

## **Let's support young people's solidarity and youth (field) in action!**

*Recommendations for the implementation of the current programmes European Solidarity Corps and Erasmus+: Youth in Action in 2020 due to COVID-19 outbreak.*

COVID-19, and the measures to contain it, are affecting European Youth programmes (European Solidarity Corps and Erasmus+: Youth in Action) as they are other areas of life. Their impact is felt by programme participants, beneficiary organisations and prospective applicants, and by National Agencies.

As Youth National Agencies, with responsibility to manage the implementation of these programmes, we are doing whatever we can to help and support the thousands of individuals and organisations directly involved. Our primary focus is on maintaining participants' safety and well-being. Increasingly, we are also facing questions and concerns – from National Authorities, parliamentarians, sectoral partners, prospective applicants and trainers – about programmes' continuity during and after the period of the pandemic.

We believe that swift and decisive action is essential if we are to safeguard the reputation of European Youth programmes, and European cooperation in youth field, as a force for good in the lives of young people. That is why, the following recommendations for implementation of the current programmes European Solidarity Corps and Erasmus+: Youth in Action in 2020 have been prepared.

### **Flexibility in use of funds**

We support the solution, European Commission is working on, to allow National Agencies to use available funds within open Delegation Agreements, to increase granted budgets for projects that need additional support.

There are still two deadlines remaining under the 2020 Call for European Solidarity Corps and Erasmus+: Youth in Action. Projects supported at these deadlines can bring significant benefits to young people and their communities across Europe – and help mitigate the negative impacts from COVID-19. To help realise this potential, we recommend that National Agencies be granted complete flexibility in their use of the funds available to them under the 2019 and 2020 Delegation Agreements for both programmes, so that they can re-distribute funds from the different programme actions and activity types, without limitation. Such a solution was implemented successfully under the 2018 Delegation Agreements for European Solidarity Corps programme.

### **Clarity about the opportunities in 2020 for starting projects.**

In February we had the first deadline in 2020, which was still unaffected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the Youth field there are still two deadlines ahead. All those projects are going to start in 2020, they will suffer massively under the unsecure conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic when it comes to the different kind of mobility activities and forms of encounters. It is completely unpredictable what will be the situation in two months, during summer or in autumn / winter. NAs are already now confronted with a huge number of questions and requests to plan already now for different kind of activities (see below), or to adapt project content to the conditions likely in the coming month and during the course of the project, , or to have the opportunity to prolong the project duration. For the moment it is difficult to answer and to give reliable information to beneficiaries and potential applicants. But reliable information on what will be possible for future projects is necessary to allow beneficiaries to start their approved projects or to apply for projects in the coming two deadlines. We ask the European Commission to give as soon as possible a clear orientation.

### **Increased support for in-country activities**

Current programme rules already allow, under some actions and activity types (Solidarity projects in European Solidarity Corps and Youth Dialogue projects in Erasmus+: Youth in Action), projects that take place within the home country only – without the involvement of an international partner or transnational mobility. We

recommend that Youth National Agencies be given the flexibility to increase their allocation of funds to such actions, beyond the limits set out in the Delegation Agreement (20% for ESC, limited amount for KA3 in E+), at the application deadlines of May and October 2020.

### **Adjusted programmes rules**

We are all aware that in the future months the implementation of transnational projects under programmes will be simply impossible, as a result of numerous travel and other restrictions in all programme and partner countries.

On this basis, we recommend that National Agencies should, as an exceptional measure, in a limited period until the end of 2020, be granted flexibility to approve the implementation of virtual project activities or in the home country project activities only, without the need for trans-national mobility. Based on the views expressed by current beneficiaries, prospective applicants, other sector stakeholders and trainers, the Network of Youth National Agencies believes there are opportunities to support a wide range of projects in this way – with benefits to national recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Beside already possible Solidarity projects, Volunteering projects, Volunteering Teams and Volunteering Partnerships Projects, Jobs and Traineeships (under European Solidarity Corps) and Youth Exchanges and Youth Worker Mobility (under Erasmus+: Youth in Action) could all be supported as national projects. This is only possible if National Agencies have the flexibility to increase their allocation of funds to such projects, beyond the limits set out in the Delegation Agreement. The Network of Youth National Agencies acknowledges that a change in programmes rules would be needed, but believes to be justified by the willingness shown by young people and youth organisations to make a positive difference in the current context.

### **Increased flexibility in use of TCA, NET and STEC funds**

The European Commission has responded positively to the request to extend eligibility periods for TCA, NET and STEC funds. This will facilitate the adaptation of planned activities and development of new projects in line with current conditions – and is greatly appreciated by the Network of Youth National Agencies. However, given the potential length of the recovery and its effects on physical mobility, 6 months may not be enough, and we urge European Commission to consider the extension to 12 months for both 2019 and 2020 Delegation Agreements. Building on this flexibility, the Network of National Agencies recommends maximum flexibility in implementing 2019 and 2020 TCA, NET and STEC work programmes, to reorient to virtual or alternative solutions as well as in calling new actions that do not require physical mobility until that will be possible again. For example, give more freedom to National Agencies and encourage them to focus in the upcoming TCA / NET activities on development of concepts, studies, analytic papers, DEOR activities and other forms of intellectual outputs as well as on the continuation and development of longer lasting co-operations and strategic partnerships between National Agencies.

Additionally, National Agencies should be given the opportunity to carry out **national** and international activities in TCA / NET which are linked to COVID-19 pandemic and which are helping National Agencies, beneficiaries and applicants to understand and deal with the situation in youth work, to support them to adjust their work and to prepare for European cooperation and activities in the future making use of the programmes.

### **Special call for “Youth work projects in Corona crisis”**

We also propose and are willing to work hand in hand with European Commission and Member States, to develop and implement an optional special European wide decentralised call, that would support youth work projects in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the youth field we can also see the benefits of launching an additional Key Action 2 Strategic Partnerships call Commission has been proposing in the NA Survey (in case there would be more funds available) and focusing 2nd and 3rd 2020 round projects to youth work in the digital world and lessons learned from the current crisis.

## Ongoing investment in transnational mobility and cooperation in the youth field

The consequences and effects of the current pandemic will not be limited to the year 2020 only. The new programmes Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps 2021-2027 will also start in difficult circumstances. The Commission will propose an adapted Multiannual financial framework, in order to cope with the consequences of COVID-19. We strongly believe that a focus on young people, their living conditions, their health and well-being, and their participation is absolutely necessary in the coming years. We are also convinced that involving, supporting and stimulating young people to engage in European cooperation and solidarity is, more than ever, of very high importance. Youth projects, youth organisations and the European youth work community at large, should be enabled to play an effective role in this. Therefore, we strongly urge that the adapted MFF reflects this need and sustains investment in European programmes for the youth field and in transnational mobility and cooperation between young Europeans.

Solidarity with young people and with youth organisations – that’s the message underlying all of these recommendations. It is based on our commitment, as Youth National Agencies, to support young people in their development, enabling them to make a difference on the issues they care about.

These are very difficult times. The COVID-19 pandemic has already brought about changes in the way we live our lives – and will have a far-reaching impact on established cultural, economic and social structures. The European Union itself faces its biggest challenge.

In 2016, President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, announced the European Solidarity Corps as creating *“opportunities for young people willing to make a meaningful contribution to society and help show solidarity – something the world and our European Union needs more of. For me, this has always been the very essence of what the European Union is about.”*

The Network of Youth National Agencies believes that young people and youth organisations are ready to play their part in rebuilding Europe – and in showing solidarity with all those affected by the current pandemic.

Let’s use the European Youth programmes, European Solidarity Corps and Erasmus+: Youth in Action: **let’s support young people’s solidarity and youth (field) in action!**

Network of Youth National Agencies  
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