

Position paper of the members of the National Advisory Board for the EU programmes Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps in Germany: The New Generation of EU Youth Programmes 2028-2034

The interim evaluations of the EU programmes Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps have shown a wide range of positive effects at individual, structural, and societal level. The two programmes have great potential for social cohesion in Europe and the realisation of European values as set out in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union.

The EU youth programmes are also indispensable for pursuing the concerns and objectives of European youth policy and are key instruments for its successful implementation. The implementation of the EU Youth Strategy is inconceivable without the learning mobilities, projects and opportunities for exchange, capacity building, quality development, and networking made possible by the programmes.

The unique selling point of Erasmus+ Youth is to sustainably strengthen the personal development of young people through non-formal learning experiences, among other things. The programme is an instrument for achieving added value in youth work at European level on the one hand and strengthening the voluntary democratic engagement of young people in Europe on the other. Young people particularly appreciate the fact that the programme strengthens their social and intercultural skills, language skills, awareness of European values and self-directed non-formal learning as well as an exchange between the younger generation on social and political issues in Europe.

The European Solidarity Corps makes a direct contribution to social cohesion in Europe and promotes the voluntary engagement of young people in society at local level and beyond. Solidarity as a central goal of the programme corresponds to the current social relevance and strengthens the attitude towards European values as the foundation of the European Union.

Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps complement each other in their relevance. They must correspond to the future political guidelines of the European Commission and be characterised by objectives that should be given greater focus and priority in the new generation of programmes: the independent and youth-specific contribution of the programmes to the development and strengthening of more democracy and social cohesion in Europe. As such, the two programmes must and can send a clear signal to all young people up to the age of 30 in Europe as independent youth programmes or as a visible youth chapter in Erasmus+ that their active participation is wanted, desired, and necessary.

This results in the following recommendations for the future of EU youth programmes:

- **Strengthening the EU youth programmes**

Based on previous experience and in the knowledge of the effects and existing potential of the EU youth programmes, these should be continued and further developed. The word brand 'Erasmus+ Youth' should be retained and be clearly recognisable to young people. This also includes maintaining an independent youth chapter in the Erasmus+ programme.

- **The importance of non-formal and informal education**

The EU youth programmes create scope for non-formal and informal learning experiences. These learning experiences contribute significantly to promoting the knowledge, skills, and abilities of young people, over and above an exclusively employment-orientated focus. They strengthen the key qualifications of young people and empower them for active participation in politics, business, and society. The learning experiences can relate to the acquisition of professional as well as societal and social skills.

By promoting democratic skills, critical thinking, political education, and intercultural exchange as well as encouraging social engagement, they play a key role in strengthening social cohesion and preserving democracy. This potential must also be used in the future and made accessible to as many young people as possible in addition to formal educational opportunities.

- **Democratic values and social cohesion**

In times of increasing nationalism, threatened democracies, and critical European voices, it is important to consciously engage with Europe, the European Union, and its values. The EU youth programmes create meeting places for young people from different countries and help to create an understanding of the realities of life for other Europeans. They also strengthen networking and cooperation between organisations, thereby supporting the European idea and transnational cooperation.

The programmes thus contribute to social and societal cohesion in the Member States and in Europe. They are key instruments for maintaining, strengthening, and defending democratic values in Europe. They should also be an indispensable building block for the development of a European identity and a common European self-confidence in the future.

- **Youth participation in programme development and implementation**

A prerequisite for the effective orientation of the programmes is the broad and genuine participation of young people and their democratic youth association representatives in the design and implementation of the programmes at all levels. To this end, flexible, reliable participation formats from the local to the European level must be developed, established, and implemented together with young people. In the Member States, independent youth advisory boards with transparent structures should be set up to advise the National Agencies on programme implementation.

- **Cooperation with non-associated countries**

With the help of EU youth programmes, German organisations have gained decades of positive experience in cross-border cooperation in youth work and youth policy. This European exchange also extends beyond the EU and makes a lasting contribution to understanding, tolerance, and cohesion in a wider Europe. In the interests of solidarity, standing up for European values and ideals as well as youth policy and professional cooperation beyond the borders of the European Union, the participation of partner countries and non-associated countries in the programmes must be made possible to a greater extent in future.

- **Diversity of funding formats and better accessibility**

Diverse and coherent funding formats in the EU youth programmes are important. They correspond to the framework conditions of youth work in Europe and make it possible to provide a broad spectrum of programmes for a wide variety of young people. The activities and formats in the youth programmes must be maintained and further developed in their diversity, and they should always be geared towards the target group of young people and their different and specific needs. For example, accessibility to the programmes must be significantly improved to reach young people in particular who previously had no or insufficient access to the programmes.

- **Programme priorities**

The four priorities of the youth programmes ‘Inclusion and Diversity’, ‘Participation in Democratic Life, Common Values, and Civic Engagement’, ‘Digital Transformation’ and ‘Environment and Fight against Climate Change’ correspond to current needs and should be continued, as should the promotion of the European dimension in youth work. At the same time, it should be possible to react flexibly to social developments and new challenges to ensure the relevance and effectiveness of the programmes.

- **Securing financial resources for programme implementation**

The EU youth programmes need needs-based, crisis-proof, dynamic funding that considers both the effects of inflation and the changing requirements for programme implementation regarding users in the sense of consistent target group orientation.

- **Simplification of application and administrative procedures**

In view of the access of a broad and differentiated spectrum of target groups, the participation of small and large institutions from the child and youth welfare sector, the engagement sector and civil society, it is essential that the application process and programme administration and accounting become more user-friendly. To this end, it must be ensured that the application and project accounting processes are extensively de-bureaucratised, IT tools are fully functional and error-free, contracts are shortened and made available in all official EU languages, and proportionality is established between the project volume applied for and the administrative effort involved.

The application procedure must be reorganised in such a way that young people are actually put in a position to write and manage applications themselves.



The National Advisory Board advises the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women, and Youth on the implementation of the EU programmes Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps.