

## You are listening to the Shaping Inclusion and Diversity Podcast - Episode 1 - on why now might be just the perfect time to embark on the journey of creating a national inclusion and diversity strategy

*“Cat: Where are you going?”*

*Alice: Which way should I go?*

*Cat: That depends on where you are going.*

*Alice: I don’t know.*

*Cat: Then it doesn’t matter which way you go.”*

This dialogue between Alice and the cat, was taken from the book Alice in Wonderland by English author Lewis Carroll. It’s a great starting point for us to talk about strategy. Why? Because, as you can read in more depth in the “Shaping Inclusion and Diversity Publication”, strategy is all about knowing where we are at and where we want to go.

*If you just say OK, we will try to be more inclusive in whatever we do. That is a general statement, and everybody will say “yeah, we will do that”. But then when it comes to concrete things you might forget it. Whereas if you have an outline, a good outline in the strategy, you’ll just say OK now we are doing this from the strategy.*

You just heard [Marko Banković](#), from the Serbian National Agency sharing why he thinks a strategy is important.

Now you might be asking yourself: Do I reeeeeeally need a strategy? You might feel like things are going quite alright in the inclusion & diversity realm in your organisation even without a strategy. Or maybe you do have a strategy in place and don’t see the need to create a new one.

Let’s do an imaginary box ticking exercise. Listen to the following situations and tick the boxes of those that sound familiar to you. Ready? Let’s go:

- Whenever you try to explain your inclusion and diversity plans to colleagues or external partners you tell a different story;
- Your inclusion plans for the coming year are defined by one or two people in your office;

- There are inconsistencies in or lack of information on inclusion and diversity in your communication (printed materials, website, etc.);
- You haven't gotten around to listening to your audience (both programme partners and young people) about their needs regarding inclusion and diversity;
- You find it hard to pinpoint which areas of inclusion and diversity your National Agency has done very well at and what areas you have not had much success yet;
- When asked why you work in the inclusion field, your default answer is "because it's my job".

If you ticked any of these imaginary boxes, then this is a good time for you to take a step back and focus on what you are doing and why you are doing it. A strategy can help us in this process because it acts as a general guideline which defines the direction we want to go and helps us avoid distractions along the way.

But let's hear it from someone who already went through the process. We asked [Marjolein Vandembroucke](#) from the National Agency in Belgium Flanders why they decided to create a strategy. Here's Marjolein:

*The thing is, we all do a lot of stuff and we really believe in what we are doing, but we did not have the materials supporting our gut feeling that what we were doing is the best thing that we could possibly be doing and it's worth taking our time and energy for it.*

While there might never be the right moment to pause, sit down and work through a strategy process, the launch of the Europe-wide Erasmus+ and Solidarity Corps implementation guideline is definitely a great opportunity.

Here's [Marko Banković](#) again:

*You need a strategy so that you know where, you know the path that you will be taking. If we are talking about the programme in the next seven years it is a good way to do it now. And when you know the path then you can, you know, make the action plan and have concrete points how to get to that. Without the strategy you might have concrete activities but they might not all lead to the same goal, to the same endpoint. Although they are all useful.*

Let's remember that strategy is here to help us increase the positive impact of our work. Here's how Jutta Kivimäki from the National Agency in Finland describes that impact:

*How it really matters to their lives, what kind of change it makes. For example, self esteem.. Because you notice that you are actually able to cope. For me it is always that if there is a young person who takes part in these kinds of actions and after that has an idea that "this is what I want to do". "I want to go and study this and this thing". Something or so.. Then I always.. Those are the success stories, that if you are able to.. If the young person learns that this is the way that I want to do it or this is the way that I want to go on to see a little bit into the future.*

As the SALTO Inclusion & Diversity article "[International youth projects benefit most those with fewer opportunities](#)" points out, having access to international youth projects is especially beneficial for marginalized young people. In other words, Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps need to increase the focus on Inclusion and Diversity to increase its impact.

Here's how Marta Gutierrez-Benet, Programme Manager for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps at the European Commission puts it:

*It's really the change of mindset. So, inclusion and diversity has become almost a mantra. Or really a key element that everyone is recognizing now as an essential element of the new program. And I think this is very important, because visibility also helps understanding on what's on offer, and already plants the seeds that Erasmus+ equals focus on inclusion and diversity. And there is a long way to go still, to translate that in all dimensions, in all fields, etc. But I think it is already quite visible. The fact that everytime we talk about Erasmus+ we define it with some word related to inclusion and diversity, to make the Erasmus+ more inclusive. We are proposing a new Erasmus+ program that is more inclusive, that will reach out to more people and so on. So, it is a discourse that goes from the political sphere, down there, to the multipliers in the organisation and so on.*

So, now that we got started on this conversation about strategy, it's up to you. Head over to the "Shaping Inclusion and Diversity Publication" to get familiar with the different steps that lay ahead of you in this strategy process.

And if you still have doubts, here's [Marjolein Vandebroucke](#) from the National Agency in Belgium Flanders again, speaking about the 2021-2027 Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Implementation Guideline:

*It's good that it is out there. And it is supposed to be inclusive. But that does not mean that it is more inclusive. That doesn't change anything as such. It is up to us to make the change.*

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