



BEYOND BORDERS

Neighbours together

SUPPORTING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN YOUTH PROGRAMMES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUTH WORK AND VOLUNTEERING IN ERASMUS+ NEIGHBOURING PARTNER COUNTRIES

Insights from regional stakeholder consultations carried out by regional
SALTO Resource Centres in 2021

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Framework & purpose of this report

Framework

With the new cycle of EU youth programmes starting in 2021, the regional SALTO Resource Centres (SALTO SEE, SALTO EECA and SALTO EUROMED) together with the National Agencies for Erasmus+, youth field, and the European Solidarity Corps of the Czech Republic, Croatia, Finland, France, Germany, Lithuania, Poland, and Slovenia have set up “Beyond Borders - Neighbours Together”, a new strategic framework for cooperation for the period 2021 - 2027.

Beyond Borders is coordinated by SALTO SEE together with SALTO EECA and SALTO EUROMED and aims to support quality partnerships and projects involving Partner countries that are developed in the youth field within the Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps programmes as well as the further development and recognition of youth work in the participating countries. The initiative wants to create new (or renewed) dynamics for this cooperation, and furthermore, give more visibility to the experiences and expertise that have been and will be further developed in this field.

In 2021, multi-stakeholder consultations were organised in the neighbouring partner regions in order to include actors involved in youth cooperation between Erasmus+ Programme and Partner countries from these regions into identifying the needs and potential priorities for activities that the regional SALTO Resource Centres and Beyond Borders could support in the coming years.

The consultations offered the opportunity to explore how the EU youth programmes could support further developments in the youth

(youth work) field with a diversity of stakeholders in youth work in the neighbouring partner countries. In particular, they aimed to identify particular areas of youth work development and volunteering that could benefit from additional assistance and should be further supported (by SALTO and National Agencies), to define what kind of support different organisations and key actors might need, and how SALTOs could support a more efficient and broader use of the opportunities provided by the European Solidarity Corps and the Erasmus+ programme.

In the **Eastern Europe and the Caucasus region**, consultations were held with a diversity of youth work stakeholders in seven countries in June - July 2021. Participants were mainly representatives of organisations active in the Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps programmes. Nevertheless, project coordinators of organisations, which are not active in the Programmes also participated, as well as some local and national authorities, municipalities, ministries, and youth council representatives. The consultation process included online focus groups in national languages, with one exception, where feedback was gathered through an anonymous online form. Each meeting was facilitated by a local youth work trainer. Most of the meetings were also translated, so representatives of the SALTO Eastern Europe and Caucasus Resource Centre as well as the reporter could be involved.

In the **Western Balkan region**, the consultation process was organised in a similar way. Four national meetings and one regional meeting were organised by SALTO SEE together with a team of experts, including Contact Points and facilitators from the region, in the period June - July 2021. Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the meetings were held mostly online. The meetings took place in local language and brought together between 25 and 35 participants each, including representatives of NGOs, as well as some representatives of institutions and other experts, e.g. from research or education, covering Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Montenegro. The final regional

meeting further elaborated the outcomes of the national meetings in a regional perspective, establishing elements of relevance for the wider region. The meeting was held in English and involved 55 stakeholders from all countries of the region, including also some participants from the neighbouring Programme countries of North Macedonia and Serbia. An invitation for participation was sent to identified stakeholders directly, well as published on the SALTO SEE FB page.

SALTO EuroMed developed a slightly different process in spring 2021 and carried out an evaluation of the support that the Centre had provided for the implementation of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes in the **SouthMed region** in the period 2017 - 2020. The process aimed to establish recommendations for work of the Resource Centre in the upcoming years, including in the frame of Beyond Borders. The evaluation included a consultation of existing activity reports and statistics, focus groups and questionnaires involving Programme beneficiaries, especially youth workers (youth work professionals) and volunteers. Altogether, 300 beneficiaries were invited to participate, and 84 beneficiaries took part in the evaluation process.

About this report

This report is based on a comparison of the reports summarising the outcomes of the three regional consultation processes in the neighbouring regions. It lists the areas which were underlined in all regions and which could therefore serve as a basis for identifying areas of further support that could be taken up by Beyond Borders in and with all neighbouring partner regions.

The seven priority areas identified in this report below were further discussed and elaborated by around 100 participants coming from Erasmus+ Partner and Programme countries at the Beyond Borders Kick-off event, which was held in Paris on 21 - 23 June 2022. Reports of all regional consultations as well as a separate report on the event outcomes are available from the SALTO Resource Centres.



**Identified priority areas
for further support in
Erasmus+ Neighbouring
partner regions**



1. Recognition and further development of youth work and volunteering

Youth work is seen as the essence of youth cooperation. Volunteering is also considered beneficial to youth development. There is a shared concern across all three neighbouring regions about the value attributed to youth work and volunteering, as well as the recognition and validation of both.

Specific points highlighted by region:

Western Balkans:

> Recognition of youth work and youth workers: A common understanding and definition of youth work and youth workers is missing in all four countries and in the region in general.

> Recognition of non-formal education and volunteering: Non-formal education (NFE) is not well recognised in the WB region, even though in some countries recent legislation has increased its legal recognition. (...) Volunteering-related laws, policies or acts are existing and regulate volunteering processes and infrastructure. However, in some countries, the existing legislation was considered more of a barrier than a driver for promotion and development, while in others, it was not really implemented, and there was no provision of financial means or certificates.

> Legal recognition – by the legislation of each country in the WB: In order to work with young people in an efficient, sustainable and impactful way, youth work recognition needs to be built and recognised at the national level. Recognition of youth work should come as a cooperation process with different stakeholders at the national level.

Eastern Europe and Caucasus:

> In most EECA countries, youth work is not perceived as an attractive career choice for young people and Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps provide an important motivational factor in increasing the attractiveness of the sector to future youth workers and youth policy experts.

South Med region:

> The low regard in which some volunteers feel they are held is one of the causes of dissatisfaction leading to conflict, as organisations are suspected of pursuing opportunistic aims and treating the volunteering project as a “business”.

> During focus group meetings with organisations holding a Quality Label (i.e. label establishing that an organisation fulfils the quality requirements to host or send volunteers within the European Solidarity Corps), as well as in the online survey of youth workers, other thematic areas emerged: some of which correspond to the specific situation of certain countries - such as “peace-building” in the Middle East. More generally speaking, the thematic area of “empowerment of young people” is a priority shared by the majority of organisations.



2. Youth participation and youth policy development

The promotion of greater youth participation in policy making and greater civic participation of youth are seen as essential for impactful cooperation. Support for policy reform should always duly consider youth participation.

Specific points highlighted by region:

Western Balkans:

> Youth work and youth participation, including development and support to youth networks and networks of youth workers: Participants suggested that youth participation, as well as youth work, needed to be recognised through policy papers and by decision makers. They stressed that relevant dialogue between youth, organisations working with young people and decision makers/governmental representatives was missing.

> There is a need to advocate to the government or to provide support for advocacy in order to “push” the government to support a better usage of the Programme (Erasmus+/ESC) for the countries that are not part of the Programme.

Eastern Europe and Caucasus:

> Issues of youth policy reform, such as the institutionalisation of youth work and recognition of non-formal learning, are very important for the sustainability and impact of Erasmus+ and ESC projects in all EECA countries.

South Med region:

> Political empowerment, or the civic involvement and participation of young people, is another aspect of empowerment, raised in particular in Tunisia and Morocco. For both of these countries, civic participation of young people in local government appears to be a priority for numerous organisations due to the major institutional changes that these countries have experienced in recent years, which legally establish participatory approaches within local government.



3. Stakeholder cooperation and coordination

All major stakeholders both within the EU and outside of it should work more closely together to ensure the Programmes' success.

Specific points highlighted by region:

Western Balkans:

> Participants recognized several elements as those that are missing in international cooperation in this field. They stressed the need for better coordination among stakeholders (national and international) in order to provide better support for the EU youth programmes, but also to advance the cooperation among decision makers and youth.

> Furthermore, they highlighted the need for international cooperation to support the better use of already existing resources and more visibility for the good practices, particularly in regard to youth participation.

Eastern Europe and Caucasus:

> Participants underlined the need for more coordinator meetings, possibly thematic and regional as well.

South Med region:

> From the SALTO Centre's point of view, poor access to information about volunteers hosted in Southern neighbourhood countries is a major concern. While a unified information system does exist with regard to beneficiaries of the Erasmus+ and ESC programmes at the level of the National Agencies in Programme countries, use thereof remains limited due to its complex and cumbersome nature requiring the submission of specific requests to third parties.

> Envisaging support for the formalisation of local networks of organisations holding Quality Labels (for ESC) in order to facilitate the exchange of information concerning the hosting of volunteers. Coordination could be exercised on a rotation basis by each organisation with a local expert, that is to say having received trainer training.

> Formalising the relationship between the pool of local experts and the SALTO EuroMed Centre and defining clear channels and modes of communication between them.

> More effective identification and selection of priority thematic areas focusing on those providing more obvious possibilities of convergence between North-Med and South-Med organisations in connection with EU priority thematic areas.

> Organise thematic regional meetings in order to promote the dissemination and transfer of skills between peers at the South-South level.

> Give greater priority to the strategic objective of deployment of the Erasmus+ programme in the neighbourhood countries, over that of skills development. To this end, joint activities and establishment of contacts between organisations in programme countries and partner countries should be more extensively developed. This should not only be focused on educational and organisational methods and tools, but also on the development of joint projects and funding applications.



4. Exchange of good practice

There is a need for exchange of good practice in the field of youth and youth policy (covering youth work, non-formal learning, volunteering and other fields) between countries, organisations and communities.

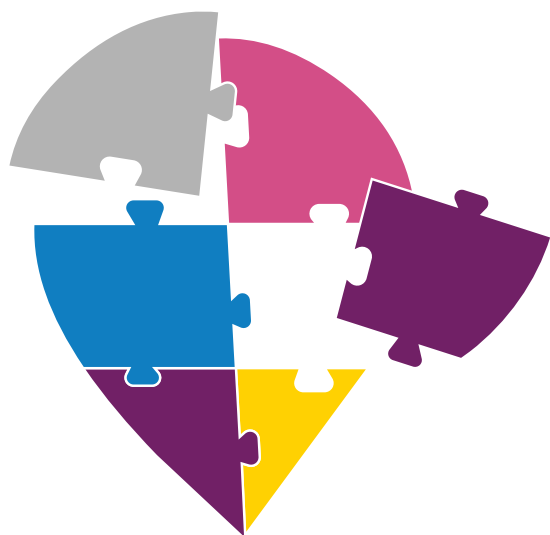
Specific points highlighted by region:

Western Balkans:

> Exchange of existing good practices at the national, regional and European levels: Good practices and models need to be exchanged among different actors (youth workers, government representatives, other institutions, young people, and youth organisations) and would directly impact and support the recognition of youth work locally and nationally.

Eastern Europe and Caucasus:

> We need to know what a youth worker should do to attract young people to their youth centre - European good practice will help greatly with this.



5. Inclusion and diversity

Diversity is seen as a great asset of the youth sector and a factor conditioning democratic participation. There is a need for greater inclusion to allow for greater diversity in the youth sector and beyond.

Specific points highlighted by region:

Western Balkans:

> Support capacity building & mentoring of youth workers and youth organisations on basics of youth work, youth participation, inclusion and reaching out to marginalised young people (...).

> Improve participation in the Programmes of those young people that are coming from rural areas and develop mechanisms to involve hard-to-reach youth.

> Consider the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and other situations on the mental health of young people when developing youth work.

Eastern Europe and Caucasus:

> More support for youth with fewer opportunities is needed to make the Programme more inclusive to groups like orphans, IDPs.

> Inclusion of young people with disabilities - how can we actually involve them, the problems start at home/community, so we need to reach out to them first.

> More regional outreach outside Baku and big cities is needed to promote the Programme and include Azerbaijani youth from all backgrounds.

> Moldova needs a better mapping of active NGOs - some partners keep meeting the same people.

South Med region:

> It seems that most Erasmus+ opportunities are still only open to a narrow 'elite' and some people participate in numerous projects.

> In capacity-building with regard to young people's vocational skills, take young audiences more effectively into account such as "NEETs" and "JAMO", which constitute specific target groups for public action (e.g. the "Urban Policies" ("Politiques de la Ville") in France) and for actors in international solidarity working in the youth sector. The question of the adaptability of the support methods and tools used in youth work for these target groups needs to be more effectively taken into account. On the other hand, specific target groups such as women, migrants and refugees appear to be more distant from the core target of youth actions and programmes.



6. Capacity-building for youth organisations

Supporting youth organisations through various capacity-building measures is beneficial and seen as an efficient way to develop youth work and youth participation.

Specific points highlighted by region:

Western Balkans:

> The need for capacity building & mentoring of youth workers and (youth organisations) on issues such as: basics of youth work, youth participation, inclusion, and reaching out to marginalised young people; and of networks of youth organisations on project development, partnership-finding, youth policy and advocacy.

> SALTO SEE could undertake initiatives which can affect the development of youth workers' competencies and impact the sustainability of a youth work career, such as looking at how the sector supports youth workers in terms of professional development and human capacities in different contexts. Capacity building can be offered as trainings, seminars, study visits, youth work academy, etc.

Eastern Europe and Caucasus:

> We need more capacity-building and training opportunities for youth workers - youth work is not a desired professional path and we need to enhance career prospects and opportunities.

> All EECA countries reported the need to develop the capacity of youth workers and to internationalise the sector by allowing for exchange of expertise and sharing of good practice across borders.

South Med region:

> Increasing the supply of training courses in the Partner countries, in terms of the number and frequency thereof, in order to ensure the widest possible coverage of organisations. This concerns both information sessions and advanced training.

> In terms of training and support capacities for host organisations, a pool of local experts was formed during the preceding period through trainer training activities. However, this pool of local experts is not sufficiently promoted and supported. Nevertheless, these experts have played an undeniable role in networking between local organisations on the basis of relations of cooperation and mutual assistance in the management of volunteering projects and the pooling of resources. These networks remain at an informal stage, without their role being made specific. This does not facilitate the inclusion of a maximum number of organisations holding quality labels and may, on the contrary, encourage relations of competition between organisations in order to be accorded "expert" status and play a leadership role.



7. Programme promotion and information

Young people are interested in the European youth programmes (Erasmus+ and ESC) and want to know more. In order to increase the impact of the Programmes, more has to be done to promote and inform young people and the organisations working with them about them.

Specific points highlighted by region:

Western Balkans:

> Participants agreed that Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps programmes are not visible nor recognised enough in the WB region and that only some organisations know about these opportunities and actually participate in projects. Better coordination among stakeholders (national and international) would help to promote and use the Programmes.

> The organisation of more national, regional and European meetings, seminars, study visits etc. that provide a space to discuss key concepts on volunteering, its values, benefits, promotions, and its importance is always needed in this regard.

> Provide (more) concrete information to youth and interested groups.

> Organise (more) information sessions with the schools and in the universities to promote the Programmes and relevant concepts.

Eastern Europe and Caucasus:

> Dissemination of information and the promotion of both the Erasmus+ and ESC programmes are seen as vital and much needed in all countries of the region.

> There are many information campaigns but this is only information; what is missing is active assistance; we need to work with young people where they are.

South Med region:

> Undertake planning of activities more in accordance with a results-based approach to projects, in order to ensure greater visibility, efficiency and effectiveness of the actions conducted, and greater effects in terms of the development of skills connected with the development of concrete projects within the framework of the Erasmus+ programme.

> Provide financial support, for example through payment for services, in order to enable local experts in the Mediterranean countries to fully play their role of supporting local organisations and relaying information for the SALTO EuroMed Centre, on the basis of the model developed by the EECA and SEE SALTO Centres.

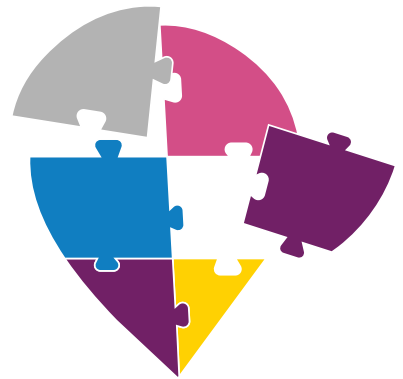
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1.
*Recognition and further
development of youth work*



2.
Volunteering



3.
Inclusion and diversity



4.
*Youth participation and youth
policy development*



5.
*Programme promotion and
information*



6.
*Capacity-building for youth
organisations*



7.
Exchange of good practice



8.
*Stakeholder cooperation and
coordination*



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