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MIDTERM EVALUATION ERASMUS+: YOUTH IN ACTION – BELGIUM (FLEMISH COMMUNITY)

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2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 2014, Youth in Action has been integrated within Erasmus+: Youth in Action. This integration has led to more available funds for international mobility for youth in Flanders. This is a well known fact in the sector and works as an incentive to participate in the programme. The success rate of submitted projects is similar in the current programme (76%) as in the previous programme (78%), showing the continuous high quality of submitted projects in Flanders. The number of participants and staff members in youth exchanges, youth worker mobility, EVS and meetings between policy makers and young people has increased from 6 456 in the last three years of the previous programme to 9 084 in the first three years of the current programme. The overall satisfaction with the previous programme was already high and has only increased in the current programme. In general, competence development is agreed on by a larger proportion of participants in the current programme than in the previous programme. Youthpass is more often used.

Effectivity

The programme is effective in promoting several key competences of life long learning, active citizenship, social inclusion and youth work competences. Different actions have different learning outcomes. Participants in youth worker mobility report more to have developed youth worker competence and agree in a higher degree that social inclusion has become more important to them than other participants. Participants of the Structured Dialogue know more about European issues, European policies and structures. EVS-participants report in a higher degree that they have learned something about inclusion, non-formal and informal learning and about their personal development. Participants in youth exchanges have developed their creative skills more than participants in other sub-actions. The diversity in actions and sub-actions is one of the strengths of Erasmus+: Youth in Action and its predecessor. The effectivity of the actions is largely determined by finding the appropriate action for a certain objective and the design of the project.

From a policy point of view, key action 2 projects are considered to be a missed opportunity. Strategic partnerships up to € 450 000 are possible, but these would constitute a big part (if not all) of the grant for this key action. Youth organisations do not identify easily with the possibilities of this key action, sometimes because of funding rules. For instance, organisations working with young people with fewer opportunities depend on additional staff to extra support these young people, but only staff costs for intellectual output is provided in this key action.

The National Agency uses a supportive approach towards beneficiaries to attract new organisations, to reach out to young people with fewer opportunities or to young people who belong to less strong youth structures. This supportive approach of the National Agency is highly appreciated by the beneficiaries. This approach has come under pressure in the last three years because of the increase of grants and the many technical issues surrounding the IT tools. This added to the workload and/or caseload of the staff of the National Agency.

Another outreach initiative of the National Agency is a pathway approach in TCA. This approach is aimed at organisations that want to work with specific target groups. It involves information days about Youth in Action, a round table with organisations interested to work with the programme and an international study visit to some good practices. The focus has been on Youth in the city, NEET and young people with disabilities in the period 2014-2016. TCA has become a strong instrument to support the programme and to stimulate innovations in youth policy.

The current programme provides for transnational training in the programme. Some beneficiaries express a need for national training opportunities about the programme because they better fit the busy agenda of beneficiaries.

Efficiency

Flanders has opted to withhold two National Authorities and two National Agencies because education and youth are in Flanders two sectors with a well-established and independent history. The integration of the programme is more situated on the administrative than on the organisational level. There is one programme guide, there is more coherence in the funding rules and there are common tools. This integration has led to an increase of means for the youth sector. Integration does not equal efficiency though from the point of view of the stakeholders. The idea has grown that the programme has become even more difficult than the previous one. The use of a jargon and an approach to developing projects less familiar in the youth sector, the extensiveness of the application form and the Mobility Tool are experienced as burdensome and time consuming. The URF formula is sometimes an administrative hassle and does not always take into account the diversity of structures of organisations in the youth sector.

International NGO's have to submit their projects to the National Agencies of the country where their headquarters are based since the current programme. In the previous programme, they had to submit their projects at a decentralised level. These INGO's work at an international level. Although their work is useful, it is doubtful that it necessarily trickles down to the local, regional and national level. It seems more logical that the subsidiarity principle is applied here and that these organisations are subsidised at a centralized, European level.

The Programme Committee is now one committee for the entire programme and is experienced as an impoverishment with regard to the content of the programme.

The digitalisation of the programme has been an important feature of the last three years. This digitalisation has been met with mixed feelings by beneficiaries and members of the National Agency. The many bugs and inadequacies of the tools has added to the workload of the National Agency and the beneficiaries. At the same time, some aspects of the digitalisation are considered to be efficiency gains and the potential of the tools is recognized. An integrated path of well-integrated, communicating tools that are user friendly and are adapted to a young person who acts as a volunteer for a small organisation, would raise the potential of the IT tools.

Relevance

The specific objectives of the programme stay relevant and some will feature even more prominent on the social and political agenda of the coming years. The link between the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme and the Youth Strategy is considered to be extremely important. A better alignment of the timing of the EU Youth Strategy and that of the programme is desirable.

The transition to Erasmus+ has not been smooth for all stakeholders of the programme. The first year of the current programme saw a decline in the percentage of young people with fewer opportunities. Since then, this percentage has restored itself and stabilizes. A possible explanation for this temporary drop is that, due to changes in the funding rules, these organisations identify less with the possibilities of the current programme than the previous one. It asked time to recognize these possibilities. A second explanation is that these organisations are confronted with specific challenges (more intensive support by staff members, unexpected drop out of participants, ...) that poses specific problems for these organisations in the current programme. A third explanation is that, especially in KA2, these organisations have to compete with large scale national and international organisations.

A second stakeholder less represented in the current than in the previous programme, are local organisations and informal youth groups. A re-introduction of national youth initiatives could contribute to one of the specific

objectives of the programme: fostering policy reform at the local level because local organisations design more national youth initiatives. National youth initiatives are a learning opportunity to design a transnational project for informal youth groups and/or local organisations. It is also a means to get acquainted with the programme. Finally, they offer a way to promote European values at the local level.

Internal and external coherence and complementarity

There is a certain tension in the funding rules between youth exchanges and youth worker mobility. External experts can be included as a participant for calculating the organisational support in youth worker mobility, but not in youth exchanges. This makes youth worker mobility a more interesting sub-action than group exchanges and that could be an explanation for the sudden popularity of youth worker mobility at the start of the current programme.

Within youth worker mobility, very diverse projects follow the same funding rules. A simple feasibility visit has the same funding rules as a high level youth training, demanding specialised training materials and the input of experts.

There is a certain overlap between youth worker mobility and strategic partnerships for good practices. The same project is eligible for both sub-actions if cleverly designed and/or written.

National funding programmes for international mobility have disappeared in recent years because of the success of Erasmus+: Youth in Action and its predecessor. The programme is the main programme to realise international mobility in the youth field in the Flemish Community. Bel' J, a scheme to promote exchanges, training and voluntary work between the different Communities of Belgium, is complementary to Erasmus+: Youth in Action and is designed to be complementary.

European added value and sustainability

The Erasmus+: Youth in Action is the only programme that makes international mobility possible in the youth field in Flanders. An increase in funds in the coming year can be effectively absorbed in all actions and sub-actions of the programme, although this will demand a specific effort for EVS. These projects take longer and are more difficult to realize because they are more demanding on host organisations in accommodating and mentoring volunteers. Co-financing has become less evident for non-profit organisations because of financial cut backs in their financing at the local, regional or national level. The fact that the unit costs for EVS have not been adjusted since 2012, while renting on the private housing market and the cost of living have increased, add to the difficulty for host organisations in Flanders and Brussels to organise EVS. A revision of these unit costs is urgently needed.

In sum, Erasmus+: Youth in Action is highly appreciated by all beneficiaries and is highly effective in the Flemish Community. It creates unique possibilities in international mobility for young people in Flanders and has grown out to be the main and only programme for international mobility in the youth field. The retention of a separate Youth chapter with a clear link to the EU Youth Strategy with own, earmarked budget lines promotes and guarantees the visibility of the youth field in the programme and is considered to be an important prerequisite to be effective. A terminology in the programme, more attuned to young people and to the way the youth sector is used to work, a reduction of the administrative burden in the programme, a revision of some of the funding rules (especially some of the unit costs) and well-integrated, user friendly IT tools will add to the effectivity and efficiency of the programme.

3 METHODOLOGY

For this midterm evaluation of Erasmus+: Youth in Action a triangulation of methods and sources has been used.

- The evaluation of the previous programme is based on the data of the standard surveys collected by the RAY-network in November 2011, May 2013 and November 2014. In the November 2014 sample, only projects that were financed in 2013 are included. In each wave, participants or project leaders of projects, financed by the Flemish National Agency that finished between nine months and three months before the actual data gathering, are invited by e-mail to answer an internet based questionnaire. Each sample is complemented with participants or project leaders who live in Belgium but who were involved in a project financed by another National Agency active in the RAY-network at that moment. Two surveys are administered: one for the project leaders and one for the participants. Questions deal with competence development, personal development, the development of a European identity, political and social values, the use of Youthpass, knowledge about and experience with the Structured Dialogue, background variables, ... For this midterm evaluation a file is used in which the three waves are merged. This results in two datasets: a file of 436 participants and a file of 186 project leaders who participated in the previous programme. Some data from the end evaluation of the previous programme commissioned by the Flemish Government are used (Stevens, 2015). This end evaluation is also based on the forementioned data sets.

- Some data will be used in this midterm evaluation stemming from the special RAY-survey about learning in Youth in Action. This special survey took place in May 2012 and November 2012. The same approach is used to reach participants and project leaders in the special survey as in the standard surveys. The special survey focuses on learning in specific situations (formal, non-formal and informal moments). This special survey resulted in a sample of 180 participants and one of 86 project leaders. A few questions (f.e. learning competences and background variables) are the same for the standard survey as for the special survey. For these data, merged data files are created. This results in a sample of 616 participants and a sample of 273 project leaders.

- For the evaluation of the current programme, the data gathered by the RAY-network in November 2015 and February 2016 for the participants and in March 2016 for the project leaders is used. For the first time, the French speaking part and the German speaking part of Belgium also participated. The result is a Belgian sample of 720 participants and 139 project leaders. For this evaluation only participants and project leaders subsidized by the Flemish National Agency and participants/project leaders subsidized by another National Agency active in the network, but who live in the Dutch speaking part of Belgium or in the Brussels region who used Dutch to answer the questionnaire, are used. The result is a Flemish sample of 469 participants and 94 project leaders. The administration of the survey is the same as in the previous studies. The questionnaire has been adopted to the new programme Erasmus+: Youth in action.

- These data are complemented by data provided by the National Agency.

- Two group discussions with policy makers took place in Brussels. The first group discussion was held on February 9 2017. The second one took place on March 14 2017. Five representatives of the national authority, the National Agency and the Flemish youth council joined these discussions.

- A focus group of staff members of the National Agency was organized on April 6 2017. Six members of the staff joined this focus group.

- Initially, it was the intention to organise a focus group of project leaders. Two attempts failed. Individual interviews with seven project leaders were conducted instead in the period March 22-April 10 2017. A mix of experienced beneficiaries (3) - who also participated in the previous programme and can compare the two programmes - and new beneficiaries (4) is realized. Project leaders of group exchanges (6), EVS-projects (3) and strategic partnerships (2), but not of a KA3-project are included. Most project leaders are professional youth workers (6). One project leader is a volunteer in an informal youth group.

4 ANSWERS TO THE STANDARD QUESTIONS

4.1 TO WHAT EXTENT HAVE ERASMUS+ AND ITS PREDECESSOR PROGRAMMES CONTRIBUTED TO THE REALISATION OF THE ERASMUS+ SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES IN YOUR COUNTRY? ARE THERE DIFFERENCES ACROSS FIELDS? PLEASE PROVIDE, WHERE RELEVANT, YOUR ASSESSMENT FOR EACH OF THE SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES AND PROVIDE EVIDENCE AND EXAMPLES WHERE POSSIBLE.

Since 2014, Youth in Action has been integrated within Erasmus+: Youth in Action. This integration has led to more available funds for international mobility for youth in Flanders. In the first half of the current programme Erasmus+: Youth in Action 362 projects have been allocated a budget of €7 285 064,23. In the last three years of the previous programme, €5 995 000 was spent. The current programme is good for an increase of funds of 20%. This is a well known fact in the sector and works as an incentive to participate in the programme.

In total, 475 projects have been submitted between 2014 and 2016. More than 76% of the submitted projects have received funding of the programme. This success rate is similar to the success rate of the previous programme (78%) (Stevens, 2015), which points to the continuous quality of the submitted projects. In total, 9084 participants and staff members of youth organisations participated in the first three years of the current programme in youth exchanges, EVS, youth worker mobility or meetings between policy makers and young people. During the last three years of the previous programme, these sub-actions were good for 6456 participants and staff members. This is an increase in participation of 40%.

The general satisfaction with the current programme is higher than with the previous programme. Although there is not a direct question on satisfaction, the RAY survey includes indirect indicators of satisfaction. 98% of participants would stimulate others to participate in a similar project and 91% of them would participate again in a similar project in the current programme. In the previous programme, the percentage of participants encouraging others to participate is between 87% and 97% and the percentage of participants that would partake again is between 79% and 87%. This shows that over time, the satisfaction with the programme increases among participants..

4.1.1 TO PROMOTE COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT

A similar pattern can be observed towards agreement with competence development. In the previous programme, agreement with competence development is high, but this agreement has even become bigger in the new programme (see table 1). The three competences and skills that have been developed the most by Flemish participants through their participation in the programme are foreign language skills, social skills and intercultural skills, closely followed by non-conventional forms of civic competences and entrepreneurship. Some competences are developed in a lesser degree, for instance media literacy and creativity. Although the agreement with competence development augments over time, this increase can not be observed for all competences. For instance, there is less agreement with the development of mathematical competences and media literacy in 2015-2016.

It is more difficult to make a comparison between the previous and current programme for project leaders because the question wording has changed between the old and new survey for project leaders. The larger agreement with competence development can be partially attributed to the new question wording in the new survey. In this questionnaire more concrete skills were asked, while in the old surveys more abstract competences were used (see table 2 and table 3). A similar pattern in reported competence development can be seen among project leaders and participants. Social competences and intercultural competences feature as the most often developed. They report in a high degree that they have developed foreign language competences, sense of

entrepreneurship and/or sense of initiative. Also among project leaders media literacy is the competence the least developed.

Young people with fewer opportunities reported in the previous programme in a higher degree that they have developed all sorts of competences, but especially intercultural competences, foreign language competences and learning to learn (Stevens, 2015). An analysis on the total transnational sample learns that the difference between young people with fewer opportunities and young people with the most opportunities is the most outspoken towards learning to learn (Geudens, 2015). In the new programme, there are no differences between young people with fewer opportunities and other participants in reported competence development. A possible explanation is that more than half of the participants in the 2015-2016 sample participated in a project funded in 2014. As we shall see, there is a decrease in participation of young people with fewer opportunities in that funding year, resulting in a smaller number of young people with fewer opportunities in the 2015-2016 sample.

4.1.2 TO PROMOTE ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP, INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE, SOCIAL INCLUSION AND SOLIDARITY

For more than half of the participants in the previous programme European issues have become more interesting after participating in the programme. More than half of them have become more supportive of disadvantaged people (see table 4). For more than one in three participating in social and political life has become more central in their life and the same amount of participants are more committed to tackle discrimination. More than 71% of the participants agree that they have become more aware of the multicultural make-up of Europe. In the current programme more than 6 out of ten appreciate more cultural diversity after their participation in the programme (see table 5). This is once more an illustration that the programme promotes intercultural dialogue.

In 2015-2016 almost half of the participants feel more European and more than four out of ten is more interested in working against racism and xenophobia. The least evolved active citizenship values are participation in politics and care for the environment. Only one in four participants think that these values have become more important to them. Because the wording of the questions in the Ray surveys have changed over time, it is difficult to compare the old and the new programme. The only item that has remained the same is 'I am committed to work against discrimination, intolerance, xenophobia or racism'. In the current programme a larger amount of participants agree that the fight against discrimination has become more important to them.

Project leaders were only asked one item about active citizenship in the RAY surveys of 2011-2013. In the previous programme 72% of the project leaders agree that they are strongly involved in social and political life (Stevens, 2015). In the current programme, we see the same pattern among participants and project leaders (see table 6). For more than 6 out of ten of the project leaders their appreciation for cultural diversity has grown since their participation. Almost half of them feel more European, are more prepared to develop youth policy and are more committed to work against discrimination. For only one in five of them their participation in political life has become more important.

4.1.3 TO PROMOTE PARTICIPATION IN THE LABOUR MARKET

According to project leaders and participants, the programme promotes their job opportunities (see table 7 and table 8). More than six out of ten agree that they have a better outlook of their future career possibilities and the same amount of them agree that their job chances have increased. The percentages are fairly the same in the previous and the current programme, although the percentages increase slightly.

4.1.4 TO FOSTER QUALITY IMPROVEMENT IN YOUTH WORK

The Flemish data gathered by the Ray-network show that the former Youth in Action was effective in improving youth work in Flanders by training participants in non-formal learning. This holds true for participants and

professionals in the youth sector. It holds true at the individual level as well as on the organisational level. Some results are (Stevens, 2015):

- 94% of youth workers understand non-formal learning better
- 90% of youth workers have learned how to apply non-formal learning in the youth sector
- 88% of youth workers have learned something they can use in their work with young people
- 88% of youth workers can better guarantee the quality of activities with young people
- 88% of youth workers have already used knowledge and skills learned in the project in their own organisation
- 81% of youth workers agree that the programme attracts new young people
- 73% of youth workers report an increased willingness of their organisation to involve young people with fewer opportunities
- 65% of youth workers know better how to find financial means to develop activities with young people
- 65% of youth workers agree that the local network of their organisation has extended
- 64% of youth workers report an improvement of the management of their organisation

The special RAY-survey about learning in 2012 shows that the programme brings participants and project leaders in contact with innovative methods (Stevens, 2013):

- 55% of the project leaders have been involved in a project that used methods they never had used before
- 78% of the participants have participated in a project that used methods that were new to them

The previous programme also contributed to the quality improvement in youth work by stimulating transnational networking on the individual and organisational level. Some results are (Stevens, 2015):

- 82% of youth workers have met someone with whom they plan to develop a project in the future
- 79% of youth workers are better able to design and manage an international project
- 67% of youth workers have contacts abroad to plan a future project
- 96% of project leaders claim that their organisation have more international contacts or partnerships after participating in the programme
- 88% of project leaders state that their organisation has more international projects after their participation in the programme

Also the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme fosters the quality of youth work by promoting youth work competences of participants (see table 9) and project leaders (see table 10) and by promoting international networking at the individual and organisational level. The participants are active in youth worker mobility or TCA-projects, some participate in youth exchanges. The agreement with the development of these competences is high among the participants. Some results are (Stevens, 2016):

- 88% of the participants and 97% of the project leaders have better learned to design and implement an international project
- 88% of participants and 95% of project leaders have learned to cooperate in an international team
- 89% of participants and 87% of project leaders will include an international dimension in their work with young people
- 80% of the participants and 90% of the project leaders have established foreign contact to develop a project with
- 88,5% of the participants know better the principles of non-formal learning

- 88,5% of the participants have learned something that they can use in their work with young people and have already turned it into practice.
- 84,2% of participants have a better insight in the different forms of learning
- 84,4% have learned how to involve young people in the preparation and the management of a project, know how to integrate formal methods in a project and how to be a team player.
- 79,9% agree that they have a better grasp on the development of quality control of a project
- 76,4% know how to develop a project in line with the needs of young people
- 74.4% know how to handle tensions in a youth project
- 73,8% have improved their skills to evaluate learning outcomes of a project
- 60.7% know better how to find financial means for youth work
- 39 of 41 project leaders (95%) agree that their organisation has more contacts or partnerships with other countries
- 36 of 39 project leaders (92%) state that their organisation has more networks at the European level
- 32 of 37 project leaders (86%) claim that their organisation has more international projects

Just as among participants, the overwhelming majority of the project leaders agree to further development of youth work competences. The agreement is even higher among project leaders than participants (see table 10). A few competences have been developed in a lesser degree, such as the further improvement of youth work competences and fostering non-formal learning in youth work. Still three quarters of the project leaders have the intention to even further improve their skills and competences. The same amount of project leaders learned to foster non-formal learning in youth work. Once more, finding financial means is the competence that has been developed by the smallest group of project leaders. Yet two thirds of project leaders know how to find finances to organise activities. Finally, in regard to youth work competences, it must be noted that not all project leaders in the youth sector or in Erasmus+: Youth in Action projects define themselves as youth worker.

4.1.5 TO COMPLEMENT POLICY REFORMS AT LOCAL, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL LEVEL AND TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF KNOWLEDGE AND EVIDENCE-BASED YOUTH POLICY AS WELL AS THE RECOGNITION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

The programme complements local, regional and national policy reform by increasing the knowledge of youth policy and youth policy development. The 2011-2013 data show that 76% of the youth workers or persons active in the youth field (participants and project leaders) have gained insights in youth policy and 69% of them have an increased knowledge of the development of youth policy (Stevens, 2015). In Erasmus+ more than two thirds of the participants have more knowledge about European youth policy and more than seven out of ten of them have an increased knowledge of youth policy (see table 9). Among project leaders 26 of 41 project leaders (63%) agree to have more knowledge of European youth policy and 28 of 41 project leaders (68%) living in the Dutch speaking part of Belgium, know how to contribute to youth policy development.

The effect of the programme on the development of knowledge and evidence based youth policy is limited. The University College of West-Flanders – Department of Social work has been appointed as Flemish research partner in the RAY Network. The Department of Youth of the National Authority supports the development of evidence-based youth policy by supporting the Flemish Youth Research Platform (jeugdonderzoeksplatform- JOP). JOP functions as the national correspondent for the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (ECKYP – Youth Partnership) and the Youth Wiki (a key action 3 project financed by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency). It also participates in the Pool of European Youth Researchers (PEYR - Youth Partnership). As such, national and international actors are informed of the research executed by this platform and at the same time, the Youth Research Platform keeps up with national and international (policy) developments relating to (Flemish) youth.

Besides the improvement of youth work competences, which include competences for non-formal learning, the programme uses Youthpass for the youth field. Since 2007, it is used in the programme to certify the learning outcomes of Youth in Action projects and it aims to make the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning in the project more clear. It is an instrument for young people to proof what they have learned. In the current programme 50% of participants have received a Youthpass as a consequence of their participation in a project. This is remarkable higher than in the previous programme, where only 37% of the participants claimed to have received a Youthpass as a result of their participation in the project. The continuous effort by the National Agency to promote the use of Youthpass pays off.

Interviewer: *“Do you use Youthpass in your projects?”*

Project leader: *“Yes, because we find it important and because we also know Jint finds it important. In general, the Erasmus+-programme too, so we try to emphasize this. Especially for EVS, because these are long term projects. We receive one EVS-volunteer a year and we give training courses each year and there we use Youthpass.”* (Experienced project leader of group exchanges, youth worker mobility and EVS-projects, also active in the previous programme)

The use of Youthpass differs according to sub-action. Especially in EVS-projects and the Structured Dialogue Youthpass is used. 13 of the 19 EVS-participants (68%) and 16 of the 27 participants in the Structured Dialogue (59%) in the 2015-2016 sample received a Youthpass as a result of their participation. Among participants of youth worker mobility and youth exchanges these percentages are respectively 45% and 42%.

Youthpass is foremost used as a tool for reflection. Two thirds of participants who get a Youthpass, use it as a tool to reflect about their learning in the project. For three quarters of those participants this reflection was helpful to become more aware of their competence development. In total 53 of the 232 Youthpass owners (23%) used their Youthpass at least once. The majority of those who have used it, had the impression that it was accepted (31 of 53 or 60%) and that it helped them (37 of 53 or 70%).

It cannot be denied that Youthpass is received with mixed feelings in the Flemish Community. Some project leaders stress that in times of high youth unemployment and/or for some groups, like young people with a low educational attainment, Youthpass can be useful in the search for a job (Stevens, 2015). Some project leaders doubt the usefulness of Youthpass. This could be an explanation why the use of Youthpass in Flanders is still lower than in some other countries.

“Every organisation has its own way at the end to stress what has happened. That is something you have read and that is something that you can use. Or they have something to remember the exchange. Yes, Youthpass. I wasn't a 100% fan. It feels like a formality, a patch that you get. But then, what will you do with it?” (Project leader of a youth exchange, new in the programme)

4.2 TO WHAT EXTENT HAS THE PROGRESS ON THE REALISATION OF THE SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES CONTRIBUTED TO THE REALISATION OF THE ERASMUS+ GENERAL OBJECTIVES IN YOUR COUNTRY?

The Erasmus+: Youth in Action aims to contribute to the overall objectives of the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018). This connection between the framework for European cooperation in the youth field and the Erasmus+: Youth in Action is considered to be very important in the Flemish Community and the timing of the framework and that of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action should be more aligned.

The objectives of the current framework are: to provide more and equal opportunities for young people and to encourage young people to actively participate in society.

Compared to the last three years of the previous programme, there is a clear increase in the number of young people who participate in Erasmus+: Youth in Action. In the period 2011-2013, 6 456 participants and staff members participated in a youth exchange, a youth worker mobility or TCA/TCP, an EVS-project or a meeting between policy makers and young people. In the current programme, 9 084 young people and staff members participated in one of these sub-actions during the first three years. This is an increase of 40%. Of the 6 825 participants 1 703 belong to the group of young people with fewer opportunities. One in four participants of projects subsidised by Jint has fewer opportunities (see table 11). This is an increase compared to the previous programme. For the whole previous programme (so the full six years), this percentage was 21% (Stevens, 2015). The transition into the new programme resulted first in a decrease of young people with fewer opportunities in 2014 (see table 11), but has since then been restored and stabilizes again on the level before 2014.

A big group of participants and project leaders agree that their professional career opportunities or study plans have become clearer after participating in the programme. Young people with fewer opportunities differ the most from young people with more opportunities in their self-reported development of learning to learn. Young people with fewer opportunities agree in a higher degree that they have a clearer idea about their career aspirations and have a clearer idea about their educational pathways than young people with more opportunities (Geudens, 2015a). These findings are corroborated by a project leader who involved young people with fewer opportunities in his project:

“And if I look at the impact of the project, the biggest impact was really on these young people [young people with fewer opportunities]. They had never taken a plane. Then they arrive in Finland. It gives me goosebumps if I think about it. They can barely speak English. Because that is also a factor. They can barely speak English and they become friends with Fins who also can barely speak English. That was really beautiful to see. It was nice.” (Project leader of a group exchange, first time applier)

These findings suggest that the programme helps to realize the objective of more and equal opportunities for young people. They have to be nuanced at the same time. Although young people with fewer opportunities claim to have a clearer idea about their career opportunities or educational pathways than young people with more opportunities, there is no difference between the two groups in their concrete plans for further education or in their assessment of increased job chances (Geudens, 2015a). Secondly, the analysis of the RAY data show that a large part of participants in the programme are already highly educated: (56% of participants in 2011-2014 and 58% of participants in 2015-2016 have a higher educational degree) (Stevens, 2015, 2016).

The programme offers young people opportunities to actively participate in society. It offers non-formal and informal learning opportunities, the opportunity to do volunteering work abroad and international mobility. The Structured Dialogue gives young people the opportunity to be heard about several policy issues. Even among participants in the programme, Structured Dialogue is not very well known and the participation in it is low. This is mainly due to the low number of projects in this sub-action. The low budget for this key action results in a small number of realized projects. Once more, the knowledge of and the participation in the Structured Dialogue is higher in the current programme than in the previous. Only 18% of the participants in the previous programme have heard of Structured Dialogue and only 10% have experienced an activity within the Structured Dialogue. In the current programme, 31% of the participants in the data set of the RAY Network have heard of the Structured Dialogue, but only 13% have participated in an activity within the Structured Dialogue.

4.3 TO WHAT EXTENT HAVE ERASMUS+ ACTIONS INFLUENCED POLICY DEVELOPMENTS IN THE DOMAIN OF YOUTH IN YOUR COUNTRY? WHICH ACTIONS WERE MOST EFFECTIVE IN DOING SO? ARE THERE MARKED DIFFERENCES BETWEEN DIFFERENT FIELDS?

There is not a simple and straightforward answer to this question, but it is safe to say that there is an interconnection between Erasmus+: Youth in Action, European and Flemish youth policy. (International) mobility has featured less prominent in Flemish youth policy recently. This can be partially attributed to the success of the previous Youth in Action programme and the current Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme. The strength of these programmes have made a similar Flemish programme obsolete. The objectives and priorities realised by international mobility projects (such as intercultural learning, social inclusion, strengthening youth organisations) are key objectives and priorities in Flemish youth policy. Although the formulation of these objectives and priorities at European and Flemish level can be different, they are very much akin. Similar changes in European and Flemish policy goals over the years can be observed (e.g. the stress on employability of young people after 2008). Although (trans/interational) mobility is not included as a priority in current Flemish youth policy, it is mentioned within the policy brief of the current Minister for Youth.

From a policy point of view, KA2 projects are considered to be a missed opportunity. This key action strenghtens transnational cooperation between organisations from different fields on subjects that could empower these organisations in the long term. They also could be beneficial to future policy planning in the youth sector as a whole because they also adress issues relevant for the policy level (e.g. volunteering in urban areas, transition into the labour market, ...). Until now, there are only a limited number of approved applications for this key action. Although the youth sector is explicitly mentioned in the description of this key action in the Erasmus+ Programma Guide, project developers in the youth sector do not easily identify with the possibilities of this key action. The project leaders who have submitted a KA2-project and who were interviewed for this midterm evaluation, stressed that they only applied after staff members of the National Agency had pointed out the possibilities of this key action.

“What I have not mentioned yet, is that I had my partner organisation first and immediately I had something like, this is not possible whithin Youth in Action because we do not involve young people. I just had to overcome that obstacle first and Jint had to convince me that (...) policy projects are eligible.” (project leader of a KA2-project)

The funding rules of this key action could be a reason why organisations refrain to apply (for instance, the lack of costs for staff). The underfunding of this action could be another possible explanation (see later).

Until now, the Flemish government has not be involved in an initiative for policy innovation under KA3. Flemish organisations in the youth sector have responded to the call for proposals EACEA/05/2016, a Key Action 3 supporting policy reform. This call concerns projects aiming to upscale and disseminate good practices that fits the so-called Paris Declaration of March 15 2015. These projects promote social inclusion and prevent violent radicalization. The result is that Flemish organisations in the youth sector participate in three network projects concerning a topic that is high on the political agenda.

One action under KA3, the Structured Dialogue, has a direct impact on Flemish youth policy. The experiences within the Structured Dialogue are used within Flemish participatory policy projects (e.g. the Flemish youth and children’s right policy plan, citizen’s cabinet). Not only the content, but especially the consultation mechanisms (such as approaches to involve young people, evaluation) of the Structured Dialogue are similar in Flemish participatory policy projects.

4.4 WHAT SPECIFIC APPROACHES (SUCH AS CO-FINANCING, PROMOTION OR OTHERS) HAVE YOU TAKEN IN ORDER TO TRY TO ENHANCE THE EFFECTS OF ERASMUS+ IN

YOUR COUNTRY? TO WHAT EXTENT HAVE THESE APPROACHES BEEN EFFECTIVE? CAN ANY PARTICULAR POINTS FOR IMPROVEMENT BE IDENTIFIED.

The National Agency uses a supportive approach towards beneficiaries. Especially organisations new in the programme, organisations for young people with fewer opportunities and inexperienced, informal groups get extra support. The National Agency is the most frequently mentioned way to come in contact with The Erasmus+ Youth in Action programme for project leaders living in the Dutch speaking part of Belgium (see table 12). Five of the seventeen project leaders that came into contact with the programme through information of the National Agency, did that through face-to-face contact with one of the staff members of the National Agency, four through an information event and four through the website.

This supportive approach is also widely and highly appreciated in the interviews with the project leaders. The support in developing an idea into a project is cited by inexperienced project leaders. Inexperienced and experienced project leaders bring up the technical support in using the different IT tools. The help is described as swift, to the point and relevant. Staff members are described as *“very professional, friendly and enthusiastic”* (experienced project leader of EVS-project). Also the website youthinaction.be is more than once referred to as an important source of information. Especially, the roadmap on the website and the checklist before applying for a project is considered to be very helpful. The effectiveness of this supportive approach in generating projects is also illustrated in the next interview fragment:

Interviewer: Do you think that it is possible to develop a project without the support of Jint?

Project leader (informal group of young people, new to the programme): “As an informal group of young people? No. To develop an idea? To develop a project? Yes. But translating that idea or that project into the application form or finding your way in the Mobility Tool? No. No way!”

To encourage organisations that work with young people facing difficulties in education and the labour market a pathway approach as a methodology has been developed in TCA. This approach exists of information days about Youth in Action, a round table with organisations interested to work with the programme, an international study visit to some good practices working with the same target group. This pathway approach is not limited to Key Action 1 but encompasses all different actions and activities. The focus has been already on Youth in the city, NEET and young people with disabilities in the period 2014-2016. The focus for 2016-2017 is refugees.

To enhance the effectivity of the Erasmus+ Youth in Action programme a framework for the implementation of the principle of proportionality has been elaborated. This principle of proportionality tries to promote the diversity among the appliers, improve the accessibility of the programme for small, inexperienced organisations, organisations working with priority target groups, informal youth groups and voluntary organisations, improve the internationalisation of organisations in the Flemish Community and the relevance of projects for youth work and youth policy In Flanders and Brussels. This framework is a work in progress and can be changed to new needs. This framework has been communicated to potential beneficiaries of projects.

Furthermore, the Flemish government subsidizes Go Strange. Go Strange involves a helpdesk, a website, a guide, a facebook page and a bi-annual event. Go strange informs young people about all possibilities to study, to work, to do apprentices, to do language courses, to work as a volunteer, ... abroad. The Erasmus+ Youth in Action programme is actively promoted in Go Strange. It is a means to reach young people and organisations that aren't necessarily involved in the Erasmus+ Youth in Action programme. The last bi-annual event took place on October 25, 2015 in Antwerp.

4.5 DO YOU CONSIDER THAT CERTAIN ACTIONS OF THE PROGRAMME ARE MORE EFFECTIVE THAN OTHERS? WHAT ARE THE DETERMINING FACTORS FOR MAKING THESE ACTIONS OF THE PROGRAMME MORE EFFECTIVE?

Different actions have different learning outcomes (Stevens, 2016). Creative and cultural competences are slightly more promoted in youth exchanges and youth worker mobility projects than in other projects. Youth exchanges have the additional advantage that it can be done from a very early age on, making it a stepping stone to more international mobility.

A larger proportion of participants in youth worker mobility claim that the integration of people with fewer opportunities has become more important to them and have learned something new about inclusion, youth and youth work, (the development of) youth policy, project development and project management compared to participants of other actions. Several project leaders interviewed for this midterm evaluation pointed out that their future partners in a project were a direct result of their participation in a youth worker mobility project or a TCA-project. The contacts inspired them to set up a youth exchange, a strategic partnership or to become an EVS-organisation. In this sense, this sub-action not only strengthens the quality of youth organisations in the Flemish Community. It also promotes projects in the other key actions.

Participants of the Structured Dialogue report in a higher degree that they have learned something new about European issues, European policy and structures, democracy and active citizenship than participants of other projects.

EVS-participants report in a higher degree to have learned something new about inclusion, education, non-formal and informal learning and personal development.

The diversity of actions and projects is one of the strengths of Erasmus+: Youth in Action and its predecessor (Stevens, 2015). The effectivity of the actions is largely determined by finding the appropriate action for a certain objective and the design of the project.

One action is considered to be less effective until now and that is the effectiveness of KA2-projects as a support for policy development (see question 3). On the onset of the new programme, the expectation was that large national organisations working with young people with fewer opportunities would sign in for this key action. Until now, this is seldom the case. These type of organisations and (informal) youth initiatives have to compete with with total different types of organisations in this key action, such as big national and international NGO's, (higher) education institutions or institutions for vocational education and training. Working with young people with fewer opportunities demands extra staff and staff costs are only provided for intellectual output in this key action. Furthermore, this key action is underfunded. Projects up till 450 000 euro are eligible under this key action, but the available budget in one year is less than this maximum. This results in on the one hand a strong competition between beneficiaries in which these organisations drop out more easily or on the other hand these organisations conclude not to put in the effort and they do not submit a project.

4.6 TO WHAT EXTENT HAS THE INTEGRATION OF SEVERAL PROGRAMMES INTO ERASMUS+ MADE THE PROGRAMME MORE EFFECTIVE IN YOUR COUNTRY? DO YOU SEE SCOPE FOR CHANGES TO THE STRUCTURE OF ERASMUS+ OR ITS SUCCESSOR PROGRAMME THAT COULD INCREASE EFFECTIVENESS?

On the administrative level, the programme is more integrated. There is one programme guide, there is more coherence in the funding rules and tools. This integration has led to an increase of means for the youth sector. Integration does not equal effectiveness though.

First, the image of the programme has changed among potential applicants of projects. The increase in financial means is widely known in the youth sector, yet at the same time, the idea has grown that the programme has

become more difficult. Also the problems with the IT tools in the beginning of the programme have not improved the image of the programme. Although the complaint of an incomprehensible language in the administration is not new (Stevens, 2015), the impression lives that it has become worse and adds to the administrative burden of applicants.

Among some project leaders interviewed for the midterm evaluation the idea also exists that the programme fits more the educational sector than the youth sector.

Project leader (first time applier, group exchange and EVS-project): *“You have the feeling that you have to master a very specific jargon that you do not know yet (...) while I have something like, let me design a project where I think about all these aspects, but do I really have to make that all so explicit? I think, it’s more education. They are more used to think like that, but youth workers?”*

Interviewer: *Do you have the feeling it is more adjusted to education than to youth work?*

Project leader (first time submitter, group exchange and EVS-project): *Yes, yes. Or at least, they are more used to think like that.*

The fact that it has been put under the name Erasmus+, strengthens the idea that the programme is intended for students. It must be added that none of the project leaders interviewed for the midterm evaluation objected against the name Erasmus.

“For me, personally, it doesn’t matter. It is just a name. (...) If I talk about my job or Erasmus+ with other people who do not know the programme, they hear Erasmus and not the plus. And for them, the plus is whatsoever and they hear Erasmus education. I do not think it is very clear to people who are not involved.” (experienced project leader of group exchanges and EVS, also active in the previous programme)

A second problem is that some organisations in the youth sector do not identify with the possibilities of the current programme (see question 3) and that leads to changes in the kind of organisations that submit projects. Although the number of submitted and realised projects per year has remained fairly the same for the three first years of the new programme compared to the three last years of the old programme, there is a change in the submitters between the previous and current programme (see table 13). While in the previous programme 38% of the projects were realised by local organisations (such as municipal initiatives, youth houses or centres and local and regional youth work), this percentage has dropped to 31% in the first three years of the current programme. The decrease in the proportion of national youth work is less pronounced (from 61% to 57%) (Jint, 2017; Stevens, 2015). New in the current programme are international NGO’s. They are good for 11% of the projects (Jint, 2017). Furthermore, the percentage of young people with fewer opportunities dropped between 2013 and 2014 from 24% to 17%. Meanwhile, this percentage has augmented again to 28% in 2015 and 2016. Finally, only informal youth initiatives that were able to design a transnational youth initiative stay in the programme. Others have disappeared. On the other hand, there is an influx of new organisations who can handle the more abstract terminology and procedures of the programme. These organisations are lesser known by the National Agency and are sometimes further away of the youth sector. It is still too early to know if these organisations will stay in the programme and/or these organisations will have an effect on the quality improvement, complement policy reform and the internationalisation of the youth field in Flanders.

A third consequence of the integration of the programme is that it demands more concertation at the policy level, between departments and policymakers of different sectors involved.

The fact that there is a separate chapter for Youth and that 10% of the total budget of Erasmus+ is earmarked for the youth sector are important preconditions for the effectiveness of the programme. It guarantees the recognizability and the impact of the programme for the youth sector. This should certainly be retained in future programmes. The programme could become more effective if a language is used that is tuned to the youth sector and if the IT tools are better integrated and more user friendly.

4.7 IS THE SIZE OF BUDGET APPROPRIATE AND PROPORTIONATE TO WHAT ERASMUS+ IS SET OUT TO ACHIEVE? IS THE DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDS ACROSS THE PROGRAMME’S

ACTIONS APPROPRIATE IN RELATION TO THEIR LEVEL OF EFFECTIVENESS AND UTILITY?

One key action that is underfunded, is KA2. The Erasmus+ Programme guide mentions that strategic partnerships up to 450 000 euro are eligible. As can be seen in table 14, in 2014 the total amount of available funds for this key action in the Flemish Community is lower than the maximum possible grant. Although the available funds for this key action have increased in 2015 and 2016, a project of 450.000 euro would still take a large proportion out of the funds of this key action. At least the programme guide should mention that interested beneficiaries should check with their National Agency what the maximum available budget in their country is. Otherwise the risk exists that organisations design partnerships that are not eligible in advance for financial reasons.

Another way to answer this question is to look at the available and allocated funds (see table 14 and 15). A comparison between both tables shows that in the first three years more funds are allocated to youth worker mobility than committed. This is an indicator that this action is underfunded. According to the staff of the National Agency, this is also the case:

“The increase in budget in some subaction is gigantic. Other subactions are underfunded. We can only approve 12 to 14 projects of mobility of youth workers a year. While each year 70 to 80 projects are submitted.” (staff member C of National Agency)

Even project leaders have noticed that not a lot of these projects are approved. This leads to an increased competition and a rising anxiety about mistakes in filling in the application form.

“Because the problem is that less projects are approved. Not EVS, because there the funds are sufficient, but especially among mobility of youth workers, training and seminars you can see that not that many projects are approved. Maybe too many projects are submitted? That raises the question: how can I fill in this application as good as possible?” (experienced project leader of group exchanges, mobility of youth workers and EVS-projects, participated in the previous programme)

The number of participants in this sub-action has increased substantially in the first three years of the current programme compared to the last three years of the previous programme (from 789 youth workers in the period 2011-2013 to 2 259 in 2014-2016). Especially in 2014, the number of participants in this sub-action augmented sharply (1 073). In 2015 (757) and in 2016 (427) this number has decreased again, but it is still bigger than the average in the last three years of the previous programme (263 participants per year). This sharp increase in participation in youth worker mobility between the previous and current programme can be attributed to differences in funding rules between youth exchanges and youth worker mobility. Because of these different funding rules, it can be more attractive to apply for a youth worker mobility than a group exchange. Furthermore, youth worker mobility projects can take on different forms and some of these projects are overfunded because of the grant structure. For instance, a simple feasibility visit follows the same funding rules as a high level youth worker training involving external experts including the development of training materials.

On the other hand, the funds available for EVS are not fully allocated in 2014-2016. EVS is the sub-action wherein it is the most difficult to convince organisations to submit projects. One of the main reasons is the workload of an EVS project. That workload is not rewarded financially. Once more, the focus group with the NA staff:

Staff member B of National Agency: *“If you look at the amount of working hours they spend, than I think... not only working hours, but also hours mentoring, than it is almost voluntary work.”*

Staff member D of the National Agency: *“Absolutely. Maybe, this is a bold statement, but it could be one of the reasons why we have so many problems to convince organisations. They even have to invest in extra money.”*

Staff member B of the National Agency: *“For that reason some of our EVS guest organisations switched to the lifelong learning programme a few years ago because they received more money for trainees. They received more money for them, but they did the same.”*

This suggests that the non take-up of the funds in the EVS sub-action doesn't mean that this sub-action is overfunded, but that the funding rules of EVS need a revision.

The funds for key action 3 are small. As a result, only a few projects are approved (maximum 3).

4.8 WHAT CHALLENGES AND DIFFICULTIES DO YOU ENCOUNTER WHILE IMPLEMENTING THE VARIOUS ACTIONS OF ERASMUS+? WHAT CHANGES WOULD NEED TO BE INTRODUCED IN ERASMUS+ OR ITS SUCCESSOR PROGRAMME TO REMEDY THESE?

One of the challenges of the programme is that organisations in the youth sector do not identify with all the possibilities of the programme or with some of the sub-actions of the programme. As mentioned before, this is especially the case for key action 2.

A second challenge is the involvement of organisations working with young people with fewer opportunities. The number of young people with fewer opportunities has dropped in the first year of the new programme, but has since been restored. That is an indication that the transition between the previous and current programme was more challenging for these organisations. Working with younger people with fewer opportunities demands more specialized and more intensive support by staff members of these organisations or by youth workers. Therefore, it is not a luxury to have an extra staff member to realize a qualitative project. Another challenge for some of these organisations is that they are, more often than other organisations, confronted with young people who drop out of the project at the last moment for several reasons. Predicting the real number of participants in the application of the project is a challenge for these organisations. This problem is especially acute for organisations working with refugees. More attention should be drawn to these organisations and their challenges or difficulties in a next programme. This attention should be translated into special budgetary provisions for these organisations.

A third challenge is the administrative burden and workload for beneficiaries. This is not a new grievance. The administrative burden and workload was already high in the previous programme. Especially the elaborateness of the application form, the management of a project and reporting are frequently mentioned as burdensome, even by professional and experienced youth workers. If it was the intention to make the programme less time consuming by implementing digital tools, than this goal is still not reached as can be seen in table 16. Among project leaders living in the Dutch speaking part of Belgium, the agreement about the ease of implementing a project has not changed between the old and the new programme.

A fourth challenge is the extensiveness and difficulty of the programme, the application process and reporting. Although reporting is experienced as less difficult as applying (see table 16). The programme assumes an extensive, pre-existing knowledge of learning, terminology, designing a project and the programme itself. This is experienced as an obstacle by inexperienced organisations and project leaders. Designing and implementing a project for the first time is described by many project leaders as overcoming a steep learning curve.

“Not in the beginning. In the beginning you do not even realise what an objective is – this sounds idiot now – but what is an objective precisely? What could impact mean? It could be useful to see some examples if you never have done that before” (Project leader of a youth exchange and a KA2 of an informal group of young people, first time applier)

“I have already told you that I am used to writing projects, but none was so extensive as this one. That is true. I found ... At a certain moment, I thought and I am still thinking this, oops, I have worked here four to five years as a project coordinator. If this is difficult for me, how difficult this must be for someone who has never written a project and who is not used to think on such an abstract level of what they want. I think that is a huge obstacle: that form, as regards content.” (Project leader of a KA2-project, new to the programme)

“If you do it for the first time, than it is really a search. You do not even know what a partner country is, what a programme country is. They assume very quickly that you know that. I have already made some stupid mistakes. Because you think, partner countries, that is ... partner countries sound to me as partners. This is our partner and that is what I have indicated. But no, it’s the countries cooperating in the programme. Because they make use of the EU programme. I know that I made a mistake there. Then it is good that there is Jint to help you out.” (Project leader of a group exchange and EVS-project, new to the programme)

Once more, these project leaders are heavily depending on the support of the National Agency. This challenge could be met by offering more learning opportunities in the programme. Short national training and workshop events could expand the learning opportunities within the programme. The current programme foresees transnational training opportunities, but these last several days. Not everybody can take off a week. For these project leaders, short national workshops or training events are an alternative.

“(…) therefore, these salto training sessions are good. But it is a serious time investment. (...) My coordinator doesn’t want me to be gone so long. This is my main job and than you are away for a week. If only national agencies could organise such a training session, (...)” (Project leader of a youth exchange and EVS-project, new to the programme)

“If they cannot simplify the application form, they [the National Agency] could give examples or organise a workshop how to fill in an application form, what are the basics of the programme. Once a month or once every three months. For those who are really interested, they could organise a training of two days.” (Project leader, working with young people with fewer opportunities, new to the programme)

Beneficiaries are making use of the support of the National Agency. The financing of several key actions and sub-actions will increase in the near future. At the same time, the funding for the management of the programme by the National Agency has not substantially increased in the first three years of the programme. This has put the supportive approach of the National Agency under pressure. Therefore, an increase in budget of the programme should be accompanied by an increase in the management fee of the programme.

4.9 TO WHAT EXTENT ARE THE APPROACHES AND TOOLS THAT ARE USED FOR DISSEMINATING AND EXPLOITING THE RESULTS OF ERASMUS+ AND ITS PREDECESSOR PROGRAMMES IN YOUR COUNTRY EFFECTIVE? WHERE CAN YOU SEE THE POSSIBILITIES FOR IMPROVEMENTS?

None of the interviewed beneficiaries has knowledge of or has used the Erasmus Plus Projects Platform. People who have knowledge of the Erasmus Plus Projects Platform consider it to be not very user friendly.

4.10 TO WHAT EXTENT IS THE SYSTEM OF COOPERATION AND DIVISION OF TASKS BETWEEN THE COMMISSION, EXECUTIVE AGENCY, NATIONAL AGENCIES, EUROPEAN INVESTMENT FUND, NATIONAL AUTHORITIES, INDEPENDENT AUDIT BODIES, AND ERASMUS+ COMMITTEE EFFICIENT AND WELL-FUNCTIONING FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF YOUR COUNTRY? WHAT ARE THE AREAS FOR POSSIBLE IMPROVEMENT OR SIMPLIFICATION IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ERASMUS+ OR A SUCCESSOR PROGRAMME?

Since the new programme, international NGO’s have to apply in the country where their seat is located. Belgium harbours several youth INGO’s. In the first three years of the programme, 36 projects have been submitted by INGO’s. They are good for 11,3% of the submitted projects. In 2014 21 projects were submitted (5 EVS, 10 mobility

of youth workers, 5 strategic partnerships for youth and 1 project Structured Dialogue). 12 of these 21 projects were approved for a total of 284 999 euro, which is more than 11% of the total budget of 2014 (Jint, 2015). In 2015 10% of the submitted projects were projects from INGO's, while they represented 15% of the total allocated budget of that year (Jint, 2016). Because these organisations work at the European level, it is doubtful they foster quality improvements of the youth sector at the Flemish level. Therefore, it seems more logical that the subsidiarity principle should be applied here and that these organisations are subsidized at a centralized, European level.

The Programme Committee is now one committee for the entire programme and is experienced as an impoverishment with regard to the content of the programme. The meetings do not handle the content of the programme and members do not have an overview of what is happening in the youth sector in Europe. A certain need has been expressed to a place where the European Commission, the member states and the National Agencies can meet each other and discuss the programme. At this moment there is no body or consultation where the three instances meet. Such a body is useful to share insights, to construct common view points, a common roadmap for the future of the programme,

4.11 TO WHAT EXTENT HAS THE INTEGRATION OF SEVERAL PROGRAMMES INTO ERASMUS+ RESULTED IN EFFICIENCY GAINS OR LOSSES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME IN YOUR COUNTRY, BOTH AT THE LEVEL OF THE NATIONAL AGENCY/IES AND ON THE BENEFICIARIES' AND PARTICIPANTS' LEVEL? DO YOU SEE SCOPE FOR CHANGES TO THE STRUCTURE OF ERASMUS+ OR ITS SUCCESSOR PROGRAMME THAT COULD INCREASE EFFICIENCY?

Flanders has opted for two National Agencies and two National Authorities because the two sectors have an own, independent history and are well established. The National Authorities are two different ministries and fall among the competences of two different ministers. The National Agencies and National Authorities are highly recognizable for the stakeholders. This adds to the recognition of the programme.

"If Youth in Action is on the agenda, than everybody knows it is about the European programme for youth. They also know, if they want to organise something within the programme, they have to come here [to Jint]. That is generally known in the youth sector." (Member D of the first group discussion with policy makers)

The integration of the programme is mainly situated at the administrative level in the sense that similar application forms and reporting instruments are used for the key actions, sub-actions and fields of the programme. Efficiency for the beneficiaries is defined by the time they spend on designing and managing a project and the administrative burden it brings along. For the field of youth, some aspects of this integration are efficient, others not. Some tools are not sufficiently adapted to the practice and reality of the youth sector and that causes extra stress and timeloss for project leaders to use the tools. With the support of the National Agency, most problems are solved, but this leads to a bigger workload for the staff of the National Agency.

Several project leaders signal that the different tools are not easy to find with the most frequently used search engines. They need the link to the website sent to them per e-mail or they need to include the link to the tools in their favourites of their browser. This leads to specific problems. Because some project leaders do not use the different tools so often, they do not have the reflex to save the tools under their favourites. Sometimes the URLs of the different websites change. This leads to a search for the right website adress, which often ends in a phone call or an e-mail to the National Agency.

The fact that organisations only have to register once and the use of the PIC code, are efficiency gains. Beneficiaries often use a personal e-mail for the EU login. If staff or volunteers disappear, organisations can lose their EU login. This results again in a phone call or an e-mail to the National Agency.

The integrated application form is more troublesome. The extensiveness of the form is generally considered as adding workload and administrative burden. In the interviews, some project leaders have the impression it has even turned for the worse due to the integration of the forms of the different sub-actions into a standardised form.

- *"I even have the impression that it [the application form] has become more extensive. At least for EVS. Isn't that the case?"* (projectleader B – EVS-project and youth exchanges, also active in the previous programme)
- *"That's quite possible (...). It is now standard under the KA1 projects and that are exchanges. In the former programme, you had different forms for EVS and exchanges."* (projectleader A – EVS-project and youth exchanges, also active in the previous programme)

It must be stressed though that not all interviewed project leaders are negative about the application form.

"I am used to – and maybe that explains a lot – till end of December, I have been a project coordinator. So I have written a lot of projects. All sorts. That is often a Word template, but that pdf system is much better. Compared to provinces, cities and local authorities – I have written over ten projects or so – I found that pdf system good. (...) At the same time, the questions are good. (...) We now have included an article in English in our project. That is something we wouldn't have done without these questions. (...) As a result, we have a stronger project. But spontaneously, we wouldn't have thought about it. So it stimulates that form. Those questions inspire. At the end I was happy with it, but at the moment of writing I was thinking, allee, still two pages with boxes to go." (Project leader of a KA2-project, new to the programme)

As a matter of fact, in the RAY study the majority of project leaders (10 out of 17) living in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium agree that the online tools for applying and reporting are easy to use and almost all of them (13 out of 15) agree that the website of Youthpass is easy to use. Much depends on the IT skills of the project leaders. Project leaders with extensive digital skills manage, though even they need sometimes support. Others are heavily depending on the technical support of the National Agency.

The staff members of the National Agency have serious doubts about the efficiency of the integrated forms and tools. The tools have led to an increase in questions about technical issues. All this contributes to more workload. It also leads to more specific problems. For instance for giving feedback to applicants, the e-forms and webtools do not allow adding comments in the documents. Something what is easily done in a Word document. The many changes in the forms and tools make it too time consuming to translate forms and manuals into Dutch. Another consequence of the integration of the programme is that the rules have become more rigid and changes to the programme less flexible because all parties have to agree with the changes. The focus group of the staff members of the National Agency:

"That is something that you certainly shouldn't forget. Our workload has not only increased due to the increase in funding, but especially by the increase in tools. We do not only invest extra time in supporting applicants and beneficiaries in working with the tools. We support also each other in working with the tools and we also help the Commission in detecting and solving problems."

For participants, the integration of the programme has little consequences.

A good and comprehensible guide to use the tools, webinars about the basics of the tools, simplification and diversification of the application form according to sub-action, integrating the different and many IT-tools into one path for the end-users, could improve the efficiency for beneficiaries and the National Agency.

4.12 DO YOU CONSIDER THAT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CERTAIN ACTIONS OF THE PROGRAMME IS MORE EFFICIENT THAN OTHERS? ARE THERE DIFFERENCES ACROSS FIELDS? WHAT GOOD PRACTICES OF THESE MORE EFFICIENT ACTIONS OF THE PROGRAMME COULD BE TRANSFERRED TO OTHERS?

The different actions and sub-actions are very different in set-up. EVS lasts longer and involve less participants. This also holds true for KA2-project. These projects do not have the objective to reach a big number of participants, but to promote innovation and good practices in the youth sector. Therefore, it is not easy to indicate what make some actions more efficient than others and what can be transferred from one action to the other.

EVS-projects are the most difficult projects to realize because of funding rules. Although the funding per participant is the highest (see table 17), in some respect these projects are underfunded. This is certainly the case for the unit costs the organisations get per participant per day. This amount has not changed since 2012, while the cost of living has increased. Since the introduction of the Online Linguistic Support in the programme, there are no funds for language courses in some languages (among others Dutch). Nonetheless, all interviewed EVS- guest organisations still provide lessons in Dutch, because they are convinced you cannot learn a language behind a computer screen, but through contact with native speakers. Most EVS-guest organisations invest their own financial means to provide language courses for their volunteers.

4.13 TO WHAT EXTENT HAS THE SYSTEM OF SIMPLIFIED GRANTS RESULTED IN A REDUCTION OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN FOR NATIONAL AGENCIES AND PROGRAMME BENEFICIARIES AND PARTICIPANTS? ARE THERE DIFFERENCES ACROSS ACTIONS OR FIELDS? WHAT ELEMENTS OF THE PROGRAMME COULD BE CHANGED TO FURTHER REDUCE THE ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN, WITHOUT UNDULY COMPROMISING ITS RESULTS AND IMPACT?

The system of simplified grants already existed in the previous programme for the field of youth. It has expanded to the travel costs. The National Agency and beneficiaries agree that the system of simplified grants has reduced the administrative burden. The only exception might be KA3 projects in which staff costs are not provided and the simplified grants to do not cater for the intensive preparation and follow-up of Structured Dialogue projects.

Beneficiaries made some remarks on the travel costs. A few organisations pointed out that a lot of youth exchanges take place during the holiday seasons. This increases the costs of air travelling. The calculation of the travel costs based on the distance band is sometimes not sufficient because additional transport costs are made to get people from the airport to the venue place. One organisation preferred the former arrangement in which beneficiaries got 70% of the real costs and in which those costs had to be proven. This was an organisation that has had exchanges that exceeded the maximum distance band of 8 000 km. The largest amount of travel costs to these places is lower than 70% of the real travel costs. This organisation found the previous system easier to plan because as organisation you know you have to find the extra 30%.

An area for improvement are exceptional costs for projects working with young people with fewer opportunities. At some stage in the previous programme unit costs were possible for these projects. Another lack are unit costs to pay external experts, professionals, free lancers, ... to improve the quality of youth exchanges.

4.14 TO WHAT EXTENT ARE THE IT TOOLS PROVIDED BY THE COMMISSION ADEQUATE FOR THE EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME IN YOUR COUNTRY? DO THEY ANSWER YOUR NEEDS? GIVE SPECIFIC EXAMPLES WHERE THEY CAN BE IMPROVED. IS THE SET OF IT TOOLS APPROPRIATE OR SHOULD IT COVER MORE/LESS ELEMENTS OF THE PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION?

The process to obtain an EU login pose little problems. Most project leaders use their personal e-mail adress for the EU login. Due to the fast turn-over of personnel and/or volunteers in the youth sector, this can create problems for some beneficiaries. A clear communication to use a general e-mail could solve this problem. The unique registration form is sometimes challenging for youth organisations. Some questions are less relevant for some informal youth groups (e.g. the amount of money earned in the last year) and sometime there is confusion about the extra documents that have to be included (e.g. holder or owner of a bank account). The sometimes complex structures of youth organisations are not always easy to fit into the tool.

The application form poses technical problems and problems in regard to content. Project leaders, who have ample experience in designing and writing a project, are positive about using an interactive pdf. Other project leaders are less positive and signal several technical issues. Inputted data in the pdf sometimes vanishes without a clear reason, some fields in the application cannot be filled in or sometimes the form refuses to proceed (because some data are missing). People cannot open the interactive pdf and have to save it to their desktop before using it. It is difficult to work with several people in the same pdf. That makes cooperation between the different partners more difficult. Most organisations find a solution to this last problem by reconstructing the pdf file in a Word file and share it in a cloud tool. At best, the coordinating organisation redacts the final application. More often the applying organisation writes most of the project, adding to the workload of this organisation.

Other complaints are that a lot of project leaders have the impression that they have to repeat themselves a lot because some questions are very similar or it is not clear what the difference is between some questions. Some questions are not relevant for some sub-actions (e.g. a project leader of a group exchange had to answer the question who his OLS contact person was, without knowing what OLS is) or the size of some boxes in the pdf of the application form are not big enough to answer. Also the use of terminology that is less often used or not used at all in the youth sector, makes the process of applying and reporting more time intensive. The late publication of the application form is not efficient from the point of view of the submitters:

“What I find very annoying, is that each time you only have the right [application] form a month or a month and a half before the deadline. We are obliged to use a previous form if we want to start. Then copy and paste. Sometimes you meet another technical problem. Then we have to start a new... It is bothersome and time consuming. It didn't used to be that way and that was easier and much quicker.” (Experienced project leader of youth exchanges, EVS and mobility of youth workers, also active in the previous programme)

The Mobility Tool poses several problems. The tool is described as “*too complicated*” and “*counter-intuitive*”. The input of participants one per one increases the workload. Bugs in the IT-tool lead to crashes of the tool. Sometimes it is not possible to access the tool or a specific part of the tool. Unexpected errors appear. The search function of the tool is not clear. The reason why some information is asked, is not always clear and are experienced as unnecessary, yet burdensome.

“I must admit that everything is apart and that it has become more complicated than before. It is really not a pleasure to work with that online Mobility Tool. There are many problems and than we have to ask Jint for help.” (Experienced project leader of youth exchanges, EVS and mobility of youth workers, also active in the previous programme)

Not all beneficiaries are negative of the Mobility tool. One beneficiary described it as “*a successful concept*”, “*easy to use*” and “*well structured*”.

Two remarks about the website of Youthpass are recurrent. Some beneficiaries think it would be more logical if you could access the website by using the EU login. Some project leaders find the website too difficult for young people because of the use of terminology. Especially, the key competences of lifelong learning (e.g. mathematical skills) are considered to be formulated too difficult for youth work.

The first two years of the programme the OEET did not exist or had a lot of bugs and other technical problems. This resulted in a delay of the assessments of the evaluation reports and in the pay out of the final payment. The lateness of the second payment was also noted by the beneficiaries.

There are also a lot of IT tools. A project leader of an EVS-project has to use twelve to thirteen different IT tools from beginning to end. An integrated path with one login could resolve this problem.

Also for the NA there are issues. The different systems are not always well integrated and it takes time before data, submitted in one system, shows up in another system or even doesn't show up at all. The output for the yearly report is complicated.

Frequent changes or updates make the manuals of the tools obsolete. These updates make it impossible to translate the manuals into Dutch.

One part of the digitalisation of the programme is considered less effective: the Online Linguistic Support. EVS-organisations keep sending their volunteers to language courses, although they do not get funding for it. Their reasoning is that you can not learn a language behind a computer screen, but in interaction with native speakers and in group. This vision is also expressed by the staff members of the National Agency.

4.15 TO WHAT EXTENT IS THE LEVEL OF HUMAN AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES THAT IS AVAILABLE FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME IN YOUR COUNTRY ADEQUATE? WHAT STEPS DID YOU TAKE TO OPTIMISE THE EFFICIENCY OF THE RESOURCES DEPLOYED FOR THE ERASMUS+ IMPLEMENTATION IN YOUR COUNTRY?

The budget for the management of the programme by the National Agency has not increased in the first three years of the programme while the budget of the programme has. At the same time, the Flemish government has not diminished its financial support for the National Agency, while the rest of the Flemish national youth sector has seen its financial means cut back. Overall, this has led to an increase of the caseload and workload of the staff members of the National Agency and puts pressure on the supportive approach of the National Agency.

Since 2015, an external facilitator has been involved to develop a supportive approach trajectory. The aim of this trajectory is to uphold the quality of the submitted projects. The result of this trajectory is that a primal target group of beneficiaries has been identified. First time or second time beneficiaries still get the same support as before. More experienced submitters are asked to fall back on their own expertise (certainly when it involves the application form and designing a project), but still can get a basic support.

Furthermore, new staff members with a different profile have been recruited. These new staff members have a bigger expertise in digital skills, so they can provide support to beneficiaries and to the other staff members.

To streamline the increase in questions about technical issues and the use of the digital tools Mobility Tool+ Clinics have been created. Instead of answering individual questions per mail or on the phone, beneficiaries facing the same problems are invited to a training session on the IT tools.

The current programme also poses some new challenges. One of them is the evaluation of the projects. Earlier, it was already mentioned that the lateness of the IT tools has caused a delay in the assessment of the project in the first two years of the new programme. Also changes in the programme put time restraints on the evaluation of projects. One example are KA2-projects for innovation in youth work. The quality of products generated in this key action have to be assessed. Sometimes these products are very elaborated and ask specialized expertise. The National Agency sometimes has not enough staff to evaluate these products and/or is lacking the necessary expertise in specific cases. External assessors are used, but these are more expensive.

A second challenge is that some key actions are underfunded at the national level (e.g. KA2), so that some bigger project proposals are not eligible because of financial reasons. Although these projects do not make a change to get financed from the outset, these projects have to undergo the total evaluation process.

4.16 TO WHAT EXTENT DO THE ERASMUS+ OBJECTIVES CONTINUE TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS OR PROBLEMS THEY ARE MEANT TO SOLVE? ARE THESE NEEDS OR PROBLEMS (STILL) RELEVANT IN THE CONTEXT OF YOUR COUNTRY? HAVE THE NEEDS OR PROBLEMS EVOLVED IN SUCH A WAY THAT THE OBJECTIVES OF ERASMUS+ OR ITS SUCCESSOR PROGRAMME NEED TO BE ADJUSTED?

The improvement of key competences of young people and especially those young people with fewer opportunities stays extremely relevant. It is also in tune with Flemish youth policy. Some key competences are more vital and will become more of a challenge in the future. Participation in democratic life in Europe and active citizenship (e.g. the successes of populist movements in Europe, the lower turn out in elections – even in a country as Belgium with a compulsory voting system, ...), intercultural dialogue (e.g. the increase in superdivers cities and the superdiversification of the younger generations), social inclusion and solidarity (with among others intergenerational solidarity) will become even more important social issues in the coming years.

The unemployment rate among young people is high. 15,2% of young people between 15 and 24 in the Flemish Region and 36,2% of 15-year to 24-year olds in the Brussels Region are unemployed (VDAB, 2016). There is a certain scepticism about the instrumentalization of the youth sector to enhance the labour market opportunities of young people.

Improving the quality of youth work and policy reforms at the national, regional and local level deserves lasting attention and so does the internationalisation of youth work. This last one has become more important because the initiatives at the national level have been reduced, partially due to the succes of Youth in Action and Erasmus+: Youth in Action. This programme is the main means to realize this objective.

A clear link between the European Youth Strategy and the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme should be uphold and the programme is a means to realize the objectives of this European Youth Strategy.

4.17 TO WHAT EXTENT ARE NEEDS OF DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS AND SECTORS ADDRESSED BY THE ERASMUS+ OBJECTIVES? HOW SUCCESSFUL IS THE PROGRAMME IN ATTRACTING AND REACHING TARGET AUDIENCES AND GROUPS WITHIN DIFFERENT

FIELDS OF THE PROGRAMME'S SCOPE? IS THE ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME WELL KNOWN TO THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING, YOUTH AND SPORT COMMUNITIES? IN CASE SOME TARGET GROUPS ARE NOT SUFFICIENTLY REACHED, WHAT FACTORS ARE LIMITING THEIR ACCESS AND WHAT ACTIONS COULD BE TAKEN TO REMEDY THIS?

The transition to the Erasmus+ programme coincided with a drop of young people with fewer opportunities. A possible explanation are differences in the funding rules between the two programmes. The fact that there were more possibilities to bring in costs for beneficiaries working with this target group, made it visible that the programme has special attention for this target group. Attention for the peculiar challenges these organisations meet in the organisation of a project, makes this attention more visible.

Small and local groups and informal youth groups are less prominent among the beneficiaries of the new programme than among the beneficiaries of the previous programme. Nonetheless, some of these projects were the most innovative and creative projects in the previous programme (Stevens, 2015). A reason is the disappearance of national youth initiatives in the programme. Developing a transnational project from scratch for local and informal groups is not straightforward. Re-introducing these national youth initiatives could attract these stakeholders back to the programme.

Long-term EVS-projects are very difficult to realize, especially as host organisations. One of the reasons is that organisations have to co-finance these projects because some costs are not longer financed in the programme or because the unit costs have not increased since 2012 while renting on the private housing market and the cost of living has increased significantly. Co-financing has become less obvious for a lot of organisations in the non-profit sector due to budget cuts in local, provincial or national subsidies in the last couple of years.

The programme is well known among national youth organisations. For national youth organisation internationalisation often equalizes to the Erasmus+: Youth in Action. Group exchanges and KA2 strategic partnerships feature in the policy plans of these organisations. In the first three years of the current programme, one third of the nationally recognized youth organisations have an approved project within the programme. In the interviews with project leaders it was often mentioned that the programme is still not known enough among the general public and even possible beneficiaries.

“What I find is that Youth in Action offers such a fine opportunities, but it is not known enough and it is still used too little.” (Projectleader of a group exchange with young people with fewer opportunities, new to the programme)

“This programme deserves to become popular. (...) So I would invest in people who are willing to do an effort to make Youth in Action more known. I am not telling that it is handled now in the wrong way, but most people have no idea what it is. What is Youth in Action? Even at Couleur Café they do not know it.” (Project leader of a youth exchange for young people with fewer opportunities and former EVS-participant, new in the programme with the current organisation he works for)

The focus group of policy makers stresses that it is more efficient that the programme is known by possible beneficiaries who have the intention to develop a project than the general public. It is the development of projects that creates possibilities for young people to have an international experience. The focus group of the staff members invoke the cost of a general publicity campaign.

- *“It could be better and broader known. That is an absolute fact”* (Staff member B of the National Agency)
- *“But than you need big money. A good promotion campaign costs heaps and heaps of money.”* (Staff member C of the National Agency)

- *“And than you can not change your name every seven years.”* (Staff member F of the National Agency)

4.18 TO WHAT EXTENT ARE THE VARIOUS ACTIONS THAT HAVE BEEN BROUGHT TOGETHER IN ERASMUS+ COHERENT? CAN YOU IDENTIFY ANY EXISTING OR POTENTIAL SYNERGIES BETWEEN ACTIONS WITHIN ERASMUS+? CAN YOU IDENTIFY ANY TENSIONS, INCONSISTENCIES OR OVERLAPS BETWEEN ACTIONS WITHIN ERASMUS+?

There is a certain tension between the funding rules of youth worker mobility and group exchanges. The distinction between youth worker and participant is not always that clear cut in youth work. The funding rules for both sub-action provide for organisational support. The amount of this support is based on the number of participants in the project. A footnote in the programme guide defines participants in youth worker mobility as all participants, including trainers, facilitators or accompanying persons. A footnote for youth exchanges defines participants as all participants, including group leaders and accompanying persons. External free lancers or external experts can be considered as trainers or facilitators in youth worker mobility, but not as group leaders in group exchanges. As a consequence, there is no funding for external free lancers or experts in youth exchanges, although sometimes specialist expertise is needed in this kind of projects. Because of slight differences in funding rules, the one sub-action can become more attractive than the other one and some applicants can be tempted to ‘shop’ between the two. This could be the reason why youth worker mobility became so popular with the onset of the new programme.

There is also a similar tension between Key Action 2 and youth worker mobility. Clever designers of projects can describe a youth worker mobility as a strategic partnership for the exchange of good practices.

Until now, no real cross-sectorial project – in the sense of a cooperation between education and youth – has taken place. So there is not much of synergie between the two fields. There are several projects approved in Youth in Action that could be considered cross-sectorial. They do not take the form of a cross-fertilisation of education and youth, but of youth-sport, youth-culture, youth-media, ...

Sometimes educational institutions or school-related organisations submit projects under Youth in Action. In that case, the beneficiary is examined and there is a check whether the project fits into the set up of Youth in Action (a non-formal education activity in the leisure time of young people and the non compulsory character of the activity). If the project is considered non-eligible under Youth in Action, the applicant is referred to the National Agency for education and training.

4.19 TO WHAT EXTENT DOES ERASMUS+ COMPLEMENT OTHER NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMMES AVAILABLE IN YOUR COUNTRY? CAN YOU IDENTIFY ANY TENSIONS, INCONSISTENCIES OR OVERLAPS WITH OTHER PROGRAMMES?

As seen before, the national funds for the internationalisation of the youth sector have been phased down, partially due to the success of the previous and current programme.

There is one programme, Bel’ J, that makes exchanges, training and volunteering work possible in the other Communities of Belgium. This programme is complementary to the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme and has been designed to be so. Flemish young people could go to all other European countries, but not to one of the other regions of Belgium. Bel’J now offers this.

4.20 TO WHAT EXTENT ERASMUS+ AND ITS PREDECESSOR PROGRAMMES PRODUCE EFFECTS THAT ARE ADDITIONAL TO THE EFFECTS THAT WOULD HAVE RESULTED

FROM SIMILAR ACTIONS INITIATED ONLY AT REGIONAL OR NATIONAL LEVELS IN YOUR COUNTRY? WHAT POSSIBILITIES DO YOU SEE TO ADJUST ERASMUS+ OR ITS SUCCESSOR PROGRAMME IN ORDER TO INCREASE ITS EUROPEAN VALUE ADDED?

Similar Flemish programmes have disappeared and the Bel' J programme is complementary to Erasmus+: Youth in Action.

An added value of a European programme, is that there is a clear framework in which everybody is involved in the same manner and with the same rules. Realizing a similar framework at a national level would ask a lot of bilateral agreements, which is more difficult to realize for a small country.

The clear option of the European Commission to invest in learning mobility and to increase the budgets in time of austerity would not be possible at a national level. The Flemish Community would never be able to spend this amount of money to learning mobility and internationalization of youth work.

There are some possibilities to increase the value of the programme. A re-introduction of national youth initiatives would foster policy reform at the local level (because local organisation often apply for these projects). It is a stepping stone to larger projects and could be part of a trajectory approach into the programme for local organisations and informal youth groups. It is a first step to design a transnational youth initiative for small and local organisations. Furthermore, they offer a way to promote European values at the local level. There are still possibilities in KA3 to strengthen the participation of young people in the programme.

4.21 TO WHAT EXTENT ERASMUS+ WILL BE ABLE TO ABSORB IN AN EFFECTIVE WAY THE SHARP INCREASE IN THE BUDGET THAT IS FORESEEN IN THE COMING YEARS UP TO 2020 IN YOUR COUNTRY? COULD THE PROGRAMME USE EVEN HIGHER BUDGETS IN AN EFFECTIVE WAY? DO YOU SEE CHALLENGES TO EFFECTIVELY USE MORE MONEY FOR PARTICULAR ACTIONS OR FIELDS OF THE PROGRAMME?

There are some key actions and sub-action were an increase could effectively be absorbed. This is the case for group exchanges, KA2 and KA3 projects. An increase in EVS funding is considered to be the most challenging to be effectively spend. These projects ask time to motivate organisations to develop and design projects, to seek partners, ...

"If you look how much effort they have to do to be accredited, how much effort they must do to submit a project, how much effort they must do to host those volunteers in a good way and to support them..." (Staff member F of the National Agency)

5.1 TABLES

Table 1: Self-reported skills development of participants (percentage agreement)

Skill development	2011-2013 (N=610)	2015-2016 (N= 453)
First language skills: To say what I think with conviction in discussions	79.5	85.1
Foreign language skills: To communicate with people who speak another	86.6	96.1
Mathematical skills: To think logically and draw conclusions	75.6	72.5
Learning to learn: How I can learn better or have more fun when learning	65.3	78.8
Learning to learn: To plan and carry out my learning independently	56.1	68.4
Social skills: How to cooperate in a team	88.8	93.1
Social skills: To negotiate joint solutions when there are different viewpoints	86.3	92.2
Intercultural skills: To get along with people who have a different cultural	88.2	94.7
Civic skills: How to achieve something for the community of society	82.0	88.0
Civic skills: To discuss political topics seriously	60.2	68.8
Entrepreneurship: To develop a good idea and put it into practice	81.8	84.1
Sense of initiative: To identify opportunities for my personal or professional	74.4	84.6
Creative skills: To express myself creatively or artistically	63.5	73.2
Media literacy: To produce media content on my own	51.0	50.1

Table 2: Self-reported competence development of project leaders (percentage agreement) – previous programme

Competence development	2011-2013 (N=179)
First language competences	41.3
Foreign language competences	85.4
Mathematical competences	22.7
Basic competences of science and technology	24.4
Digital competences	42.2
Learning to learn	62.2
Social competences	97.2
Intercultural competences	93.2
Civic competences	67.4
Sense of entrepreneurship	65.7
Sense of initiative	86.6
Cultural awareness and expression	67.4
Media literacy	47.5

Table 3: Self-reported skills development of project leaders (percentage agreement) – current programme

Skill development	2015-2016 (N= 96)
First language skills: To say what I think with conviction in discussions	86.2
Foreign language skills: To communicate with people who speak another language	97.9
Mathematical skills: To think logically and draw conclusions	81.9
Learning to learn: To plan and carry out my learning independently	88.3
Social skills: To negotiate joint solutions when there are different viewpoints	89.2
Intercultural skills: To get along with people who have a different cultural background	96.8
Civic skills: How to achieve something for the community of society	90.4
Entrepreneurship: To develop a good idea and put it into practice	92.6
Sense of initiative: To identify opportunities for my personal or professional future	85.1
Creative skills: To express myself creatively or artistically	95.1
Media literacy: To produce media content on my own	72.3

Table 4: Self-reported evolution in values concerning active citizenship, intercultural dialogue, social inclusion and solidarity according to participants – 2011-2013 (N=404)

Value	To a smaller extent	In the same extent	To a greater extent
I participate in societal and/or political life	9%	55%	36%
I am interested in European issues	8%	41%	51%
I am committed to work against discrimination, intolerance, xenophobia or racism	10%	56%	34%
Disadvantaged people have my support	1%	44%	55%

Table 5: Self-reported evolution in values concerning active citizenship, intercultural dialogue, social inclusion and solidarity according to participants – 2015-2016 (N=450)

Value	Has become less important	Has remained the same	Has become more important
I keep myself informed on current European affairs	2.0	63.4	34.6
I engage in civil society	1.6	71.1	27.3
I actively support the inclusion of people with fewer opportunities	0.9	64.4	34.7
I actively contribute to environmental	1.8	74.2	25.8
I participate in democratic/political life	2.2	74.7	23.1
I engage in voluntary activities	1.6	63.9	34.5
I appreciate cultural diversity	0.9	38.9	60.2
I am interested in contributing to youth policy development	2.4	53.9	43.7
I feel European	2.4	49.8	47.8

I am committed to work against discrimination, intolerance, xenophobia or racism	1.8	56.2	42.0
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Table 6: Self-reported evolution in values concerning active citizenship, intercultural dialogue, social inclusion and solidarity according to project leaders – 2015-2016 (N=94)

Value	Has become less important	Has remained the same	Has become more important
I keep myself informed on current European affairs	0 0.0	55 59.8	37 40.2
I engage in civil society	2 2.2	59 64.1	31 33.7
I actively support the inclusion of people with fewer opportunities	0 0.0	54 58.7	38 41.3
I participate in democratic/political life	1 1.1	71 77.2	20 21.2
I appreciate cultural diversity	0 0.0	35 38.0	52 62.0
I am interested in contributing to youth policy development	1 1.1	48 52.2	43 46.7
I feel European	1 1.1	50 54.3	41 44.6
I am committed to work against discrimination, intolerance, xenophobia or racism	0 0.0	49 53.8	42 46.2

Table7: Self-reported evolution in career outlook and job chances of participants – percentage agreement

Item	2011-2013 (N= 409)	2015-2016 (N= 433)
I have a clearer idea about my professional career aspirations and goals	63.7	69.8
I believe that my job chances have increased	62.6	65.4

Table 8: Self-reported evolution in career outlook and job chances of project leaders – percentage agreement

Item	2011-2013 (N= 179)	2015-2016 (N= 43)
I have a clearer idea about my professional career aspirations and goals	116 67,8	37 74,4
I believe that my job chances have increased	101 56,7	26 60,5

Table 9: Self-reported youth work competences by participants in youth worker mobility and TCA-projects 2015-2016 (N=143)

Youth work competence	Strongly disagree	Disagree	agree	Strongly disagree
I now understand the concept of non-formal education and learning better	0.0	11.5	55.4	33.1
I now understand the connections between formal, non-formal and informal education and learning better	0.0	15.8	54.1	30.1
I have learned more about how to foster non-formal learning in youth work	0.0	13.0	51.4	35.6
I have learned how to develop and implement better an international youth project	0.7	10.9	43.5	44.9
I have established contact with youth workers/leaders in other countries who I intend to develop a project with	0.7	18.4	39.5	41.5
I have learned something which I intend to use in my work/involvement with young people	0.7	11.5	48.6	39.2
I have learned more about how to actively involve young people in the preparation and implementation of projects	0.7	15.0	52.4	32.0
I'm now involved in partnerships or networks providing opportunities for future cooperation in the youth field	0.7	15.3	52.8	31.3
If relevant I now consider how to include an international dimension in my work with young people	0.0	11.0	54.5	34.5
I am now better able to acquire financial support for activities involving young people	2.1	37.2	40.7	20.0
I am better equipped to assure the quality of a youth project I am organising	0.7	19.4	49.3	30.6
I now know more about the content of youth policies at European level	2.1	29.4	45.5	23.1
I now better understand how I can contribute to youth policy development	1.4	27.5	47.9	23.2
I have already applied knowledge and skills acquired during the project in my work/involvement in the youth field.	0.0	10.4	54.2	35.4
I have improved my skills for the assessment of learning outcomes and competence development in through (international) youth work	1.4	24.8	53.9	19.9
I have improved my skills to design an activity/project for young people based on their interests and learning needs	0.7	22.9	55.7	20.7
I now plan to develop my youth work competences through adequate education and training activities	0.7	23.6	51.4	24.3
I have learned better how to work in an international team	0.0	13.7	47.5	38.8
I am now better able to deal with ambiguity and tensions in my engagement in the youth field	2.1	23.6	51.4	22.9
I have learned better how to choose, modify or develop adequate methods for working with young people	0.7	14.3	60.7	24.3

Table 10: Self-reported youth work competences by project leaders – 2015-2016

Youth work competence	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly disagree
I now understand the concept of non-formal education and learning better	0 0.0	8 19.5	24 58.5	9 22.0
I now understand the connections between formal, non-formal and informal education and learning better	0 0.0	9 21.4	24 57.1	9 21.4
I have learned more about how to foster non-formal learning in youth work	0 0.0	10 23.8	23 54.8	9 21.4
I have learned how to develop and implement better an international youth project	1 2.4	0 0.0	23 56.1	17 41.5
I have established contact with youth workers/leaders in other countries who I intend to develop a project with	1 2.4	3 7.1	19 45.2	19 45.2
I have learned something which I intend to use in my work/involvement with young people	0 0.0	2 4.8	20 47.6	20 47.6
I have learned more about how to actively involve young people in the preparation and implementation of projects	1 2.4	6 14.3	18 42.9	17 40.5
I'm now involved in partnerships or networks providing opportunities for future cooperation in the youth field	0 0.0	6 14.6	18 43.9	17 41.5
If relevant I now consider how to include an international dimension in my work with young people	0 0.0	5 12.2	21 51.2	15 36.6
I am now better able to acquire financial support for activities involving young people	1 2.4	14 34.1	18 43.9	8 19.5
I am better equipped to assure the quality of a youth project I am organising	1 2.4	3 7.3	22 53.7	15 36.6
I now know more about the content of youth policies at European level	2 4.9	13 31.7	16 39.0	10 24.4
I now better understand how I can contribute to youth policy development	1 2.4	12 29.3	20 48.8	8 19.5
I have already applied knowledge and skills acquired during the project in my work/involvement in the youth field.	0 0.0	4 9.8	22 53.7	15 36.6
I have improved my skills for the assessment of learning outcomes and competence development in through (international) youth work	0 0.0	6 14.6	27 65.9	8 19.5
I have improved my skills to design an activity/project for young people based on their interests and learning needs	1 2.4	3 7.3	24 58.5	13 31.7
I now plan to develop my youth work competences through adequate education and training activities	0 0.0	10 24.4	23 56.1	8 19.5
I have learned better how to work in an international team	0 0.0	2 4.9	22 53.7	17 41.5
I am now better able to deal with ambiguity and tensions in my engagement in the youth field	0 0.0	5 12.2	25 61.0	11 26.8
I have learned better how to choose, modify or develop adequate methods for working with young people	0 0.0	4 9.8	23 56.1	14 34.1

Table 11: Evolution of young people with fewer opportunities 2011-2016 (data provided by Jint vzw)

	2012	2013	TOTAL	2014	2015	2016	TOTAL
Total number of young people with fewer opportunities	516	883	1 399	382	598	723	1 703
Total number of participants	2 998	3 621	6 619	2 162	2 128	2 535	6 825
Percentage	17,21	24,39	21,14	17,67	28,10	28,52	24,95

Table 12: I learned from the Erasmus+: Youth in action programme in the following way – project leaders – February 2016 (N=40)

Manner	N	%
Through an informal youth group	6	15,0 %
Through a youth organisation	16	40,0 %
Through another organisation	13	32,5 %
Through friends/acquaintances	3	7,5 %
Through school/college/university	9	22,5 %
At work	11	27,5%
Through information in a paper, magazine, on the radio, tv or internet	5	12,5 %
Through information of a National Agency of Erasmus+: Youth in Action	17	42,5 %
Through a regional agency/office of the National Agency of Erasmus+: Youth in Action	5	12,5 %
Through information of a website of the European Commission	5	12,5 %
Through the Eurodesk network	1	2,5 %

Table 13: Overview of organisations submitting a project in 2014-2016 in KA1 (data provided by Jint vzw)

	Youth organisations	Youth welfare	Welfare	New social movements	Sport	Culture	Education	Minorities	Other	Total
Absolute numbers										
Total	145	61	35	40	3	17	2	6	9	318
International	29	1		4					2	36
National	83	29	35	23		2		6	3	181
Local	33	31		13	3	15	2		4	101
Percentages										
International	9,12	0,31	0,00	1,26	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,63	11,32
National	26,10	9,12	11,01	7,23	0,00	0,63	0,00	1,89	0,94	56,92
Local	10,38	9,75	0,00	4,09	0,94	4,72	0,63	0,00	1,26	31,76
Totaal	45,60	19,18	11,01	12,58	0,94	5,35	0,63	1,89	2,83	100,00

Table 14: Available funds according to key action and action – 2014-2016 (Flemish Community)

Key action	Action	2014	2015	2016
KA1	Staff Mobility	293 517,85	282 160,52	281 744,93
	Group Exchanges	758 448,46	741 447,04	749 049,54
	EVS	926 992,31	906 210,73	904 846,47
KA2	Strategic partnerships	392 217,69	489 497,78	559 849,47
KA3	Policy Support	84 848,64	103 495,15	103 377,11
Total		2 456 024,96	2 522 811,22	2 598 867,53

Table 15: Allocated funds according to key action and action – 2014-2016 (Flemish Community)

Key action	Action	2014	2015	2016
KA1	Staff Mobility	665 407,00	505 153,00	309 637,00
	Group Exchanges	555 536,13	732 230,56	947 282,53
	EVS	724 229,00	684 244,01	740 960,00
KA2	Strategic partnerships	450 292,00	385 365,00	307 023,00
KA3	Policy Support	68 000,00	113 437,00	96 268,00
Total		2 463 464,13	2 420 429,57	2 401 170,53

Table 16: Implementation of a project – previous and current programme (agreement among project leaders)

Item	2011-2013 (N=70)	2016 (N=17)
It was easy to obtain the essential information required for applying for this project.	56 80%	15 88%
The essential information required for applying for this project was easy to understand.	52 74%	12 71%
In the case of this project, it was easy to meet the funding criteria.	57 81%	14 82%
The application procedure for this project was simple.	38 54%	9 53%
The administrative management of this grant request was simple.	39 55%	8 47%
The funding rules and calculation methods were appropriate.	56 80%	13 76%
Reporting was easy.	45 66%	11 64%
The overall grant system was appropriate and satisfactory for this project.	52 74%	12 70%
Compared with other funding programmes, the administrative management of this grant request was easy.	32 (of 59) 54%	8 (of 14) 57%

Table 17: Average cost per participant – according to Key action and sub-action – 2014-2016

Key action	Action	2014	2015	2016	Total
KA1	Staff Mobility	620,14	667,31	721,76	655,24
	Group Exchanges	400,82	470,89	482,57	455,76
	EVS	5 445,33	6 109,32	6 387,59	5954,11
KA2	Strategic partnerships	5 360,62	6 317,46	4 515,04	5364,69

KA3	Policy Support	105,75	246,07	211,11	178,02
Total		2 463 464,13	2 420 429,57	2 401 170,53	783,59

5.2 CONSULTED LITERATURE

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- VDAB (2016), *Werkloosheidsgraad (15-24 jaar) naar geslacht in de Europese Unie, 2000-2015*, Brussel: VDAB, last consulted op 30/04/2017 op <https://europa.vdab.be/>.