



16th to 19th November 2015
EU Info Centre Podgorica, Montenegro

RECOMMENDATIONS



ERASMUS+: YOUTH IN ACTION FORUM FOR THE WESTERN BALKANS
16th to 19th November 2015, Podgorica, Montenegro

This document contains the recommendations made by the participants of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action Forum for the Western Balkans, which was organised by SALTO South East Europe Resource Centre together Association for Development and Prosperity – ADP-Zid and with the support of the Directorate for Youth and Sport of Montenegro and the EU Info Centre in Podgorica, Montenegro, from 16 – 19 November 2015.

Participants

45 stakeholders in the Programme participated in the activity, coming from NGOs - among them also those that work closely with SALTO SEE as Contact Points for the Programme, youth field, in their countries -, national Ministries in charge of youth or dealing with youth and civil society, and from the European Commission and its Executive Agency.

In addition, 30 young people from Montenegro who came to learn more about the opportunities that the Erasmus+ Programme offers, especially the European Voluntary Service, participated in the first day of the Forum.

Background

The Erasmus+ Programme started with the beginning of 2014 and has now been running for almost two years. As of 2015, also a new Western Balkans Youth Window is open again, so organisations from the Western Balkan partner countries can apply again for project grants. During these first years and months, many organisations have gained some first experience with the Programme, as project partners or as project coordinators of projects applied for under the Western Balkans Window. Though based on its predecessor, Youth in Action, the Erasmus+ Programme is different in quite some ways and offers new possibilities for beneficiaries from this region, for partially also more complex projects.

Objectives

On this background, this Forum offered an occasion to find out more about the **opportunities** that the Programme offers. It wanted to provide the participants, most of whom already had prior experience with the Programme, with the information needed to use the Programme as a tool in their work with young people and to further develop their organisation's capacities through partnerships and cooperation with organisations from other countries.

Second, participants were invited to share their **questions and feedback** about the Programme: What works well, what are the strong points, and what challenges and obstacles did they see? Besides technical concerns the Forum wanted to take a look at the Programme from a more political angle and at its actual relevance for the Western Balkan region.

Finally, the Forum aimed to collect the participants' **suggestions and recommendations** for the future work of the different stakeholders involved in this Programme, in particular the European Commission, SALTO (possibly together with National Agencies), Contact Points in the region, and national ministries in charge of youth.

Annexes

Programme overview and list of participants



RECOMMENDATIONS

In their final evaluation of the forum, **participants strongly recommended that meetings such as this forum to consult the stakeholders from youth work and youth policy about the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme should be held regularly** (annually or bi-annually).

The participants highlighted the benefits of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme for young people and youth work in the Western Balkans:

- Mobility of young people is a big benefit for WB region.
- Mobility and exchanges between countries are breaking stereotypes in this region and bringing innovative ideas or practices from EU countries.
- Local youth is dealing with topics that they would usually not be able to do due to limitation in national contexts.
- The Programme benefits the societies in the WB because young people change their perspective when they get engaged and they become motivated to participate in the local community.
- The Programme enables growth of young people and their competences, as well as exchange of best practices and knowledge among young people from different countries.
- The Programme contributes to the promotion and recognition of non-formal learning/education enabling young people to benefit directly.
- The programme raises the employability of the young people that take part in it.
- Individuals, organizations, and municipalities are gaining skills and capacity.
- The Programme helps gain national recognition for youth organizations that benefit from Erasmus+.
- The Program has support structures in place (National Agencies, SALTOS) to facilitate the creation of partnerships with other organizations/institutions.
- Without such a Programme many young people from the region would not have the chance to travel, learn and share, and to “meet the world”.
- Participants specifically stressed individual gains from EVS: independence, responsibility, articulating thoughts and comments, openness for new experiences, interaction with people and improving foreign language skills, communication, meeting and accepting new cultures, resourcefulness and improvisation.

The specific recommendations to key decision makers and stakeholders are as follows:

ERASMUS+: YOUTH IN ACTION, CAPACITY BUILDING, WESTERN BALKANS YOUTH WINDOW

- **Procedures**

The participants highlighted the need to **increase the financial resources allocated to the Western Balkans Youth Window** because of the large number of quality applications and in order to answer to the needs of youth and organizations in the field.

1. Youth organizations in the WB often lack the capacity to follow complicated procedures (PIC registration, PDF online application, budget, KA2 relates to mobility activities which are then described in KA1, online platforms, where to find forms on the Erasmus+ website). Therefore:



application procedures as well as budgeting and reporting should be simplified, not to have 2 parallel systems for one project.

2. The application form is too rigid, too much framed, and it guides applicants to one outcome and only to a certain type of activities (now the PDF looks like it is made for K1 mobility activities, but K2 is much more complex and not consisting only of seminars with sending and hosting organizations. The table for activities can only include activities with sending and hosting organizations etc). Therefore: **the application form should be more flexible and allow for different outcomes and types of activities.** E.g. all priorities from the Programme Guide should be listed in the application form so that organizations can feel they can apply for more than employment/employability and skill building. The PDF should correspond more accurately to the Programme. Templates for programs/agendas of activities could be made available.
3. Communication with Programme officers at the EACEA through use of general e-mail is rather faceless and limited. **Programme officers should use individualized communication with organizations and create more partnership-based communication.**
4. Application procedures do not allow for participation of associate partners, which makes it difficult/impossible to involve some potential partners. For instance, institutions on local level often are a part of larger institutions or ministries and cannot obtain a PIC number on their own (e.g. local office for labor is a part of the city municipality). **To increase possibilities for partnerships, open up the process also for associate partners that do not need to register for PIC but still are important for realization of project aims.**
5. Experts on projects cannot be employed persons from the partner organizations involved the projects. This directly undermines the sustainability of the involved organizations and doesn't allow for efficient use of resources. **Widen the definition of expert and allow for more flexibility in engaging staff.**
6. The current flat rates for travel costs should be adjusted:
 - a. They do not take into account the real situation regarding mobility in the WB region, including non-existing infrastructure and political issues, which do not allow for straight lines to be drawn and thus calculate distances. **Improve the flat rate calculation taking into account existing mobility barriers in the WB region and based on realistic calculations taken into consideration roads, available lines, means of transport etc.**
 - b. Flat rates for youth exchanges are of lesser amounts than for other types of mobility activities, which creates a discriminatory principle against young people. **Increase flat rates for youth exchanges and at least make them equal to amounts for other activities.**
 - c. Create a **category of travel costs for youth with fewer opportunities** taking into account their specific situation (see also Equal Chances, point 7, for other issues regarding youth with fewer opportunities)

- **Promoting better access and equal chances**

Having in mind one of the main purposes of Erasmus+, to support initiatives of young people, it is crucial that the Programme in its structure does not discriminate against or exclude any of them. Participants of the Forum identified as particularly vulnerable smaller youth organizations with less capacity and experience with the Programme. Thus, the following recommendations were drafted:

1. Create better access within Western Balkans Youth Window for new and/or small organisations to enter the Programme:

- a. A separate call and specific support for **capacity building (e.g. for grant writing, for quality management of projects etc.)** should be offered to organizations interested in entering the Programme. The support could be organized by Contact Points, on the condition that they receive proper finances for organizing such activities.
 - b. **Creating two LOTs per call and dividing between grants for beginners and for “big projects”** would be good so that youth organizations that are small compete among each other and thus still have a chance to receive crucial support.
 - c. Calls could include a **sub-granting possibility** so that smaller organizations could be involved and capacity built in this way.
2. **Adapt application forms for starting organizations and/or improve the support system** so that such new and youth organizations get the real chance to participate.
 3. Promotion of cross-sectorial cooperation should be accompanied by concrete measures to **protect youth organizations’ position in the Programme**, and more **partnership building opportunities** should be created in the WB context. E.g. promote as a positive aspect, if applicants involve small and grass-roots youth organizations in their consortium.
 4. Erasmus+ projects have a different logic than “usual” projects approved by local public funds. These public funds are anyhow scarce which brings problems in securing co-funding in the WB context. Therefore: **co-funding should be a lower percentage for the Western Balkans and/or in-kind contributions should be considered co-funding.**
 5. In order to reach out to **youth with fewer opportunities** it is vital to create an **interactive guide** to be posted on the Erasmus + web page (videos or other forms that are youth friendly) on how to make a project from the idea to finishing the application. Ask youth organizations that have experience to contribute for content. **Simplify the Programme Guide and make a separate one with all details for the Western Balkans Youth Window.** (See also Procedures, point 6 c.)

RELEVANCE of PROGRAMME TOPICS/PRIORITIES

1. Participants of Forum felt that the current priorities of the Programme are “**too much focused on employment**” and that there should be **more support for Human Rights and value based projects** as these are also pressing challenges now. They also underlined the importance of promoting (more) exchange among Balkan youth, providing opportunities to **exchange cultures, peace building and reconciliation.**

They also noted that:

2. **Participation** is a particularly good priority as youngsters after such activities influence the local community in the longer run.
3. **The social inclusion** dimension of the Programme should be more developed, different tools should be adapted that will ensure equal participation in projects focusing on this priority.
4. **Employability** is a good priority, but it should not take over entire Programme, since even youth exchanges anyway increase employability.
5. The participants recommended **adding specific priorities for the Western Balkans Youth Window** considering the specific context (peace building, radicalization, intercultural dialogue, minority issues etc).
6. **SALTO SEE and Contact Points Actively should be significantly engaged in in consultation in developing and evaluating WBYW priorities.**

INCREASING PROGRAMME VISIBILITY

1. The Erasmus+ programme should be **more visible and there should be targeted promotion** among youngsters and youth organizations.
2. Information and promotion campaign should also do more for **outreach to other partners** that are not only youth organizations (including all stakeholders among youth, civil society organizations, institutions etc.).
3. To overcome the lack of knowledge about the Programme among youth, CSO's and governments in the WB, it would be necessary to **secure the political will to develop national youth policies and recognize the Erasmus+ programme, Youthpass, EVS as volunteering.**
4. More efforts should be made to **promote results** of Erasmus+ projects.

STRENGTHENING QUALITY and IMPACT of Programme implementation in the Western Balkan region

1. **Strengthen support for EVS in the region** in view of decreasing numbers of EVS volunteers and projects:
 - a. There is a need for more **promotion** of EVS in the region; this should be done by CP and SALTO; also sending organisations should be encouraged to take on a stronger role in this regard.
 - b. There is also a need for more **capacity-building of EVS organizations** to provide quality support and mentoring of their volunteers.
 - c. Currently, pre-departure meetings for EVS volunteers are not obligatory and (especially new) organizations often do not do them well, or not at all. This reflects on the volunteers' situation (they do not know where they arrive, how to overcome homesickness and culture shock, basics about the Programme etc.): **Pre-departure training/preparation of EVS volunteers should become again an obligatory part of the EVS training cycle** done by National Agencies/SALTO in order to create a better learning process and understanding of EVS by the volunteers, and strengthen the flow of information between SO/HO and volunteer from the preparatory stage on.
2. To avoid misuse and repetition of use of Programme funds, we feel there is room for **more monitoring on how EU money is spent.**
3. In order to reach a greater impact it is vital to intensify **advocacy and create political pressure so that Youthpass certificates are recognized** by the authorities and relevant institutions.
4. The possibility to form partnerships with different sectors increases chances to achieve goals related to priorities. Promotion and building of such **sustainable cross-sectorial partnerships** should be intensified.
5. Obstacles for youth volunteering are created also by (existing problematic) legislation or lack of legislation in the context of the WB. **Promoting the inclusion and recognition of youth volunteer work** by authorities should be prioritized (e.g. volunteering promoted as part of the WB and countries' cultures; recommendation to national authorities to support and deal with recognition of Youthpass).
6. **Tackle existing problems** (related to national legislation or practice) **in the Western Balkan countries to legally register long-term EVS volunteers** and solve problems with residence permits for EVS volunteers in a more structured way.
7. Erasmus+ offices, EU Delegations or other EC Directorates (e.g. DG NEAR) are often unaware of the existence and role of SALTO SEE and/or Contact Points, and/or lack knowledge about the youth

chapter of the Erasmus' programme. **To increase visibility, recognition and impact of existing strategies and activities, it would be important to develop better channels for sharing information between different stakeholders:** different Directorates in EC, EU Delegations, Erasmus+ offices, SALTO, CP, etc.

ENHANCING SUPPORT ROLE OF CONTACT POINTS in the Western Balkans

SUPPORT

- Institutional - CP need more support in communication with National Erasmus+ Offices and EU Delegation (see also point 8, Quality and Impact). More communication and consultation between CP and EU Delegation and National Erasmus offices is needed, so that they better understand the role of CP and to jointly identify possibilities for exchange of information and cooperation (see also point 8, Quality and Impact)
- CP need more knowledge and skills on how to support local authorities in using the Programme.
- Financial - More financial resources are needed to answer needs of organizations in the field. Today's costs do not cover operational and activity-related needs. CP should also ask for and receive more cooperation and financial support from local and national governments.

ROLE and TASKS

- European Commission should ask CP about regional priorities and expectations (see also first point under 'Quality and Impact').
- CP should ask for a meeting with the EC Youth Unit / Youth Unit should organise consultations with the aim to ensure exchange of information and consultation of the field by the institution.
- CP should organize more trainings about specific technical issues (assistance with writing the application, how to solve mistakes, IT knowledge and skills etc.).
- CPs could be part of the structure to help / monitor during implementation of the project (during application, implementation and monitoring). Extra resources would be needed for this.
- Clearly define responsibilities of CPs, make sure enough resources are also allocated and, if needed in country, increase number of CPs.

VISIBILITY and IMPACT

- CP need more information to be more effective in their work: Results of open calls, statistics of participants of projects (numbers, gender, disability, minorities) (should be made available to CPs and online).
- Clear, accurate and concrete information about the Programme (objectives, priorities, results) should be provided by CPs to youth organizations, but also to institutions and media.
- Information about changes of the Programme should reach youth and organizations easily through CPs.
- More resources (human and financial) would help CP to promote and inform, but also support and monitor project implementation to ensure quality, impact and visibility.
- There is a need for more promotion of the Programme among young people in general. CP should have one person (adequate human resources for activities and tools) to do only this.
- CP should clearly separate between the work of the organization and their role as CP (web site, email, mailing list, facebook group/ page etc...).
- To increase visibility of CP, CP should be mentioned in Programme Guide in connection with SALTOs.

SYNERGIES with other political initiatives in the Western Balkan region

Regarding the **development of other initiatives promoting European integration and regional cooperation, in particular the Berlin process** (in particular the envisaged creation of a Regional Youth Cooperation Centre for the Western Balkans), participants expressed that this process could be of great benefit for the region. At the same time, they noted:

1. The **need to ensure that potential financial contributions from the European Commission to the Berlin process in the youth field are not at the expense of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme;**
2. The importance to develop **synergies** between the Berlin process and the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme;
3. The importance of **building on the experiences of past initiatives** in the region working towards the same objectives;
4. That a stronger involvement of Croatia and Slovenia in the development of the RYCC for the WB (Berlin process) would be beneficial for addressing issues of reconciliation in the region;
5. The strong **wish that stakeholders from the youth work field are regularly consulted** in the further development of the relevant political processes and initiatives.

COUNTRY-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Apart from the recommendations listed above, all country groups had some specific suggestions which are highly relevant for their contexts, but not necessarily for others (at least they were not emphasized by other national groups during the framework of the Forum).

	Recommendations to EACEA	Recommendations to SALTO SEE / NATIONAL AGENCIES
ALBANIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possibility for Albanian organizations to participate in other Key Actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the organisation of more events at national level to boost the local associations' participation in the Programme. • Facilitate communication and cooperation with relevant national institutions when/if that is possible and needed. Support the translation of manuals and booklets into Albanian. (A need that comes from NGO-s and different youngsters in the country for a couple of years now).
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each EU member state should give more information about the Programme and the CP to their respective embassies in BiH • Do more monitoring of approved projects in BiH • Support CP in advocating for recognition of Youthpass in BiH by institutions dealing with volunteering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the visibility and presence of SALTO in BiH • (E.g. invite media to on-arrival trainings - CP can help with this; Organize joint activities with national CP; • More regional events within Programme)
KOSOVO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One of the biggest problems we are facing is participant mobility, thus we suggest to the Programme, in particular the Executive Agency, to provide more support in the process of Visa application. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are very few applications from Kosovo, and most organizations hesitate to apply either due to lack of information or to lack of capacity. Therefore we need: • More support for capacity building • More promotion of the Programme

MONTENEGRO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transfer Youthpass in ECTS credits if students went on some training or youth exchange, or EVS during studies related to their field of studies • In evaluation of project applications, also have in mind priorities and need for youth in MNE set at the national level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More information by CP in advance on what kind and type of activities and which target group we should try to reach for E+YiA project applications.
SERBIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Move February deadline to March (K2A), because the holiday period makes it very difficult for applicants to prepare applications for this deadline. 	
CROATIA & MACEDONIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocate more money for K2 - Youth in Action projects. • Organize more often forums at Western Balkan level and European level; • Organize conferences where young people will be the main creators of plans and project ideas for this action (final conference of youth at the end of each year). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the cooperation between the National Agency and Ministry of the Youth (HR) or National Agency for Youth (MK). • Create a web portal - database of all organizations in each country, projects... • Validation of the significance of Youthpass, certification of voluntary work... (at state level).

ANNEX 1: Erasmus+: Youth in Action Forum for the Western Balkans: Programme overview

Monday, 16 Nov	Tuesday, 17 Nov		Wednesday, 18 Nov	
Arrival	Registration	9:30	Synergies between the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme and other regional initiatives for youth The Berlin process (Simone Heine, DAAD Montenegro) Sharing information and discussion in national groups: How are the Berlin process and possibly other regional initiatives in the field of youth implemented in our country? What are (potential) synergies between them and with Erasmus+?	
	<p>Welcome and opening of the Forum</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth Directorate of Montenegro EU Delegation to Montenegro <p>Framework and programme of the Forum (SALTO SEE and ADP Zid)</p> <p>Who is here?</p> <p>Erasmus+: Youth in Action Programme – Framework, priorities and developments (Artur Payer, European Commission Youth Unit)</p>			
	Coffee break	11:00	Coffee break	
	<p>Western Balkans Youth Window (Eva Moser, Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency of the European Commission)</p> <p>Parallel session for youth from Montenegro: What is the European Voluntary Service? What's in it for me?</p>	11:30	Further reflection and feedback about Erasmus+: Youth in Action according to needs and interests of participants	
	Lunch break	13:00	Lunch break	
	<p>Reflection and feedback about Erasmus+: Youth in Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Benefits of participation Obstacles for participation How do we understand Programme priorities? How are they relevant for us? 	14:30	<p>Recommendations to different stakeholders - round 1:</p> <p>NGOs, National Authorities, Contact Points</p>	
	Coffee break	16:00	Coffee break	
	<p>Sharing of outcomes of working groups</p> <p>Closure of the Day</p>	<p>16:30</p> <p>18:00</p>	<p>Recommendations to stakeholders – round 2: European Commission, National Agencies/SALTO</p> <p>Evaluation of the Forum by participants</p> <p>Closure (Igor Milosević, ADP-Zid)</p>	
	Welcome evening	Evening out and dinner in Cetinje	20:00	Dinner

ANNEX 2: Participants

First name	Last name	Country of Residence	Organisation
NGOs			
Mateo	Lamnija	Albania	Malteser Albania
Taulant	Merkuri	Albania	Megaphone
Jonida	Mamaj	Albania	EDEN Center (Environmental Center for Development Education and Networking)
Milivoje	Lujic	Bosnia and Herzegovina	NGO "Eko-Leonardo" Youth club
Emina	Hasanagic	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Fondacija Krila nade/Wings of hope, Bosnia and Herzegovina
Aida	Brdar	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Association for prevention of addiction
Katarina	Vuckovic	Bosnia and Herzegovina	KULT
Igor	Spetic	Croatia	Odred izviđača pomoraca Posejdon
Matej	Matic	Croatia	Youth in EU
Bardha	Ahmeti	Kosovo	NGO LENS
Valon	Nushi	Kosovo	PEN - Peer Educators Network
Astrit	Sahiti	Kosovo	Forum for Progressive Initiatives
Selim	Daku	Kosovo	Kosovo Center of Diplomacy
Andrej	Gabroski	Macedonia	Youth Council Prilep
Sanja	Stefanova	Macedonia	Youth Council of Municipality of STIP
Katarina	Camovic	Montenegro	DBC Podgorica
Aida	Perovic-Ivanovic	Montenegro	NGO Prima
Miroslav	Stanšić	Montenegro	Youth club Niksic
Milica	Zugic	Montenegro	Mladiinfo Montenegro
Bojana	Stojkovic	Serbia	Centar E8
Ana	Pecarski	Serbia	Association Peoples Parliament
Jelena	Spasovic	Serbia	NGO Libero
Contact Points for Erasmus+: Youth in Action			
Srdjan	Mitrovic	Serbia	Grupa "Hajde da..."
Ana	Skoflek	Montenegro	ADP-Zid
Igor	Milošević	Montenegro	ADP-Zid
Irena	Topalli	Albania	Beyond Barriers Albania
Lavdrim	Shehu	Albania	Youth in Free Initiative
Senada	Susic	Bosnia and Herzegovina	PRONI
Dukagjin	Leka	Kosovo	Ligo Lex Legis

Policy makers			
Snezana	Klasnja	Serbia	Ministry of Youth and Sport of the Republic of Serbia, Deputy Minister for Youth
Erion	Banushi	Albania	Agency for Support of Civil Society
Andi	Kananaj	Albania	Agency for Support of Civil Society, Director
Admir	Čeho	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Secretary, Commission for Youth Issues B&H
Xhevat	Bajrami	Kosovo	Government of Kosovo, Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport, Director of the Youth Department
Igor	Vušurović	Montenegro	Office for Youth and Sport, Director
Vanja	Kontić	Montenegro	Office for Youth and Sport
Maja	Radovic	Montenegro	Ministry of labor market and social welfare
Marija	Cimbaljević	Montenegro	Ministry of education
Tamara	Tovjanin	Montenegro	Ministry of education
Krsto	Vukadinovic	Montenegro	Office for Youth and Sport
Ranko	Lazovic	Montenegro	National E+Office
Vladimir	Pavićević	Montenegro	Main city, unit for development of entrepreneurship
Institutions			
Artur	Payer	Brussels	European Commission, Youth Unit
Eva	Moser	Brussels	Education, Audiovisual and Culture Agency of the European Commission
Patric	Šmelcer	Podgorica	EU Delegation to MNE
Simone	Heine	Podgorica	German embassy in Montenegro/DAAD
Sonja	Mitter Škulj	Ljubljana	SALTO South East Europe Resource Centre
Facilitators			
Domagoj	Kovačić	Serbia	
Ajša	Hadzibegović	Montenegro	

Additional participants from Montenegro on Day 1 of the Forum

Ana Ivanović
Alina Music
Marija Scepanovic Brajovic
Amina Niković
Sandra Vujović
Marija Kustudic
Rade Dacevic
Lazar Radulović
Milica Živković
Anja Vujanovic

Iva Vukcevic
Andrija Bozovic
Sara Draskovic
Andjela Markovic
Ivan Velimirovic
Jelena Ivanovic
Nemanja Milikic
Iva Kovacevic
Tijana Pravilović
Isidora Vlaović

Damjan Latinovic
Olja Kočalo
Aleksandra Gvozdenović
Petar Perović
Bojan Bojović
Jasmina Miladinović
Nataša Pavićević
Tatijana Djuranovic
Milena Obradovic
Martina Malić