

Proposals for a more inclusive European Solidarity Corps

The proposals below were initially elaborated by the National Agency officers attending the Inclusion & Diversity Colleague Support Group (25-27 March 2019) organised by SALTO Inclusion & Diversity Resource Centre in cooperation with the European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre and the Latvian National Agency for Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme. As a second step, this document was presented to the members of the Steering Group of the Erasmus+ Inclusion & Diversity Strategy in the field of youth that also had the opportunity to further discuss it, add new ideas and contextualise some of the proposals.

As highlighted during discussions, several of the proposals below can also be relevant for the Erasmus+ programme.

As follow-up, members of the Steering Group will be working on some tasks related to the proposals, which results will be presented in the next meeting in 15-16 October 2019 (Brussels, Belgium), namely:

- To further reflect on a wider definition of inclusion project and implications in financial support to be made available (explore different scenarios)
- Pilot thinking on how to develop a simplified and more creative application, selection and reporting system for informal groups interested in running solidarity projects
- To map coaching and mentoring practices of National Agencies in supporting inclusion organisations in using both Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes.

General proposals

- The programme calls for a **wider definition of the inclusion project** (when compared to Erasmus+). A project can promote change and social inclusion due to its target group (as beneficiary of the actions and volunteering placement) and not only by having participants with fewer opportunities. This is a general understanding of many NAs and projects' promoters. This could be clarified in the application form (especially for solidarity and volunteering projects) by having a **question about the target group and its impact on young people with fewer opportunities - and the option to choose if it is considered inclusion due to the profile of participant(s) or target group** (make it perhaps similar as in Youth in Action Programme identifying it as A or B projects). This would allow better and more accurate data on inclusion statistics/reporting. An enlarged understanding of what an inclusion project is will create the need to further reflect and decide on exact financial support that would be made available for each of the type of inclusion project. This could be streamlined in the programme guide, NA Guide, Guide for Experts, and other related documents, application form and future Strategy.
- To be able to reach out to more young people with fewer opportunities and new organisations, there is the need to **simplify** and make accessible (language wise) the **application forms and the user**. Pay attention to accessibility of the forms and information in formats for visually impaired people. Information and application possibilities could be possible via mobile phones/apps. Consider the possibilities of Eurodesk in this tailored information work and that the Youth portal could include an "opportunity-check"/ "what is there for me?" section.
- There is a significant number of projects that tick the inclusion boxes but from the application they are clearly not an inclusion project. **Identification of applications as inclusion projects could be done based on the assessment** rather than only on the information submitted by

applicant in the application form. This assessment information should be linked to E+ Link in order to enable reporting. IT could work as a double check system and it would provide more accurate statistics and data on inclusion on national level.

- Volunteering opportunities can have a key impact on personal and professional development of young people, especially for the ones in higher risk of exclusion such as school dropouts and young people in NEET situation. It is important to fill this gap in between drop-outs with volunteering opportunities before going into the labour market or further education. It is an opportunity for this young people to stay connected and develop skills and future careers. Therefore, it is important **to lower the age limit to 16 years - at least as exceptional and justified case, in order to enable inclusion projects** (as it was in Youth in Action 2007-2013). Even if in some countries, this option will not be applicable due to national regulations, this should be in the programme as a possibility.
- Young people with fewer opportunities might have specific language needs. OLS might not be the most adequate tool to support such learning. **There could be the possibility to let the applicant choose for OLS or an amount (such as 150€)** to allow the participant(s) to learn the language through a (non-formal) approach. Linguistic support should be provided to short-term activities.
- On the **quality label** process, there is the need to clearly describe the capacity to host young people with fewer opportunities and that to make this information would be linked to application form and also available in the portal - as to have a distinguished reasoning why the project is inclusive or not.
- **Provide in online tools and general communication (updated) contact information** to be used by participants in case of clarifications in issues such as insurance (e.g. CIGNA rather than directing young people to National Agencies). If not possible to provide such information to National Agencies, applicants and participants should be directed to the ones that can support them and clarify their questions.

Volunteering

On programme accessibility (for the Commission)

- Better explanation (including examples) in the Guide of what an **exceptional cost** is would be recommended, as often organisations do not know what can be included and, therefore, do not ask for it. At the same time, the list shouldn't be exhaustive and there should be flexibility regarding different needs if volunteers are not identified at the application stage.
- There is the need to have **some flexibility with rules after the application**, so that some exceptional costs could still be included at the agreement stage (as it is not possible to identify volunteer and specific needs in advance, it is difficult to foresee all exact costs) Proposal to **have a certain percentage (such as 10%) of the budget which could be "flexibly spent" for all the formats**. This would allow to save and use funds more efficiently as there wouldn't be the need to ask maximum amounts during application (same with inclusion lump sums as funds returned back can't be used any more). Then it **could be enough to justify it with an amendment** and should not affect NAs' performance rate. Alternatively: similar procedures as in the volunteering partnerships could be used; a top up system (similar to Erasmus + on travel expenses) could be introduced for this type of flexible 10 % costs; or the KA2 model in Erasmus+ that allows changes in budget headings up to 20% to substitute this cost (although in the last case it wouldn't represent an additional amount, only reallocation, which is not the ideal support to inclusion needs).

- There is the need to acknowledge and compensate for the additional work and efforts of organisations and their staff to manage inclusion projects. **Costs for the salary of the project manager** could be eligible and included in overall Project Management costs (cover a certain percentage of the **salary or it could be paid based on a daily fee**). Usually inclusive organisations are mainly voluntary based, understaffed or with lack of funds and in this way it will be enhanced professionalisation of organisations within the field and attract more beneficiaries to the Programme.
- Hosting costs that allow volunteers to be accommodated properly in dignity, safety and comfort are quite high, especially in the urban areas such as capitals and large cities. Therefore, **higher amounts for hosting costs and review of national rates approach** are needed (in certain countries) to balance the gap between rural and urban areas. Explore the possibility to link to other purchasing power index-scales, e.g. in order to differentiate between capital and rural area.
- Appropriate support for team volunteering is key to assure a successful experience for volunteers and impact in the community, especially in the cases where young people with fewer opportunities are participating as volunteers. **In inclusion projects, to have a supporting organisation for the team preparation and follow-up should be mandatory**. It is important to clarify in the application the **role and profile of supporting organisation in volunteers' home country**.
- More flexible opportunities would allow the participation of more young people. **Part-time/flexible working hours could be an option in case you have a special condition and/or special needs**. At the same time, it can motivate new organisations to try out the programme. Above all it is important to adopt working hours to the needs and abilities of the participants.
- **A successful volunteering project should pay attention to facilitation of reintegration and post placement** by ensuring a successful transition between the end of a project and the return of the volunteer. There is the need for better guidelines on this issue and special financial support for the opportunities after the volunteering project (such as provision of organisational and/or inclusion support after the volunteering placement).
- **Solutions that allow more long-term planning, strategic approach and flexible distribution of funds** (such as partnership agreement for 3 years) should be made available. It allows experienced inclusion organisations to be more strategic in the way they approach inclusion and to develop long-term projects.
- The Portal has a great potential and could work as **one landing page** from which organisations go to other tools. The approach to its use can be more inclusive to facilitate registration of young people with fewer opportunities (that for now it is mostly done with the support of organisations). Matching is not really happening through this tool yet. **Implement the youth portal (volunteering opportunity database) into European Solidarity Corps portal so that young people can search for the organisations**. In addition, it is important to make available on the portal also the tasks expected to be done by the volunteer - to be sure they are barrier-free.

On promoting inclusion (for National Agencies)

- **Assure quality of pre-departure training and that inclusion is tackled in such training**. The pre-departure training is delivered by organisations and, in some countries, by NAs.

Examples: Irish NA is now incorporating it in the TEC - good practice training. In order to have pre-departure training tailor made, Finish NA trains organisations on how to do it, to make sure that certain elements are there. On TEC cycle, reintegration and post placement of the volunteer could be tackled and promoted.

- **Map organisations working with target groups** that you would like to see participating in the programme and that could be easily shared between NAs to facilitate networking and partnership building (pay attention to GDPR limitations).

Example: such mappings are being done in the framework of the Strategic Partnership on Inclusion. Check the Cookbook on Inclusion (available in SALTO-YOUTH website) for some tips on how to do it

- **Offer tailor-made support to youth workers and organisations which are motivated to get involved in the programme.**

Examples: in the framework of the Strategic Partnership on Inclusion some NAs are providing coaching and mentoring to application and implementation of projects and involving new organisations in a cycle of national activity (preparation) and international activity – to allow also to get to know potential partners and develop projects together.

- **On NET activities: closer exchange and partnering with inclusion organisations is needed.** Consider using NET for contact making between these organisations and NA staff. Programme inclusiveness related activities can be promoted such as inclusion tasters and study-visits.

Jobs and Traineeships

On programme accessibility (for the Commission)

- It is a relevant opportunity to promote inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities. To be able to make use of it, is important to **simplify procedures for a quicker process and more funds are needed - including for salaries of the participants**. If not funded from the programme, there could be the possibility to combine it easily with other funds including national programmes. Guidelines on how to combine with other funds are needed, otherwise it is difficult for NAs to motivate organisations to apply.
- **Adequate financial rates are needed.** The existing ones are low even for non-inclusion projects. These and other conditions are currently not fitting for the (inclusion) users.
- **Transfer between volunteering and jobs/traineeships could be facilitated.** This could be done through an approach similar to a volunteering partnership (e.g. enable quick take-over of volunteers).
- To facilitate the participation of young people with fewer opportunities, it would be important to be flexible regarding the **possibility to accept jobs & traineeships that are part of the formal curricula**.
- The creation of a **specific sub action for inclusion jobs & traineeships** could be considered. As suggested also for volunteering projects, a flexible format regarding working hours (part-time) could foster participation. Differentiate funding lump sums for organisational support between highly qualified jobs and for inclusion jobs: for inclusion jobs the funding could be the same level as volunteering.

On promoting inclusion (for National Agencies)

- NAs to get to know the employment sector better and to establish contacts with the organisations in order also to ensure the quality of the placements (based on the values of the programme).
- To explore the possibility to use exceptional costs to cover expenses related to support and mentoring of employee with fewer opportunities.
- Check the possibility to support the costs of placement by covering different expenses such as salary and board and lodging.

Solidarity projects

On programme accessibility (for the Commission)

- The coach has a key role in solidarity projects and in linking organisation with participant. As in programme guide 2018, it is important to give **possibility to identify a coach that is engaged in the organisation applying for the grant**. Especially when working with inclusion groups, it is important for the organisation to have as coach a person they trust (the same way young people apply because they trust the organisation).
- Due to the diversity of projects that is possible to submit under solidarity projects, it would be beneficial to have **more flexibility around the duration and funding of the events** – long-term and short-term:
 - **Make solidarity projects longer than a year, 18 months**. This is especially important for projects focused on process (and for some target groups, as they need more time to get in), not necessarily for ones focused on “project/event” (like festival, pop up restaurant).
 - More flexibility in **accessing funds to organise larger events in a shorter amount of time**. It would be good to get money for the activity not as a monthly amount, but rather allow the payment of the full grant in one payment.
- **Facilitate procedures for solidarity projects** to allow more young people to benefit from this opportunity. For example, PRN code can be a significant administrative burden to them and, therefore, these data could be much simpler collected in the application form (at the moment, the registration is a burden and does not bring a clear benefit for the grant management). Either it should be easier/more user friendly, or it could be linked to other tools they need later on (mobility tool, alumni options). Consider the **possibility to have alternatives to the written process of application and reporting** (e.g. face-to-face presentation/video).
- It is important to keep the possibility for **NAs and assessors to highlight the inclusion dimension of a project**. The explicit inclusion question in assessment of relevance has been deleted in 2019 (compared to 2018).
- **Assessment and monitoring** of the solidarity projects is challenging, as there is no need to submit action plan and budget. Proposal to add **question to the application form about monthly activity timetable** (something simple, not necessarily detailed but to have a reference). If not possible, proposal for NAs to request for it after approval (as it is the practice of the Lithuanian NA).

On promoting inclusion (for National Agencies)

- To be able to improve inclusion within solidarity projects it is important to **target organisations that work with inclusion target groups** more effectively (reaching out, informing them about the opportunities, supporting if needed).
- Develop an **approach to reach out** to youth who are not linked to any structures, organisations, etc. but are falling under inclusive groups. Considered these groups, as solidarity projects could be particularly well used for/by them: in prison, probation, ex-offenders, children in foster/institutional care, refugees, geographically disadvantaged.

Examples: NAs experiences in reaching out in music festivals, climate demonstrations or any other protests and in cross promoting different opportunities through email communication, newsletter...

- As there is a common need to **better communicate to potential beneficiaries** this opportunity, NAs are invited to cooperate between them in creating a Plain English Guide.

Example: Irish NA has a draft proposal that can be used in the future by the network.

- Develop a **supportive approach** in your National Agency.

Example: Dutch NA organises a kick-off meeting with young people leading solidarity projects as a risk check and assurance that project will be on track.