

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, SALTO SEE, 2019



ANNEX 3: ONLINE FOCUS GROUPS REPORT

Date: The focus groups were implemented in the period from 5th to 15th May 2019

Participants: 36 in total (5 from Albania, 8 from Bosnia and Herzegovina, 6 from Kosovo*, 6 from Montenegro and 11 from Serbia), in 7 focus groups, each with participants from a single country.

Facilitators: Marija Popović and Petre Mrkev

The focus groups were held online. The participants were invited directly by SALTO SEE with the aim of involving organisations with a diversity of experiences with Erasmus+: Youth in Action. 36 out of 78 contacted organisations participated in the focus groups.

The focus groups started with an introduction of the facilitator and the participants. The facilitator explained the purpose and the process of the conducting the study, as well as the place of the focus groups within it. The facilitator presented briefly the overall topics of the focus groups and how the results would be used.

The participants of the focus groups were of different backgrounds, so there were slight differences between the questions asked (e.g. in some focus groups there was bigger emphasis in the introductory questions on personal experience with the Programmes (for less experienced and newbies in the organisations), while in others the focus was put more on the organisational motivation and experience of participation in the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme and in the European Solidarity Corps.

The 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 itself.

Some of the participants coming from very active organisations (Let's..., Serbia; NGO Svetlost, Serbia; Institute KULT, Bosnia and Herzegovina) were unable to attend the focus groups, but they still expressed a wish to contribute, therefore they answered the focus groups questions via e-mail. The representative of the South East European Youth Network (SEEYN) provided additional written (more structured and thought-through) answers via e-mail. All these answers are integrated in the focus groups results.

Beside all the efforts to have separate groups of representatives coming from experienced or non-experienced organisations from Albania, Montenegro and Kosovo*, at the end it was impossible to organise more groups from each country. Therefore, for those countries the facilitator worked with a mixture of experienced and less-experienced organisations, still including those who have been granted once or more from the EACEA, those who have applied once or more but have never been successful and those who have been partners to one or more projects applied at decentralised level. All Focus Groups involved currently accredited or previously accredited organisations for EVS/ESC, as well as organisations who have never been accredited, but plan to apply for the QL in the future.

There were few participants in the FGs who were last-moment replacement suggested by the originally invited representative of selected NGO. Some of them did not have relevant knowledge, while some of them were 'directly supported' during the FG by another official of their NGO, who probably had issues with the language, but was still eager to provide additional information and support the whole process.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS OF THE ANSWERS

Q1: For how long has your organisation been involved in the Erasmus+: Youth in Action Programme? And what is your personal experience with the programme?

Only one group was answering this question. After that the facilitators concluded that it takes lot of time and concentration of participants, which influenced the time and energy to focus on the questions directly related to the study. Therefore, the transition questions were used as introductory questions in most of the groups. This group was experienced and their experience with the programme started mostly through volunteering, either on projects or as EVSers.

Transition questions:

Q2: What motivates your organisation to take part in the E+:YiA and ESC programmes and what are the main expectations of your organisation from being involved in these programmes?

The organisations have pointed out following main reasons for enrolling in E+ and ESC projects:

Aspects stressed by several organisations or all the group:

- ✓ Highly appreciated - organisational development (including boosting financial potential, simplicity of the budget is helpful);
- ✓ Mobility opportunities for young people and capacity building, improving language skills;
- ✓ Participation in different mobilities is used as a reward for active members of organisations;
- ✓ E+ gives organisations opportunity to support young people with fewer opportunities;
- ✓ The programme is open for introducing and exploring new tools in youth work; The programme itself is very supportive and it allows to do things and to try things that no other programme does, but this is the point of education;
- ✓ Opportunities for boosting capacities of youth workers;
- ✓ The international scope of the E+ Programme, it is nicely structured that fits in youth organisations' activities;
- ✓ The Programme is complementary to the work done by organisations;
- ✓ Several organisations pointed out that the Programme is actually good for carrier development in youth work, since many individuals start as participants, then they volunteer and they finish as professionals in youth work.

Individual conclusions:

- ✓ Sustainability of international cooperation;
- ✓ Good resource for self-development of young people, as well as to get support for their own ideas;
- ✓ Creation of new partnerships;
- ✓ The selection of projects is unbiased;
- ✓ Gives a chance to work on specific topic, such as LGBTI;
- ✓ It is used for pushing the local decision makers to open a youth fund through seeing how inclusion works in E+ projects;

- ✓ Applicants from Bosnia stress that the Programme is one of the rare open windows for us to apply to do mobilities;
- ✓ Community development (bringing foreigners and their influence to the local community) as well as positive impact of foreign volunteers on organisations through long-term volunteering opportunities;
- ✓ The interest of youth from European countries to be part of activities in SEE countries and to learn about community and culture in SEE countries;
- ✓ It gives more confidence when applying to other EU programs;
- ✓ Increased number of active members in the society or involved beneficiaries in the local activities of NGOs;
- ✓ Young people do not know what to do, before they start with the university, they go abroad and see, they expand their opportunities, at least they come with clear idea what they want to do, they would have one positive thing in their CV.

And the main expectations of the organisations:

- ✓ To enable easier flow of and access to information (in Kosovo*), because all the organisations that we meet, they don't even know, they are not informed what is E+, they think Erasmus is only for students and universities;
- ✓ To be more decentralised, so to have any of the current institutions (in Kosovo*) more involved, then for the young people would be easier first to understand E+ and its benefits and then to use those benefits in their work, so making it easier for inexperienced organisations;
- ✓ To have more opportunities and bigger involvement for the young people and youth NGOs coming from the region, bigger budget for ESC and especially bigger budget for administrative costs.

Q3: How would you describe the main positive aspects of the Programme implementation in the Western Balkan region and what challenges and obstacles do you see? Would you give an example?

OPPORTUNITIES:

Aspects stressed by several organisations or all the group:

- ✓ Sustainability (human resources, international cooperation, financial etc.);
- ✓ Boosting capacities of organisations and individual competences;
- ✓ Having opportunity to create new methods, to test them, to test new approaches – both Serbian and B&H groups have stressed this as a positive;
- ✓ Good opportunity for partner finding;

Individual conclusions:

- ✓ Intercultural learning;
- ✓ Boosting capacities of young people, opportunity for travel, learning about wide range of topics;
- ✓ Positive influence on change of attitudes and behaviours of young people with regards stereotypes and prejudices;
- ✓ Supportive environment;
- ✓ Motivating volunteers;
- ✓ Serbian participants have pointed out that this is the most influential programme on our governments in the field of youth work and youth policy;
- ✓ Main positive aspect is introducing of youth work and youth mobility benefits to wider society and decision makers in BIH;
- ✓ Transparency of the selection results;
- ✓ Opportunity for acquiring and retaining local volunteers;
- ✓ Euro-peers was a great idea; It should be revitalised;
- ✓ It gives opportunity to create meaningful space for networking and cooperation between WB organisations and EU organisations;

- ✓ It gives you enough resources for big ideas and processes.
- ✓ The opportunity to promote the diversity of the country, as many people come and go and they create more realistic image of the country and places;
- ✓ It offers a peaceful way of cooperation between countries that still do not have a healthy communication and cooperation;
- ✓ The variety of activities and the creativity in methodology of implementation such as non-formal approaches in training courses, the involvement of different cultures in one particular activity/project.
- ✓ Acquiring experience to implement qualitative projects with the participation of more partners.
- ✓ Being able to write E+ project is a hard work, it requires skills in planning and writing, so somehow as an organisation you get better and you know better what you want. E+ application are lengthy and it should help writing other application, even that on the other side, the E+ applications are specific and not necessary similar with the other program's applications;
- ✓ Less bureaucracy compared to other EU Programs and openness for questions and support.

CHALLENGES:

In majority of the groups this was the longest discussion, and the participants have had a need to express their concerns and negative experience mostly with Programme implementation. Some of the aspects that they pointed out are related directly to the Programme, while some of them are internal things that create challenges in project implementation.

Programme-related

- ✓ Accreditation process for EVS/ESC is too long and complicated. It is demotivating for beneficiaries. This was pointed out across several focus groups both in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- ✓ There is only one deadline per year in EACEA. This causes that organisations apply for bigger grants, while for majority of organisations would be more proportional to their size and scope of work to apply several consecutive projects - pointed out by 2-3 organisations;
- ✓ Huge time-frame between the application and implementation of the activity limits the participation of young people (they lose motivation, they start doing something else, they leave) – this is particularly for the centralized level, at the national level (in Serbia) this time is shorter;
- ✓ Strong point by many of participants was that smaller and less experienced organisations are challenged by the lack of capacity and administrative procedures of the projects – they were complaining that the Programme is not youth friendly, that the applications are too complicated for young people and young organisations. The Programme is fitted more and more to huge organisations and people who know how to manage big projects, big amounts of money, but they are clueless about how to deal with young people and their needs.
- ✓ The impression is that the EACEA is stuck with administration and documentation and that they don't care about programme or quality of implementation;
- ✓ When there was "sending money" of 480€ many more organisations were eager to participate in youth exchanges and to organise groups of young people;
- ✓ It is actually very difficult to work and involve young people with disabilities on practical level, and especially in the Balkans (logistically as well);
- ✓ List of participants as an official document of the Commission is not gender sensitive;
- ✓ There is an issue of rebranding of EVS, everybody is calling it *korps* (:/*korps-dead people*), as well as since majority of young people from the Balkans wants to leave the country, having a youth programme with ESC (like Escape) as acronym sends wrong message;
- ✓ There is lack of common understanding of what is quality in projects;
- ✓ Lack of financial (at least minimal) financial support for leaders of youth exchanges is causing lack of quality in the exchanges (more experienced people lose motivation, they need to work and cannot afford to volunteer constantly); Lack of finances also pushes organisations to switch from organising youth exchanges to youth worker mobilities;
- ✓ the financial aspect of E+, as it requires a lot of time, lot of work, but it mainly supports the costs of activities, while doesn't cover the overhead or it covers them in very limited way;

- ✓ There is a big problem with inadequate profile participants present at activities (e.g. it is very common that instead of youth workers there are youngsters or volunteers at youth workers mobilities);
- ✓ Lack of responsiveness of EACEA officers towards the beneficiaries, slow communication;
- ✓ Lack of awareness of E+ and ESC in Bosnia and Herzegovina (there is a need for stronger support to the Contact Point);
- ✓ When volunteers complain during on-arrival or mid-term trainings, it appears that the official attitude of SALTO is that the volunteers are always right. This causes the loss of organisations that don't want to deal with this anymore.
- ✓ The Programme Guide is not Users' friendly. People get intimidated, they have other donors who have more simplified procedures, so they go to those donors;
- ✓ E+ online platforms often have bugs (crashing);
- ✓ The Programme is not Network friendly (for network organisations);
- ✓ There is an issue of "one lap-top projects" where people just look to take money from the project – there should be more monitoring of projects;
- ✓ B&H specifics: complex B&H system that makes obstacles for implementation of project. There is no real effort to establish the NA; Kosovo*-B&H visa issues; Non efficient implementation of Law on volunteering in B&H, thus lack of systems for international volunteering projects. Non recognition of youth work in B&H, lack of recognition of Youtpass and other tools young people use in E+YiA programme.
- ✓ It is hard to get funds, evaluation criteria are too high;
- ✓ the limited opportunity to be an applying organisation, which sometimes contributes to lack of interest to the organisations and to the length of processes to find an applying organisation when you have a project idea;
- ✓ When project ideas are applied directly to NAs they tend to exclude the WB countries, thus the partners on these projects are in most of the cases only from programme countries;

Internal/organisational

- ✓ Partnership is stressed as challenging by 3 out of 4 groups, and more specifically;
 - finding partners, and especially to finding reliable partners;
 - equal partnership and sharing responsibility over the programme, competences of the team members and finances;
 - lack of financial responsibility of partners (collecting the travel receipts and reporting back about the money);
 - lack of ownership over the project of all the partners at a project;
 - lack of competence of partners (they claim that they are experts in one topic, while it turns out that actually they are not).
- ✓ Lack of human capacity, and especially to write projects;
- ✓ Frequent fluctuations of staff in partner organisations cause a lot of problems, given that there is no transfer between staff;
- ✓ There is still a big group of donors investing (in Kosovo*), which makes a challenge for E+ not to be so interesting/attractive;
- ✓ The communication between the organisations (in Kosovo*) that deal with E+ and with volunteering is insufficient, not enough willingness or readiness to support each other, to know what is going on, to collaborate;
- ✓ There were many projects not implemented due to visas being rejected. That brings up another challenge - partners from the EU countries rather take partners from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia or Montenegro, as they do not need visa. (Kosovo*).

Additional aspects of working reality in Montenegro:

- ✓ Administrative issues, like the tax exceptions which are a big problem. The project is registered at the Ministry of foreign affairs, for that Ministry of education is in charge. But, the problem is that sometimes administration and staff in the Ministries (in charge of e.g. tax exemptions) are not aware of the Programme.

- ✓ More support would be needed during the implementation phase, but for us it is actually related to the national authorities in Montenegro (they are not aware of E+, although they are in charge for it). The organisation gave an example that they had some technical issues last year about tax exception request. It is still not known who is in charge for it for E+. The organisation has had communication with four different ministries, Erasmus office, with the delegation of EU, and they received different answers. The mentioned bodies (Ministries, E+ office) have had different meetings, some communication, but without results, and that can be discouraging.
- ✓ We had a problem with authorities in Montenegro (one can come, but not as volunteer). There are administrative obstacles to register volunteers.

Additional aspects of working reality in Kosovo*:

- ✓ In the most meetings in Kosovo* there are pretty much the same organisations and for me it is normal that they are supported, as it is obviously clear who wants to work with E+. So to push them and to identify appropriate support measures.
- ✓ When it comes to E+, regardless how much SALTO and Brussels try to push the Programme in Kosovo*, national institutions to support the organisations are needed. It is important to motivate the institutions to get involved. There should be a mechanism to push the institutions, as many of their representatives do not care about it.
- ✓ The specific situation of Kosovo* complicates the implementation of the Programme, and it is even more complicated in the local context. There is a feeling that the most of organisations are still not aware of what support and what information are out there and what they can do.

Key questions (based on the outcomes of the survey):

Q4: Opportunity for exchanging volunteers has been perceived as the greatest benefit of Erasmus+:YiA projects by only 9% of the organisations surveyed. How do you comment this? What is your experience in implementing volunteering activities in E+:YiA context?

- ✓ Organisations say that the investment is much bigger than the gain – strongly stressed out both in Serbia and B&H;
- ✓ There is a phenomenon of lowering of capacities of youth organisations in the Balkans (human and financial), and then if they are responsible enough they are not going to host long-term volunteers;
- ✓ Uncertainty is the biggest reason (one does not know if in 3 months an organisation will have people and money, as well as the programmes that they used to have to be able to support volunteers in proper way);
- ✓ Hosting a volunteer is a full commitment, and it is too demanding. Some organisations got tired after 10-15 years of hosting/sending, thus there is higher workload for them, and they are not able to commit any more;
- ✓ Selection procedure is big issue, because it doesn't give you realistic picture;
- ✓ There are too high expectations from hosting organisations from volunteers, which seems to benefit only with professionals as volunteers;
- ✓ There is too high demands for getting the accreditation;
- ✓ There is a lack of long-term/permanent activities to be offered for hosted volunteers;
- ✓ It is very hard to find accommodation for volunteers with disabilities;
- ✓ In some cantons in B&H it is not possible to use CIGNA insurance;
- ✓ Hosting became difficult on financial side - Financially, the process takes really long, sometimes for the first transfer of funds and always for the last transfer, which can take almost a year after the end of the project implementation;
- ✓ It would be better if there is more support for the organisation and the person who supports it.
- ✓ Dependence from the coordinating partner, some European partners do not respect the agreement just because they are leaders of the project;

- ✓ The volunteers are not really used properly, for the organisation in general they are a good tool, they involved them in the activities, but not fully;
- ✓ Having just one EVS or ESC volunteer at the time, it takes more efforts;
- ✓ Not many organisations work with EVS and now with ESC;
- ✓ Low percentage is mainly due to low capacity of the organisations to incorporate volunteers
- ✓ Young people, if they are interested in this kind of projects, because their goal is to finish college, to finish study, then to get employed;

The facilitator focused the conversation back to impact of the EVS instead of challenges again.

- ✓ The strongest impression (stressed by several groups) was that maybe these 9% is because of the formulation of the question, because not a lot of organisations see EVS as the “greatest benefit” because they had many more people involved in other parts of programmes (in numbers) since EVS is limited to smaller number of people;
- ✓ Many organisations also stated that the impact is big, especially for sending organisations (volunteers coming back to work to their sending organisations and bringing new experience, ideas and competences).
- ✓ There is big organisational learning for hosting organisation in EVS/ESC;
- ✓ Because the impact and opportunities are really huge, and the way how a person and the organisation can grow through EVS is really huge. The smaller the community, the bigger the impact (not only on volunteer, but even more on the community);
- ✓ EVS is perceived as a life-changer;
- ✓ Going as EVS is not a replacement of paid staff. And there are opposite opinions by partners, and especially from the volunteers that they have had much obligations/task and very few rights to agree or disagree on this. This is one of the misunderstandings of the Programme or even volunteering;
- ✓ One organisation had opposite opinion, they agreed that EVS/ESC is not the greatest benefit, because of the other its parts. There are grants for other things (like job shadowing), Erasmus+ is a big field that many people don't know. Exchanging staff and youth workers who are not young people themselves that would be the greatest benefit;
- ✓ There is a phenomenon of “tourist volunteers”, without clear idea why they have come; they become obligation, but not the help to organisation. For organisations it started to be a big job, and less benefit;
- ✓ Volunteers are confused at the end of the programme how to use Youthpass.
- ✓ EVS and ESC is one of the greatest programs (joint statement from those who have been EVS volunteers themselves - 7 out of 17 interviewed).

Q5: There is a higher percentage of beneficiaries that prefer applying for a grant at centralized level than at decentralized level. And the ones applying at one and/or the other level perceive that an organisation has fewer chances to acquire a grant at decentralised level through applications with Partner Countries from the Western Balkans in NAs (55.7% chances) than at centralised level to the Executive Agency (59.5% chances). What is your opinion on this? And what is your experience? Could you please elaborate?

In this question there was no particular difference between the countries, but there was clear difference between more and less experienced organisations. Less experienced organisations felt that they lack capacities to apply directly, also believing that they have lower chances to get a grant, while bigger and more experienced organisations either apply only to centralised level or combine the two. It was also clear that EVS is preferably applied through decentralised actions.

Serbian group had specific situation by having a NA, with low budget and no possibility to cooperate with neighbouring partner countries (which was before natural to them). They felt that they have less money on disposal in current point of time.

In the focus groups implemented with organisations from Kosovo*, Albania and Montenegro the comments from participants in the FGs follow the findings from the survey. Those who have been successful at

centralised level prefer that way, while the rest are trying to participate through partnerships with the EU partners.

There were split opinions about pros and cons of having a NA in those groups. Some participants stated that it is better to have a NA because the possibility of direct contact (more close, in own language), it takes less time, it is easier to monitor. By shading their motivation to have own NA, they also shared a concern that it should be ensured that this NA should function in transparent way. The ones that were pro centralised level state that the chances are greater to get the funds at centralised level, stating also that people are not aware that when you have a NA the host country needs to finance those projects partially too.

It was highlighted that at decentralised level there is big discrepancy in procedures, availability and (non)preference of working with our region in some NAs. On several occasions it was stressed that the centralised level is additionally limited by having only one deadline, and that this is not sustainable.

Organisations also stated that the choice of where they apply depends on the type and complexity of the actions (e.g. EVS and YE are applied more at decentralised level, while more complex projects, bigger and where they want to have control over are applied through centralised actions).

The smaller and less experienced expressed that:

- ✓ they applied, but didn't get it on centralised level;
- ✓ It is much easier to apply to national Agency, since organisation can apply in their native language;
- ✓ The negative thing in applying to EACEA is that the competition is higher.

More experienced organisations had different points of view:

- ✓ A network representative stated that that was the best decision ever. It has given the project completely different more meaningful dimension, more needs oriented, higher creativity and possibility for strategic, sustainable approach. It gave opportunity for producing deliverables in different forms, for following trends and overall diversifying the whole approach and methodology of youth work and youth organisations. Although, on the other hand, it can be a bit confusing for some organisations and a bit intimidating, as they are not sure what exactly can pass as idea within the capacity building activity (but this can be solved by trainings, and better structured info-sessions for organisations);
- ✓ One stated that the decentralised level is more preferred. On the other hand if an organisation wants to be applicant it could apply only to EACEA (because the possibility to manage funds by itself). On the other hand advantage of the decentralised level is that an organisation can apply in own language and there are 3 calls, not only 1 as at the decentralised level. The biggest disadvantage on the national level is the small fund available. Centralised level is highly competitive, and organisations opt for partners' NAs. On the other hand an organisation needs to be careful if the NA recognises the cooperation with the Western Balkans when Tempus was not available as much as it is now;
- ✓ The other opinion is that grants on centralised level are more easy to get;
- ✓ There was also third option of combining the two financing options. This was confirmed in both countries by several organisations;
- ✓ Some organisations prefer to become part of bigger group/larger projects and being a partner within e.g. Strategic Partnership;
- ✓ One organisation stated that they have had a lot of problems with quotas in NAs for the Partner Countries, and that they were kicked out of partnership on many occasions in the past 3 years. So, they prefer applying directly. They also don't work with regional (wider scope including Turkey, Hungary) NAs.
- ✓ The centralised way does not function perfectly, either on application or implementation phase. It lacks quality on both phases and it takes a lot of time.

Q6: Nearly half of the beneficiaries surveyed (44%) told us that the E+:YiA Programme has become more accessible because of the 'possibility to integrate more activities in the project'. How relevant is this possibility to organise more complex projects and integrate different activities into one project, for your organisation? What types of activities in such projects is your organisation (interested to be) involved in?

In this question, again, there was just clear distinction between more and less experienced, whereas more experienced organisations welcomed the opportunity to integrate more things in one project, and found it very relevant, while less experienced said that applying smaller projects is more proportional to their capacities. They also stated that it is quite challenging and demanding as it would take some time to be well prepared for it, and also to increase the capacity of organisation. They would need maybe not new department dealing just with this, but definitely would need to have at least two people that would be able to implement this kind of projects.

Serbian organisations pointed out that the reality of Serbian NA is that they cannot afford to apply complex project that the NA even discouraged this due to lack of funds at the moment. Otherwise they welcomed the idea.

Pros for integrating more activities in one project:

- ✓ Possibility for strategic planning and having long-term impact. It gives more stability and helps the organisation to plan;
- ✓ It is valuable for developing new tools and test approaches, and to evaluate them;
- ✓ It is the most productive and efficient way to design and implement E+ project, even though it is little more complex, you cover many pieces with one project.
- ✓ It is a great opportunity to target different target groups in the same project (both young people and youth workers), and to motivate them for long-term engagement; Possibility to integrate local actions by participants of mobilities in big projects was also very welcomed;
- ✓ An organisation can have bigger impact on the partners and community;
- ✓ In smaller projects, one organisation takes the lead, while other lose their motivation. In more complex projects the responsibilities among partners and workload can be better balanced and shared;
- ✓ Having several activities in one project makes E+ more accessible, as in this way partners are more interested to collaborate with partner countries. So, in this way we can benefit more as partner countries as our partners are more interested to apply with more activities in one project. It is hard for partners to prepare a project only for one activity in WB country, if there would not be an opportunity for multiply activities.
- ✓ It is really great opportunity to be able to implement such a complex project, but it is also very important to follow all rules and administration and reporting procedures, which means - to have capacities to implement it properly, so capacity for coordination, implementation and financial reporting.

Examples of usual activities:

- ✓ Solidarity corps, youth exchanges, study visits and trainings;
- ✓ Only training courses and job shadowing, due to the limited capacities;
- ✓ Very relevant, as we can integrate ESC activities, Youth Exchanges and capacity building activities;
- ✓ A mixture of training courses, APV, and closure with a publication with data from the activities which can be further used as a follow-up for new projects and for the beneficiaries to use it for certain needs;
- ✓ Training course in Romania and youth exchange in Albania, or study visit in Albania and seminar in another country.

Q7: Another reason for the perceived increased accessibility of the E+:YiA Programme is linked to the 'possibility to establish cross-sectoral cooperation in the youth field' (33%). With what sectors your organisation cooperates the most?

This question was not asked in all the groups given that in some groups the organisations were inexperienced. Even more experienced organisations did not have much to say it appeared. The overall impression is that the organisations do not use much, nor that they are used to cross-sector cooperation in the youth field. It is still a novelty in the region.

Some organisations cooperate with schools, universities, and local governments, while almost none of them cooperate with business sector.

- ✓ One organisation stated that they found it interesting to see that it is possible to involve business now in the cooperation. Now when this is available, one can see that the values of the sector and business sector are totally different. On that side, they are not so sure that the most of NGOs are ready to understand why the profit is so important for the business side, and on the other side it is good that the business can now consider cooperation with the NGO sector with the support of European Commission. This shows a political direction in which the Commission is offering or supporting this kind of mingling between these two sectors;
- ✓ There was a feeling that it is going in the right direction, and especially when it comes to higher education and cultural centres. With regards the business sector, the feedback from the companies was that they don't see what they gain, they see it just as more obligations, more work;
- ✓ Opportunities to involve public sector:
 - bringing more different points of view to what the organisations are doing;
 - It is necessary for all big-scope projects to have different sectors involved, so that they make bigger impact; the project influences decision makers, and brings the youth and the institutions closer.
 - It is very important to have cooperation with different stakeholders and special institutions, if you want to achieve something at national level, for example, if organisations are dealing with advocacy or some changes in the policies;
 - There are certain activities which cannot be implemented properly without involvement of different stakeholders.
- ✓ Challenges to involve public sector recognised:
 - Lack of capacities of public institutions (especially schools) to participate in projects;
 - Administrative obstacles;
 - Lack of will from the public sector to get involved (since there is not a lot of money "for them").
 - frequent changes in staff in public sector that are dependent on political situation and staff allocation;
 - It requires more efforts and more willingness to take into account attitudes and point of views from different background, different sectors, public or private or institutional;
 - One of the obstacles is that a lot of organisations would participate in the application phase but later on would not be able to implement the project;
 - It is actually an extra work for NGOs, not for the other stakeholders;

Focus groups implemented in Albania, Kosovo* and Montenegro have raised some recommendations for better cross-sector cooperation, and gave examples of cross-sector cooperation from their practice.

Recommendations:

- ✓ To raise awareness especially to these local and state institutions, to be more active in the field;

- ✓ It is important to have in mind, that Kosovo* as developing country has public institutions with human resources who have hard time to first understand your project, its impact, and only then to see how they can be involved;
- ✓ The Erasmus office and other institutions who are in charge of E+ in Montenegro should do more in promoting E+ values and especially to explain to local institutions why it is important to cooperate with NGOs, youth associations in implementation of different projects;

And some concrete examples of cross-sector cooperation they practice(d):

- ✓ I am currently involved in cross-sector workshops, environmental and climate change aspects
- ✓ In terms of cross-sector cooperation we are concentrated on schools, educational departments in municipalities and Municipalities themselves
- ✓ We cooperate with local schools and also with local department for youth and culture in our municipality
- ✓ We cooperate mostly with regional NGOs and with local governmental institutions.
- ✓ We are dealing a lot with culture, culture and education, but also social services
- ✓ We are dealing mostly in the environment and sustainable development and everything that we do is somehow connected with many stakeholders at local level.
- ✓ Departments of education and Ministry for Education closely cooperating on our activities, implemented directly in the high schools, as we are focused on the education.
- ✓ Local Governments, private businesses and some Ministries have been good partners.
- ✓ Schools and youth departments of local governance.
- ✓ Different stakeholders which support youth here in Albania, e.g. other NGOs which support young artists, media NGOs, then municipalities and ministry of youth education and sport, different government and policy makers for youth.

Q8: Finally, more than a half of survey respondents (53%) said that increased accessibility of the E+:YiA Programme is due to 'increased access to information and support measures'. What types of support measures and offered by whom does your organisation use the most? In what ways the SALTO SEE Resource Centre can (better) support involvement of your organisation in the programme?

This was the only question where there was a clear distinction between the national groups, whereas Serbian groups felt well supported and informed enough (with some minor suggestions), while B&H groups expressed strong need for more support and improved work of the Contact Point in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Serbia:

- ✓ a lot of work has been done by SALTO, the organisations use the opportunity for TCA activities;
- ✓ a negative is lack of support by the Serbian NA for participating in the TCA activities;
- ✓ work of the Contact Point in Serbia is seen positively, as well as the support provided by the Ministry of Youth and Sports;
- ✓ The web site of the EACEA is not youth friendly at all. It is not easy to find information;
- ✓ More trainings outside the capital and big cities is desirable;
- ✓ SALTO web site is widely used by trainers and youth workers and it is found useful by several organisations, while for managers in NGOs there is not so much information available;
- ✓ Tempus Foundation is really open and gives a lot of support.

Bosnia and Herzegovina:

- ✓ SOHO and annual meetings are very useful (also for networking among organisations within the country) – pointed out by several organisations;
- ✓ There is lack of information. In Bosnia and Herzegovina information is available only on the web platform "Mreža mira";

- ✓ Organisations use all the opportunities provided by SALTO SEE RC;
- ✓ Information on the web site of the Contact Point is not found very useful;
- ✓ SALTO web site is used widely;
- ✓ Support provided by the SALTO Project Officer was praised a lot.

Focus groups in Albania, Kosovo* and Montenegro pointed out following:

Contact points:

Montenegro

- ✓ An organisation stated that they got support firstly from their Contact Point, from ADP ZID from the very beginning ("Everything that we asked them, about financial management and staff, we were really supported by them").

Kosovo*

- ✓ A beneficiary from Kosovo* stated about the Contact Point in Kosovo* as "I forgot that they exist." A concern was expressed at the meeting in Prizren last July that the Contact Point is not active, not visible, and that maybe SALTO should deal with that issue somehow. It can be difficult, maybe should come from the organisations, try to make the map of all organisations that use E+, that get grants, make projects, host volunteers, try to find organisations that are interested, as it depends on their willingness, ability and interest to cooperate and support each other, as it requires time, efforts and human resources that are lacking so much.
- ✓ Another organisation stated that they have not been using the services of the Contact Point, that they are not visible, and that they are not aware if they are really active and if they do something. Again, the proposal for mapping the active organisations came out, with suggestion to identify if one of them is appropriate for the role of Contact Point.

SALTO SEE RC

- ✓ SALTO is continuously promoting the organisations from Kosovo* to get more involved in E+, also organising specific trainings for them, and there is increased effort from SALTO;
- ✓ SALTO website is used;
- ✓ SALTO organises informative sessions and they support Contact Points in the Balkans to reach a high number of NGOs;
- ✓ About EVS/ESC, SALTO SEE RC has always been a great resource not only for information, but also to provide support during the implementation, how to overcome challenges and so on. If there would be something like this for other actions, for the other activities of E+, there would be more projects and maybe more qualitative projects;
- ✓ Different types of support provided by SALTO SEE RC were highly valued by several organisations, also pointing out good and effective communication with SALTO SEE RC.

Other forms of support:

- ✓ Other forms of support are the experienced partner organisations in the Balkans - peer to peer support. This was highlighted by several organisations as one of the biggest types of support;
- ✓ Internet and the E+ Programme Guide;
- ✓ There are many exchange projects that are contributing a lot in the field of sharing information in different countries, in this case also in Albania. Project itself is a great tool to benefit directly;
- ✓ Online info-sessions organised by EACEA;
- ✓ Support of the project managers/task managers of EACEA.

RECOMMENDATIONS

SALTO SEE

- ✓ SALTO SEE team is great in responding and supporting;
- ✓ There is a need to clarify or refocus the role of SALTO SEE in Serbia;
- ✓ Make the accreditation process shorter and less complicated;
- ✓ More in person contact between organisations and SALTO/Executive Agency;

- ✓ Provide more support to the Contact Point in Bosnia and Herzegovina (financial, training, boosting competences, visibility);
- ✓ SALTO SEE should support contact persons and people that have experience to share it during the annual meeting;
- ✓ to have more contact points per country and with more authority (or just appoint organisations with more experience to mentor others);

- ✓ Recommendation for bettering cross-sectorial cooperation in form of contact making seminars;
- ✓ More meetings like this (focus groups, tete-a-tete meetings), so the organisations can exchange information (more specific than the annual meeting of accredited organisations);
- ✓ more experience sharing between organisations, maybe some platforms on national or regional level to be able to easily share information and support each other;
- ✓ More of networking activities between Partner and Programme Countries;
- ✓ To organise more info sessions on opportunities and changes, on the updates in the program (the last year there was only one info session on E+);

- ✓ To accredit also organisations for participating in other actions (mobility of young people and youth workers), because people sign Mandate and disappear, or in some other way to check if the partner is capable to deliver what they promised (like a popularity list or something like that);

- ✓ For Serbia it would be important to be open to cooperate with Western Balkans. Current situation is not realistic, nor natural;

- ✓ Given that too many things have changed in transition between EVS to ESC, the suggestion is to have more trainings on ESC, so the organisations would start being used more by the organisations;
- ✓ To enforce European Solidarity Corpse promotion more;
- ✓ Euro-peers was a great idea. What has happened to it? It should be revitalised;

- ✓ To translate Programme guides to local languages, and in electronic versions;
- ✓ More trainings for local small organisations, rather than info sessions, as well as meeting SALTO people also in person from time to time (not only to hear each other when something is wrong);

- ✓ About EVS/ESC, SALTO SEE RC has always been a great resource not only for information, but also to provide support during the implementation, how to overcome challenges and so on. If there would be something like this for other actions, for the other activities of E+, there would be more projects and maybe more qualitative projects;
- ✓ To make the staff of the different Ministries of the WB countries aware of the Programme and procedures, so they could manage their part (e.g. tax exemptions);

The Programme

- ✓ There are a lot of young people who like to go to trainings, and not all of them work in organisations, they could use it in other aspects of their lives (for their education). In that sense it would be good to have training for youth workers and trainings for young people, and then you have YEs only for the beginning.

- ✓ Clarification is needed with regards the costs - it is unclear what happens with the money that stays from the travel costs, and if/how organisations are allowed to use it.
- ✓ Increasing responsiveness of the EACEA Programme Officers to beneficiaries (they caused serious loss of money due to their late responses or no responses towards beneficiaries).
- ✓ To make Programme more accessible to small youth organisations, so they would have kind of quota, and if this is not used up, then this quota may be used by "sharks" – by more experienced organisations and bigger ones;
- ✓ The part of the Contract about promotion of the Programme by organisations during the projects should be put more in practice/more monitored;
- ✓ Reader friendly guide is needed;
- ✓ More practical handbooks/publications (it can be even in form of interactive online contact point);
- ✓ There should be more monitoring during the implementation and after it, to ensure that what is written in the applications is really happening;
- ✓ To have more than one deadline at centralised level;
- ✓ There is a lack in consistency of the work of EACEA/NAs - an organisation applies and gets the assessment, it improves the project according to the assessment for the next deadline and it receives less points;
- ✓ Existence of "ghost" organisations - (there are projects applied from organisations for which it is not clear if they even exist, some of them do not have even an address).

Closure

The participants stated that they were also very happy with the opportunity to meet up (especially B&H groups) and discuss the current state of Erasmus+ implementation in their country, to share experience. They expressed the need for more physical meetings of organisations involved in E+ (not just for EVS/ESC). They said that the study somehow also came as supporting system (not just that they have been helping SALTO out with conducting it), that they felt that they are "asked" and taken into account as stakeholders. The groups also expressed the need to have this kind of meetings (focus groups) regularly, as well as to receive the final results of the study at the end.