

When I joined my first international program... I was like... not speaking english good at all. For the first 10 days, I didn't speak at all.

To be honest... I was taking the risk of being hungry all the time. I was just experience living abroad. Even if I was hungry... even if I was starving on the street... I really wanted to take the chance.

It was my first...first and last time abroad.

At my erasmus+ exchange... I learned what I don't want to do at my job...20 different jobs in the 9 months... lots of events , projects... tried out all... saw my weaknesses... you have nothing to lose. When something like this is offered to you.

First and foremost support is you first need to have the will and desire to go abroad... then you need to have a person a similar background as mine... we struggle with language and application.

I've been really struggling... want to ... develop my personality... I deserve to go for this program to develop myself... but so far I could not.

Money is an issue... Erasmus is paid... it's always there... you have to come back... You can't go without any support... have some money in your pocket if something goes wrong.

Overall... i was very excited... not anxious. I really wanted this. I was open for learning... and learning norwegian. All the time new things... very tiring. Not in comfort zone... different hope, language... all one in a different country. You learn a lot. You get tired... btu you experience a lot. It changed me so much. I'm so different person then I was... 4 years ago.

Because we are youth are the future... you are not going to create the future through just youth from europe... in the middle east in other partners ... countries... you need to mix this knowledge together...

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Hi Rahel, welcome! Come on in!

Oh thanks for having me, Greg.

Well it's such a pleasure, come on over here into the kitchen.

Have a seat.

I love the view!! So many trees! Thanks for letting us borrow your kitchen for this series of conversations.

Yes, it's actually my pleasure! This is now the inclusion and diversity kitchen, huh?

Before we begin, can I offer you some cookies and coffee or tea?

Yes please, I'll have a cup of tea.

So, where do we start?

Let's maybe... introduce ourselves and the series?

All, right I can go first, my name is Rahel Aschwanden, I'm a facilitator, learning designer and educational content producer. I work a lot with the topics of equity, inclusion and diversity, among others I have written some publications for SALTO inclusion and diversity. I'm non-binary, have two kids and love gardening, vegan cooking and capoeira... just to tell a couple of things about myself.

Here's your tea. By the way, my name is Airtón Gregório, but you can call me Greg. I'm a teacher, artist and internationalist. As a gay man from a poor multiracial family, I have lived and worked with inclusion and diversity over the years, both benefitting from opportunities and giving back to the community. I love mixing all sorts of ingredients in cooking and working alike.

And we're here together as your hosts for the Inclusion and Diversity Kitchen Podcast.

This podcast is being produced by SALTO Inclusion and Diversity Resource Center in order to support the idea of making inclusion and diversity everyone's business at the NA.

In other words: creating more ID sous-chefs :)

And since food is a great conversation starter, we'll have these important conversations while cooking.

Over the upcoming episodes, we'll touch upon several different aspects linked to promoting inclusion and diversity in all areas of work at national agencies for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps.

So more concretely, what's on the menu in terms of topics we'll discuss over these six episodes?

We'll talk about why inclusion and diversity matter, who is responsible for that in everyday work, what tools are available, the role of communication and how to get others on board for promoting inclusion and diversity.

And, for that, I have talked to staff from different national agencies from across Europe...

About food....

Among other things, yes...

And you will present some of the highlights of these conversations you had... here at the podcast, in our Inclusion and Diversity kitchen! Welcome to the table!

And speaking of highlights, today's episode is a bit different in order for us to get started...

We'll start with potentially the most important people for the EU programs...

The youth themselves.

Today, instead of NA staff, I'm bringing you food for thought from three young people who participated in some EU programs for youth. All three can be considered young people with fewer opportunities. And let me just disclose here... Kristza and Serhat actually participated in a youth exchange program run by an organization I co-founded.

Can't wait to meet them! But let me ask you first... what do you think the three of them have in common?

I think all three, Kristza, Serhat and Shrouk, share an irrepressible will. And that is what has made a difference for them in being able to participate despite the barriers they face.

What else do you think has made them succeed in **accessing** the programs?

They also mentioned people, individuals, that believed in them, went the extra mile for them and just gave them that feeling of "this is for you!" and I think that's maybe a core invitation for everyone who's listening...:

To try to be that person?

Yes, whenever they get an opportunity to support a young person with fewer opportunities. To know that they can really make a difference in that person's life.

All right, shall we hear from them?

Yes!! Let's start with Kriszta:

I'm Csibi krisza Susanna, ... I'm coming from Hungary ... I'm born in Romania in Hungarian Family.

Moved to Hungary 3 years ago... for my Erasmus adventure. I'll be 22 years old in two weeks... and I'm at the moment I'm studying ... working at university ... working with international students. Also volunteer at lots of places.

With Kriszta, who is a desert kind of person, I talked about two different experiences, going abroad for the first time for a youth exchange at the age of 16... and then moving to Hungary for her volunteer with the European Solidarity Corps... and living there, in Hungary, ever since.

I'm curious to hear about her experience at the age of 16!

You should be! Listen to this:

When I joined my first international program... I was like... not speaking English good at all. First 10 tens... I didn't speak at all.

OMG, what happened?

I was worried too when she shared that, but look what she said:

It was life changing experience... even if I was not ... introvert... don't speak the first 5 days... even if I was not speaking... I was feeling so nice... I Was collecting all the information ... I was just listening to everything. Taking home every little drawings... every little thing... this was a really life-changing. That you exchange... I realized lots of things... because I met 30 people from 30 different countries... different countries... I heard stories there I could never imagine... how people have to live their life...because of government... how hard life can be... how much help is needed in life... even if I was not speaking... it was really impactful for me...

So, I remember Kriszta from back then and she was this shy, introvert person... and at first when we accepted her, she had doubts, she might not remember that, but she wasn't sure this was for her. But there was this person...

...(Hmm) now comes the person that made the difference...

Exactly. There was this person from her sending organization, who would write back and forth with us, that talked to Kristza's parents and eventually got them on board and helped Kristza overcome her fears. Here's how Kristza remembers this:

It was ... Maria is an...she's changing the world... she called she had this opportunity ... in English... I can travel... will teach me lots of things... come back and in 6 months help me to learn and achieve things here in my community... since she knows I already volunteers in lots of the world... really want to change the world... this fits me.

Kristza and I also chatted quite a lot about why it even matters that the programs are inclusive:

Because... the more inclusive. ... the more participants learn... the more they benefit. Put into really simple example...put together 5 volunteers... just Slovakia and Hungary... similar cultures... coming from same... social economic class... then they don't see ... new things... don't experience new things... do not see bigger picture... together from really different social backgrounds... families... traditions...they may see ...their eyes may open... the world is so colorful ...the other person has a different view... I see it black... it's also the truth... I have my own truths... we both is real.. And true. This is why I think you have to be more inclusive..

And she also broke it down for herself:

When I was included at 16 years... everyone thought I'm too young, not really experienced... I don't deserve a chance... they included me and changed... why I'm volunteering at ot... psychology... I learned things... never end up doing this without the chance to find out these things.

These cookies are delicious by the way... did you make them?

Sure did! I'm glad you liked it. I'm still learning to make them...

Oh there's so much more to say about Kristza... but I'm sure you also want to hear from the others, right?

Definitely. I'm curious about who they are, their stories... what they like to eat or cook...

So, I want you to meet Serhat. He's a Kurdish young man from Southern Turkey that participated in the same youth exchange as Kriszta:

Serhat.. I'm from Turkey. Livingin Norway, Oslo.

With Serhat, who had just returned to his new home in Norway after spending time with his family in Turkey, I ended up talking a lot about food and it was so nice to see how excited he got when talking about his favourite food from back home.

Food is something we miss a lot when moving abroad, isn't it?

What I miss most is... we call it sarma... it's grape leaves... you prepare rice and some meat... vegan or vegetarian or non-vegetarian... it's up to meat or not ... what you do is you take grape leave with rice and wrap it and put it into a bowl and you boil it. And it tastes really good and my mom used to make it. Another one... sound disgusting... when we slaughter the sheep... we take intestines out and wash them so many times... until super clean. We fill it with fine cooked rice and put those in a bowl and we boil it and in the end we make it a traditional meal. Usually tradition we eat this in the night, helps with digestion.

I like how he's considerate of vegans and vegetarians like you.

Yes, that might also be a result of his international experience... I remember how Serhat was quite upset at first when joining his youth exchange in Switzerland and we only had vegetarian food.

It's kind of relatable! I guess that's pretty much how most of my family would feel too!

I asked Serhat about the support he needed to be able to go abroad on his European Solidarity Corps program. And he talked about the support he received during the application process.

Needed someone to give me feedback on ...how to communicate the language... use effectively to get acceptance. Most valuable points. Really get into this ESC... because that application is so important for people to get in or be considered as a candidate.

This personal support .. which we ended up giving him as being an alumni of our program was really important because Serhat didn't have any support from his family. They did not understand why he would want to go abroad to volunteer.

Accepted... personal support was not really there. I had all my family against me...didn't want me to go...wanted me to work in Turkey. I wanted to develop soft skills. They were saying that ... soft skills doesn't bring you any money in the short run. Could't convince them will bring value to life in the long run. I will go... you cannot stop me. Support I Didn't get. Some might let a lot of support.

It actually reminds me of my own family again, the things I would listen to when I was younger. Did Serhat also come from a not very wealthy background...?

Yes... His family certainly went through hardship to make it possible for him to study.

To be honest... I was taking the risk of being hungry all the time. I was just experience living abroad. Even if I was hungry... even if I was starving on the street... I really wanted to take the chance....money is the issue yeah.... When they apply for those opportunities... they are saying you will get pocket money 240 ... waiter salary in norway is 2400... service industry lowest paying... 240 to 2400 great gap...it's normal to get intimate. I took all the risk... even if starve ... I came here with some initial money from my family...helped me for 1 month. I survived... it was not really enough... since they were paying for my accommodation, food and travel... it was not big issue. It was not enough but ok.

I find it super important to hear a first-person account like this. They can give us the depth of the real person behind a form, on the other side of a ticked box.

Did you also ask Serhat why he thinks inclusion matters?

I sure did. Here are his words... are his words... coming from his own minority background and reflecting about his youth exchange:

There are... many groups are there being discriminated from our society. When you attend those groups and when you see there are like minded people and willing to listen to you...and agree with you. It makes you feel better. You are not alone. There are like minded people fighting for the same cause. They people are not in the same idea... with you... they still discuss their ideas with you with in a respective manner.. Don't' break each other's heart. That's why it's so inclusive... you have different idea and you are welcome to join us. Share your idea... the floor is open. Best part of the inclusion that we had.

And from there, we reflected on diversity as a starting point for learning... just like Kristza had also brought up. And Serhat shared personal experience from his youth exchange:

One thing... I had a friend... We got accepted to the same activity... I knew that friend for a couple of years... didn't' know his life...just university friends... hanging out in social project. Super engaged... it was great opportunity for him to be engaged in international environment. We had a session about privilege... in that session I realized we are ... our privileges are completely different... similar we look like. Struggling ... so much , that i cannot fathom...left a big mark on me. You cannot see you cannot know the history of a person... what they have come through in ...everyone has their story, their own fights... we should always be respectful to one no... you never know what struggles... what kind of things they have had in their histories.

So Serhat is saying that, even though he didn't necessarily grow up privileged, he realized he had privileges others did not have... is that it?

Exactly. In that youth exchange.. Which was part of a longer program we offered for 30 young people from across Europe, we had I think 5 participants from Turkey... each of whom had a completely different background... And it was incredible to see how prejudices that are so deeply rooted can, sometimes, dissolve slowly when you're in contact with another person.

And that's what Serhat sees to be the power of youth exchanges?

Yes, of inclusive and diverse youth exchanges.

In my opinion, that's the most important ...powerful session you can do. All those privilege sessions, living library... black, kurdish, turkish, white... break stereotypes...you go there as similar person... you come out as completely different people.. Realisation different you are...even if live in similar environment. I think those sessions should be done more. Especially... to politicians ...decision makers... we as normal citizens... it might makes a big effect...if we do this session to decision makers it would create a bigger impact on our society.

Oh wow, what a great suggestion right there! Thank you Serhat for that.

After these two amazing guests, I'm curious about the third!

You should be! Meet Shrouk, a very inspiring 23 year old from Egypt.

I'm Shrouk... I'm Cairo Egypt. I studied media and mass coms... I work Erasmus virtual ... facilitator for cross cultural ... youth leader... MCW in NY. Started my initiative... yellow vs. blue... team s well...

And here's her favourite meal:

My favourite food is ... chicken sweet and sour and noodles... and I don't cook it. I'm terrible... really love cooking. Had a small business for desserts... favourite meal really well.

Small business for dessert? Shrouk seems to be my kind of person!

Haha

Well, Shrouk is rather new to the world of the European programs for youth.

I actually started... I participated at erasmus+ virtual exchange... in 2019... in october... it was virtual... really awkward for me, really entered... I don't want to try my mic. First time on camera... doing it with people from abroad... facilitator so brave. Then I said finish this session and that's it. But I continued for 8 weeks with them. Enjoyed it so much. Felt like a family for me. We got to connected ... even if was virtual. We were all talking. Everytime finishing and going out and really smiling for hours for how we shared...

Did Shrouk only have virtual experiences then?

No, just before the pandemic started, Shrouk was able to join a youth exchange in Morocco about de-radicalization. Her first time outside Egypt.

Same time I got accepted to travel for Erasmus youth exchange to Morocco. Went to the offline one... lots of differences... I didn't find any similarities... but I have learned so many things. Literally life changing...

Now, something that really struck me when talking to Shrouk was when she mentioned that with her different experiences in virtual and in-person exchange she started to be interested in being a facilitator herself. Yet, she had doubts because it seemed like facilitation was only something for Europeans... she had never met any middle-eastern facilitators.

Oh, representation... a crucial ingredient. It's crazy what it does when it's not there, huh?

Yes, but Shrouk wouldn't be Shrouk if she hadn't put her head to becoming the middle-eastern facilitator she wanted there to be.

If I put in my mind ... i will... they will not see someone from egypt... so I started courses online... doing stuff online, improve myself... but I couldn't... since 2020...

Her biggest dream now is to have an opportunity to learn and practise her facilitation in-person as a European Solidarity Corps volunteer. But so far the path has been difficult.

I'm trying to find a project... but I send A LOT of emails... yes you can apply... sorry they are not sponsoring visas... or did not even reply... because we cannot allow people from Egypt because of current situation...

She means the COVID-19 pandemic?

Yes, and she also explained that she doesn't quite see how Egypt would be different from any European country when it comes to the coronavirus... So that reason doesn't convince her.

It doesn't convince me either...

When I find something finally... I could not get the visa... because we are not yet on the list... not in the priorities to get the visa. I waited for 3 months... it's a journey.

Besides, Shrouk explains that as a partner-country outside the European Union, participation for Egyptians is limited and information on what is possible or not is hard to come by.

Oh I really hope that Shrouk will be able to do her ESC program... I think that's what the program should be about... giving young people an opportunity.

Precisely, I was curious to hear how these barriers affect other young people in her surroundings:

I can't really judge... not so many can be consistent...the ones who really believe... can go for it. But I can tell it's really hard. Ok... I'm got tired... but then after 5min I can't give up on this because I really want it. It depends on people and education because some people believe... they can just go to university then get a stable job...get kids. Others want to have a different life.

I also explored with Shrouk what she thinks would be needed to make the programs more inclusive:

I guess that it would be important for example ... salto youth... I have applied for lots of programs... ver good amount. I always got response that i did not get it... other participants.. .participants from europe... cheaper... because of the time... you got accepted you go to visa... if I am in place... maybe i would take the ebay...place... the person behind the screen applied feels about it.

We would be needing... it's impossible... that the projects in erasmus not just be applying through organisations... that i can show my interest as individual... or can really consider us as applications not countries... not looking at me as egyptian... that's her plan for the future...

I just scrolling down on facebook... I hope today I will find partners in egypt... they want from france poland... just EU... then I feel like I'm getting depressed... one day I will find egypt. That's what I think...

Although we don't have much time left, I do want to ask what Shrouk thinks are the reasons why the programs should be inclusive ...

(By the way, do you want some more tea?)

(Yes, please and I'll have another cookie)

So here's Shrouk's answer to your question... it has two parts to it, on the one hand about the way you and others see yourself:

Will explore other things about yourself... people in egypt want me to behave this way... i will be forced in my country.. lots of situation when I was in Morocco... I just told the people ... I believe in 1-3... can you also respect my beliefs... feeling maybe I am weird... ..we became really good friends. In contact with lots of them.... I thought we never be friends... you were telling us about your beliefs... you are just expressing yourself. That was hard for me... enver in front of me . beliefs.. What I do what i don't' do. Important for human being to grow.

And on the other hand how you see others...

It changed how I think about specific groups. When I facilitate... programs... people having problems... with people from islamic countries or trans... when they speak with each other... their tons change... they can show some of their views... when they look at other person reaction they reconsider...start asking questions... and then their perspective... changed. It was because of how they heard about it... it definitely changes... me without meeting you... I wouldn't' seeing who you are.

Well, that was plenty of food for thought!

I know, right? Time to wrap up, isn't it?

Yes, I think so... But we'll be back soon with our upcoming episodes and this time with guests from national agencies... and their recipes for more inclusion, diversity and flavours, right?

Indeed! And I think we should end this program with inspiration from our young guests.

Please... bring it on!

I thought I would come... I need to talk about my experience. I want to share energy...frustration... it's good ... it's something that made me think... If I can make yellow vs. blue... if I can make exchange programs... then I can bring people with less opportunities... go through this hard time to appreciate.. .

This podcast has been produced by SALTO Inclusion and Diversity Resource Centre, for more resources and tools check: www.salto-youth.net/inclusion