



Empowering  
young people

## YES Forum's Position Paper on the Erasmus+ 2021-27 interim evaluation & Erasmus+ 2014-20 final evaluation

As a European network of youth & social NGOs working with and for vulnerable youth, the YES Forum has embraced the 2021-2027 Erasmus+ programme since its start.

Key progress has been made towards a more accessible Erasmus+ Youth, both for grassroots organisations and participants themselves. An almost **doubled budget for the whole programme** demonstrates a strong commitment towards creating more learning opportunities for youth. The focus on inclusion is stronger than ever, with concrete solutions to foster it such as putting **Inclusion & Diversity forward as a horizontal priority** and the new **Inclusion support budget category**. Simplification remains steady as demonstrated by the **introduction of Small-scale Partnerships**.

However much remains to be done on the front of inclusion. Our recommendations therefore provide concrete solutions to bridge the remaining gap between Erasmus+ and the youth most distant from it: this can only be done by **offering a level-playing field to all Erasmus+ beneficiaries, including grassroots organisations working with the most vulnerable youth**.

### 1. Simplification: Trim & Doll up the Erasmus+ Guide

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Once a youth and social worker's interest in Erasmus+ has been sparked, the Erasmus+ Programme Guide is the first concrete step on their path towards applying for a grant.

However, since Erasmus+ got its "+", its Guide has grown ever bigger: from less than 270 pages in 2014 to more than 450 pages 10 years later in its English version. Such a seemingly insurmountable wall is the first obstacle brave professionals must face. In the field of youth & social work, a particularly vulnerable sector in most EU member states, this discourages many potential newcomers which simply do not have the resources to explore such a maze on their own.

To make Erasmus+ more welcoming towards newcomers:

- › **Shorten the Erasmus+ Programme Guide:** compile duplicate information from similar Key Action 1 activities (e.g. objectives, priorities, structure of projects) in the Education, Youth and Sport strands, and highlight only differences (e.g. budget amounts, target groups, eligible organisations). Provide an abridged version focusing on key facts.
- › **Make the Erasmus+ Guide easier-to-read and understand:** use a simpler language to avoid making the EU jargon one more obstacle, and use formatting options as well as visual aids to ease navigating through the guide (e.g. titles' formatting allowing to clearly identify their rank, more contrast in colours and characters size, headers/footers helping readers finding their way).

## 2. Simplification: "One portal for all"

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Applying to and reporting about Erasmus+ projects now happen through a single platform: beyond that, Erasmus+ ICT tools remain a puzzle whose pieces do not perfectly fit. Newcomers must first find out how to register among two duplicate processes (PIC & OID), where to find various templates (e.g. Legal Entity form), which of the available partners-finding tools is best suited to them, check their National Agency's website for any discrepancies or additional procedures ... By the end of a project, a beneficiary must also understand that tools such as the *Erasmus+ Projects Results Platform* or the *Youthpass* are not interconnected with the *Erasmus+ Beneficiary Module*.

The instability and inconsistency of ICT tools supporting Erasmus+ has added confusion, with subdomains being referred to as standalone platforms (e.g. don't search for the *Organisation Registration System*, it is a section of the main Erasmus+ platform), tools being replaced along the way (e.g. the *Beneficiary Module* has replaced the *Mobility Tool+* after the new programme started) and changing names despite having the exact same purpose (e.g. above example).

To foster the inclusion of newcomers and long-term engagement of current beneficiaries:

- › **Implement a central yet comprehensive Single Window Portal for Erasmus+**, catering for all users' needs by redirecting them depending on their profile, step in a project etc.
- › **Favor stable ICT tools over revamping them too often:** do not replace or split ICT tools during the programme duration.

### 3. Simplification: Keep “Single Lump Sums” proportionate

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The “single lump sums” as originally introduced with Small-scale partnerships is worth the experiment and proportionate to the scale of such projects, effectively easing the application process for newcomer and less-experienced organisations.

Such a system comes with several drawbacks, however. For instance, unless their project spontaneously amounts to these thresholds, applicants are led – to some extent – to artificially scale activities so that their budget reaches 30.000€ or 60.000€, thus distorting their project design based on bureaucratic constraints rather than their target group's needs.

In addition, simplification comes at the cost of insecurity for applicants, due to inconsistencies and uncertainties regarding the compatibility of such Single Lump Sums with national tax law, or the absence of hindsight of audits on Small-scale partnerships which may prove either too strict – putting undue pressure upon beneficiaries – or too lax – allowing shady budget management. For these reasons:

- › **Keep the Single Lump Sums system to Key Action 2 Small-scale Partnerships until its added-value has been thoroughly evaluated.**

On the other hand, the “traditional” funding models in Erasmus+ already offer a range of budget categories adapted to diverse situations:

- Actual costs are the least easy funding model to use due to the bureaucratic efforts involved in estimating costs and supporting such estimates with relevant documents, while offering little to no flexibility in the budget management but provide more appropriate funding since based on real costs.
- Unit costs are the easiest funding model to use, as most of a project budget can be automatically calculated based on the number of participants, duration of their stay etc. Their main drawback lies in the discrepancy between unit costs calculated based on the living cost in whole countries and actual costs that can vary a lot in the same country, for instance between rural and urban areas.
- A combination of unit costs and actual costs has proven the most practical option, allowing to easily calculate 90% of a budget through unit costs and to cover the remaining through actual costs offering the flexibility to adjust to any project's specifics.

For these reasons:

- › **Favour a combination of unit costs and actual costs as a standard funding model.**

## 4. Inclusion: Evaluate it in both decentralized and centralized actions

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Thanks to the efforts of Erasmus+ National Agencies who have progressively teamed up through the RAY Network<sup>1</sup>, evidence-based research on the results of Erasmus+ Youth is available.

The RAY Network's studies now provide invaluable data for the continuous improvement of the Erasmus+ programme, covering extensive aspects such as its effects on project participants and leaders (RAY MON) as well as narrower focuses, especially inclusion.

However, such efforts encompass only the decentralized actions managed by the Erasmus+ National Agencies and remain hindered by the lack of common indicators related to inclusion among Erasmus+ countries. Therefore:

- › **Evaluate the achievement of the *Inclusion & Diversity* priority in all Erasmus+ actions, including the centralized actions managed by the EACEA.**

## 5. Inclusion: Beware the mirage of “all-virtual solutions”

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Online tools represent an asset towards the inclusion of participants in some situations (e.g. health problems, disabilities, geographical seclusion) but, when too prevalent, also become an additional exclusion factor for others (e.g. lack of a dedicated space at home, insufficient digital literacy, financial difficulties depriving learners from a decent setup).

Meanwhile, the unique intercultural learning achieved by participants through Erasmus+ relies as much on the activities they carry out – some of which can be done online – as on their immersion in a foreign culture for a certain period – which is nigh impossible to achieve without travelling abroad and brings lower benefits to participants at best. Thus:

- › **ICT tools should only support actual mobilities and not replace them through “full virtual mobilities”.**
- › **Exceptional Costs should explicitly allow investing in equipment and facilities that can be provided to participants** who would otherwise be excluded from a project with a focus on online activities.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.researchyouth.net](http://www.researchyouth.net)

## 6. Sustainability: Towards a more resilient Erasmus+

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Creating a more sustainable and resilient environment for beneficiaries is one more way to encourage potential newcomers to step into Erasmus+, and in turn to widen the offer of opportunities for participants.

The EACEA and National Agencies should therefore draw lessons from the most recent shocks experienced by the programme – the historical inflation, the war in Ukraine, among others – to implement long-term measures fostering the long-term involvement of beneficiaries:

- › **Revise all budget categories' amounts to reflect inflation** since they were first set. Travel Grants have overall remained the same since 2014 for instance: one does not travel as far in 2023 with the same grant as in 2014 though.
- › **Implement an Inflation Adjustment Mechanism within Erasmus+**, re-evaluating the amount of all budget categories on a yearly basis, at mid-programme, or at least when the average inflation rate in the EU reaches a critical threshold. Such a measure would foster the long-term implication of applicants by allowing more secure, strategic planning.
- › **Design a comprehensive, harmonized policy by the EACEA on what kind of modifications are allowed in an Erasmus+ project** without the approval of one's National Agency, especially when it comes to Key Action 1 unit costs. To this day, information about the flexibility offered to applicants in their budget management remains partial, scattered and hard to access (e.g. in Grant Agreements so not accessible prior contractualization).

December 2023

### About the YES Forum

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Founded in 2002, [YES Forum](#) is a European network of organisations working with and for young people facing challenging situations. By promoting their social inclusion and developing their professional skills, we act to improve the life chances of vulnerable young people. YES Forum aims to create an environment where young people and youth professionals have equally accessible learning and work-related opportunities in Europe and beyond.