



POSITION PAPER

IMPROVE INCLUSION OF HIGHLY VULNERABLE YOUNG PEOPLE IN INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY IN THE FRAMEWORK OF ERASMUS+ AND EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS

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FOREWORD

The current document was created by an international consortium put together by Associazione Joint. The involved organisations are experienced in conducting mobility projects within the framework of Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programs. The consortium is composed of a number of 26 organisations from 14 countries and has been focusing on the topic of inclusion, particularly addressing the inclusion of groups of young people that find themselves in highly vulnerable situations and could benefit in their life path from a potential participation in an E+ mobility or an ESC project.

The document “Implementation guidelines of Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity Strategy” is highly underlining the importance of inclusion of people facing access barriers or having fewer opportunities in education, training and youth work as a key objective of the European Commission. Beneficiaries are to be provided with systematic, equitable and tailor-made support of inclusion and diversity projects at all stages of the project cycle. The members of our consortium adhere to this vision and advocate for **a stronger focus of the E+ and ESC Programs on the inclusion of highly vulnerable groups of young people.**

HIGHLY VULNERABLE GROUPS

The consortium has gathered around a common understanding of the concept of highly vulnerable groups of young people. Therefore, we have agreed that **a highly vulnerable young person is a person that is living in a situation of vulnerability and who is facing an overlapping of potential exclusion factors, of which at least one is a long-term or permanent condition.** Their involvement in mobility activities implies a need for a long term structural support system to be put in place by all partners in the project and promoted by National Agencies and European stakeholders.

METHODOLOGY

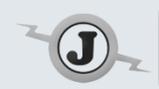
The current recommendations are the result of a participatory research process that engaged a significant number of expert organisations in the development of the document.

Firstly, a needs analysis was conducted through an online survey that gathered answers from 73 international organisations from 23 countries. Moreover, 10 organisations working at local level with highly vulnerable young people took part in qualitative interviews to better understand the potential barriers for their involvement in E+ or ESC mobilities.

During the Annual Meeting of the Network of Associazione Joint, held in November 2022, 26 organisations created the following set of recommendations, starting from the needs analysis results.

We address these recommendations to National Agencies, European institutions and other stakeholders that can contribute to the change.





SECTION 1: GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1. Introduce a clear distinction, within the Programme structure, between the concept of “young people with fewer opportunities” and the concept of “highly vulnerable young people”.

As a consortium, we believe that there is a need for a clear terminology distinction to be included in the ESC and Erasmus+ programme framework. Moreover, we trust that this distinction should have an impact on the expected quality standards for inclusion of highly vulnerable young people and on the resources provided for the implementation of such mobilities, that require extra structure, long term approach and, many times, individual constant support for the participating youth belonging to this specific profile.

1.2. Increase the budget for Erasmus+ and ESC projects, to answer to the general increase of life cost in Europe.

The growing inflation of the last year in the EU led to a general increase of the prices of the goods and services that organisations need to implement their projects both in Erasmus+ and ESC programmes (travels, board and lodging, materials). Furthermore, in the case of volunteering projects, the purchasing power of the pocket money that volunteers receive has significantly decreased. This is particularly important for the involvement of highly vulnerable participants who do not have the possibility to cover extra costs on their own.



SECTION 2: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REINFORCING INCLUSION OF HIGHLY VULNERABLE YOUNG PEOPLE IN ERASMUS+ YOUTH MOBILITIES

2.1. MAIN STATEMENT

Reinforce the value of Youth Exchanges as an impactful tool for social inclusion of young people in general, and of highly vulnerable young people in particular.

2.2. NEEDS

Most of the organisations active locally and working with highly vulnerable young people have not enough experience and staff capacity to implement international mobilities, but many of them are aware that the young people they are working with would highly benefit from such learning experiences. Therefore, we are certain that **cooperation between organisations working locally on social inclusion and organisations active in the international field is crucial.**

In Youth Exchange mobilities the role of the group leader is strongly under recognised and under valued by the general and financial structure of the Program. As there is not a specific focus and sufficient financial resources to cover the need of professional leaders, organisations are often forced to nominate a young person with basic experience in Erasmus+ and without specific training. In order to provide pre-departure, reinforced on-site and after-arrival support and follow-up especially for highly vulnerable young people, proper leaders' training is needed. Moreover, with a low budget available for a Youth Exchange, no remuneration of leaders' work is possible, which is a serious obstacle for organisations to involve highly vulnerable youth.

Pre-departure preparation and proper support of participants, in particular of participants from vulnerable situations, in the terms listed in the Inclusion and Diversity strategy, requires a systemic approach and professional management of mobility projects not only by the hosting organisation but also by the sending ones. **At the moment, the work of Sending Organisations is not recognized in terms of budget and this affects the quality of the offered support and prevents the possibility of setting common quality standards on quality.**

The after COVID period has made more and more visible the fact that young people, especially those in highly vulnerable situations, are facing mental health and emotional challenges that were maybe not so obvious before. As a result, we, organisations working in sending and hosting youth mobilities, would like to underline the importance of a structured, supportive process that allows them to fully benefit from the mobility experience and to always feel that they are in a safe space. To reach this quality standard we need to make sure we can activate all needed resources in terms of professional staff, expertise and budget.



2.3. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.3.1. Foster and support the creation of long-term cooperation between organisations active on inclusion at a local level and organisations active in the field of international mobility.

This relationship is meant as a mutual learning opportunity that will contribute to the capacity building of both types of organisations. The consortium identified 2 possible solutions: Firstly, National Agencies should have an active strategy to foster cooperation between local organisations working with highly vulnerable young people and organisations expert in the field of E+ mobility. This is already done by the Czech National Agency, and this approach could be spread to other countries, making the practice a common standard.

Secondly, National Agencies should support the recognition and visibility of the organisations experienced in international mobility and projects with highly vulnerable young people.

2.3.2. Recognize “inclusion” as a key competence in the framework of the European Training Strategy Competence Model for Youth Workers to Work Internationally.

ETS Competence Model for Youth Workers to Work Internationally is a key model for quality youth work and a point of reference for international youth workers around the EU. The topic of inclusion is barely visible in it today and that needs to be changed.

2.3.3. Higher acknowledgement of the role of the group leader in Youth Exchanges involving highly vulnerable youth.

The role of the group leader, in the perspective of inclusion of young people experiencing highly vulnerable situations, must benefit from a stronger recognition also in terms of funding. We propose to allocate a specific budget for organisations in order to recruit and select qualified group leaders, following the model of the “tutor” already foreseen in Solidarity projects under the ESC programme.

2.3.4. The Erasmus+ Guide should suggest a percentage of the project costs to be allocated to Sending Organisations.

The work of Sending Organisations in Youth Exchanges is essential for the actual involvement and positive participation of highly vulnerable young people, since they can offer the preparation and the support that are fundamental for the involvement of this specific target. The most common practice is that Sending Organisations rarely receive any part of the project budget. We believe that the Erasmus+ Guide should indicate an ideal percentage of budget that should normally be allocated for Sending Organisations for the preparation and follow-up of the participants, especially when involving highly vulnerable participants. Moreover, in the Program Guide, the role and tasks of Sending Organisations in Youth Exchanges should be better defined, following the guidelines of the Erasmus+ and ESC Inclusion and Diversity Strategy.



SECTION 3: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REINFORCING INCLUSION OF HIGHLY VULNERABLE YOUNG PEOPLE IN EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS MOBILITIES

3.1. NEEDS

In order to foster access of highly vulnerable young people to volunteering experiences in the framework of ESC, ***there is a strong need for ESC accredited organisations that work in inclusion to reach out to local structures, institutions and organisations that work with specific vulnerable groups*** in a more constant and long term way, providing, for example, social and educational services: inclusion schools, shelters for young people, alternative care structures, structures working with young people with disabilities, highly vulnerable NEETs, etc.

For ***ESC organisations to have recognition that will legitimise their work in front of local organisations working with highly vulnerable young people***, they need to be supported to justify their experience in working in a qualitative way with specific groups and to make themselves visible and trusted by local structures.

Including highly vulnerable young people in ESC mobilities requires a lot of time, effort, and structured approach from all the partners included in the process, starting from before the preparation until the follow-up. Such an approach, that many times takes the form of individual constant support to the young candidate, cannot be improvised on the spot, especially for short term ESC. It is a process that needs to be structured, implemented by highly professionalised staff members and with a long-term vision. As ***short-term ESC mobilities are the more approachable projects for highly vulnerable youth, the budget structure should also take into consideration a longer time of support than the usual duration of the mobility***.

3.2. RECOMMENDATIONS

3.2.1. ***Support the facilitation of networking between organisations working with highly vulnerable young people and ESC accredited organisations.***

In order to fulfil the need for an expertise exchange and stronger local cooperation between ESC organisations and local structures working with highly vulnerable young people, we recommend that National Agencies create and coordinate different instruments to bridge connections and ensure recognition. One option is to introduce a new feature in the ESC accreditation label that allows for the recognition of the organisation as an entity focusing on projects addressed to highly vulnerable volunteers.

A second possible recommendation is that National Agencies provide an official document, in the form of a printed certificate to be awarded to those organisations accredited to address the topic of inclusion of highly vulnerable people. This type of instrument is a form of recognition but also a way to ensure that ESC inclusion organisations are better seen on a local level, by other partner structures and local institutions.

We strongly believe that National Agencies have an important role in ensuring a communication and networking bridge between organisations working with highly vulnerable young people and organisations working in the mobility field. As stated in the section before, we recommend the model already tested by the Czech National Agency in ensuring a communication bridge to facilitate inclusion projects and exchange of expertise.



3.2.2. Rethink the structure of the budget for inclusion to increase the resources for long term support needed when engaging highly vulnerable volunteers.

Coordination and management of exceptional cost for inclusion requires additional administration work. We suggest therefore to add 7% indirect costs to cover for this additional work. In situations of engagement of highly vulnerable young volunteers the ongoing individual support, as well as the coordination of different external experts or external service providers requires a case management approach and very attentive coordination of the process, from the selection moment to the follow-up and the long-term planning of the volunteer's life path.

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CREDITS

This document is the product of work done at the Annual Meeting of the Network of Associazione Joint, held in November 2022.

This document, therefore, represents the conclusions of the work of the representatives of 26 organisations, who signed the text.

Below are the names of the signatory organisations.

Associazione di promozione sociale Joint (Italy)	Koinoniki Synetairistiki Epicheirisi Sillogikis kai Koinonikis Ofeleias Infinity Greece (Greece)
Asociación Madrid Outdoor Education (Spain)	Neolea Gia Antalagi kai Katanoisi (Cyprus)
Asociatia Curba de Cultura (Romania)	No Borders (Italy)
Associacao Social Recreativa Juventude Vila Fonche (Portugal)	Nuoriso - ja luontomatkailukeskus Oivanki (Finland)
Athens Youth Path (Greece)	Obcianske Zdruzenie KERIC (Slovakia)
Cruz Vermelha Portuguesa, Delegação de Braga (Portugal)	P.E.CO. - Progetti Europei di Cooperazione (Italy)
DOTS - Cooperativa de Inovação Social para a Transformação Social (Portugal)	Parcours le Monde - Sud Ouest (France)
Dreaming OPEnly (Germany)	Passion Udflugt (Denmark)
Dypall Network: Associacao para o Desenvolvimento da Participacao Cidadã (Portugal)	Regionalne Centrum Wolontariatu (Poland)
En Root (France)	Travelnest Egyesület (Hungary)
Fundacja Integracji Społecznej PROM (Poland)	Ye Too Ponese: espacio para la gestion de ineditos viables (Spain)
Genesis ZS (Czech Republic)	Zachodniopomorska wojewódzka komenda OHP w szczecinie (Poland)
Grenzkultur GGMBH (Germany)	Zveza Drustev Mladinski Center Postojna (Slovenia)

