



Open Letter to the Members of the CULT Committee of the European Parliament

The European Youth Sectors in a State of Emergency

In a state of loss, fear and uncertainty, youth needs continuous and structured support, guidance and space to recover and thrive.

One year since the beginning of the pandemic, Europe remains in a state of shock and denial. While the effect of the pandemic on public healthcare will eventually subside, the social and economic impact has not yet started unravelling. A grim future lays ahead; particularly for youth. Recent crises exemplified that economic stagnation, unemployment, frustration, poverty and lack of sustainable life prospects hit younger populations the hardest and offer ground to anti-social behaviours and political choices.

Faced with unique circumstances and preparing for results that are largely uncharted, youth organisations across Europe need to enhance their capacities and support youngsters in overcoming manifold socioeconomic challenges; and, at the same time, struggle for their own survival. In many cases, especially in countries where EU funding is an important factor for youth sector development, challenges are already showing. With mobility activities practically deactivated for the foreseeable future and threats of exclusion more acute for more youngsters, it is clear that the existing funding architecture of the Erasmus+ programme is deficient.

The two latest 7-year budgets of the European Union (2014-2020, 2021-2027¹) have seen significant increase to the available funding to the youth sector. The

¹ The Youth in Action programme (2007-2013) had an overall budget of 885 million euros for the seven years. Erasmus+ (2014-2020) had an overall envelope for youth of roughly 1.4 billion. The Erasmus+ budget for youth for the upcoming period (2021-2027) has further increased to 2.5 billion euro. An additional 2.2 billion was invested under the Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency programme for all actions covered by Erasmus+ but the allocation among different fields (education, training, youth, sports) is pending.



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difficulties of youngsters to enter “adult life” due to structural obstructions and crisis is a main reason behind this increase. The significant quota of the SURE programme (Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency) allocated to Erasmus+ confirms this trend. While the relatively generous funding constitutes an attestation that decision makers place importance to the youth sector, it is questionable whether it is simply the quantity of available resources that shall define the successes and failures of Brussels’ planning.

The primary virtues of the Erasmus+ programme is the approximation of youngsters from different countries, the formation of a European identity, culture and “way of life”. For the here and now of a growing number of youngsters in Europe, such concerns are currently a luxury. As it was the case before the pandemic and as it is now loudly confirmed, in times of socioeconomic crisis, the existing approach and architecture of EU’s funding mechanisms cannot make up for decaying social policies of European states or the inability of the EU to pursue its social agenda. These policies would need to target the least empowered and most vulnerable youngsters first; those individuals and groups are in most need of emancipation and agency. But, for anyone who works in the field of youth and is grounded to social realities, it is obvious that this is rarely the case, even less so in the countries where youth face challenges en masse.

In line with the “Life beyond EU Funding: Imagining a Different Role for Youth Organisations in Europe” campaign, we urge the CULT committee to:

- Take notice of the grave need of youth structures for steady, sustainable financing for supporting youth development²;
- Push the European Commission for a brave reallocation of resources from other funding mechanisms (projects, stakeholders’ meetings etc.) to operational support of the youth sector.
- To channel all available funds from the SURE programme to operational funding to youth structures.

² See, for instance, the [final declaration](#) of the 3rd European Youth Work Convention or the [youth policy section](#) of the Council of Europe that consistently claims for more sustainable funding of European youth organisations.