

To the kind attention of

Mrs. Sophia Eriksson, Director for Youth, Education and Erasmus+ at the EU Commission's Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture

MEP Michaela Sojdrova, Rapporteur on European Solidarity Corps

MEP Sabine Verheyen, Chair of Committee on Culture and Education

MEP Milan Zver, Rapporteur on Erasmus+

Object: COVID-19 impact on youth organisations activities and sustainability

The **Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organisations** is an International Non-Governmental Youth Organisation, gathering 53 national organisations that promote intercultural education, understanding and peace through voluntary service and non-formal education projects.

38 of our members are based in 20 Erasmus + programme countries; 7 in neighbour countries - Armenia, Belorussia, Ukraine, Russia and Switzerland; 8 in Canada, Japan, India, South Korea, Mexico and Nepal. 44 of our members are based in 24 member countries of Council of Europe.

Alliance members, as well as all youth, non-profit and civic society organisations, are heavily affected by the spread of COVID-19 and they are experiencing serious difficulties in the management of their activities, in particular Erasmus+ (E+) and European Solidarity Corps (ESC) projects.

As a network we would like to bring our members' voices to you and share their main concerns and proposals. We are here presenting a series of practical issues and possible related solutions, for youth organisations to be supported in overcoming the negative impacts that COVID-19 spread is causing on youth projects, volunteering, learning and mobility.

Our reflections and requests second those already expressed by other platforms and networks, as the European Youth Forum (YFJ) and the Network of European Voluntary Service Organisations (NEVSO) and they also join the ones pointed out by the Members of the European Parliament, calling as well for support and clarity in this situation (<https://bit.ly/3ereOTW>).

Alliance members' general concern

All information provided by National Agencies as well as the measures taken to support local organisations must be the same and coherent in E+ and ESC programmes and partner countries.

Alliance members' specific concerns and proposals

1. For E+ and ESC programmes: projects currently close to the end need to postpone the last activities that were expected to take place and are obliged to overpass the agreed limit of the project duration.

We suggest to extend the duration of those E+ and ESC projects now arriving to their end for 12 extra months.

2. For ESC programme: even in the case where projects stopped and volunteers went back to their home countries, there are costs that organisations still carry as well as educational support that they keep providing volunteers with.

We suggest to ensure the granted funding to organisations until the volunteers' contracts end and even in the case of long-term volunteers deciding to stop their service and go back to their home countries.

3. For ESC programme: volunteers who decided to stop their service abroad and to go back to their home countries might be involved there in local volunteering activities. In addition, a large number of volunteers is expecting to continue their service in the hosting country when the temporary travel restrictions and quarantine measures will be over.

We suggest to allow volunteers to keep the ESC volunteering status, the CIGNA insurance and the financial support for food and pocket money even during the weeks and months that projects stop.

4. For ESC programme: some organisations were expecting to host a certain number of volunteers and rented a specific infrastructure accordingly, but currently find themselves hosting less volunteers than foreseen, as some participants could not reach the hosting country because of travel restrictions. Still, these organisations have to pay for the whole infrastructure they rented.

We suggest to allow organisations to get the organisational costs also for volunteers' vacant places, in case expected volunteers could not reach the hosting country.

5. For ESC programme: due to the unpredictable issues that the virus spread and its containment are entailing, some organisations are facing unexpected costs linked to their projects implementation and management or costs that are higher than those foreseen.

We suggest to exceptionally allow organisations to recur to the force majeure clause also for costs and expenditures that overpass the approved budget originally allocated to granted projects.

6. For E+ and ESC programme: participants obliged to stop their participation and to go back to their home countries paid their return ticket or, when volunteers could not afford this expenditure by themselves, organisations did.

We suggest to allow organisations to claim for force majeure funds in order to cover participants' unexpected return travels.

In some countries this measure already seems to be in place. Nevertheless, whenever possible, the money to cover these costs has to be taken from the budget originally allocated to projects. It might happen that no money will be left within the projects budgets and this would make it impossible to cover these expenditures.

We suggest to create a specific fund to deal with such situations and to enable National Agencies to use the exceeding money of their annual budget to solve such cases.

7. For ESC programme: many volunteers wish to go back to their hosting countries at the end of the lockdown measures and wish to recover the time they lost during the lockdown period.
We suggest to prolong the duration of ESC long-term projects up to the weeks or months which volunteers had to stop their service.

8. For E+ and ESC programmes, particularly for ESC Volunteering Teams: in-country mobilities will be most likely possible again much earlier than the international ones.
We suggest to exceptionally allow organisations to use the grants received for international mobilities for national mobilities.
If this shift is allowed, the content of granted ESC and E+ projects would remain the same but instead of having a group of international people, young participants of the same nationality would be involved.
To make this possible, we also suggest to allow National Agencies to use more than the 20% of total budget for in-country activities, as they have already been allowed to do.

9. For E+ and ESC programmes: the survival of many organisations is at risk, as due to this situation many of them will not receive any income and financing in the close future.
We suggest to provide organisations with financial support in order to counterbalance the fact that all applications submitted for next projects are currently pending.

10. COVID-19 is not the last challenge that organisations will have to face. Organisations' survival might be endangered in the future by similar global shocks.
We suggest to plan new support strategies for organisations and to reinforce the operative grants already existing and devoted to sustain their structures. Certainly, this would be a way to strengthen organisations' resilience to future possible challenges.

The Alliance and its members do hope you will listen to our concerns that come from the direct experience of Erasmus+ and ESC project management and from the direct cooperation with and daily commitment to youth.

The Alliance and its members stand, now more than ever, for a society of peace, mutual understanding between countries and cultures, a society where youth participation and the valuable role of youth organisations are enhanced and recognized. We stand for the European values of human rights, democracy and solidarity.

We are confident of your understanding and support and we remain at your disposal for any question you might have.

Thank you,

Copenhagen, 21.04.2020

Lasse Jensen
Alliance President



ALLIANCE
of European
Voluntary Service
Organisations