

# **Inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities in Eastern Partnership countries and Russia: The way forward**

This policy brief summarises the outcomes of the study *Inclusion in Eastern Partnership countries and Russia* – commissioned and supervised together by the Austrian, Finnish and Polish National Agencies of Erasmus+ Youth in Action, SALTO EECA and SALTO Inclusion, and financed by the European Commission. The goal of the project was to contribute to an evidence-based approach in the identification and development of support measures for youth organisations in the Eastern Partnership Region and Russia that deal with various aspects of social inclusion in the region.

By inclusion in this study we refer to activities targeting primarily young people with fewer opportunities, as defined by the European Commission in its “Inclusion and Diversity Strategy”.<sup>1</sup>

After an explanation of the context and the main approaches used in the research, this policy brief provides an overview of the main challenges faced by the organisations in the region and concludes with a series of recommendations that should be taken into account when designing further support schemes for the region.

## **Introduction and approach**

After YOUTH and Youth in Action, Erasmus+ is the third EU programme that supports youth work and promotes non-formal education in the countries of Eastern Partnership (EaP) and in Russia. Since 2000, when the YOUTH Programme was opened to the seven countries in Eastern Europe and Caucasus, many international and local training activities targeting youth workers from the region took place, many of them on the topic of inclusion.

The injection of about €31 million, through the Eastern Partnership Youth Window in 2012-2013, for projects working with and in the region (with exclusion of Russia) was very important for the youth sector. One of its aims was to increase the number of inclusion-related projects in the EaP countries. However, later analysis of the initiative has shown that the goal was not really achieved, and small, local organisations from small towns and villages remained outside of its reach.

This has confirmed what was already suspected: the measures and activities offered for the youth field by the EU programmes were created with not enough comprehensive analysis of the real needs in the regions in question and their specific characteristics.

*Inclusion in Eastern Partnership Countries and Russia* responded to a need for an evidence-

---

1 More details on the strategy can be found at <https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-3103/InclusionAndDiversityStrategy.pdf>

based and needs-oriented approach. This long-term project (2014-2016) was conceived to identify needs for and obstacles to inclusion in youth work in the region and its aim was to design support measures and non-formal training activities in the framework of Erasmus+ Youth in Action programme there.

## **Approaches of the study**

The methodology used for this study integrated desk research with collection of field data, carried out in a team of 15 local researchers from all the seven countries, coordinated by Abel Polese, the main researcher responsible for the project. Over 230 interviews were carried out in the seven target countries with youth workers employed both in local organisations and working as freelance youth trainers with specific experience in inclusion projects. Discussions with experts and visits to local and international events for youth workers provided a second set of data.

The full report of the study, based on the above-mentioned data and interviews is available on the SALTO website.<sup>2</sup>

## **Findings of the study**

### Political framework

The study identified the existence of two distinct tendencies, shaped mostly by government attitudes towards the youth sector:

- **Liberal attitudes** either encourage initiatives or, at least, do not hinder activities and are displayed by governments that include Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.
- **Directive attitudes** attempt to limit activities, have a tendency to centralise and keep activities, to different degrees, under state control and are displayed by governments that include Azerbaijan, Belarus and Russia.

Knowledge about the Erasmus+ Youth in Action (and its predecessor programmes) varies substantially across the region. Liberal attitudes of a country have a positive effect on the capacity of youth organisations to be active in international projects and engaged in the Erasmus+ YiA programme (e.g. Georgia and Moldova), while directive attitudes of a country (e.g. Azerbaijan and Russia) seem to have the opposite effect.

### Definition of inclusion

Although the baseline definition of inclusion for this study was provided to the participating organisations and was based on activities targeting primarily young people with fewer opportunities, as defined by the European Commission in its “Inclusion and Diversity Strategy”<sup>3</sup>, it has been challenging to identify organisations working on inclusion for a number of reasons:

---

2 <https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/inclusion/inclusiontraining/inclusionineeca/>

3 <https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-3103/InclusionAndDiversityStrategy.pdf>

- Not all organisations use the same definition of inclusion or understand inclusion in a broad sense.
- Consequently, the definition of a disadvantaged group seems to be very subjective with some groups not being aware of falling into the category.
- Few organisations exclusively target disadvantaged groups whereas most of the organisations surveyed work with both disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged youth groups.

### Main target groups

Although some tendencies were likely to be different from country to country, the study has allowed us to cluster organisations and activities depending on their target group. Young people are the common denominator of all the organisations but they can be distinguished into:

- Young people with physical, sensory and mental disabilities
- Young people facing geographical obstacles
- Young people facing discrimination due to sexual and gender issues
- Young people facing educational difficulties
- Young people disadvantaged due to cultural differences

There are also organisations that provide horizontal activities, targeting several groups at the same time (e.g. humanitarian aid, training, social entrepreneurship).

### Rural vs. urban space

Another tendency shown in the study is that organisations based in major cities are more active when it comes to (international) inclusion projects than their rural counterparts. City-based organisations are more likely to have staff with knowledge of foreign languages, are more visible (attend most of the main events with donors, embassies and EU delegations) and have thus more access to information and funding.

### Organisations' capacities

There are two main challenges for organisations working in the region. Firstly, limited availability of human resources is one of the main challenges to local organisations, which struggle to find sufficient funding to keep good youth workers and pay them a regular salary. Secondly, lack of coordination between donors and organisations prompt the latter to adapt to the donors' priorities to secure funding. This makes it more difficult to concentrate on issues that are not considered a priority by donors.

## **Conclusions and implications**

Based on the findings of the study the most urgent issues to address are:

- **Professionalisation:** Limited expertise, access to knowledge and exchange of information with other organisations keep quality (and quality control) at a low level. Targeted training courses were pointed out as a possible solution.

- **Understanding (of inclusion and youth):** There is little overlapping between the definition of inclusion in the European Union's Inclusion and Diversity Strategy and the ones used by local organisations. Likewise, there is no specific focus on excluded young people. They are treated either within the programmes for family and children (0-18 years) or as adults (18+).
- **Finance:** Financial issues are perceived as a potential threat to long-term activities, development, professionalisation and impact. The fundraising capacity of some organisations in the region has also been limited by the attitudes towards international funding.
- **Cooperation:** There are frequent examples of organisations that target the same group not working together. This is even more serious given that joining forces could enable youth NGOs working on inclusion to attract public attention.
- **Access and support:** The capacity to work with inclusion is negatively affected by the lack of necessary infrastructure (e.g. few hotels accessible to wheelchairs), special services for participants with disabilities (e.g. translation into sign language) and, in general, support by the authorities.

## Recommendations

Future programmes promoting non-formal training activities and other support measures for youth organisations in Eastern Partnership countries and Russia should take into account the following points. They should:

1. Acknowledge the fact that the region is composed of countries that, in spite of their common past, have very specific characteristics. Consequently, there is a great deal to be gained by diverse approaches acknowledging that it is administratively simpler to work with certain actors and countries.
2. Establish a network of contact points (or resource people), based on the positive experience of the Western Balkans model. This point is concerned with decentralisation of management structures and sense of responsibility of local organisations.
3. Encourage stakeholders and beneficiaries at the regional or at least the national level to agree on a common understanding of the concept of inclusion and of youth workers and the general terminology to be used. This approach could possibly lead to the recognition of non-formal education and acknowledgement of the status of youth workers.
4. Foster interaction between the state and youth organisations. Attention should be paid to promoting cooperation between state organisations and NGOs, offering participants from both sectors the chance to take part in the same projects.
5. Foster competences in the region through specifically tailored courses, with particular emphasis on: entrepreneurship and the job market; strategy and management; financial management; monitoring, evaluation and quality; and interpersonal skills.
6. Encourage the creation of a network of Erasmus+ (and Youth in Action) alumni.
7. Create and maintain a coaching scheme allowing younger and less experienced organisations working on inclusion to apply for Erasmus+ grants with the help of more

experienced partners.

8. Encourage experienced youth organisations to put their experience at the disposal of younger organisations, thus helping them develop more rapidly.
9. Encourage cross-sectoral cooperation which would allow organisations to develop and step up their campaigning for the rights of people with fewer opportunities.
10. Strengthen the social status of youth inclusion activities, e.g. by promoting its benefits.

The full version of the study is available on SALTO youth:

<https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/inclusion/inclusiontraining/inclusionineeca/>

This study was commissioned and supervised by the Austrian, Finnish and Polish National Agencies of Erasmus+ Youth in Action, SALTO EECA and SALTO Inclusion in the framework of a long-term cooperation within Erasmus+ Youth in Action and published in April 2017.

The study was financed by the European Commission.



*Jugend in Aktion*  
Österreichische Agentur



SALTO-YOUTH  
EASTERN EUROPE AND CAUCASUS  
RESOURCE CENTRE



Erasmus+

SALTO-YOUTH  
INCLUSION  
RESOURCE CENTRE



Erasmus+