

Multiannual Financial Framework: Erasmus 2021-2027

YES Forum's Feedback on Proposal 2018/0191(COD) – September 2018

YES Forum is a European network of 39 youth and social organisations in 19 EU Member States or Programme countries **working with and for young people** who face socio-economic and educational disadvantages, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity and geographical discrimination.

YES Forum focuses on **promoting their personal and professional development in society, supporting their active citizenship and inclusive youth policies** at local, regional, national and EU levels. Therefore it creates and supports projects, trainings, seminars and conferences that provide space for exchange of information and critical thinking in the field of youth, which gather **youngsters, professionals in the field of youth work and policy makers**.

Summary

In this document you will find six topics covering YES Forum's suggestions to strengthen Inclusion and Accessibility in the Erasmus Programme through the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework:

- I. YES Forum believes that Information, Communication and Technological tools can at best complement "physical" outreach;
- II. *DiscoverEU* looks distant from the objectives of focusing "on inclusiveness, and to reach more young people with fewer opportunities", while Youth Exchanges could achieve the same goals in a structured way;
- III. There could be a better balance in the overall budget: KA1 in the field of youth should prioritize activities which are the most accessible to youth in all its diversity and KA2 in the field of youth should also prioritize activities providing greater benefits to young people with fewer opportunities;
- IV. The new Programme should offer a better balanced and fairer distribution of funds between Education and Training (Higher Education in particular) and Youth;
- V. The new Programme should offer more clarity, visibility, and avoid the bureaucratic complications many NGOs and stakeholders (equally interested in *Erasmus* and the *European Solidarity Corps*) are already expecting from such a split;
- VI. YES Forum strongly supports the objective of simplification in the future Programme, making suggestions about the optimisation of the online tools.

YES Forum welcomes the European Commission proposal to renew, improve and, especially, **strengthen Erasmus** through the **next EU Multiannual financial framework**¹.

In particular, the doubled budget sends an extremely positive sign to EU citizens and the EU Civil Society. Additionally, the stated objective of making the next Erasmus programme **more inclusive** and **accessible** to the widest possible range of target groups is a long-awaited, much needed and therefore extremely important feature. Without it, the gap amidst European youth will only grow bigger, carrying numerous threats for the European Union future.

However, YES Forum would like to share the following remarks and suggestions to improve the next Erasmus programme, **in particular in regard to Inclusiveness and Accessibility**. Our network's fundamental concerns about Proposal 2018/0191(COD) in the field of youth work are:

- I -

A “greater use of information, communication and technology tools, blended mobility [...] and virtual cooperation” will not be enough

The new budget encompasses a large variety of measures and improvements for the accessibility of the programme to both youngsters with fewer opportunities and small-scale stakeholders. Among them, the use of ICT appears like a priority.

While it is important to make the best use of improved technological means in the programme, **it is essential to keep in mind ICT solutions can at best complement “physical” outreach**. Only field work by social and youth workers can actually reach out to the widest diversity of target groups.

Therefore, **to overcome ICT's limitations** when it comes to Inclusion and Diversity:

- A strengthened focus must be implemented on one of the new proposal's main improvements: **Small-scale Partnerships**. Thanks to this new and more flexible format, the programme will indeed be more accessible to newcomers and community-based grassroots organisations working directly with disadvantaged learners. These are the ones who can actually involve young people with fewer opportunities, by providing direct, alternative and more efficient channels to reach them.

¹ Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing 'Erasmus': the Union programme for education, training, youth and sport, 30.05.18 [Online]

- Moreover, all **projects addressed at young people with fewer opportunities should benefit from the envisaged simplified procedures** especially when it comes to funding extra work. In particular, project grants should not provide funding only to run activities, but also for outreach, in order to ensure youth and social workers can actually dedicate the indispensable time to engage with groups that have been, until now, excluded from Erasmus.
- The target and benefits of **“online platforms and tools for virtual cooperation”** in the field of youth (Article 9 (c)) should be **clearly defined** in the proposal itself.

- II -

DiscoverEU – A glamorous but counter-productive measure?

Even though **DiscoverEU** is a perfect tool when it comes to improving the EU’s image across Member-States, it **will jeopardize the objective of focusing “on inclusiveness, and to reach more young people with fewer opportunities”**.

As this new initiative has been experimented for the first time this year only, no data are available about its results and actual achievements. Including it on a regular basis in a 7-year financial framework therefore appears reckless. Moreover, it is easily predictable that this initiative will not be able to reach youth in all its diversity, but will instead benefit “young people with more opportunities”. We can only agree with the Erasmus Student Network’s opinion that **“As it is now [...] the DiscoverEU initiative will remain rather elitist and limited to certain geographical areas.”**²

DiscoverEU contradicts the objective of more inclusiveness in the youth strand of Erasmus. Indeed:

- Because the communication on this initiative has been mostly carried out online through Social Media, young people with fewer opportunities, who are predictably not reached by the “EU Social Media Bubble”, will barely hear about it if grassroots NGOs don’t have the means to directly inform and support them.
- Applying and travelling abroad on their own for young 18 year olds carries many barriers. Only young people who are already independent, autonomous, have financial means (i.e. parents’ support) to pay for expenses besides travel-related costs covered by **DiscoverEU**, who are self-confident, have prior experience abroad (i.e. who could enjoy family vacations), have minimum

² *“More Erasmus for more people, but not enough investment”* - Reaction of the Erasmus Student Network to the new Erasmus+ Programme, published in June 2018 [Online]. <https://tinyurl.com/y9zttyk9>

linguistic skills ... only these young people “with more opportunities” can fully engage in the initiative, while the vast majority of the others are left aside.

The funds allocated to *DiscoverEU* would, therefore, be **better spent on other actions**. Not only when it comes to inclusiveness, but also for the basic learning outcomes: Youth Exchanges, for example, provide the benefits of travelling abroad, experiencing interculturalism, learning on specific topics. Compared to *DiscoverEU*, **Youth Exchanges achieve all of that in a structured way**, with the support of youth workers!

- III -

Towards a new, better balance in the field of youth

It is also essential to enforce a better balance in the overall **budget**, a balance **reflecting the focus “on inclusiveness, and to reach more young people with fewer opportunities”**.

Article 14.2 (b), contrarily to Article 14.2 (a) for the field of education and training, doesn’t provide any details on how the budget allocated to the youth strand will be distributed among the different types of actions. To actually put effective efforts towards greater inclusion, **KA1 in the field of youth should prioritize activities which are the most accessible to youth in all its diversity:**

1. The Mobility of young people;
2. Youth participation activities;
3. The Mobility of Youth Workers;
4. *DiscoverEU*, if it is maintained in the programme.

For the same reasons, **KA2 in the field of youth should also prioritize activities providing greater benefits to young people with fewer opportunities:**

1. Partnerships for cooperation and exchange of practices – small-scale partnerships fostering a wider and more inclusive access to the Programme should be a key priority among these activities;
2. Partnerships for innovation;
3. Online platforms and tools for virtual cooperation.

YES Forum believes that the future Programme should commit to a **clearly defined distribution of available funds among the abovementioned activities**, in this order of priority.

- IV -

A fairer balance towards all of youth

All fields benefit from the strengthened Programme in the same way, as each budget is proposed to be doubled. Instead, **the new Programme should offer a better balanced and fairer distribution of funds** between (1) Education and Training, and Higher Education in particular and (2) Youth.

Education and Training is an essential field and **financial support through projects must be strengthened**. However, activities in this field, especially in Higher Education, are only accessible to a few: young people who are studying, in VET or in a training of any sort. NEETs are, therefore, excluded, even though they should be a priority – according to the Programme’s stated focus on inclusiveness.

A better balance, reflecting the objective of providing a “*wider and more inclusive access*”, should therefore **benefit activities which are open to youth without any restrictions**: these activities can only be found in the youth field.

The overall budget for Education and Training, while being reinforced, should therefore less than double, to provide more financial capacities to **youth activities, accessible to and targeted at youth in all its diversity by their very essence**.

- V -

Simplification: Where is the European Solidarity Corps?

The additional **focus on continuing simplification** in order to allow more stakeholders, including newcomers, to take part in the Programme **is welcome and indispensable**. However, one major drawback is already planned. Making the *European Solidarity Corps* a different programme in the future *Multiannual financial framework* contradicts all previous efforts, embodied in the merging of 7 separate programmes into Erasmus+.

It is understandable – but extremely **confusing for stakeholders**, jeopardizing the initiative’s ambitions – **that the *European Solidarity Corps* is planned to have its own legislative basis while waiting for a new financial framework beyond 2020**.

However, since the *European Solidarity Corps* is a learning experience as the European Voluntary Service was, it is difficult to understand why it would not be reincluded in the next Erasmus

Programme. **It would offer more clarity, visibility, and avoid the bureaucratic complications many NGOs and stakeholders** (equally interested in Erasmus and the *European Solidarity Corps* in many cases when it comes to youth) **are already expecting from such a split.**

Indeed, how can we expect rules, processes and other bureaucratic obstacles not to gradually differ between Erasmus and the *European Solidarity Corps*, if it is not the very reason these two programmes are not reunited?

- VI -

Simplification: Less is more

Lastly, **YES Forum strongly supports the objective of simplification in the future Programme** to make it accessible to the widest possible range of target groups. This starts with a new shortened Programme Guide, which is easy to read and understand. Online tools must be actually optimised as stated in the Proposal: instead of multiple platforms, **stakeholders need a One Stop Shop to remove basic technical obstacles.** In particular, a single, consistent and well-functioning online platform must merge:

- The web-based application forms;
- The Mobility Tool;
- The Erasmus+ Project Results Platform;
- The Electronic Application Forms system run by the EACEA;
- The Beneficiaries space run by the EACEA.

We urge the European Commission to clarify its intentions on the abovementioned issues and to consider YES Forum's suggestions for improvements, in order to fulfil the European Union's commitment towards a wider and more inclusive access to Erasmus.

For more information, please visit our website or contact us directly at:



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