COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION (EU) 2021/1877

of 22 October 2021

on the framework of inclusion measures of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programmes 2021-2027

(Text with EEA relevance)

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular Articles 165(4) and 166(4) thereof,

Having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/817 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 establishing Erasmus+: the Union Programme for education and training, youth and sport and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 ([1]), and in particular Article 15 thereof,

Having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/888 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 establishing the European Solidarity Corps Programme and repealing Regulations (EU) 2018/1475 and (EU) No 375/2014 ([2]), and in particular Article 16(2) thereof,

Whereas:

(1) The need to strengthen and extend the Erasmus+ Programme was expressed by the European Council on several occasions. Furthermore, in the consultations on the mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ Programme (2014-2020) established by Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council ([3]), and on the programme which would replace that programme ([4]), the need for continuity in the Erasmus+ Programme's scope, architecture and delivery mechanisms was established. At the same time a need for a number of improvements was identified, such as making the Erasmus+ Programme more inclusive, simpler and more manageable for beneficiaries.

(2) Both the Erasmus+ Regulation and the Solidarity Corps Regulation foresee that the Commission shall develop a framework of inclusion measures for people with fewer opportunities ([5]). Taking into consideration the similarities of the Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps Programmes as regards some of the target groups addressed (people with fewer opportunities in the Erasmus+ Programme and young people with fewer opportunities in the European Solidarity Corps Programme), the shared nature of the implementing structures of the two Programmes, and the similarities in the funding structure, a joint framework of inclusion measures should be established.

(3) The framework of inclusion measures should take into account areas of intervention for global challenges as set out in Annex III, point 4, of Regulation (EU) 2021/947 of the European Parliament and of the Council ([6]), as well as the European Union Work Plan for Sport 2021-2024. Organisations such as the entities receiving grants under the Programmes have a key role in making inclusion a reality, particularly in terms of organisational development, acquiring and building more capacity in handling inclusion projects and accessibility requirements, promoting inclusion across the organisation, and outreach and support to participants before, during and after the project.

([1]) OJ L 189, 28.5.2021, p. 1. Hereinafter "the Erasmus+ Regulation".

([2]) OJ L 202, 8.6.2021, p. 32. Hereinafter "the European Solidarity Corps Regulation." The Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programme will also be jointly referred to hereinafter as "the Programmes".

([3]) Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 establishing "Erasmus+": the Union programme for education, training, youth and sport and repealing Decisions No 1719/2006/EC, No 1720/2006/EC and No 1298/2008/EC (OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 50).

([4]) Regulation (EU) 2021/817 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 establishing Erasmus+: the Union Programme for education and training, youth and sport and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 (OJ L 189, 28.5.2021, p. 1).

([5]) The Erasmus+ Regulation defines "people with fewer opportunities" in Article 2(25), and the European Solidarity Corps Regulation defines "young people with fewer opportunities" in Article 2(4), in a largely identical manner. In this Decision, they will also be referred to as "participants with fewer opportunities".

([6]) Regulation (EU) 2021/947 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 June 2021 establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe, amending and repealing Decision No 466/2014/EU and repealing Regulation (EU) 2017/1601 and Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 480/2009 (OJ L 209, 14.6.2021, p. 1).

(4) In some cases, people with fewer opportunities are less likely to participate in the Programmes for financial reasons, whether because of their economic situation or because of the higher participation costs that their specific situation generates, as is often the case for people with disabilities. In such cases, their participation could be facilitated with targeted financial support.

(5) Lack of awareness about the availability of dedicated measures for people with fewer opportunities can result in less participation of these target groups. Greater effort is needed to raise awareness and increase their levels of information and awareness about the opportunities in place and how to access them.

(6) Organisations are invited to address inclusion and diversity in line with their needs and those of their community. Staff dealing specifically with issues of inclusion and diversity and with participants with fewer opportunities in their organisations can benefit from working together with peers from other organisations to support people with fewer opportunities. Different forms of support, such as training sessions, peer learning experiences and job shadowing opportunities, can be arranged with a view to helping to increase their capacity in this respect.

(7) A strong supportive approach to participants with fewer opportunities is key to help removing the obstacles to their full participation in the Programmes.

(8) Inclusion and diversity are part of the criteria to select applications for funding and to allocate financial support. Quality projects that actively address inclusion and diversity and that involve participants with fewer opportunities may be given priority in the grant awarding process.

(9) People with fewer opportunities should be reached out to in their respective personal environments by tailoring the approach to their specific information and accessibility needs. An important success factor for providing information to under-represented groups is the cooperation with stakeholders working with these target groups and the involvement of users at local and regional level.

(10) Dedicated monitoring activities, using a set of specific indicators, should provide qualitative and quantitative data to gradually support an even more strategic and targeted use of the available budget under the Programmes.

(11) Inclusion measures may already be in place in the national context. Complementarity and synergies with the measures put in place by this framework may contribute to achieving a greater impact in reaching out to and supporting participants with fewer opportunities.

(12) This Decision and the ensuing inclusion action plans should respect the fundamental rights and observe the principles recognised by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. ([7]) They should also ensure full respect for the right to non-discrimination and to promote the application of Article 21 of the Charter.

(13) The actors involved in the process of making the Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps Programmes more inclusive and diverse are heterogeneous and contribute to the development of ideas and new or improved mechanisms, as well as act as key multipliers of the inclusion and diversity efforts,

([7]) Hereinafter referred to as "the Charter".

HAS ADOPTED THIS DECISION:

CHAPTER I

GENERAL PROVISIONS

Article 1

Subject matter

1. This Decision establishes a framework of inclusion measures for the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programmes for the period of the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework.

2. It lays down the objectives of the framework and the actions and mechanisms to be implemented.

Article 2

Objectives of the framework of inclusion measures

1. The general objective of the framework of inclusion measures is to facilitate the access to the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programmes for people with fewer opportunities, to ensure the putting in place of measures to remove the obstacles that may prevent such access, and to serve as a basis for further implementation guidance as set out in the Annex. Based on the principle that the Programmes have to be accessible for all, regardless of the barriers people may face, the aim is to leave no one behind and contribute to more inclusive societies.

2. The framework of inclusion measures has four specific objectives:

(a) mainstreaming inclusion and diversity as a cross-cutting priority and guiding principle;

(b) ensuring the offer of inclusive features and mechanisms within the design of the Programmes and the budget allocated to its actions, and that the focus on inclusion and diversity is taken into account at all stages of the Programmes' management;

(c) establishing a common understanding of those who may be considered people with fewer opportunities and fostering a positive approach to diversity;

(d) supporting beneficiary organisations in establishing more high quality projects that address inclusion and diversity, and in designing and implementing projects in a more inclusive and diverse manner.

3. The Annex to this Decision provides a non-exhaustive list of the actions which the Commission has taken and will take in order to provide guidance on the implementation of inclusion measures in the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programmes.

CHAPTER II

INCLUSION MEASURES

Article 3

Learning formats

The Programmes shall offer flexible and accessible learning formats to enable reaching out to large target groups, thus increasing the integration of people with fewer opportunities in education and training, youth, sport and solidarity activities.

Article 4

Support to participants with fewer opportunities

Mechanisms to adequately prepare and support participants with fewer opportunities before, during and after their participation within the Programmes, such as preparatory visits, linguistic support, reinforced mentorship and coaching, shall be available and duly financed.

Article 5

Support to organisations

Mechanisms shall be put in place to:

(a) support organisations in making inclusion a reality, particularly in terms of organisational development, accessibility and the interaction with participants with fewer opportunities before, during and after the project. This can take the form of support activities for staff dealing specifically with inclusion and diversity in organisations, such as training and thematic networking opportunities, to work together to support people with fewer opportunities and to ensure inclusive selection procedures;

(b) support organisations in their key role to reach out and raise awareness among potential participants with fewer opportunities on the various opportunities and support mechanisms that the Programmes offer them.

Article 6

Financial support

1. The Programmes shall provide adequate levels of financial support to participants with fewer opportunities, contributing to removing the barriers that prevent them to participate in Programme's activities on equal footing to their peers. This includes taking into consideration the most appropriate mechanisms for granting such support.

2. The Programmes shall make available reinforced financial support for organisations working with participants with fewer opportunities, recognising the additional efforts put in place to effectively involve these target groups in their project activities.

Article 7

Selection process

Priority may be given in the grant awarding process to quality projects that actively address the inclusion and involvement of participants with fewer opportunities.

Article 8

User-friendliness of programme's documents

The Programmes shall ensure that the application and reference documents are user-friendly and accessible and available in different languages. Those documents shall have a clear structure and use simple language in order to support the needs of people with fewer opportunities.

Article 9

Training activities

Funding may be provided under the Programmes to offer training activities aimed at inclusion of people with fewer opportunities for, inter alia, experts, practitioners, staff of the organisations and participants. These training activities shall be aimed at creating opportunities for the exchange of best practices, building competences and for encouraging innovative ideas regarding inclusion measures.

Article 10

Supportive approach

The Programmes shall provide qualitative support for inclusion measures through the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps national agencies and the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), as well as through structures such as Support, Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities (SALTO) Inclusion and Diversity.

Article 11

Communication activities

Information and awareness-raising about the opportunities offered by the Programmes and the inclusion support mechanisms may have to be conveyed and adapted to their national and sector-specific context for each category of participants with fewer opportunities. To achieve this, implementing organisations are encouraged to provide suitable and accessible information material, establish different outreach and information channels, share best practices, and proactively target and contact organisations active in the fields of inclusion and diversity. These tasks shall be carried out in particular by the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps national agencies. To support the implementation of these tasks, inclusion and diversity officers shall be appointed in the national agencies.

CHAPTER III

MONITORING AND REPORTING

Article 12

Monitoring activities

1. Relevant data shall be collected, in particular by the Commission and by Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps national agencies and the EACEA, during the lifespan of the Programmes through a mix of sources, such as the IT tools supporting the implementation of the Programmes or the participant surveys.

2. Monitoring tasks will be carried out by the Commission with the help of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps national agencies and the EACEA, and through ad-hoc analysis, while respecting the applicable data protection rules and procedures for processing sensitive personal data.

Article 13

Inclusion action plans

1. As an integral part of their work programmes, the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps national agencies shall develop inclusion action plans, based on this framework of inclusion measures, and with particular attention to the specific challenges to access the Programmes within the national contexts. They shall report on a regular basis to the Commission on the progress made in the implementation of their inclusion action plan.

2. The Commission shall monitor the implementation of those inclusion action plans on a regular basis.

3. Where necessary, the Commission shall provide recommendations and observations to the national agencies in relation to their inclusion action plans, with a view to improve the design, implementation and follow-up of the content of these action plans.

Article 14

Reporting

The Commission shall publish reports on a regular basis on the progress made in the implementation of the inclusion measures, in particular through the mid-term evaluation of the Programmes and annual reporting activities.

Article 15

Complementarity and synergies

1. In the implementation of the inclusion measures, national agencies may ensure complementarity with other existing national measures for inclusion, in order to maximise the impact of these efforts for participants with fewer opportunities.

2. Synergies with other Union funds and national funds shall be sought, to allow for a greater impact and reinforced support to people with fewer opportunities.

CHAPTER IV

FINAL PROVISIONS

Article 16

Co-creation

1. The implementation of these measures to make the Programmes more inclusive and diverse shall be carried out based on a co-creation spirit, in constant dialogue with relevant stakeholders, in particular international and national organisations and networks active in the field of inclusion and diversity, experts, practitioners and participants themselves, the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps national agencies, the EACEA, the SALTO Resource Centres, the Erasmus+ Committee, and representatives of other Union institutions.

2. This dialogue may take place in a wide range of settings, ranging from European events to ad hoc working groups, targeted consultations and training and networking opportunities – either taking place physically, online or in a hybrid mode.

Article 17

Entry into force

This Decision shall enter into force on the twentieth day following that of its publication in the *Official Journal of the European Union*.

Done at Brussels, 22 October 2021.

For the Commission
The President
Ursula VON DER LEYEN

ANNEX

Guidance for implementation of the inclusion measures for the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programmes

The Commission, in consultation with stakeholders, may further develop the details for implementation of the inclusion measures set out in this Decision in implementation guidelines, to be elaborated and updated throughout the lifespan of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programmes 2021-2027.

The following guidance may be developed and progressively fine-tuned, as part of the regular programme lifecycle:

1. **Reference documents of the programme**: the Commission may provide guidance to stakeholders regarding the implementation modalities of inclusion and diversity measures in documents such as the call for proposals and programme guides, in the guidance for experts evaluating project proposals, as well as in application forms, and other technical documents, such as the Inclusion and Diversity Strategy ([1]).

2. **Activities in the framework of the management of Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps national agencies**: as part of their periodic assessment process, national agencies shall provide information regarding the impact of their national plans in the area of inclusion and diversity and how they contribute to the overall inclusion and diversity objectives of the Programmes at Union level.

3. **Communication materials and strategic guidelines**: In addition to the programme reference documents, the Commission may develop further guidance documents with useful recommendations, success stories and good practices addressed to Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps national agencies and the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), beneficiary organisations and potential participants with fewer opportunities to qualitatively support the implementation of inclusion and diversity measures, as well as to raise awareness about the different opportunities on offer. These materials and guidelines shall be developed in co-creation with relevant stakeholders in the field.

Where relevant, the Commission, with the support of the relevant implementing structures, shall ensure a wide reach of the materials referred to in point 3 of the second subparagraph. This shall be done through the dedicated websites, social media channels and other forms of communication, in the spirit of ensuring visibility and awareness among potential beneficiaries and participants with fewer opportunities, as well as to promote the active engagement of those potential beneficiaries and participants with fewer opportunities in the co-creation process of more inclusive and diverse Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes.

([1]) https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/implementation-guidelines-erasmus-and-european-solidarity-corps-inclusion-and-diversity_en