

European youth work should not perish!

Reverse the cut in funding for digital activities in the Erasmus+ Youth in Action programme and anchor adequate fundings in the new programme.

To whom it my concern

Erasmus+ is the most successful mobility program of the European Union. It has proven to make an essential contribution to the unity of the European Union, primarily through the Erasmus+ YOUTH IN ACTION program. It unfolds great potentials in promoting democracy, strengthening civil society and youth work (cf. RAY Interim Evaluation).

The Erasmus+ Youth in Action program has inspired innovation in youth work across Europe over the past 30 years. By excluding the funding opportunities for digital activities in the new program, **it loses this role**, as it does not encourage the enhancement of European youth work in the digital space. That closes a window for innovation before it could even be opened properly. And it massively weakens European youth work as it becomes less flexible and misses the opportunity to move into modern post-pandemic blended-learning activities, combining digital and face-to-face meetings at a new level of quality.

In the current pandemic, European mobilities such as youth exchanges, seminars and training courses are hardly possible. Thus learning opportunities for the methodological and qualitative development of European youth work are significantly limited. In 2020, hopes were high that postponing the activities to the summer of 2021 would be sufficient. A year would be lost, but partnerships could be maintained. Many organisations responded quickly by creating digital alternatives. The National Agencies of the Erasmus+ Youth in Action program supported them until June 2020 with very flexible funding solutions. In June 2020, however, the European Commission decided that the program would only fund digital alternatives at 35% of the funding rates for youth exchanges and 15% for training courses (KA2). This decision is diametrically opposed to the experience of organisations that are implementing digital programmes of high quality. **Practice shows, that after all, digital or hybrid usually means higher costs than face-to-face meetings.**

Postponing mobilities further until 2022 is not only pointless because of the expiring financial framework. Two years in a row without any activities have numerous negative effects on European partnerships and local organisations. Such organisations often recruit participants and team members via peer-to-peer networks and are now in danger of losing two cohorts and thus the direct connection to their target group. Therefore, it is crucial for many organisations to implement meaningful digital activities now. Many youth organisations, especially in Southern Europe, depending on the funding provided by the Erasmus+ Youth in Action program. **If no reasonable and adequately funded replacement measures can be implemented this year, essential structures of European youth work are threatened to disappear.** With the proposed significant reduction of the regular Erasmus+ funding rates, it is impossible to implement and finance the needed digital and hybrid activities.



In this context, four organisations from Saxony, Northrhine-Westphalia, Bremen and Berlin have joined forces with the AdB Arbeitskreis deutscher Bildungsstätten e.V. and surveyed the cost structure of digital alternatives. **The 40 participating organisations from Germany** would, in a non-pandemic year, jointly conduct 145 youth exchanges and training courses (Key Action 1), participate in 21 strategic partnerships (Key Action 2), and implement 22 measures to support policy reforms (Key Action 3) annually.

The results of the survey “Digital 100% Erasmus+” are summarised below and can be found in detail in the attachment. They support the conclusion that the **cuts in funding for digital activities are massively damaging European youth work and preventing innovation**. This is further exacerbated with the new Erasmus+ program, where digital and hybrid measures are still not or only insufficiently supported. The survey indicates that engaging the intended target groups digitally or hybrid and creating European spirit and solidarity using innovative educational concepts is time-consuming, cost-intensive, and thus expensive.

Enthusiasm for the European idea is particularly awakened by meeting peers and sharing experiences, such as creating something together despite speaking poor English or making new friends abroad. These experiences motivate people to work towards a European community. Creating them in the virtual space requires flexible and creative methods, the involvement of interpreters, experienced workshop leaders in all countries, materials to be transferred from analogue into the digital sphere, and, within the constraint of the pandemic, face-to-face meetings in national groups. **Simple and presumably affordable videoconferences will not establish such experiences and, therefore, will not inspire a European spirit**. It doesn't live up to the standards of non-formal education.

To ensure that European youth work does not perish in 2021 and that essential innovation potential remain unused in the future, we urgently appeal to you:

advocate for the European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture

- **to reverses the cut in the funding structure of digital replacement measures for activities already approved under the old financial framework;**
- **to anchors the funding of pedagogically demanding digital and hybrid measures in the new Erasmus+ program on an equal footing with face-to-face meetings.**

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this letter and for your support!

With kind regards

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“Digital 100% Erasmus+ “ survey - Results in five key statements

The effort is higher, activities are expensive - innovation is thwarted by the EU

In all three Erasmus+ funded Key Actions, only a small percentage of the approved activities have been converted into digital or hybrid formats so far. According to the survey, the main challenges are the lack of funding (75%); the motivation of the target groups (72.5%); achieving the same quality as in face-to-face activities (75%); the availability of suitable tools (50%); the lack of experience of the youth workers (50%).

The costs increase, as, among other things, digital and hybrid activities require more working time for conceptual design, additional payment for workshop leaders in all countries, more language mediators, technical support of facilitation, as well as licence costs for tools compliant with data protection and fundamental rights. Innovative formats are resource-intensive.

"analogue is not the same as digital is not the same as hybrid" - there is a need for qualification

In addition to the availability of suitable tools (e.g., data protection compliance, tools adapted to the needs of non-formal education, affordability, etc.), the lack of experience with digital tools in non-formal educational identifies as a second critical challenge. In many cases, youth workers have to explore this field from scratch and require further training. The time and effort for adequate training and qualification need to be added to the (working) time of the implementation. In times of lockdowns, the closing of organisations, imposed suspensions of cooperation with schools and reduced working hours; qualification means an additional barrier.

Reasons for not implementing digital / hybrid activities:

50% of organisations have no plans for implementing any digital or hybrid activity. Reasons cited for this are insufficient funding, the lack of technical equipment, and a lack of interest among the target groups. Another significant factor is the focus of youth work on analogue programs. Difficulties exist with adequately transferring the analogue approaches into digital practice, especially since non-formal learning processes and exchanges are usually designed to last several days. There is a fundamental need for the European youth work to qualify for digitalisation, which is thwarted by the existing funding structure.

Attractive formats are inclusive!

Inclusion and the participation of people with diverse needs are a core priority of Erasmus+ Youth in Action. A crucial success factor for inclusive measures has been identified in implementing hybrid activities (national groups hold parallel workshops in one location in their respective countries and meet each other online). Three of the significant challenges, which are also essential requirements for inclusive activities, relate to personnel support in all countries: workshop leaders, language mediators and facilitators.

Up to now there is hardly any threat to the existence of the German organisations, but a great concern regarding the partner organisations and the future of European youth work in the ongoing pandemic.

Although most German organisations do not seem to be threatened in their existence, a look at the partner structures shows that the lack of funding endangers many European partner organisations. It shows that without Erasmus+ in many European countries, no structures of extracurricular youth work would exist. The current Covid-19 regulation and the plans for the new Erasmus+ program create an unnecessary barrier for adequate qualification and European digital youth work. Covid-19 will influence European and international mobilities for a long time. Therefore it is urgent to enable and support meaningful digitalised and digitally supported youth work and responsible face-to-face meetings with tests and vaccinations.