



ICYE



Open Letter to the European Commission

To whom it may concern,

The International Voluntary Service movement, together with its member networks and organisations, welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the public consultation on the proposal for the European Union's next long-term budget (Multiannual Financial Framework, MFF). As organisations working directly with and for youth and international solidarity, we urge the European Commission to take the following priorities into account when finalising the MFF, particularly in relation to Erasmus+, the European Solidarity Corps, and related youth and civil society programmes.

We propose the following recommendations:

1. Substantially increase Erasmus+ funding.

Through the promotion of active citizenship and intercultural understanding to hundreds of thousands of young people every year, Erasmus+ is a key programme to strengthen democracy and societal resilience in Europe. To expand its outreach to a significantly broader spectrum of young people, and to systematically ensure access for marginalised youth and youth at risk of exclusion, both within and beyond Europe, the Erasmus+ budget has to be increased by at least five times. This must include equitable funding support for community-based and grassroots actors. The current budget the EC is proposing for Erasmus+ is not sufficient, when adjusting for inflation and considering the merger of Erasmus+ with the European Solidarity Corps.

2. Safeguard the Youth Chapter with dedicated funding

Youth organisations are key multipliers, reaching diverse communities, fostering inclusion, and ensuring the long-term engagement of young people. They should be explicitly recognised in the next programme regulation and provided with increased, sustained support to strengthen their capacity and impact. It is therefore key to maintain a dedicated Youth Chapter within the Erasmus+ Programme regulation, with a minimum earmark of 15% of the total budget, ensuring the explicit recognition of youth organisations and a commitment to sustained support for their work. This chapter is critical for ensuring access to programmes that are genuinely youth-led, inclusive, and rooted in solidarity.



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3. Reorient Erasmus+ objectives toward solidarity and active citizenship

Europe faces serious threats to our democratic systems. It is therefore key to give young people the tools they need to shape a more democratic, inclusive, and prosperous Europe. To ensure cohesive and resilient societies - an essential basis for Europe's security in the long term – it is indispensable to reformulate the core objectives of the Erasmus+ Programme to better reflect active citizenship, global solidarity, intercultural understanding, intergenerational learning, and lifelong education and to move beyond the narrow focus on labour market outcomes to ensure the programme fully embraces civic engagement, democratic participation, and community resilience.

4. Secure and strengthen the European Solidarity Corps (ESC)

ESC is a programme designed to support youth volunteering, community engagement and solidarity-based learning. These are core components of a democratic and resilient society and central to our European identity. The European Commission therefore needs to ensure that ESC remains within the Youth Chapter of Erasmus+ with a dedicated and protected earmark to retain its distinctive mission of solidarity, volunteering, and civic engagement and not be diluted or absorbed into more professionalised or employment-oriented schemes.

5. Preserve and adequately fund the three Key Actions

The division of the current Youth Chapter into three Key Actions was key to ensure clarity and access for different actors. Especially the disappearance of Key Action 3, which supported youth participation, democratic engagement, and youth policy development, is worrying. Removing the Key Actions risks undermining the interconnected system that they create, and by extension those in the youth sector that count on it. To maintain the existing structure based on the three Key Actions and ensure that each one is sufficiently resourced to meet its distinct purpose: mobility, cooperation, and policy development is therefore essential to the programme's coherence and accessibility.

6. Create a Fourth Key Action for global cooperation

In line with its principles of freedom, participation, solidarity, equality and human rights, the EU has a unique position to promote a more inclusive and democratic world. In the Youth Chapter a Fourth Key Action should be established that is accessible exclusively to youth organisations in third countries (not associated with the programme) and with a dedicated earmark of at least 5%. This action should prioritise multilateral youth cooperation, enabling young people from across the globe (EU and all regions) to come together in the same space — moving beyond the current model of EU + 1 region formats.

In parallel, the EU should adopt EU-level policy reforms to simplify visa procedures and formally recognise volunteer status, removing barriers to participation for young people from non-Schengen countries.



7. Ensure access across EU funding programmes

In line with Goal 9 of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 to "strengthen democratic participation and empowerment of young people and provide youth-friendly spaces in all spheres of society, it is essential to ensure that organisations working with and for youth and international solidarity — especially those that are grassroots, youth-led, or community-based — can access funding across other EU programmes beyond Erasmus+ and ESC (e.g., NDICI, LIFE, Horizon Europe, CERV). This requires simplifying application procedures, decentralising decision-making, and ensuring that smaller civil society actors are not excluded by excessive administrative requirements or the dominance of large intermediary providers.

The above recommendations are grounded in decades of experience from civil society actors delivering International Voluntary Service and youth-led solidarity projects globally. We believe that a just, inclusive, and participatory MFF can only be achieved if it centres the realities, capacities, and voices of youth and grassroots organisations. We thank you for considering these recommendations and remain available for further dialogue.

Sincerely,

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Evidence and Annex

[Building Blocks for a More Impactful European Solidarity Corps](#)

[CCIVS – Advocacy Asks](#)

[YFJ EU Youth Programmes Unpacked](#)

[YFJ – Erasmus+ in the MFF](#)

[Salto – Power of Youth Volunteering](#)

[EU - Youth Goals](#)