienced organisations often use both procedures and predominantly the centralised one".

The trend for EVS/ Volunteering projects shown in figure 3 seems to indicate that there are specificities for these types of projects and for each of the Western Balkan countries. The trend is clearly visible in Serbia, which had a significant peak in 2017. Kosovo shows a steady increase, and the other three Western Balkan countries show a decline or stable situation. The different success rate of applications for EVS/ Volunteering projects (much higher) compared to applications for Mobility of Youth Workers and Youth Exchanges reinforces the specificity of EVS/ Volunteering projects. The demand for EVS/ Volunteering projects involving organisations from Western Balkan partner countries was more limited, and in all of the countries concerned, at least 2 out of every 3 applications were approved.

Finally, the peak for EVS/ Volunteering projects reached in Serbia in 2017 can also be observed when it comes to Youth Exchanges, and this is likely due to the fact that preparatory measures for joining the Erasmus+ programme started in 2016 and national calls have been available since 2017 in this country. Therefore, Serbia should be considered as a singular case, as Serbian organisations have had a different range of opportunities to participate in the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme.

Despite the increase in decentralised funds allocated to cooperation projects with neighbouring partner regions in the past years through the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme, **granted projects involving Western Balkan partner countries show a decline since 2015**. Data suggest that this can be explained by a simultaneous decline in the success rate of applications and an additional source of funding created at the centralised level, the Western Balkans Youth Window, which has substituted, at least partially, the use of decentralised funds. This substitution effect is especially relevant for bigger and more experienced organisations in the Western Balkans region and for Youth Worker Mobility projects.

The trends in the Programme implementation in the Western Balkans look similar in the different partner countries between 2014 and 2018. The establishment of the National Agency for Erasmus+ in Serbia makes it a singular case since 2017, when national calls were opened. That year, a significant increase in the number of projects both in Youth Exchanges and European Voluntary Service can be observed in Serbia.

EVS/ Volunteering is the type of project of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme where finding common trends was more difficult both in terms of evolution in time and evolution by country. The only common factor observed was the lower demand for EVS projects and higher success rate of applications compared to the other two main types of projects in all of the countries concerned. Therefore, **support for the implementation of EVS - now European Solidarity Corps - projects with partners from the Western Balkan region requires further action on the demand side (i.e. action to increase the number of applications)**.

5.2. Profile of Programme beneficiaries

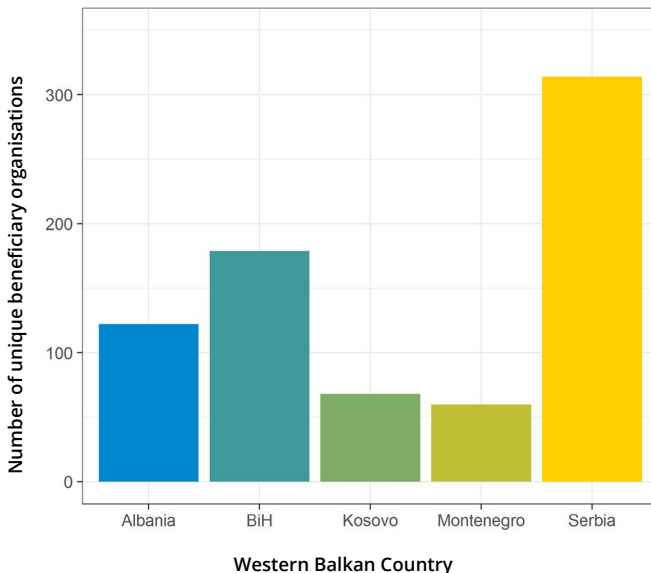
The raw data offered by the records of project applications do not allow classifying the organisations systematically, other than by the country of origin.

Data from the selections at the decentralised level offer the possibility to track every participating organisation by a single identifier (the Personal Identification Code, PIC). In the desktop research phase, we looked up the beneficiaries of the centralised Western Balkans Youth Window in the PIC search portal of the European Commission.

The PIC enabled us to identify the number of unique active organisations in the Western Balkan partner countries in the period 2014 - 2017 (and 2018 for Youth Exchanges and Mobility of Youth Workers). This number is significantly lower than the one estimated in previous analyses, due to the fact that many organisations are registered in applications under different names (most frequently using the name in the local language and in English, or with different abbreviations).

According to the data available, the number of organisations benefitting from a grant under the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme in the period under study, considering both centralised and decentralised procedures, is 743. The distribution per country is presented in the following chart.

Figure 4: Distribution of unique beneficiary organisations per Western Balkan country (2014-2018)



In order to determine the profile of the beneficiaries, our methodological approach included a Survey. Out of the 743 organisations, around 470 could be accessed via records kept by SALTO SEE. They were invited to participate. In addition, an open call for participation was circulated via different social media in the Western Balkan region. 95 different registered organisations actually participated in the Survey. The distribution per country in the sample was similar to the distribution of the complete population shown in the previous figure. The size of the sample, its random character and its distribution per country enable us to consider it as statistically representative of the population of Programme beneficiaries in the Western Balkan partner countries. Hence, we can infer with a high degree of statistical confidence the profile of the beneficiary organisations in these countries through the analysis of the sample in the Survey.

For the purposes of the Survey, the beneficiaries of the Programme were categorised by three different criteria described below.

- **Size of the respondent organisations**

According to the organisations' size (as a disaggregating criterion), all respondents were divided in four groups listed below, based on their own indications. Staff members are employees either full-time or part-time:

- Volunteering organisations: those that are run only by volunteers
- Small organisations: those having between 1 and 5 staff members
- Medium organisations: those having between 6 and 10 staff members
- Large organisations: those having more than 10 staff members.

Figure 5: Distribution of respondents by size of organisation

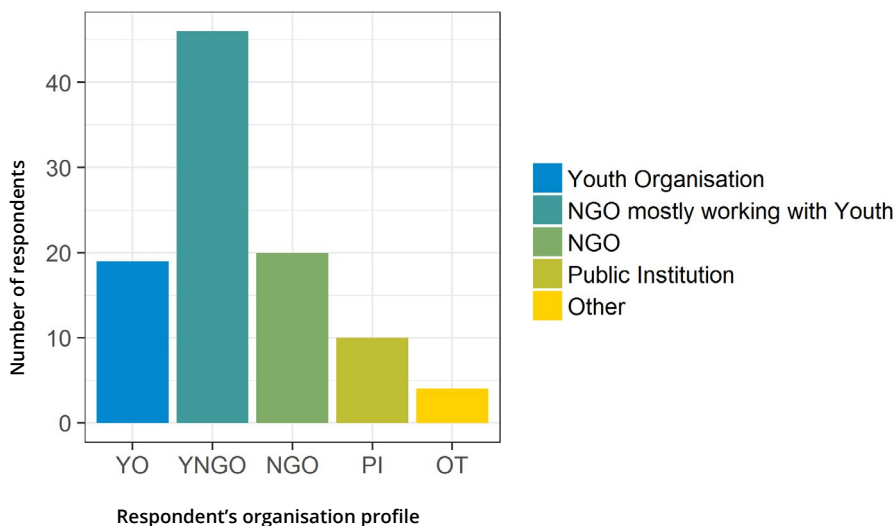


- **Type of respondent organisations**

According to the aim and mission of the organisation, the Survey enabled the participating organisations to choose between four main categories:

- a) Youth organisations
- b) NGOs predominantly working with young people
- c) Other kinds of NGO
- d) Public institutions.

Figure 6: Distribution of respondents by profile of organisation

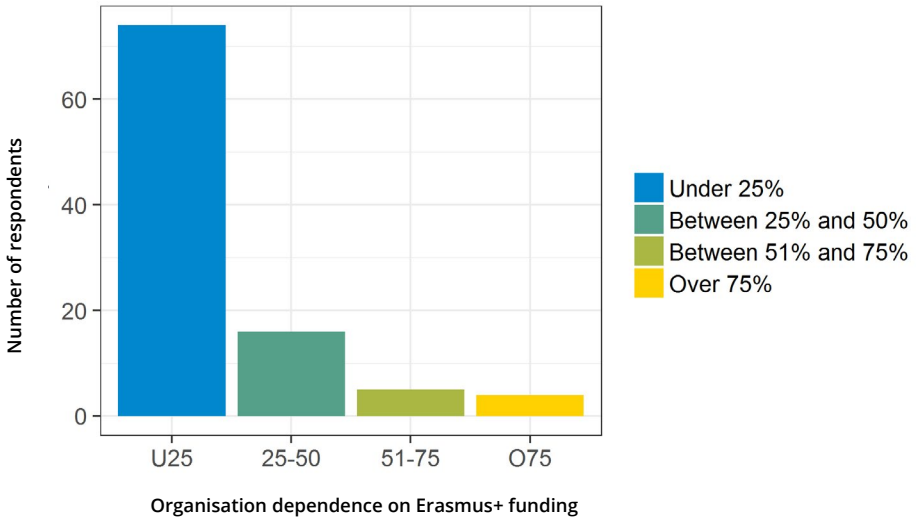


- **Dependence of the organisations on Erasmus+: Youth in Action funding**

The respondents were classified according to the influence of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme on their overall budget:

- a) Less than 25%.
- b) Between 25% and 50%.
- c) Between 51%-75%.
- d) More than 75%

Figure 7: Distribution of respondents by dependence of the organisation on Erasmus+: Youth in Action funding



In the Western Balkan partner countries, around 70% of the beneficiaries of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme are youth organisations and NGOs working predominantly with young people.

More than half of them are small organisations or organisations working only with volunteers, and the vast majority of them is to a small or very small extent (under 25%) dependent on the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme.

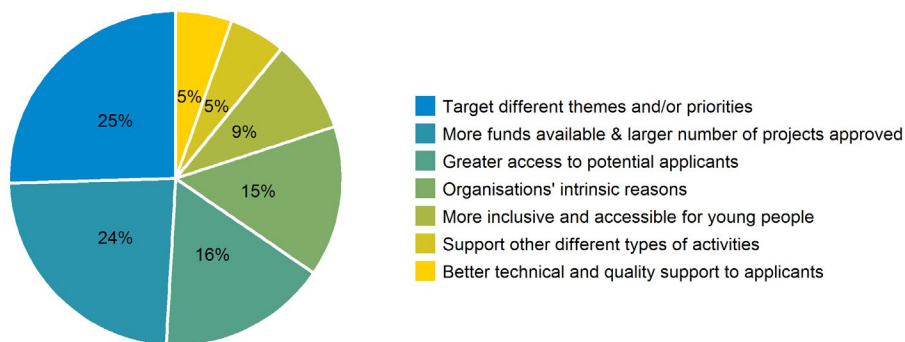
5.3. Elements influencing the Programme implementation

5.3.1. Relevance

The study explored the overall relevance of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme for beneficiaries in the Western Balkan partner countries, in relation to overall organisational aims and missions and the countries' youth policy frameworks. It also looked into the relevance of specific Actions and types of projects. Furthermore, it researched the benefits organisations associate with the implementation of Erasmus+: Youth in Action projects.

Looking at the **relevance of the Programme for beneficiaries in the Western Balkan partner countries in relation to their organisational aims and missions**, according to the Survey, organisations in these countries estimate that the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme meets their own working priorities to more than 75%. To the question of how the Programme could be made more relevant for their organisation, the most frequent responses were: targeting different themes and/or priorities, and having more funds available and larger number of projects approved.

Figure 8: Measures suggested to align the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme to the interests and needs of Western Balkan organisations



Another aspect of relevance refers to the relationship between the objectives of the Programme and the strategic priorities of the national youth policies in the five Western Balkan countries. According to the Survey, organisations from the Western Balkan partner countries perceive the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme as highly relevant (to 83%) for the priorities of the national youth policies. This perception does not depend on the individual Western Balkan country, as respondents from all countries involved answered similarly to this question.

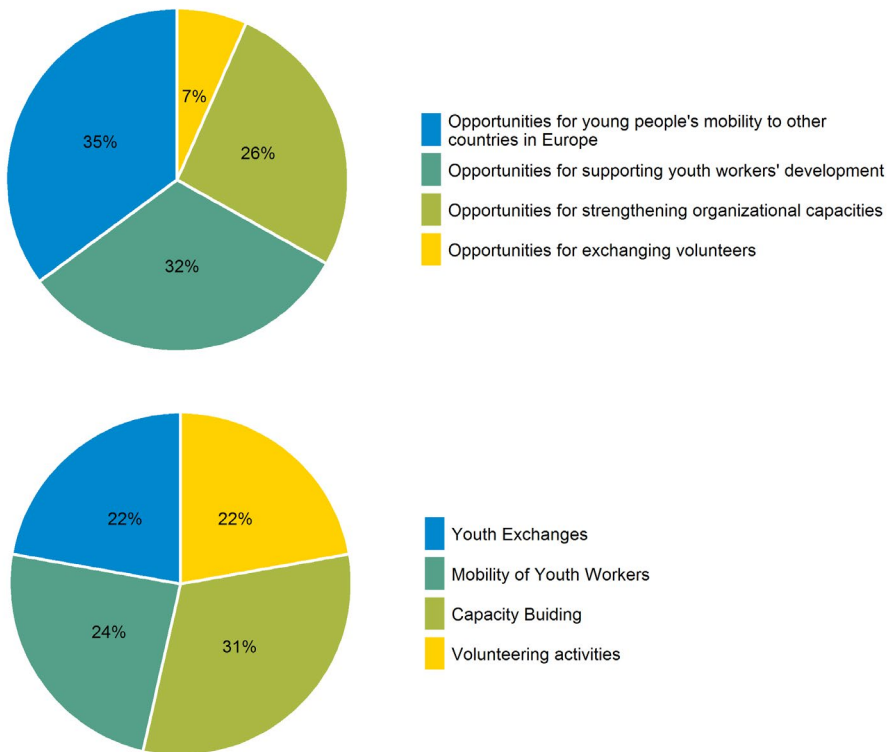
This is consistent with the desktop research findings, since the overall strategic priorities of the national youth policies in the Western Balkan countries concerned by this study highly correspond with the strategic priorities of the European youth policy framework (especially the European Youth Strategy 2010-2018). This is not surprising, having in mind that, in the EU accession phase, all public policy frameworks have to be harmonised with European standards, including those set in the field of youth.

In contrast to this 'external' coherence and relevance, there is a discrepancy among the countries when it comes to prioritising policy domains in their national youth strategies. The results of the comparative review reveal that, for instance, only three thematic areas (i.e. Employment and entrepreneurship; Participation in civil society; and Health and well-being) are prioritised in all five Western Balkan countries, while the areas of Education and training and Creativity and culture are prioritised in four of them (Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia). On the other hand, Social inclusion (Kosovo and Serbia) and Voluntary activities (Albania and Kosovo) are prioritised in youth policy frameworks in only two out of five countries.

Importantly, youth mobility and youth work have not been recognized as priority areas in any of the five Western Balkan partner countries. Only in Serbia, youth mobility has been recognised as the seventh strategic priority in the national youth strategy, emphasising the need for enhancing youth mobility, the scope of international youth cooperation and support to young migrants. It is also important to understand that there are obvious comparative differences in defining and interpreting these priority areas (and the measures linked to them) among the five Western Balkan countries.

In terms of relevance of different types of projects, capacity building has been perceived as the most relevant type of the project, but the level of relevance of all four types of projects mentioned in this study is comparable (over the 20% in all cases), as is shown in figure 9. The study also analysed the perceived intrinsic benefits (those directly linked to participation in each of these projects) of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme. This analysis, based on the opinions of the Survey respondents, is also shown in figure 9.

Figure 9: Comparison between the distribution of opinions on the intrinsic benefits of Erasmus+: Youth in Action types of projects and the most relevant type of project for the respondents' organisations.



This comparison shows that there is no complete overlap between the favoured type of project or activity and the perceived benefit of the Programme that could be related to it. This could mean that certain benefits are provided by different types of projects/activities (for example, Capacity Building projects responding to a wide variety of expectations, or volunteering activities contributing to extrinsic benefits other than just exchanging volunteers).

In the Focus Groups, the relevance of EVS/Volunteering/ESC projects was confirmed, while also the challenges with this Action were raised, in particular the lack of financial and human capacities of many organisations needed for the required long-term engagement, and the long time-frame between accreditation/Quality Label and the actual project implementation, indicating, in the words of one participant, that "the investment is often bigger than the gain".⁷ These outcomes are consistent with the

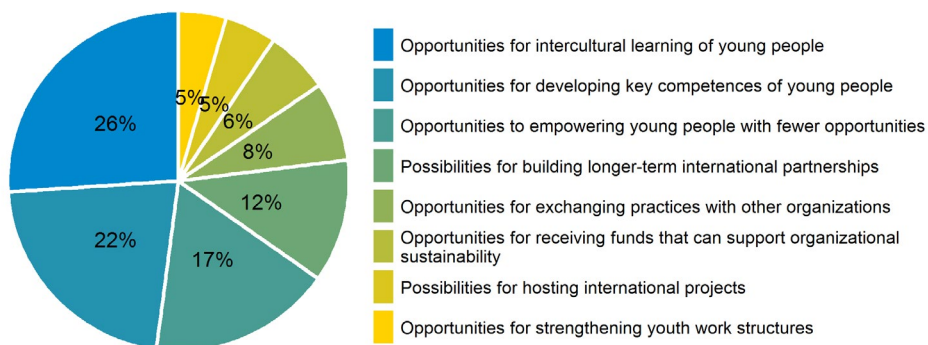
⁷ In addition, together with Corps often being pronounced and understood as 'corpse' (dead body), the rebranding of EVS into ESC (short for 'Escape') tends to be considered difficult in a region confronted with a high amount of youth emigration.

data gathered through the desk research showing a more limited demand for volunteering than for other types of projects.

Capacity Building projects are homogeneously appraised by all of the different categories of organisations (i.e. they have been systematically perceived as highly relevant), except by the group of organisations run by volunteers only. Besides the benefits associated to this Action, it may meet a part of the organisations' reported needs, such as thematic autonomy and higher funding.

Finally, the study also looked into the relevance of transversal benefits of the Programme for the organisations in the region. The following chart shows the distribution of relevance of the different benefits for the respondents:

Figure 10. Distribution of Erasmus+ Youth in Action transversal benefits as perceived by the respondents



There is a significant overlap in the perceived benefits expressed through the Survey and in the Focus Groups. The benefits that were highly rated in the Survey were also confirmed in the Focus Group discussions. Similarly, the benefits that were graded lower in the Survey were partially further explained or not even mentioned in Focus Groups, which confirms their lower relevance for the organisations.

The benefits mostly expressed in the Survey and Focus Groups can be classified in five categories:

1. Opportunities for young people's mobility, intercultural learning and development of competences
2. Opportunities for capacity building and career development as youth workers
3. Opportunities for supporting young people with fewer opportunities
4. Opportunities for organisational development and strengthening organisational capacities. These opportunities were more frequently mentioned benefits in the Focus Groups than in the Survey (e.g. the financial benefit when receiving a grant and learning how to deal with administrative issues as a basis for using other, more complicated EU programmes), but participants also reported various challenges related to these opportunities.
5. Possibilities to establish long-term partnerships.

These account for almost 80% of the transversal benefits reported (i.e. benefits beyond the ones directly connected with a specific type of project).

The less often mentioned benefits include: opportunities for exchanging volunteers and for sharing practices with other organisations, opportunities for strengthening youth work structures and achieving organisational sustainability, and possibilities for hosting international projects.

These outcomes of the Survey and Focus Groups show that the organisations participating in the study consider the benefits of the Programme related to supporting the development and competences of young people, specifically including those with fewer opportunities, as well as youth workers higher than those related to structural and organisational development. In the Focus Groups, more elaborated reflections were made. In particular, the above mentioned advantages were linked to the sustainability of the activities.

We also checked, if and how the size and type of organisation (as shown in figures 5 and 5) might have influenced their appreciation of the benefits (listed in figures 9 and 10). Overall, differences were not significant, but some are worth mentioning:

a) The size and type of organisation seems to have an influence on how organisations appraise opportunities to build international partnerships (much more frequent in middle-sized organisations) and opportunities to receive funding for sustainability (practically inexistent in the responses of big organisations and public institutions).

b) Benefits connected to empowering young people with fewer opportunities and developing key competences of young people are appraised differently by different types of organisations. In particular, both of these benefits are significantly appreciated by youth organisations (more than the other groups). Or-

ganisations run only by volunteers as well as public institutions, however, give much more relevance to empowering young people with fewer opportunities than to building young people's key competences.

All Actions and types of projects of the Erasmus+ Youth in Action programme that are open for Partner countries (KA1 and KA2, Capacity Building) are significantly relevant for Western Balkan organisations, and **the level of relevance of the different Actions/ types of projects is relatively balanced. The most relevant Action for the Western Balkan organisations is Capacity Building.** It is the only Action of the Programme to which Western Balkan organisations can apply directly. The relevance of Capacity Building is lower among smaller organisations and those run by volunteers than for bigger organisations.

The organisations participating in the study perceive the Programme also as highly relevant for the national youth policies in their countries. A comparative review has shown, however, that **while there is overall a great overlap between national youth policy priorities and European youth policy frameworks, there is a discrepancy among the five Western Balkan countries in prioritising policy domains.**

Organisations consider **the benefits of the Programme related to supporting the development and competences of young people and youth workers higher than those related to structural and organisational development.** Some types of organisations, especially organisations run by volunteers and public institutions, more strongly appraise benefits associated with supporting young people with fewer opportunities than those providing young people with key competences.

5.3.2. Accessibility

Another aspect investigated by the study relates to how organisations in the Western Balkan partner countries perceive the accessibility of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme. The study further explored the reasons that contributed to greater accessibility as well as the hampering factors and challenges linked to the implementation of the Programme.

Almost two thirds of the organisations participating in the Survey estimate that the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme has become more accessible over the years, and only about 10% of them think the opposite. This perception differs between the types of organisations depicted in figure 6, and more specifically for youth organisations, which dominantly think that the Programme has remained equally accessible over time, so they do not think that it has become easier to obtain funds.

The perception of youth organisations is consistent with the trends analysed and presented in section 5.1. Youth organisations are generally smaller than the other types of organisations involved in this study. Furthermore, youth organisations from Western Balkan partner countries are especially confronted with the reduction of the success rate in the decentralised selections due to their lack of capacity to apply directly to the Western Balkans Youth Window, which makes their chances to benefit from the Programme more limited compared to bigger organisations, which have more resources or established partnerships. This was also confirmed by the Focus Groups, where organisations with higher capacities stated the greater accessibility of the Western Balkans Youth Window, while smaller organisations indicated their difficulties to use this Action.

The greatest percentage of organisations agree about two **main reasons for greater accessibility of the Programme**:

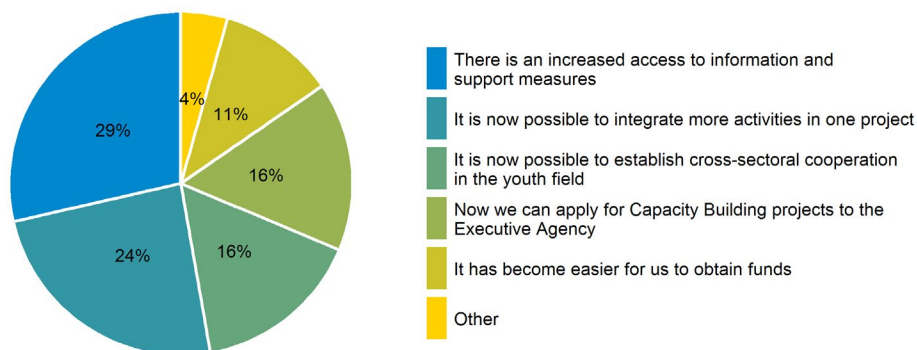
- a) Increased access to information and support measures; and
- b) The possibility to include more activities under one single project.

Regarding the increased access to information and support measures, the organisations responding to the Survey appreciate the tools and support provided by SALTO SEE the most in comparison to other support measures available. The Focus Groups also showed that the organisations perceive the activities provided by SALTO SEE and its Contact Points as the most valuable ways of support in the Western Balkan region. (Support measures are analysed separately in section 5.5 of this study.)

The Focus Groups furthermore confirmed the positive influence of the possibility for multi-measure projects, especially under the Western Balkans Youth Window, but this was more acknowledged by experienced organisations. Less experienced organisations found the preparation and implementation of these kinds of projects challenging, even though they perceived them as useful for increasing organisational capacities.

Cross-sectoral cooperation in the youth field was mentioned by only some organisations in the Survey and it was discussed more in the Focus Groups, with the conclusion that it is not much used by organisations and might, indeed, still represent a novelty for the youth work field the Western Balkan partner countries. Organisations expressed the perception that cross-sectoral cooperation was needed to achieve greater impact and influence policy, but there was more support needed to further develop understanding and capacities, especially towards the public sector.

Figure 11. Distribution of favourable factors for accessibility to the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme



Regardless of the overwhelming majority of organisations assessing the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme as more accessible now, there was still a considerably high number of reasons listed as hampering its accessibility, which shows that there is ample room for improvement.

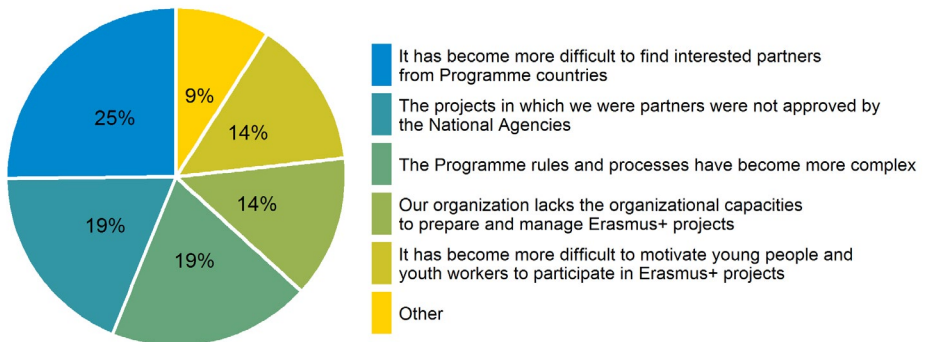
The three **most frequently identified reasons hampering accessibility of the Programme are:**

- Increased difficulties to find interested partners from Programme countries;
- Increased complexity of Programme rules processes; and
- Higher competition in selections and low rate of success of the projects submitted to National Agencies in which the organisations were partners.

In a separate question, the Survey explored the organisations' perception of the interest of organisations in Programme countries to establish partnerships with Western Balkan organisations. The correlation of this variable with the rest of the responses related to Programme accessibility, and in particular the difficulty to find partners, is very low. This indicates that the perceived interest in the Western Balkan region, by organisations in Programme countries, may not be a significant factor in explaining the actual decreasing trend in the number of projects with the Western Balkan region,

meaning that some other factors are more relevant. At the same time, a significant number of respondents rating this level of interest as average or high still think that the difficulty to find partners for projects has increased over the time.

Figure 12. Distribution of hampering factors for accessibility of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme



These findings correlate significantly with the trends identified through analysis of the raw data included in section 5.1., revealing that ‘competition’ and ‘decline of the success rate’ are two significant factors influencing the demand (number of applications presented) and the final beneficiaries (number of applications approved). This is also consistent with the fact that the reason less frequently used in the Survey as a reason for greater accessibility of the Programme was: ‘it has become easier for us to obtain funds’.

Based on these findings, there are indications for concluding that the Programme format, procedures and types of projects have made the Programme more accessible for bigger and more experienced organisations than for smaller and youth organisations.

There was a high level of agreement between the data obtained through the Survey and the Focus Groups. The Focus Groups allowed for deeper discussions about the challenges encountered during the implementation of projects and provided a broader set of elements worth considering in terms of providing further support for effective participation in the Programme. The most frequently mentioned additional obstacles referring to accessibility (presented in figure 13) are:

- a) challenges related to the limited funding opportunities for organisational staff, such as leaders of youth exchanges, or overhead costs;
- b) challenges related to understanding of the ideology and philosophy of the Programme (different understanding of quality in projects, rebranding of EVS);

- c) challenges related to providing the adequate profile of participants (e.g. youth workers, young people with fewer opportunities);
- d) lack and/or instability of organisational human capacities.

Participants in the Focus Groups also identified specific challenges in some Western Balkan countries affecting the implementation of the Programme. The most relevant ones are:

- Bosnia and Herzegovina: a) complex political system affecting procedures, b) visa issues with Kosovo, c) lack of recognition of youth work and volunteering.
- Kosovo: a) existence of other big funding programs which are more accessible, b) specific political status of Kosovo regarding procedural aspects, c) visa issues with other countries, d) lack of cooperation between organisations, e) lack of interest in the Programme by national authorities.
- Montenegro: a) administrative challenges related to taxes, b) lack of interest/support related to the Programme by national authorities.

Almost two thirds of the organisations involved in the study think that the Programme has become more accessible over the years, and only about 10% of all organisations think it has become less accessible. The Programme was assessed as more accessible by organisations of all sizes, but the percentage of those assessing it as such is the highest among larger organisations. **The majority of youth organisations, however, think that the Programme has remained equally accessible.**

Two main reasons for greater accessibility of the Programme are mentioned: increased access to information and support measures, and the possibility to include more activities in one project.

The three most frequently quoted reasons for preventing accessibility are: it has become more difficult to find interested partners from the Programme countries; Programme rules and processes have become more complex and the projects in which the organisations were partners were not approved by the National Agencies. These reasons are quoted by all types of organisations, but they affect more seriously smaller and youth organisations.

The **centralised Western Balkan Window has offered additional access to the Programme, mainly for already experienced organisations** which have significant resources. Smaller organisations lack the capacities to benefit fully from the opportunities of this Action.

5.3.3. Support provided by the support structures (SALTO SEE and EACEA)

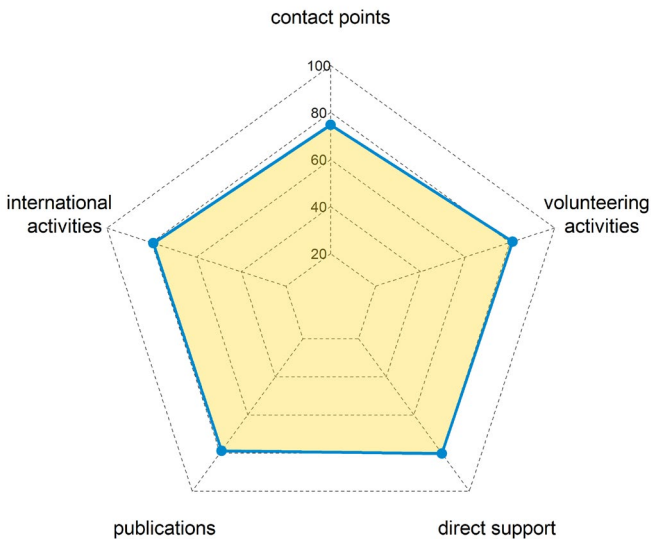
Support measures are perceived as an important element for facilitating the accessibility of the Programmes. The study looked particularly into the support provided by SALTO SEE as the Programme's main support structure in the Western Balkan partner countries, and to a lesser degree also into the support offered by the European Commission's Executive Agency (EACEA).

The Survey analysed five different components of SALTO SEE support measures:

- a) Contact Points
- b) participation in international support activities
- c) publications
- d) direct support and information
- e) activities supporting volunteering

All services are perceived as helpful or very helpful, scoring around 80% in all components, except for the service of Contact Points, which are also perceived as helpful, but scoring around 75% on average and showing a great difference in opinions among the respondents from different countries.

Figure 13. Respondents' perception of helpfulness of SALTO SEE support measures



According to the Survey respondents, the most frequently used resources are publications. The services of the Contact Points and EVS/Volunteering related activities are the least frequently used. This can be explained by the greater accessibility of publications for everyone, as they are available online and might refer to the whole

SALTO network (thematically more extensive and versatile)⁸. In contrast, Contact Points are more specific for a particular purpose and location, and activities related to EVS/ Volunteering are relevant only for a limited number of organisations.

The Focus Groups showed that the types of support mostly identified and appreciated by the organisations are: information provided on the SALTO SEE web page, trainings and other activities organised by SALTO SEE⁹, and ongoing communication and exchange of information. This is also consistent with the information gathered through the Survey.

The Focus Groups confirmed the different level of satisfaction with the support provided by the Contact Points in different countries, consistently with the data of the Survey. Organisations from Serbia, for example, felt well supported and informed, while the organisations from Bosnia and Herzegovina and, in particular, Kosovo expressed a need for more support and improved work of the Contact Points. Limited feedback was received from the organisations from Albania and Montenegro in the Survey, which also limits the possibility of creating any general conclusion about the perception of usefulness of the Contact Points in these countries.

It is worth mentioning that this appraisal is in line with feedback SALTO SEE received on other occasions outside this study. The Contact Points, nominated and supported by SALTO SEE, are the only support structures for the Erasmus+ programme in the field of youth, and now also for the European Solidarity Corps, based in the Western Balkan partner countries. Generally speaking, their resources and capacities are too limited to fully respond to the needs for support claimed by organisations/ potential Programme beneficiaries. In some countries, Contact Points receive some additional support from their national authorities (mostly on an occasional rather than a regular basis). The feedback received through this study also shows a certain correlation between the amount of support provided by the countries' national authorities for the Contact Points (and the Programmes in general) and the Contact Points' visibility.

The support provided by the EACEA for projects within the Western Balkans Youth Window was identified as a source of information in our study and therefore addressed in the Focus Groups, but it was not frequently mentioned by the participants. The web page of the EACEA was assessed by the Focus Groups participants as 'not youth friendly', and communication with EACEA staff was dominantly appraised as 'difficult', but also partially positively, 'relying on the project officer in charge of the project file'. The online info-sessions (webinars) offered were perceived as helpful.

⁸ Publications and tools are published by all SALTO Resource Centres on the same website www.salto-youth.net, and experience has shown that users are not necessarily always aware of the specific SALTO Resource Centre that has produced them.

⁹ Support activities organised by SALTO SEE include training courses, seminars, partner-finding activities and other kinds of activities organised in cooperation with National Agencies and other SALTOs as well as activities organised by others, where SALTO SEE supports the participation of participants from Western Balkan partner countries. They also include trainings and meetings for organisations and volunteers organised specifically in the framework of EVS/Volunteering/European Solidarity Corps.

Services provided by SALTO SEE are perceived as helpful or very helpful, scoring around 80% in all components (referring to participation in international activities; publications; direct support and information; and activities supporting volunteering). The support services provided by the Contact Points are appraised 5% lower and show greater differences in assessment among respondents in different countries.

The resources that are the most frequently used are publications available online. EVS/Volunteering related activities and the services of Contact Points address more specific target groups and are therefore less used. Improvement of the Contact Point services and their visibility are requested in some countries.

The most appreciated type of support of the EACEA in the centralised procedures within the Western Balkans Youth Window are online info-sessions and the direct contact with EACEA project officers. Smaller and youth organisations perceive the EACEA as less supportive than organisations that have already implemented funded projects.





6. Recommendations

This chapter presents some recommendations for the further development and implementation of the EU youth programmes in and with the Western Balkan partner countries. They are based on the conclusions of the study and the issues raised by the organisations participating in the Survey and Focus Groups, described in chapter 5. Due to the development of the programmes during the past years, while the study focused on the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme, the recommendations also target the European Solidarity Corps.

6.1. Recommendations to increase the relevance of the EU youth programmes for organisations in the Western Balkan partner countries

The relevance of the Programmes for the organisations in the Western Balkan partner countries and their interest to invest in participating are **clearly depending on their real chances to implement projects and to use the Programmes** according to their capacities and specific missions. Both are the most frequent aspects raised in the Survey and Focus Groups. Moreover, the trends of the desk research have shown that the chance to receive a project grant has significantly conditioned the organisations' behaviour. As has also been shown by the study, the success rate of applications is higher and its increase therefore less relevant for ESC/ volunteering projects.

Accordingly, to make the Programmes more relevant and interesting for organisations and potential beneficiaries, the recommendations are:

- a) Within Erasmus+: Youth in Action, **making more funds available**, in particular at the decentralised level, to increase the success rate of applications and the number of approved projects;
- b) **Including additional thematic priorities in the calls**. Themes should be decided carefully considering needs and interests of organisations and well as national/ regional (Western Balkans) and European policy frameworks and priorities.

Another recommendation refers to the relevance of the EU youth programmes for the strategic priorities of the national youth policy frameworks in the Western Balkan partner countries.

- c) Having in mind the lack of recognition of youth mobility, youth work and volunteering identified in the region, **promoting synergies between the development of national youth policies and the EU youth programmes** in the Western Balkans region and exploring how the Programmes can support recognition of these strategic priorities as well as the alignment of national youth policies with the new EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027.

6.2. Recommendations to improve the accessibility of the EU youth programmes for organisations in Western Balkan partner countries

Even though the conclusions of the study indicate that the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme has become more accessible over the years, this does not concern all types of organisations equally. In fact, **the programmes have become increasingly more accessible for organisations with higher capacities than for smaller organisations with fewer resources, which constitute the majority of beneficiaries.**

To counter this trend, in addition to increasing the success rate of applications (which, besides raising the organisations' interest in the Programmes, would contribute to improving their accessibility), the following recommendations can be extracted from the outcomes of the Survey and the Focus Groups:

- a) **Simplifying the procedures and requirements** related to project applications and implementation, in particular to facilitate the participation of youth and smaller organisations in projects adapted to their capacities (for instance by shortening the time-frame between project applications and implementation¹⁰; creating a separate slot for small organisations or small-scale projects, and having more than one deadline per year for Capacity Building or similar types of projects);

In the framework of the European Solidarity Corps, simplifying and shortening procedures and the time-frame between the Quality Label application and the project implementation.

- b) **Increasing monitoring of organisations and projects** in the Western Balkan partner countries with the aim to better identify if organisations are qualified

¹⁰ The time-frame of the overall project application – implementation process is important in the social context of the Western Balkan region, where long-term planning is challenging due to mainly project-based funding of organisations, and because many young people consider leaving their town or country in search of better opportunities, often in EU countries, and are not ready or able to commit to involvement a project that might be implemented many months later (if the application is successful).

and have the capacities to implement the projects applied for, thereby increasing the diversity of beneficiaries and the quality of projects. (Specific suggestions of the Focus Groups include quality label entry access to the Programmes and increased monitoring measures for multiple-grant beneficiaries.)

- c) **Developing a more supportive approach to applicants for Capacity Building projects** at the level of the EACEA, aiming to help applicants more effectively to improve the quality of their project applications and to receive a grant (e.g. upon renewed submission at the next deadline).

6.3. Recommendations to better adapt support services to the needs of organisations in the Western Balkan partner countries

Finally, as also expressed by the organisations participating in the study, **support activities are essential to improving access and quality implementation of the Programmes.** The recommendations include:

- a) More strongly **adapting and targeting support and information activities** about the Programmes to different kinds of target groups (for instance, national information and training sessions for different target groups; specific support measures to develop cross-sectoral cooperation etc.);
- b) **Translating key documents** of the Programmes (i.e. principles and procedures) into the languages of the Western Balkans and making more support materials available in local languages in order to facilitate understanding, especially among smaller/new organisations;
- c) **Facilitating more networking & partnership-building activities**
 - for organisations at national and regional (Western Balkan) level to facilitate networking and peer-learning and
 - between organisations from Programme and Western Balkan partner countries to overcome the experienced difficulties in finding suitable partners, especially for Western Balkan organisations that do not belong to international networks.
- d) Making specific support measures available within the **European Solidarity Corps**, to support organisations that are already (or are planning to be) active and, in particular, to **reach out to potential new beneficiaries**;
- e) **Providing specific support to Contact Points**, especially in those countries, where the Programme might have lower institutional visibility. This support is suggested in financial, capacity-building and promotional terms, in order to improve relevant competences, resources and visibility.

6.4. Concluding remarks

In order to implement these recommendations, a strategic approach and adequate resources will be needed at the level of further development of the Programmes as well as the implementation of support measures by SALTO SEE – including its Contact Points and the experts¹¹ that the Centre works with on a regular basis - and other main stakeholders in the field of youth working in and with the Western Balkan region. These include in particular the European Commission, the EACEA and National Agencies for the EU programmes in the field of youth in Programme countries, but also main actors in the field of youth in the Western Balkan partner countries, such as national authorities in charge of youth, and organisations and networks with relevant experience and capacities.

Last but not least, it seems worth noting that the above-listed recommendations do not refer much to building competences and capacities of youth workers. This may not come as a surprise as this aspect has been appreciated by the organisations participating in this study as one of the main benefits of the Programmes. The recommendation would therefore be to **keep investing in building competences of youth workers, youth leaders and other practitioners working with young people** in the Western Balkan partner countries in different areas of relevance.

What seems more challenging is the **question of how these developed competences and capacities can be transferred more strongly from an essentially personal benefit** (with some temporary added value for the organisation) **to supporting the sustainability, recognition and indeed, the professional development of youth work as such in these countries.** Thinking of how the Programmes could be used more effectively to contribute to efforts already being made at national levels in this direction should be a part of the strategy to address the recommendations that are coming out of this study.

¹¹ Experts include in particular members of the SALTO SEE pools of trainers and European Solidarity Corps Quality Label experts/assessors, but also researchers or other experts working with SALTO SEE.



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8. Glossary

Accreditation: In this study, it refers to the recognition of quality that an organisation was required to receive in order to be able to apply for financial support for Erasmus+, European Voluntary Service / Volunteering projects.

Beneficiary: In this study, this term refers to a person or an organisation participating in any activity funded by the Programmes of the European Commission.

Capacity Building: In this study, it refers to a specific Action (within Key Action 2) of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme, which promotes developing and strengthening the skills, competences, operational processes and resources of the participating organisations and their staff.

Centralised action: Any action of the European Commission funded programmes that is managed by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA).

Decentralised action: Any action of the European Commission funded programmes that is managed by National Agencies for Erasmus+ in Programme Countries.

EACEA: Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency of the European Commission. It is the Executive Agency in charge of the decision-making process and the management of some actions or calls under the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme and the European Solidarity Corps (centralised actions/calls). In this study, reference is made in particular to Capacity Building projects submitted within the so-called Western Balkans Youth Window.

Erasmus+: Youth in Action: Programme of the European Commission for education, culture, youth and sports. Erasmus+: Youth in Action refers to the part of the Programme covering the youth field.

European Solidarity Corps: European Commission funded programme replacing EVS in 2018.

European Voluntary Service (EVS): One of the Actions of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme, which promoted transnational exchange of young volunteers between organisations with the main aim to provide a learning experience for the volunteer and a service experience for the hosting organisation and local community. The European Voluntary Service was replaced by the European Solidarity Corps in 2018.

Mobility of Youth Workers: Type of project funded by the Erasmus+: Youth in Action Programme, which allows actors in the youth field to set up, together with partners, activities for youth workers and youth leaders to support their professional development and strengthen their competences of working directly with young people.

Mobility Project: A project involving transnational activities.

National Agency: Structure(s) established by the national authorities in each Programme country in order to assist the European Commission with most of the actions of the Erasmus+ programme and the European Solidarity Corps. The National agency/-ies in each country assume/s full responsibility in the decision-making process and the management of the decentralised projects (in case of several National Agencies, related to their area of competence).

Partner country: Refers to each country that is not a Programme country but can participate in some of the actions funded by the Erasmus+ programme.

Programme country: Each country that participates in all actions funded by the Erasmus+ Programme. All European Union member states and some additional countries are Programme countries (see Erasmus+ Programme Guide for list of countries).

Quality Label (QL): In this study, it refers to the recognition of quality that an organisation must obtain to participate in some of the activities funded by the European Solidarity Corps.

SALTO SEE: One of seven SALTO Resource Centres supporting the implementation of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action Programme and the European Solidarity Corps. The SALTO South East Europe Resource Centre (SALTO SEE) promotes and supports the cooperation between organisations from Programme countries and the Programme's partner countries in the Western Balkans.

Strategic Partnership: An action of the Erasmus + Programme supporting the development, transfer and/or implementation of innovative practices as well as the implementation of joint initiatives promoting cooperation, peer learning and exchanges of experience at European level.

The Programme: In this study, it refers to the Erasmus+: Youth in Action Programme.

The Programmes: In this study, it refers to the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme and the European Solidarity Corps.

Western Balkans Youth Window: Specific centralised call for proposals addressed to organisations established in Erasmus+ Western Balkan partner countries. It has been regularly in operation since 2015. Organisations can apply directly to EACEA for funds for Capacity Building projects (under Key Action 2 of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme)

Youth Exchange: Type of project funded by the Erasmus+: Youth in Action Programme, which promotes non-formal and informal learning in youth work. It enables groups of young people from different countries to spend up to 21 days together, exploring topics that connect them.

Youth Organisation: In this study, the meaning refers to that commonly used by the European Youth Forum: a social organisation set up to serve young people and where young people are in charge of the organisational structure. Regarding the general principles of operation, a youth organisation is democratic, non-governmental and not for profit.

Youth Worker: A person whose job involves providing support and social activities for young people (often belonging to vulnerable groups).



9. Annexes

The reports of the different parts of the study include more detailed information.

All available on the SALTO website here:

<https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/see/resources/erasmus-study/>

- **Annex 1:** Selected Comparative Data, Mobility Projects (decentralised level), 2014 – 2018
- **Annex 2:** Survey Analysis Report
- **Annex 3:** Focus Groups Report
- **Annex 4:** Political Analysis (summary report)

MOVIT and SALTO South East Europe Resource Centre

MOVIT has been the Slovenian National Agency for EU programmes in the field of youth, currently Erasmus+: Youth in Action and the European Solidarity Corps, since May 1999. In this role, MOVIT manages decentralised EU budget funds and supports different forms of learning mobility activities in youth work. It also runs activities to promote the development of youth work and non-formal education, in particular activities contributing to strengthening European cooperation in the field of youth. Since 2018, the European Solidarity Corps has extended these fields also to other spheres and actors organising solidarity activities as a means to contribute to strengthening cohesion, solidarity, democracy and citizenship in Europe.

Along with its role as a National Agency, MOVIT also serves as an office of Eurodesk, the European Commission's info service offering EU-related information to young people.

In 2002, MOVIT took over as the SALTO South East Europe Resource Centre (SALTO SEE), which promotes cooperation with the Programmes' Western Balkan partner countries within the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme and the European Solidarity Corps, through training and partner-finding activities and various other support measures, tools and resources. SALTO SEE aims to contribute to youth work and youth policy development in the Western Balkan region, in collaboration with other stakeholders and the help of pools of trainers, Quality Label experts and Contact Points located in the Programmes' partner countries in the region.

SALTO SEE is part of the network of SALTO Resource Centres. SALTOs provide resources, such as tools and support materials and activities, for youth workers, trainers and other practitioners in the field of youth work to support organisations and National Agencies in the frame of the Erasmus+ programme and the European Solidarity Corps and beyond.

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About this publication

As preparations for the new generation of EU youth programmes are ongoing, it is important to see how the current Programmes have been implemented and what we can learn for the future. SALTO SEE has investigated how Erasmus+: Youth in Action has been implemented in the Programme's partner countries in the Western Balkans, what are the trends and how they can be explained. This study includes recommendations for measures that could further support the cooperation with this region within the EU youth programmes and ensure that they remain relevant and accessible for the organisations that would like to use it.