



NATIONAL AGENCY STAFF TRAINING about COOPERATION WITH NEIGHBOURING PARTNER COUNTRIES (NPC)

30-31 MAY 2017, BIJ, Brussels



Background and Introduction

Neighbouring partner countries play an important role in the implementation of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter. Thousands of young people from Programme and partner countries benefit from joint projects, hundreds of organisations involved in such cooperation have the opportunity to build their capacities, and the exchange of youth work and youth policy experiences allows building quality and understanding among all 55 countries concerned, across Europe and beyond.

START OF THE COOPERATION

The level of this intensive cooperation and exchange was built during the years of the previous YOUTH and Youth in Action programmes. Starting in the year 2000, cooperation with neighbouring partner countries received a strong impetus with decentralisation in 2003, when National Agencies took over the granting of projects involving organisations from neighbouring partner countries. At that time, all three regional [SALTO Resource Centres](#) (EuroMed, South East Europe and Eastern Europe and Caucasus) had already been created to support the work of National Agencies in Programme countries and project promoters in the different partner regions.

Additional momentum in the cooperation came with establishing Action 3 within the Youth in Action Programme. Not only did the creation of a specific Action for cooperation with partner countries allow allocating appropriate resources but it also brought partnerships with the youth sectors of the EU's neighbours up to a higher political level. The impact of the cooperation was further increased with the opening of specific cooperation frameworks (Western Balkans Youth Window, Eastern Partnership Window) and complemented by the EuroMed Youth programme, which offered not only larger budgetary envelopes but also the possibility to promoters from the neighbouring regions to coordinate projects, enabling them to participate on a more equal footing. As the Youth in Action evaluation outcomes have shown¹, budgets and attention allocated to cooperation with partner countries were successfully utilised allowing tens of thousands of young people to meaningfully benefit from such exchange and stimulating youth work and youth policy developments at national level in the partner regions.

Between 2002 and 2013, National Agency officers responsible for cooperation with partner countries had the chance to meet regularly, learn from each other and exchange information as well as good practices. This allowed National Agencies to play their role better, and to further develop their knowledge and a professional approach to projects granted with partners from EU neighbouring partner countries. In addition, with the first Youth in Action kick-off seminar organised with the support of the European Commission in 2007, National Agency officers together with all three regional SALTOs created a platform for exchange, and several training and information activities were organised over the years by regional SALTOs in cooperation with National Agencies, including Action 3 officers meetings and "[Let's" educational events](#) (educational activities involving all three neighbouring partner regions).

¹ 1. Commission report to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. [Interim evaluation of the Youth in Action programme](#);

2. Report of the [2011 monitoring survey on the Youth in Action programme](#);

3. SALTO studies on impact of the cooperation within the Youth in Action programme with:

- South East Europe: www.salto-youth.net/YiAimpactSEE
- Eastern Europe and Caucasus: www.salto-youth.net/YiAimpactEECA
- Euromed: www.salto-youth.net/YiAimpactEUROMED

COOPERATION AND CHALLENGES UNDER ERASMUS+

Cooperation with the Programme's neighbouring partner countries continues to occupy an important place in the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme: Up to 25% of the funds available for KA 1 can be used for projects involving partner countries; some possibilities for cooperation are open under KA 3 and, to a more limited extent, KA 2 (strategic partnerships). Based on the reception of many good quality project applications with NPC, several National Agencies have used even more than 25% of their budget to financially support projects with NPC. In 2016, a balanced approach between Programme and Partner countries has been reintroduced as an award criterium for KA1 projects, which could lead to a stronger impact of implemented projects and the involvement of more participants from Neighbouring Partner regions overall in projects funded. In addition, a new Western Balkan Youth Window was opened in 2015 (for projects applied for under Capacity Building, KA 2), and new Windows for Eastern Europe and Caucasus and for Tunisia were opened in 2017.

Yet, cooperation with the Neighbouring Partner Regions in the youth field does not have any explicit and recognised place in the Programme: There is neither a specific Action for cooperation, nor recognizable complementarity between different possibilities for cooperation with NPC offered within the Programme at centralized and decentralized levels, nor indicators to reach for National Agencies, nor political or thematic objectives or priorities, nor a European strategy for cooperation with the EU's Neighbouring Partner regions for the youth field according to the existing political frameworks (European Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policies). This "vacuum" makes it difficult to promote and support cooperation with these partner regions in a meaningful, effective and visible way.

In addition, the current economic and political crisis in the European Union has moved political attention to addressing the challenges existing in the member countries, consequently pushing cooperation with the Neighbouring partner regions further to the margins.

The regional SALTO Resource Centres have started to address the existing challenges under Erasmus+ by efforts to heighten awareness among National Agencies and find out more about their perspectives regarding this strand of the Programme and by intensifying interregional cooperation through jointly organised key support activities involving all Neighbouring Partner Countries. More information: <https://www.salto-youth.net/about/regionalcooperation/>

On this background, the NA staff training was planned in order to stimulate discussion among National Agencies about the place of the cooperation with Neighbouring Partner Countries (NPC) in the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme and to share needs and interests of National Agencies related to this aspect of the Programme.

The **specific objectives of the staff training** were:

- to review developments of Erasmus+ Youth in Action in NPC and share experiences about current challenges and opportunities;
- to provide an update about administrative and policy developments with regard to the cooperation with NPC;
- to provide up-to-date information about the needs, challenges and potentials with regard to the situation of young people and programmes for youth in all partner regions and
- to reflect on interests, needs and ways to enhance the cooperation with NPC in a more strategic way, both at national and European levels.

Programme overview

<p>PROGRAMME</p> <p>30th May TUESDAY</p> <p>"DISCOVERING"</p>	<p><i>start: 09:30 (BIJ, rue du Commerce, 18)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opening of the meeting + presentation of the programme • Background, NPC strategy & survey, Milestones • Overview of cooperation with NPC (CwNPC) so far • CwNPC in E+: Experiences, Challenges and Opportunities • What is the most important in CwNPC? <p>lunch 13:00-14:30</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update on the E+ programme and policy developments in regards to CwNPC • An initiative for a more strategic approach to CwNPC in Erasmus+ ? <p><i>Possible common dinner out</i></p>
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<p>PROGRAMME</p> <p>31st May WEDNESDAY</p> <p>"THINKING FORWARD"</p>	<p><i>start: 09:30 (BIJ, rue du Commerce, 18)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Snapshots from the neighbouring regions: current needs, challenges and potential for young people and the youth field • Identifying possible responses within the E+ programme • Follow-up space (incl. recommendations to COM, SALTOs, NAs; TCA activities; strategic steps; technical issues, etc.) <p>lunch 13:00-14:30</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning concretes of follow-up ideas • Summary, evaluation and closing <p><i>end: ca. 16:00</i></p>
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Part 1: “DISCOVERING”

Objectives:

Sharing expectations

- Reviewing developments of Erasmus+ Youth in Action in NPC and share experiences about current challenges and opportunities
- Providing an update about administrative and policy developments with regard to the cooperation with NPC
- Offering up-to-date information about the needs, challenges and potentials with regard to the situation of young people and programmes for youth in all partner regions

Presentation 1: Windows for Cooperation with Neighbouring Partner Countries, by Marie-Luce Vissol, EACEA

All Windows are placed under KA2, Capacity Building and managed by the EACEA.

Most of the results available at this stage are about the Western Balkans, as the first calls for projects within the Windows for Tunisia and EECA are still under evaluation.

Western Balkans Youth Window:

2017 - 3.000.000 Euros available, 200 applications received.

Tendencies:

- Selection of 122 projects in 2017 call, success rate is 18%, average grant requested: 48.000 Euro. Over 1000 organisations have so far been participating in the Window
- The Window has been open since 2015. Usually small rate of ineligible projects. Rate exceptionally high in 2017 because of a change of criteria (stronger focus on capacity building, less on mobility activities).
- Projects focus on the capacity building of the NGOs
- Among mobility activities, most organisations apply for youth worker mobility; only few deal with EVS. Mobility of youth for testing new methods
Focus on EVS: how to improve EVS and methods and to enlarge the network
- Most active country: Serbia, least active: Kosovo. BiH and Montenegro in between, applications from Albania are increasing
- Topics: majority of the projects focus on capacity building of NGOs, human rights, social inclusion and gender equality, migration and refugees, entrepreneurship (unemployment, gaining skills for the labour market).

The Tunisia Window is still under evaluation. 15 applications were received at the first deadline in March 2017. Average amount of grant is 80.000 Euro. The selection will be finalised by 15/20 June 2017. Among the partners, the most represented country is Italy.

The Eastern Partnership Youth Window was relaunched after 3 years of break in the beginning of 2017. Similar to other "windows" it is part of KA 2 Capacity Building in the Field of Youth. The EaP Youth Window is comprised of 2 elements: Civil Society Fellowship for Youth as well as Partnership for Entrepreneurship. In 2017, the total budget for projects is 3,45 Mill. Euros, divided into 60% for Fellowships and 40% for Partnerships. 119 projects were submitted

with an average budget of around 80 000 Euro. Most of applications came from Georgia and Ukraine and the less from Moldova and Belarus.

The Commission is starting to identify good projects to use as models for the future call and to be clearer about the model of capacity building projects that they would like to receive. They had the feeling that the NGOs still they think about projects in the "model" of Youth in Action. They need to have a wider approach and they should be more strategic, thinking "bigger".

Presentation 2: KA1 - General Overview, by Stephanie Frangou

Projects with NPC implemented between 2014 and 2016:

- 5600 projects, 6194 activities
- 130.000 participants: 33% of them come from Partner Countries
- 62% of participants are learners and 38% are staff (i.e. more staff compared to projects with Programme countries).
- EVS: 26 %; Youth Exchanges: 23% ; Youth Worker Mobility: 38%

Topics addressed in projects:

- Youth participation, youth work: 46%
- Creativity and culture: 30%
- EU citizenship: 28%
- Intercultural learning: 21%
- Inclusion: 18%

Indicators:

- General satisfaction: 94,5 %
- Better skills: 94,2%
- Formal recognition: 77%

On average, 27% of the budget is used by National Agencies for cooperation with NPC. There are 5 National Agencies who asked, and received authorisation from the Commission, to exceed the 25% limitation of the budget dedicated to the cooperation with NPC (Germany, Ireland, Austria, Czech Republic, and Belgium-FR). Some further NAs also exceeded the limit without asking for green light by COM.

Overview of cooperation with NPC of the participating National Agencies

(Information provided by participants)

Malta: There is a quite large number of NGOs. Many are small and don't have the capacity to manage complex projects. They had quite a lot of cooperation with the South Med countries but after the Arab Spring the cooperation turned more to the EECA region (they felt more secure to work in this area). There are new organisations; many are looking for new and wider networks of partners.

Austria: The traditional focus of the Agency is on EECA, but currently there is not so much interest of NGOs in developing projects with this region. Internally, the NA has decided that the cooperation with the regions is less of a priority. The Austrian NA together with the Finnish NA,

SALTO EECA and Inclusion produced a study about Inclusion in the EECA Region, which is available here: <http://www.salto-youth.net/inclusioninEECA>

France: Long tradition of cooperation with Salto EECA, Salto EuroMed and SALTO SEE. Policy of the NA is to looking and supporting new projects with these areas. One of the big challenges of the applicants is the visa process and costs related to it.

Romania: For Romania is very difficult to spend all the 25% of the budget dedicated to the NPC and they usually don't use the EVS budget available. The focus region is EECA. Generally, they find there is lack of quality in EVS projects.

Finland: The NA is using the full 25% of the budget, but there is a problem when only 1 partner is from a NPC and they have to allocate this project under the 25%. Most projects are youth worker mobility. Cooperation involves a big variety of countries, but the biggest partner region is EECA. Problems are copy-pasting and submission of the same applications. The Agency would like to have more projects with South Med countries despite the political situation.

Germany: They can fund more projects than under Youth in Action, over 25% of the budget, with permission from COM. There are many projects, especially with EECA and SEE. Projects are of good quality, both ways, based on existing contacts (rather than around themes). Visa issues prolong waiting period for projects.

Lithuania: The partner countries are most interested in EVS and EECA (Georgia, Ukraine, and Armenia) as main partner region. Limitation to 25% is a challenge. Visa procedures are another challenge.

Poland: They could exceed the 25% but they try to follow the rules! EVS is the most awarded activity. As internal policy they decided to support projects with balanced participation (NPC and Programme countries) and would be glad to have this as formal criteria. The quality of applications/projects is very good and the challenge is the lack of money.

Most projects are with EECA, they started to receive more projects with Serbia and Kosovo; they would like to have more cooperation with South Med countries.

Slovenia: They use the 25% of the allocated budget. The most frequent partners are Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, FYR of Macedonia, Spain and Italy. Participants also come from Jordan and Georgia.

Discussion and identification of challenges faced by National Agencies in the cooperation with NPC:

- Cooperation is often based on personal contacts.
- It is difficult to involve new organisations.
- Interest in regions follows interest in the political situation.
- EVS is more followed; Youth Exchanges are less visible and followed by NAs. (?)
- Visa procedures!
- Budget limit of 25%: quality of projects is good – high threshold of get a project granted.
- (Lack of) recognition of cooperation with NPC within the NA.

- Is balanced participation of Partner and Programme countries needed to achieve an impact (in the regions)? Should it be a rule again, or can/should impact be measured differently?
- What are the future perspectives of the cooperation with NPC in EVS, especially in view of ESC?
- The status of volunteering in many countries (Partner countries but also some others) is not clear or not regulated.

The following presentations can be downloaded from the SALTO-YOUTH website:
http://www.salto-youth.net/npc_meetings

1. Capacity Building in the Field of Youth (Marie-Luce Vissol, EACEA) – *(summary above)*
2. Erasmus+ International Dimension: 2014 – 2016 Activities with Partner Countries (decentralised level) (Stefanie Frangou, DG EAC) – *(summary above)*
3. Cooperation with Neighbouring Partner Countries, policy framework (Artur Payer, DG EAC)
4. Snapshots of youth work in the Partner regions:
 - Eastern Partnership countries and Russia (Tomasz Szopa, SALTO EECA)
 - Western Balkans (Sonja Mitter Škulj, SALTO SEE)
 - SouthMed (Federica Demicheli, SALTO Euromed)



Part 2: “THINKING FORWARD”

Objective: To reflect on interests, needs and ways to enhance the cooperation with NPC in a more strategic way, both at national and European levels.

Conclusions of the meeting - Questions and proposals for the future

1. Improve synergies and visibility!

It would be important to avoid fragmentation among different Programme strands and to focus on continuity. Therefore, synergies should be increased between the centralised and decentralised levels of the Programme supporting the cooperation with Partner countries as well as between policy and Programme.

- To promote the Programme in an effective way, we should further make efforts to increase visibility and exchange of good practices – let the projects speak! Promoting good projects could be a strategic approach to increase visibility. A good tool for this is the VALOR database (very clear instructions, project results are uploaded by organisations).
- Other tools to create more visibility include: NA staff meetings, dashboard (to extract statistics), Yammer group etc.
- Present cooperation with the regions as a success story!
- Enhance knowledge about the Windows – capacity building – by creating an infogramm with essential basic information.

2. Increase project impact!

As the budget for cooperation with NPC is limited, it would make sense to support those projects that promise to have the greatest impact. What is most important to have an impact?

Would it help if balanced participation between Programme and Partner countries within one project would be reintroduced as eligibility criteria? This issue was discussed, but there was no agreement among the participating National Agencies. On the one hand, involving a higher number of partners and more than one country from a neighbouring region in one project increases important intra-regional cooperation and strengthens impact. On the other hand, such a condition might limit partnerships between organisations from Partner and Programme countries, if no further partners are available to participate in a project. Also, the thematic focus and other aspects, e.g. target group, might be more important than number or balance of countries involved.

3. Limitation of 25 %: what to do?

We learned that some National Agencies have been asking to go over the 25% limit and this was agreed by the European Commission. This indicates that at least in exceptional cases it is possible to exceed the limitation. For many National Agencies this would not be an option, however, due to the functioning of their management (bureaucracy, requirement to follow rules). In this sense, for a better use of the existing budget, it would be needed to create other criteria, e.g. regarding project content, within the existing frameworks for cooperation.

One possibility discussed was to calculate only costs related to participants from Neighbouring Partner countries within the 25% limitation. Generally, it was questioned why there needs to be a budgetary limitation at all.

These questions were discussed on the background of the upcoming European Solidarity Corps and a new amount for EVS available for non-EU Programme countries and Partner countries in the 2018 budget. It was feared that this budget would be even lower and less flexible than what currently exists in Erasmus+.

Open questions:

- How to monitor if the cooperation with NPC is going well? Would the introduction of indicators (beyond the 25% limit) be helpful, or would they be only limiting and put further pressure on National Agencies?
- Would it be helpful to monitor the amount and kind of TCA activities organised that involve and/or focus on cooperation with NPC? And/or to monitor the number of participants in TCA activities?

4. Create more possibilities for newcomers from Programme and Partner countries to get involved in cooperation with each other!

There was the general feeling that often the same organisations are involved in long-standing cooperation with partners from Partner regions. Such long-standing cooperation is important. However, there is a need to provide more opportunities for new NGOs to jump into the cooperation with the Regions. It would be important to invest more in this new wave of NGOs and energy.

Actions to be taken:

- Announce newly accredited organisations in Partner regions in regional SALTO Newsletters, to create more awareness about them.
- Promote the cooperation with NPC more systematically: Propose for TCA 2018 a meeting/platform that would offer space for providing information to participants about different possibilities for cooperation – especially the Windows and the specific understanding of capacity building applied there –, learning about each other and potential challenges, and building new partnerships between NGOs (follow up at TCA meeting and afterwards). This meeting should be open to NAs and NGOs who will work to better understand and develop an integrated process among the two Programme strands (centralised and decentralised) which should enable us to reach a more concrete impact on youth work in the different regions.

A proposal for this activity to be coordinated by SALTO EuroMed has been placed on the TCA planning board <https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/tca-pb/activity/878/>. National Agencies are invited to join the project!

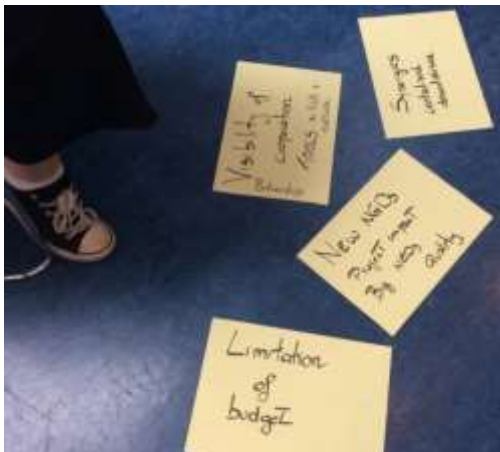
5. Increase communication among National Agencies on the topic of cooperation with Neighbouring Partner Countries!

It is important to make the power of the cooperation with the Regions more visible for National Agencies, as a resource for cooperation about specific topics and development of Erasmus+, and because of its overall political importance for Europe. To improve communication, it would be helpful to have one contact person for the Regions inside every National Agency.

The participants agreed that it would be important to create more visibility of this strand of the Programme among National Agencies. The international cooperation brings an important additional dimension to the Programme, offers relevant intercultural and learning experiences for participants from Programme and Partner countries, and should therefore be further discussed and supported.

On this background, there was the question of how to attract more National Agencies to participate in potential future NA staff trainings. It was suggested to have the next staff training about cooperation with the Partner regions in the beginning of 2019.

To create a more strategic cooperation with NPC, initiative and cooperation at the level of heads of NA would be needed.



Annex 1: Participants' Expectations

Neighbouring Partner Countries STRATEGY

NA staff meeting
Brussels, 30-31 May 2017

EXPECTATIONS

Do you have any open question that you would like to bring to this meeting and discuss?

Plans for the for 2018 and more and how we can together set up a strategy

How to monitor projects which take place in partner countries. Do we reach those organisations and young people that need to be reached or are we all financing the same organisations? How to get more insight in the relevance?

How do other NAs handle the big number of applications? Did they raise the threshold?

It would be good to tackle the topic of refugees and its impact on projects with partner countries.

Which are your expected outcomes from this staff meeting?

To have better view to the situation with Balkan region, to be able to support beneficiaries better and have more information how to check the reliability of partner countries organization while assessing the projects.

To build capacities and to understand the challenges and main priorities of the Eastern Partnership.

Networking and synergy among the regions.

Learn more about the future development of the programme with the neighbouring countries and participate in the setting up of TCA activities.

Relevant criteria how to assess the different projects; Added value to work with partner countries; What are important topics which needs priority when working with partner countries.

Get an insight into the number of projects and kind of projects with partner countries from other NAs.

Get update about administrative and policy developments with regards to cooperation with neighbouring partner countries and time for sharing with the colleagues present.

Exchange.

Do you have any specific content/topic that you would like to discuss during this meeting?

It would be useful to talk about the difficulties (qualitative and administrative) linked to the cooperation with the Partner Countries.

What are the news, and what action DG EAC will take for the future.

New Eastern Partnership Youth Window, perspective of involvement into the European Solidarity Corps.

Good practices in work with partner countries. Is cooperation with organisations from partner countries still important for your applicants?

Topic: What is the added value of working with partner countries: due to the high demand of projects with partner countries we are looking for relevant criteria how to assess the different projects. What are important topics which needs priority when working with partner countries. To discuss this with colleagues from both programme countries and partner countries is very relevant.

Discussing selection criteria for project applications with partner countries, because they get a lot and often wonder how to select. Should there be "political" criteria? There is not much of an expectation that we would agree on European level, but rather exchange how other NAs deal with this, and get inspired by different practices.

Which specific criteria apply for the assessment of projects with partner countries. - what is the impact of the refugees crisis on the E+ projects in terms of number of projects with the refugees sending countries and topics addressed with the projects.

SALTO-YOUTH
RESOURCE CENTRES

Erasmus+

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