Handbook of Integration of People with Fewer Opportunities

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INTRODUCTION

The European Year of Youth is celebrated in 2022 and aims to focus on the green and digital transition and the opportunities provided to young people by EU policies in order to become active citizens and to promote in the most efficient way. These opportunities are the part of objectives of the European Youth Programmes. In order to achieve this, the European Council agreed that it is necessary to safeguard the European Union's policies on youth issues.

This decision includes, among other things, information campaigns and different kind of activities. In the context of the European Year of Youth and in order to promote European Programmes to young people, it was deemed necessary to create a guide which will provide guidance, inform, inspire and contribute effectively to the inclusion of people with fewer opportunities.

However, it is considered important to fully understand the rationale behind writing this guide, as well as its overall value. Furthermore, it is considered equally necessary to refer to the purpose of this guide, the data used, the outputs produced and the conclusions drawn based on the results obtained. Within this process the aim was to create a guide, which will include proposals on how to enhance inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities to the implementation of the European Programmes.

Within the framework of the Programmes, a core priority is to ensure equal opportunities for people with fewer opportunities, by encouraging young people to participate, raising awareness and strengthening such activities that are focused to inclusion.

It is essential before reading this guide to have a full understanding of the definition of the term «young people with fewer opportunities».

In particular, young people with fewer opportunities are young people that are facing certain obstacles, compared to other young people. Such obstacles include physical, mental, intellectual, spiritual, sensory barriers, health problems, barriers related to education and training systems, cultural differences, social obstacles, economic obstacles, marginalization due to discrimination, while also geographical obstacles.

1. PURPOSE

The aim of this guide is to inform and train on how to include young people with fewer opportunities in European Programmes. This has been designed based on the findings and results of a survey, that was carried out via questionnaires. This survey, which was conducted by Youth and Lifelong Learning Foundation, was entitled «How grant beneficiaries under Erasmus+ / Youth and European Solidarity Corps Programmes during the period 2014-2020 and the years 2021-2022 that have implemented / are implementing projects under the priority of inclusion and diversity and/or have included / are including / are including young people with fewer opportunities in their projects, and what is the local impact of these (concerning Greece)».

The aim of this guide is to provide a comprehensive perspective on how to approach people with fewer opportunities in relation to organizations and European Youth Programmes, through a wide range of references, in order to cover, as far as possible, all cases.

Anyone wishing to go deeper into the field of reaching young people with fewer opportunities in relation to European Youth Programmes, as well as to be informed and potentially evolve, can use this guide, which will provide them with a practical approach to this thematic field based on the results extracted from the stakeholders with the contribution of their own responses via the questionnaires.

2. DATA

The questionnaires of the survey, which was mentioned above, were used as a basis for the extraction of results and conclusions. This survey aimed to collect data stemming from the responses of beneficiaries of the Erasmus+ / Youth and European Solidarity Corps programmes concerning the period 2014-2020 as well as during the years 2021-2022.

These organizations were divided into two categories. The first included organizations that may have implemented projects based on the horizontal priority of the Programmes, Inclusion and Diversity. Those organizations had either included or include in their projects young people with fewer opportunities. The second part of the research was aiming to identify the impact of the activities implemented by these organizations on local or national level in Greece.

These questionnaires were addressed to those organizations and young people who had participated in an Erasmus+ / Youth and European Solidarity Corps projects, or to those who would participate or would like to participate in a Programme. Based on the responses, that have been collected, the certain quantitative results were obtained and then the respective conclusions were drawn. This process was particularly rewarding, as these conclusions provided the basis for the creation of various ways to integrate people with fewer opportunities. The questionnaire contained mostly closed-ended questions, with some questions using the five-point disagreement-agreement (dipole) scale, along with some open-ended questions.

3. OUTPUTS

3.1. ORGANIZATIONS

According to the outputs, the majority of the participating organizations were Non-Profit Organizations, i.e. NGOs, NGO's, non-profit civil partnership, etc. It has to be mentioned that the presence of Informal groups of young people was also significant.

The majority of the participating organizations on the turnover of the last year collected the amount up to 50.000€, along with the amount of less than 200.000€ per year, as far as the organizations are concerned.

In addition, the organizations were either small or very small, with over 50% employing less than three people.

Also, these organizations seem to have not achieved any synergy or cooperation, and they have infrastructures that are friendly to young people with fewer opportunities. According to the participants, the organizations were relevant to issues concerning young people with fewer opportunities.
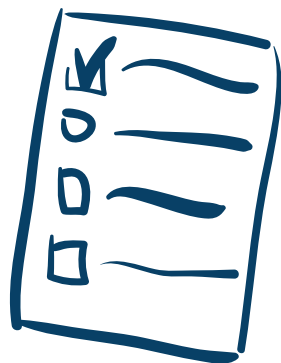
3.2. PARTICIPANTS

The participants was of young age, and more specifically between 18 and 30 years old.

From the findings we came to the result that those who participated in the Programmes had at least a Bachelor's degree in Higher Education.

However, they do not seem to have a permanent staff position within the structure of the participating organizations. In addition, 70% of the participating organizations did not employ young people with fewer opportunities.

An interesting finding is that the participating organizations implemented actions that aimed to raise awareness on inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities with most actions involving less than fifty participants.

As for young people with fewer opportunities, the majority were women up to 30 years old, with the 18-25 age group predominating. On the whole, young people did not seem to experience any disadvantage compared to their peers.

3.3. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The sources of information for young people with fewer opportunities were through participation in activities addressed to their needs (16.7%), participation in conferences and oral presentations (14.3%), participation in educational trips (13.9%), European Union websites (13.6%), web-based material (12.8%), and studies and surveys (10.8%). At the same time, the main ways of reaching these young people were «Relevant motivating actions» and «Information/awareness- raising campaigns». However, it seems that the organizations did not have a specific strategic plan for the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities.

The finding that the organizations did not have a specific strategic plan is reinforced by the conclusion that the projects were responding to the needs of the participants to a percentage less than (50%). These projects had been implemented by the organizations to engage young people with fewer opportunities. On the contrary, it seems that supportive preparatory measures had better results.

3.4. RAISING AWARENESS AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

In terms of raising young people's awareness, methods included participation in groups (24%), meetings and workshops (23%), lectures (23%) and participation in training seminars (18%).

This result does not indicate a high percentage in any particular method. Lectures, along with meetings and workshops, along with group participation, and along with participation in training seminars (28%) had overwhelming percentages of positive opinions.

3.5. PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED

The problems faced by young people with fewer opportunities were financial obstacles (33%), social obstacles (7%), geographical obstacles (5%) and only the (4%) some type of disability.

The approach of the organizations seems to have been relevant motivating actions (40%) and information/awareness campaigns (38%), and it seems that they did not have negative opinions about the integration policies of the organizations, although they had encountered some obstacles, with the main obstacles identified being the time required, the financial resources needed and the organizational structure required.

It seems that Erasmus+/Youth and European Solidarity Corps projects do not directly link to young people in terms of helping them finding a job, while the percentage of participants had a positive experience and consider that they benefited from them. The vast majority of the responses to the question «what did participation in Erasmus+/Youth and European Solidarity Corps help with» were that it contributed to social contacts (32%), increased knowledge (29%), psychological support (19%) and job skills (only 17%).
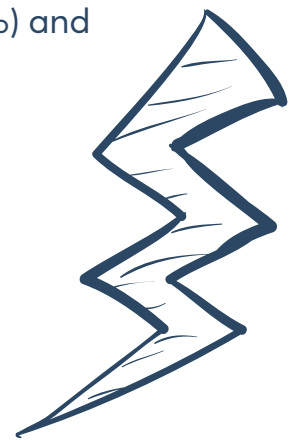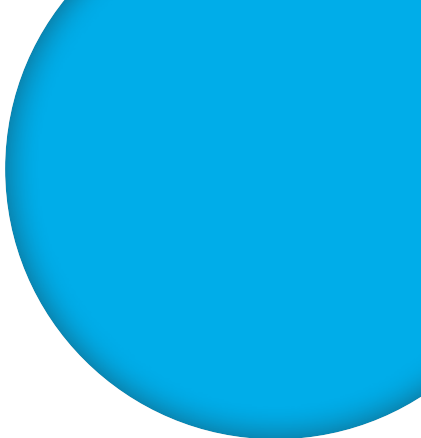
4. RECOMMENDATIONS

The result of the survey showed that the participating organizations did not largely employ young people with fewer opportunities in their activities. Moreover, in order to give a further explanation to this result of the survey, it is worth mentioning that the young people with fewer opportunities who were employed by participating organizations was at most one. The lack of a strategic plan of the organizations to reach young people with fewer opportunities shows the need to create such a plan, which will increase the participation rates of people with fewer opportunities in the Programmes.

It is important to be mentioned that young people participated in one activity, and indeed a significant proportion of young people expressed a desire to participate in more than one action. They were therefore interested in the different activities that were already being implemented, but had not been able to participate in them.

It is worth noting that the organizations used more than one method of approach. This can be observed by the results, which were not extreme in any specific method. Therefore, although there was a relatively wide range of methods, these were judged to be quantitatively or qualitatively unable to reach a significant proportion of young people with fewer opportunities.

Finally, it was found that despite all the positive experiences of young people, they were not helped in finding a job. This fact demonstrates the need for a better organization of skills and their better presentation in Europass (which can contribute in job research with its qualifications), in order to have a corresponding response on the labor market. Europass is a European Union tool on qualifications, skills and how they can be understood across Europe in the context of European mobility.

Based on the above mentioned findings, we can suggest a number of ways in order to increase the inclusion of people with fewer opportunities in the Programmes and institutions and, as far as possible, to fill the gaps that have been identified or to improve the positive elements in the already existing ways of inclusion, if they do not bring the desired results.

It is worth noting that flexibility, adaptability and reflection are essential for achieving these modes of integration in general. Flexibility is an essential element for the inclusion of people with fewer opportunities, as each person is unique and the characteristics that make them relate to the group of people with fewer opportunities can vary from person to person. Therefore, without flexibility, it would be impossible to achieve the goal of increasing the inclusion of people with fewer opportunities. For example, an activity designed to address to a specific characteristic of people with fewer opportunities, without the ability to change, would not only be an obstacle to the inclusion of other groups of people with fewer opportunities, but would also be a deterrent for them, even creating feelings of exclusion, marginalization and aversion.

Adaptability is the change that may be needed, but it must fit into the overall integration mode and the individual's needs. It is felt that a thorough investigation should be carried out into the changes to be made and how they relate to groups of people with fewer opportunities. For example, a change falls under the characteristic condition of flexibility, but if it fails to connect with the groups of people with fewer opportunities it is not effective. There fore, adaptability is also an important condition.

Finally, reflection is an equally necessary element. It is worth analyzing what we mean by reflection. Reflection means the process of productive thinking, often in the form of a brainstorming session. For example, the group use of an interactive whiteboard to provide answers to a problem question is a perfectly healthy process of improvement, free from the context of reflection with its characteristics of negativity, pessimism, competition and anxiety. Through this process, reflection can bring new ideas to the fore, contribute to the correction and thus to the improvement of an action, a situation, a project.
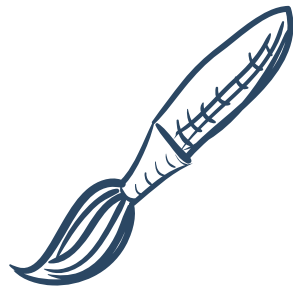
5.1. DESIGN

It is important that the target group of a project related with this thematic of fewer opportunities, should include people with fewer opportunities. It is equally important that the approach to people with fewer opportunities starts with the wider community in order to get a full picture of their needs. Specifically, it would be very efficient in terms of designing to carry out a survey that is related to people with fewer opportunities, which would include questionnaires with questions about what is missing and needs and which would be shared out to the authors'(of the questionnaires) areas of interest.

For this project to be effective, it is necessary to have contact with decision-makers in local communities. For example, various local bodies have a collection or list of their interest groups for people with fewer opportunities. Therefore, a helpful action would be to make a report of the purpose of reaching out to people with fewer opportunities to these bodies as well, which could give an overview of the needs, what they think is missing and characteristics of the groups of people with fewer opportunities. So they could even create Projects entirely for these young people, and therefore it would be easier to integrate them, since they would have more information about the target group.

It is essential to perceive young people with fewer opportunities, even when this is difficult to identify at first approach.

It would be particularly effective to adapt the action plan to all the places that may be inaccessible to a person with fewer opportunities.

This is linked to the need to carry out a thorough investigation of the barriers and reasons for the exclusion of these people. Factors include lack of training, facilities, etc.

If young people with fewer opportunities are included in the work of the institutions from the outset with activities tailored to their skills, with appropriate facilities and corresponding skills outreach training to encourage their participation and support, the problem will be significantly reduced.

Another step would even be to customize the application procedures with check-boxes and comment boxes if and when an application exists. In the case where there is an application process for inclusion of the person with fewer opportunities this could be in paper or electronic form with written language. Adding checkpoints, for example through closed-ended questions, help the person to convey whether it was easy for them to complete the process. Still through the comment boxes, the individual can convey his or her message, comment, observation, concern, or even a suggestion for an adjustment of the process.

The first step in reaching people with fewer opportunities is to design a promotional campaign through internet or leaflets with simple language and images, to make the message easier and more immediately understood. It would also be useful, if available, to present and promote material from activities that included people with fewer opportunities, for example through a short video.

5.2. CULTIVATING A CLIMATE OF TRUST

It is absolutely essential to constantly foster a spirit of trust with people with fewer opportunities in order to avoid any risk of creating a feeling of exclusion.

This can be achieved through questions that highlight the person's skills or questions that are related to the person's psychological state, such as "do you feel comfortable here?". Group activities will also help the individual to feel an equal part of a group. In addition, reinforcing initiatives can help to foster trust.

Another way to foster a climate of confidence in people with fewer opportunities is through non-formal education games and by fostering initiative in decision making and finding solutions, so that they feel that their voice is heard and helpful.

5.3. LOGISTICS

It is considered necessary to adapt the logistical needs to include people with fewer opportunities. In particular, in terms of facilities, infrastructures, tools and accessibility, in the area involving materials and technical means, it would be more efficient to have provided for the needs of people with fewer opportunities. For example, for a person who is unable to walk, it would be necessary for his/her participation to have accessibility tools, such as a wheelchair ramp.
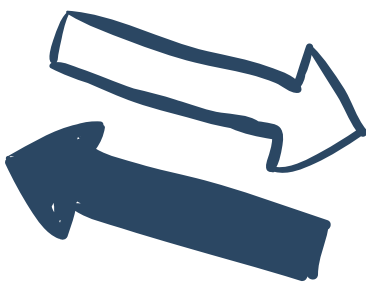
5.4. BEST PRACTICES

Another contribution to reaching people with fewer opportunities is through the creation of a catalogue/collection of best practices.

Best practices are those actions that have been effective and demonstrate this through their implementation and impact and are considered a model that is widely recommended. Best practices can also be obtained through evaluation by the participants themselves, thereby contributing to an even better implementation of the actions.

Through this collection, which can be continuously enriched, anyone interested in this thematic can look back and be inspired, reflect and get more information on activities already implemented, which included people with fewer opportunities.

5.5. FEEDBACK

It is particularly effective to listen to people with fewer opportunities to express their ideas and enrich the project by actively participating in the process of its development. The process can involve a communicative and intercultural approach free of stereotypes and racism. For example, the use of automatic translation can help communication either in text or in sound form.

5.6. LABOR MARKET

As mentioned in the conclusions, despite the positive experience, young people did not have response direct link to the labor market as a result of participating to Programmes' activities. Therefore, despite all the skills they have developed through their participation in the Programmes, these are not reflected as a means of finding employment. A suggestion of integrating people would be to adapt the organization of the skills and to better reflect them in Europass, in order to have a corresponding response in the labor market. For example, organizational skills and decision-making ability are useful skills not only socially but also in the workplace. Therefore, through activities that could be linked to Europass, such as organizing a volunteering event, this experience can be an element of both the young person's experience and can be added in "about me" field in Europass, in which he/she can develop the skills he/she have acquired.
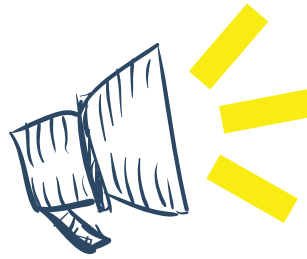
CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this guide, taking into account the decision of the European Council in the context of the European Year of Youth and the promotion of the European Programmes for young people, has been created as a tool for guidance, training and inspiration on the issue of inclusion of people with fewer opportunities.

The manual was designed on the basis of the results of the survey, to which reference was made. From these results, the corresponding conclusions were drawn, which served as input for the creation of the proposed ways of integrating young people with fewer opportunities.

The integration methods attempted to address the issue of the low employment rate of young people with fewer opportunities from the organizations, as well as the issue of the lack of a strategic plan of the organizations in terms of integration of these young people, the issue of not involving them in more activities and the issue of the difficulty of finding a job for the young people.

These issues were covered by reference to the conditions and specifications that an organized maximum efficiency plan should have, with an emphasis on flexibility, adaptability and reflection, and through the feedback that the organizations can receive from the young people themselves. It is worth noting that it was considered important, as a way of inclusion, to foster a climate of trust to better reach young people, while logistical support could be an essential tool for the inclusion of more groups of people with fewer opportunities. Finding a job could also be enhanced through activities linked to young people's potential work skills, which could be an attraction for participating young people with fewer opportunities, since one of the incentives would be to respond to the labor market.

In conclusion, the ways of inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities can be modified, reinforced, even replaced, in order to increase the percentage of young people with fewer opportunities participating in European Programmes, but also to increase the impact of this inclusion on young people, organizations, the labor market and society in general.

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