European youth work should not perish!
Reverse the cut in funding for digital activities in the Erasmus+ Youth in Action programme and anchor adequate fundings in the new programme.

Salutation> <name>,
Erasmus+ is the most successful mobility program of the European Union. It has proven to make an essential contribution to the unity of the European Union, primarily through the Erasmus+ YOUTH IN ACTION program. It unfolds great potentials in promoting democracy, strengthening civil society and youth work (cf. RAY Interim Evaluation).

The Erasmus+ Youth in Action program has inspired innovation in youth work across Europe over the past 30 years. It loses this role with the current handling of Covid-19 regulations for substitutive digital activities and insufficient support for digital activities in the new Erasmus+ program, because it does not encourage the enhancement of European youth work in the digital space. That closes a window for innovation before it could even be opened properly. And it weakens European youth work as it becomes less flexible and misses the opportunity to move into modern post-pandemic blended-learning activities, combining digital and face-to-face meetings at a new level of quality.

In the current pandemic, European mobilities such as youth exchanges, seminars and training courses are hardly possible. Thus learning opportunities for the methodological and qualitative development of European youth work are significantly limited. In 2020, hopes were high that postponing the activities to the summer of 2021 would be sufficient. A year would be lost, but partnerships could be maintained. Many organisations responded quickly by creating digital alternatives. The National Agencies of the Erasmus+ Youth in Action program supported them until June 2020 with very flexible funding solutions. In June 2020, however, the European Commission decided that the program would only fund digital alternatives at 35% of the funding rates for youth exchanges and 15% for training courses. This decision is diametrically opposed to the experience of organisations that are implementing digital programmes of high quality. **Practice shows, that after all, digital or hybrid usually means higher cost than face-to-face meetings**.

Postponing mobilities further until 2022 is not only pointless because of the expiring financial framework. Two years in a row without any activities have numerous negative effects on European partnerships and local organisations. Such organisations often recruit participants and team members via peer-to-peer networks and are now in danger of losing two cohorts and the direct connection to their target group. Therefore, it is crucial for many organisations to implement meaningful digital activities now. Many youth organisations, especially in Southern Europe, depending on the funding provided by the Erasmus+ Youth in Action program**.**

If no reasonable and adequately funded replacement measures can be implemented this year, essential structures of European youth work are threatened to disappear.

With the proposed significant reduction of the regular Erasmus+ funding rates, it is impossible to implement and finance digital and hybrid activities.

In this context, four organisations from different regions in Germany have joined forces with the AdB Arbeitskreis deutscher Bildungsstätten e.V. and surveyed the cost structure of digital alternatives. **The 40 participating organisations from Germany** would, in a non-pandemic year, jointly conduct 145 youth exchanges and training courses (Key Action 1), participate in 21 strategic partnerships (Key Action 2), and implement 22 measures to support policy reforms (Key Action 3) annually.

The results of the survey "Digital 100% Erasmus+" are summarised below and can be found in detail in the attachment. They support the conclusion that the **cuts in funding for digital activities are massively damaging European youth work and preventing innovation**. This is exacerbated by the new Erasmus+ program, where digital and hybrid measures are still not sufficiently considered. The survey indicates that engaging the intended target groups digitally or hybrid and creating European spirit and solidarity using innovative educational concepts is time-consuming, cost-intensive, and thus expensive.

Enthusiasm for the European idea is particularly awakened by meeting peers and sharing experiences, such as creating something together despite speaking poor English or making new friends abroad. These experiences motivate people to work towards a European community. Creating them in the virtual space requires flexible and creative methods, the involvement of interpreters, experienced workshop leaders in all countries, materials to be transferred from analogue into the digital sphere, and, within the constraint of the pandemic, face-to-face meetings in national groups. Simple and presumably affordable videoconferences will not establish such experiences and, therefore, will not inspire a European spirit. It doesn't live up to the standards of non-formal education.

To ensure that European youth work does not perish in 2021 and that essential innovation potential remain unused in the future, we urgently appeal to you: advocate for the European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture

- **to reverses the cut in the funding structure of digital replacement measures for activities already approved under the old financial framework;**
- **to anchors the funding of pedagogically demanding digital and hybrid measures in the new Erasmus+ program on an equal footing with face-to-face meetings**.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this letter and for your support!

With kind regards

Georg Pirker	Elke Wegener	Dr Christian Schmidt-Rost	Elzbieta Kosek	Darko Mitevski
Speaker Int. tasks AdB e. V.	Managing Director IBB e.V.	Head of Competence Centre IJA Kindervereinigung Leipzig e.V.	Deputy Executive Director Kreisau-Initiative e.V.	Managing Director NaturKultur e.V.
Arbeitskreis deutscher Bildungsstätten e.V. adb.de	Internationales Bildungs- und Begegnungswerk e.V. ibb-dortmund.de	Children's Association Leipzig e.V. leipzig-international.de	Keisau Initiative e. V. kreisau.de	NaturKultur e.V. natureculture.com

“Digital 100% Erasmus+ “survey - Results in five key statements

The effort is higher, activities are expensive - innovation is thwarted by the EU

In all three Erasmus+ funded Key Actions, only a small percentage of the approved activities have been converted into digital or hybrid formats so far. According to the survey, the main challenges are the lack of funding (75%); the motivation of the target groups (72.5%); achieving the same quality as in face-to-face activities (75%); the availability of suitable tools (50%); the lack of experience of the youth workers (50%).
The costs increase, as, among other things, digital and hybrid activities require more working time for conceptual design, additional payment for workshop leaders in all countries, more language mediators, technical support of facilitation, as well as licence costs for tools compliant with data protection and fundamental rights. Innovative formats are resource-intensive.

"analogue is not the same as digital is not the same as hybrid" - there is a need for qualification

In addition to the availability of suitable tools (e.g., data protection compliance, tools adapted to the needs of non-formal education, affordability, etc.), the lack of experience with digital tools in non-formal educational identifies as a second critical challenge. In many cases, youth workers have to explore this field from scratch and require further training. The time and effort for adequate training and qualification need to be added to the (working) time of the implementation. In times of lockdowns, the closing of organisations, imposed suspensions of cooperation with schools and reduced working hours; qualification means an additional barrier.

Reasons for not implementing digital / hybrid activities:

50% of organisations have no plans for implementing any digital or hybrid activity. Reasons cited for this are insufficient funding, the lack of technical equipment, and a lack of interest among the target groups. Another significant factor is the focus of youth work on analogue programs. Difficulties exist with adequately transferring the analogue approaches into digital practice, especially since non-formal learning processes and exchanges are usually designed to last several days. There is a fundamental need for the European youth work to qualify for digitalisation, which is thwarted by the existing funding structure.

Attractive formats are inclusive!

Inclusion and the participation of people with diverse needs are a core priority of Erasmus+ Youth in Action. A crucial success factor for inclusive measures has been identified in implementing hybrid activities (national groups hold parallel workshops in one location in their respective countries and meet each other online). Three of the significant challenges, which are also essential requirements for inclusive activities, relate to personnel support in all countries: workshop leaders, language mediators and facilitators.

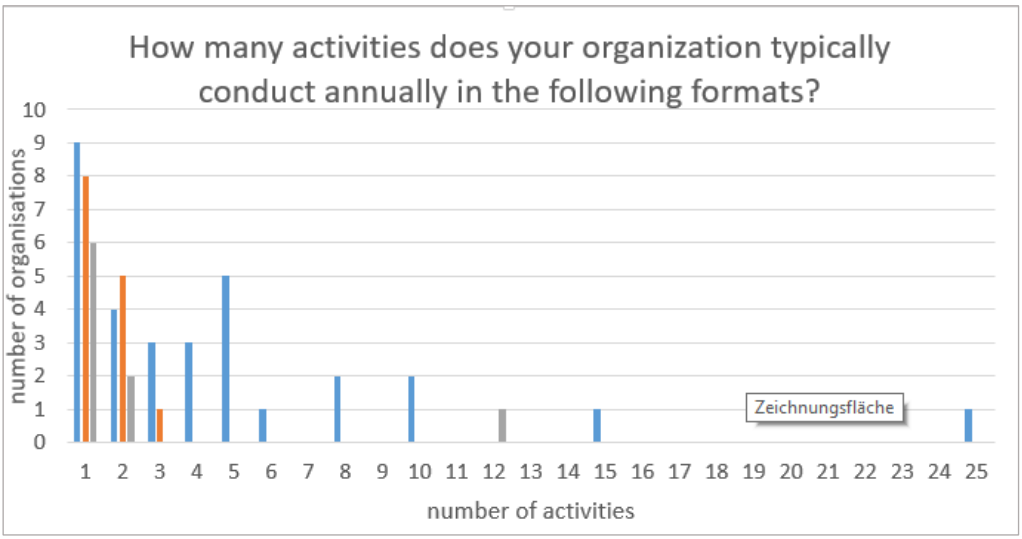
Up to now there is hardly any threat to the existence of the German organisations, but a great concern regarding the partner organisations and the future of European youth work in the ongoing pandemic.

Although most German organisations do not seem to be threatened in their existence, a look at the partner structures shows that the lack of funding endangers many European partner organisations. It shows that without Erasmus+ in many European countries, no structures of extracurricular youth work would exist. The current Covid-19 regulation and the plans for the new Erasmus+ program create an unnecessary barrier for adequate qualification and European digital youth work. Covid-19 will influence European and international mobilities for a long time. Therefore it is urgent to enable and support meaningful digitalised and digitally supported youth work and responsible face-to-face meetings with tests and vaccinations.

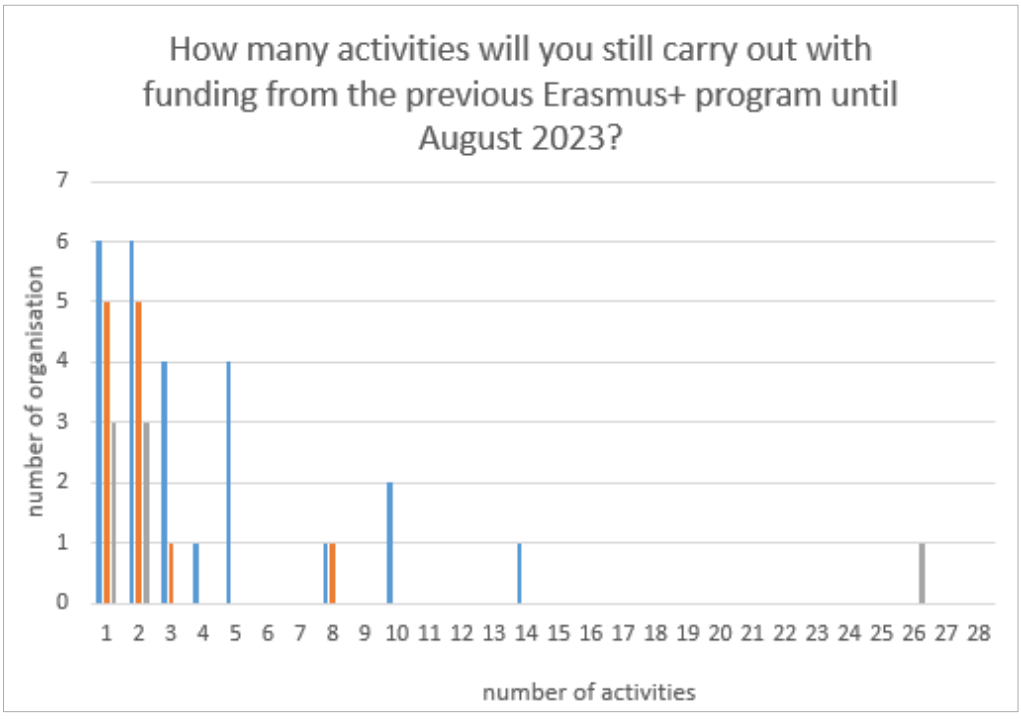
Results of the survey "Digital 100% Erasmus+" on digital and hybrid activities in the Erasmus+ Youth in Action program.

(1) Total responses received: 40 organisations from Germany.

(2) answered: 40 / skipped : 0

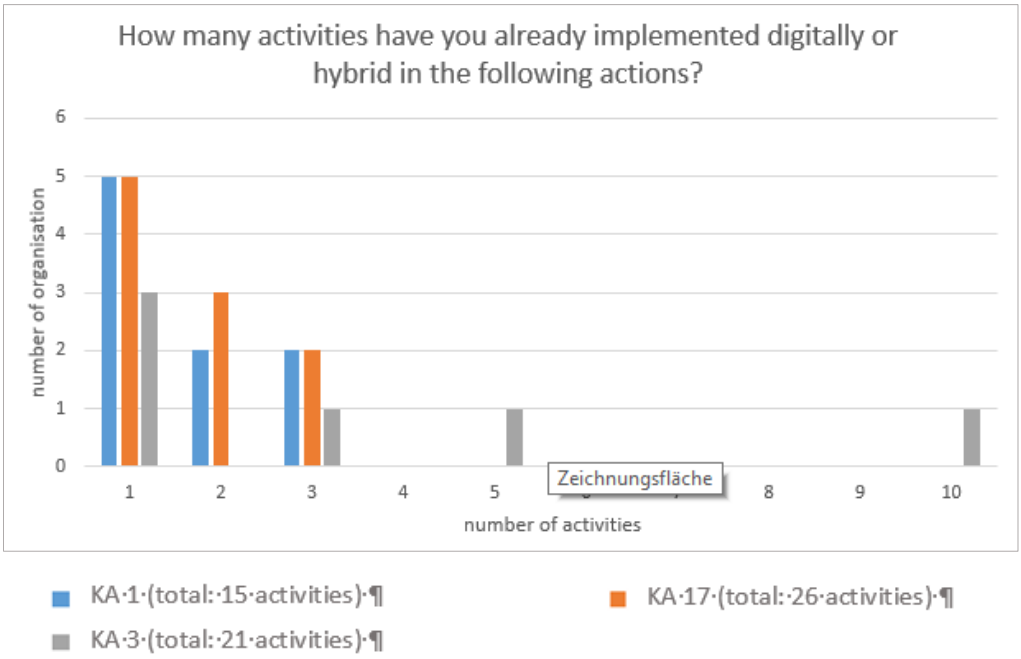


(3) answered: 40 / skipped: 0

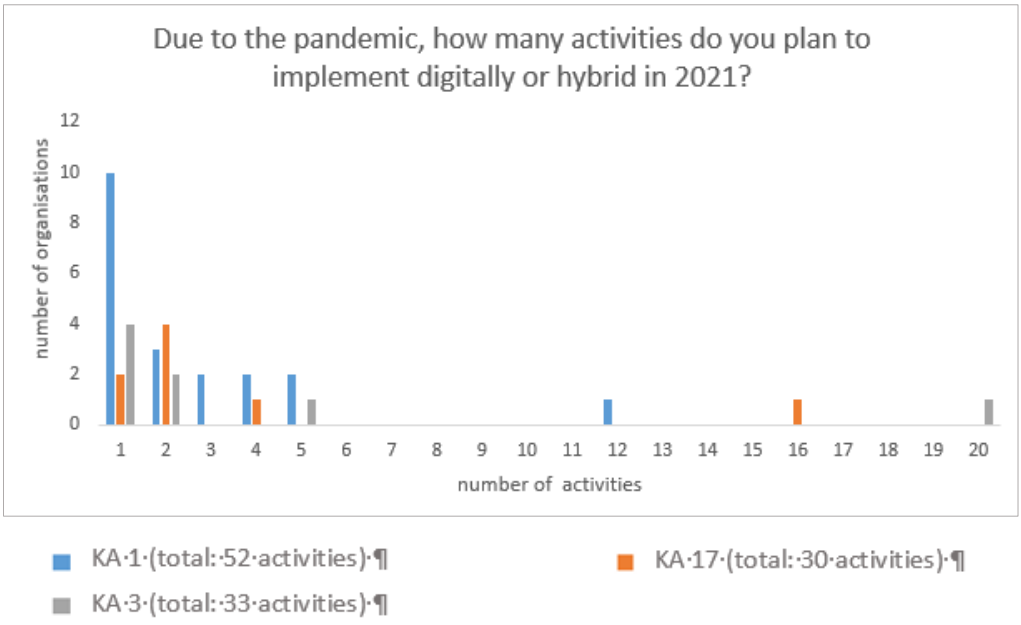


Results of the survey "Digital 100% Erasmus+" on digital and hybrid activities in the Erasmus+ Youth in Action program.

(4) answered: 40 / skipped: 0

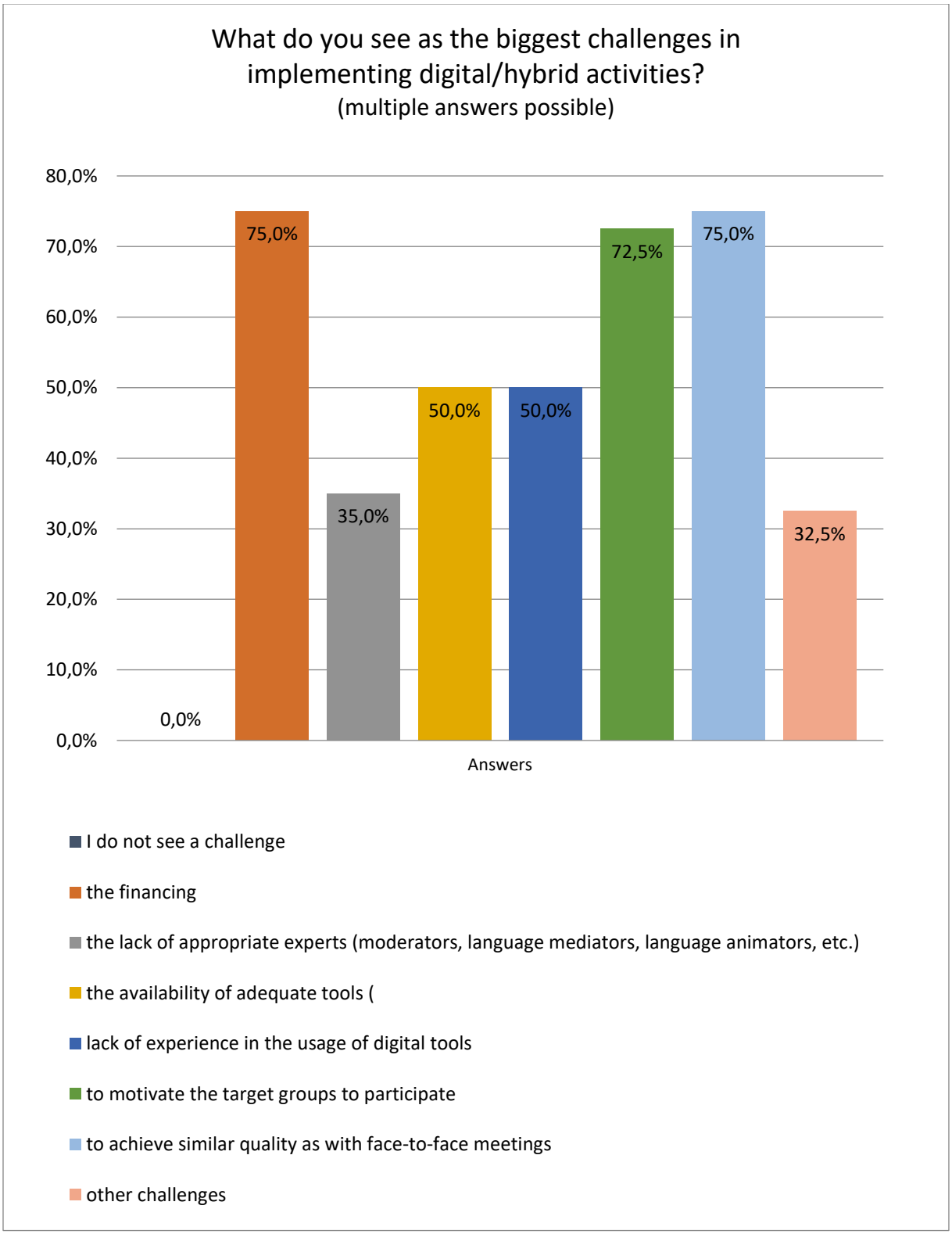


(5) answered: 40 / skipped: 0



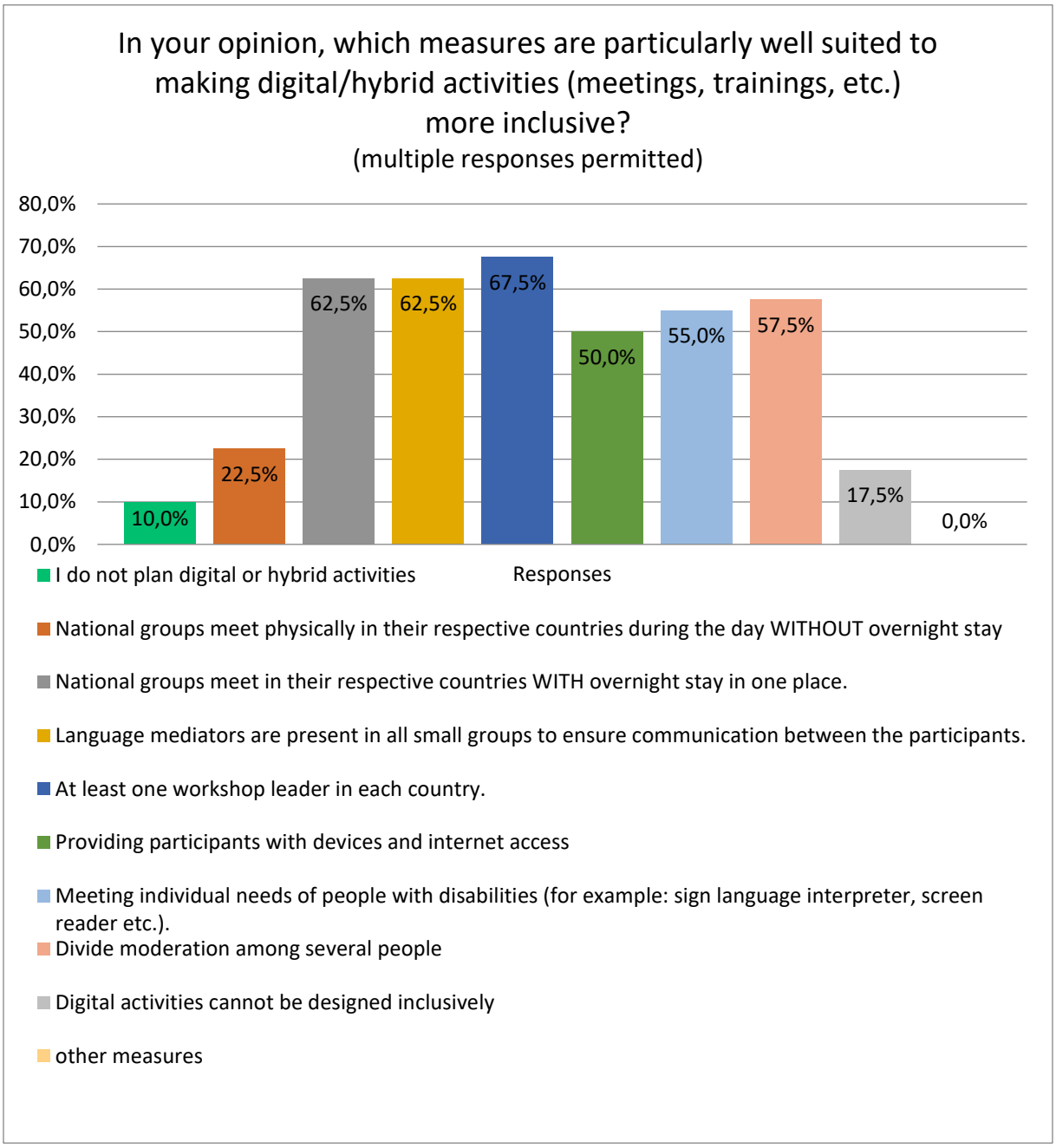
Results of the survey "Digital 100% Erasmus+" on digital and hybrid activities in the Erasmus+ Youth in Action program.

(6) Answered: 40 / Skipped: 0



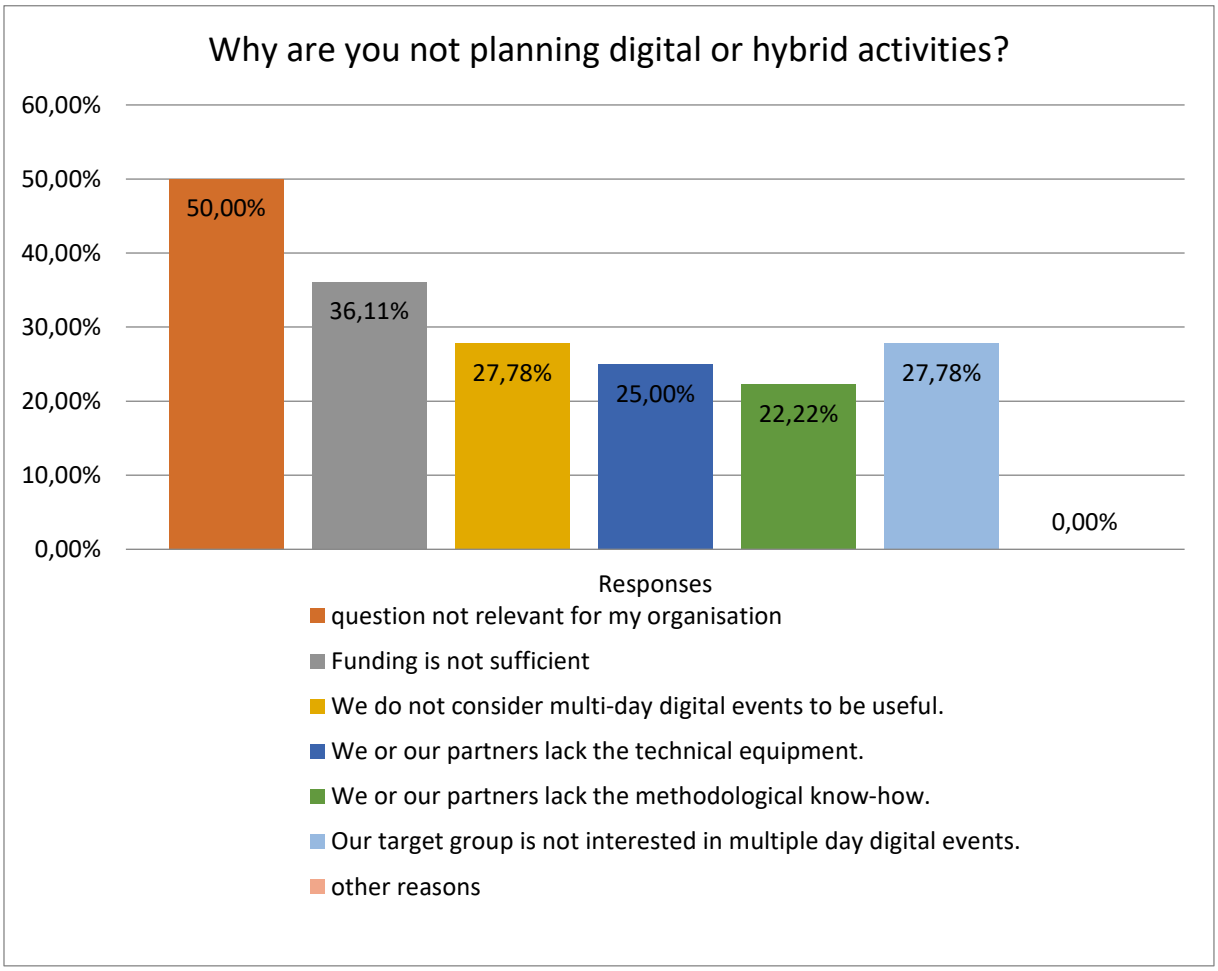
Results of the survey "Digital 100% Erasmus+" on digital and hybrid activities in the Erasmus+ Youth in Action program.

(7) Answered: 40 / Skipped:



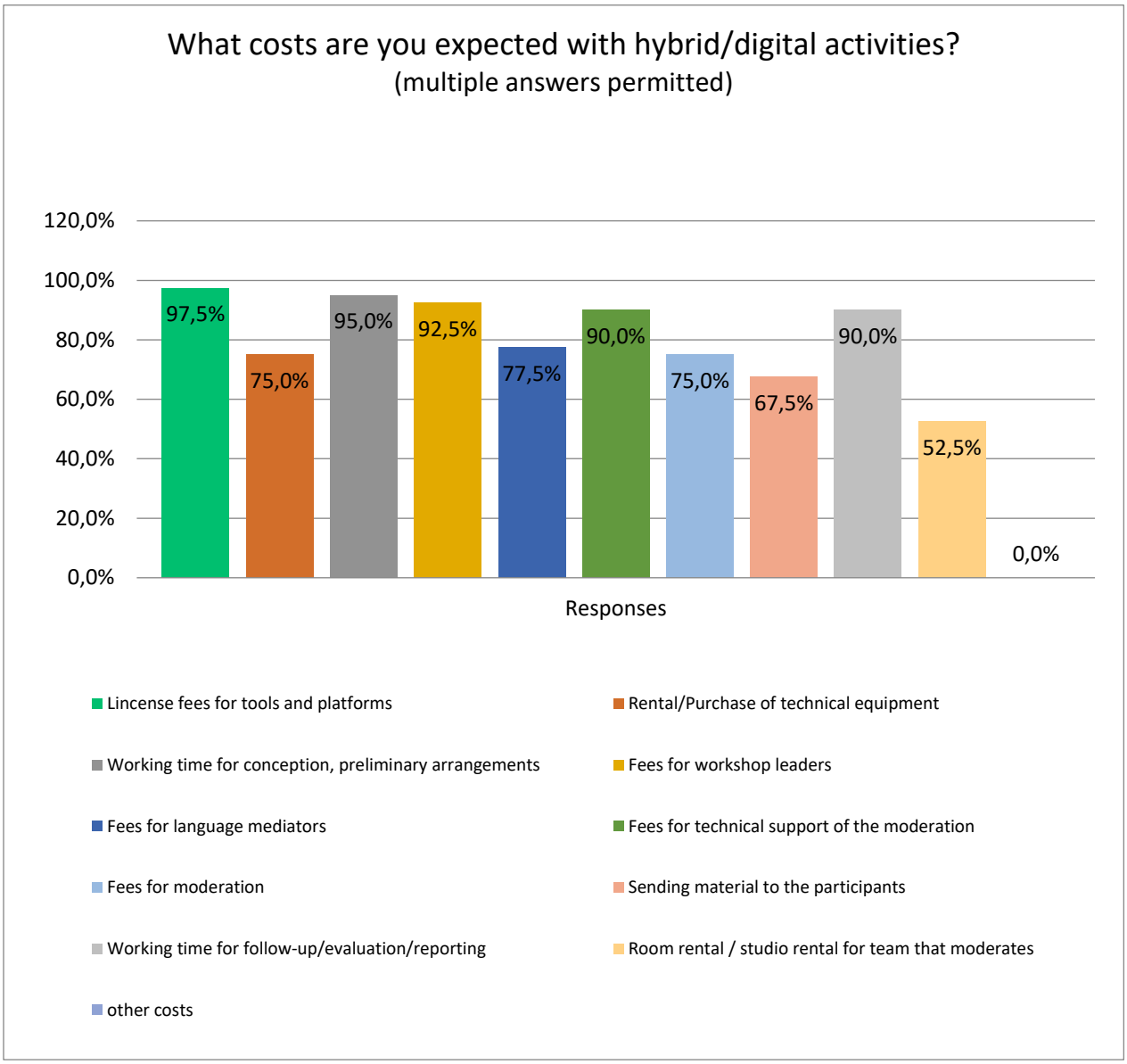
Results of the survey "Digital 100% Erasmus+" on digital and hybrid activities in the Erasmus+ Youth in Action program.

(8) Answered: 36/ Skipped: 4



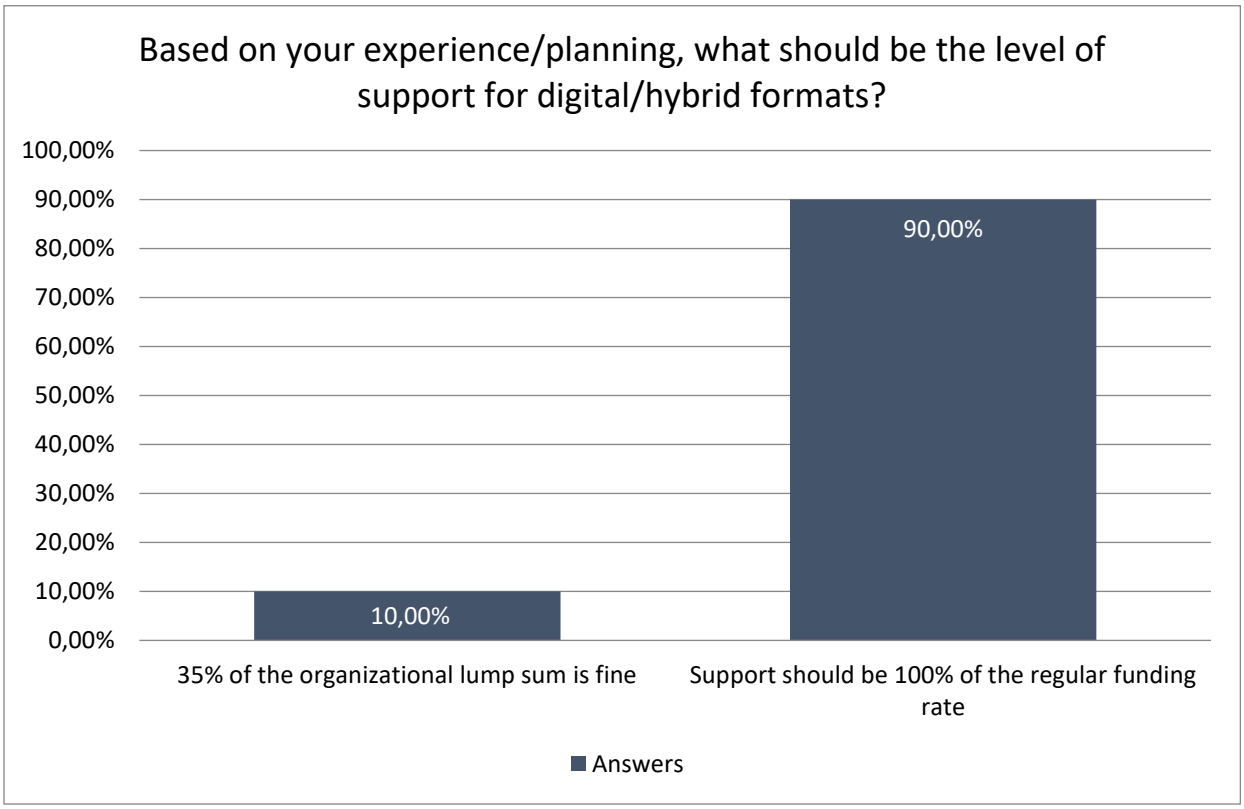
Results of the survey "Digital 100% Erasmus+" on digital and hybrid activities in the Erasmus+ Youth in Action program.

(9) Answered: 40 / Skipped:



Results of the survey "Digital 100% Erasmus+" on digital and hybrid activities in the Erasmus+ Youth in Action program.

(10) Answered: 40 / Skipped:



(11) Please provide arguments for your estimation (reference to question 10):
(answered. 37 / skipped: 3)

- **Increased time required** for organization, implementation, development of high-quality hybrid as well as digital formats, and learning the new tools and methods. [14 citations]
- **Increased staffing** in digital/hybrid formats, because the team cannot act as flexibly as in presence and more needs to be planned in advance and discussed precisely (language facilitators, experienced workshop leaders, speakers and facilitators) in design the digital non-formal learning environments professionally. [11 mentions]
- **Hybrid formats** are more cost-intensive than face-to-face events. Although travel costs are eliminated, accommodation and meals in different countries are incurred and are at least as high as for face-to-face events. Additionally higher expenses for planning, personnel (e.g. simultaneous interpreters, team leaders on site, etc.) and infrastructure. [7 mentions]
- Increased costs resulting from need for **digital tools and licensing fees** that are widely accessible and easy to use. [5 mentions]
- Increased costs for **building/improving digital/technical infrastructure** among partners and participants. [5 mentions]

Results of the survey "Digital 100% Erasmus+" on digital and hybrid activities in the Erasmus+ Youth in Action program.

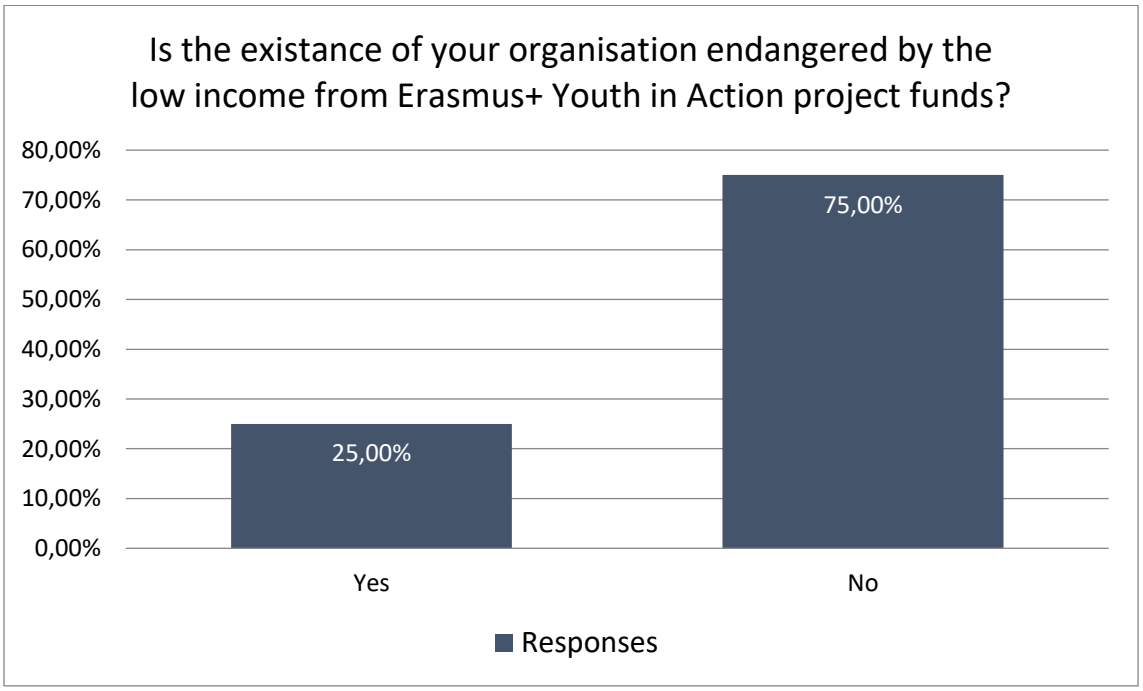
- Increased time requirements, as **multi-day digital activities need to be spread** over a longer period of time, e.g. 1 digital activity day at a time over several weeks (-> impact on licenses etc.) [5 mentions].
- Increased costs due to **technical support** (ensuring a smooth process. [4 mentions]
- Increased time spent on **motivating participants** (social media, mentoring, motivation, etc.) [3 mentions].
- Comments on **funding**:
    - 35% is too little; can fund "only digital stopgaps" but not independent formats of high quality. [3 mentions]
    - I would like to see a percentage in between. e.g., 60%. [1 mention]
    - If the national groups stay overnight in the same accommodation, the flat rate may have to be even higher. If this is not the case, 75% may be sufficient. [1 mention]
    - 45-50 percent due to greater technical, organizational effort; due to longer time periods of exchanges online and to encourage at least partial face-to-face meetings. [1 mention]
    - Both options are unsuitable in our view because they are too rigid. We advocate reimbursing the real costs up to a maximum of 100% of the original application. This would address the fact that digital formats do not automatically represent 35% or less of the original cost, while providing planning certainty for E+ expenditures by capping them upward. [1 mention]
    - In ESC, I receive only 35% of the organizational flat rate for a virtual volunteer service. This is perhaps the biggest misjudgement of the needs of such a program that I have ever experienced. 100% would be absolutely appropriate here. [1 mention]
    - The educational value of digital activities is so low that higher funding is not justified. [1 mention]
    - In order to implement non-formal education in a meaningful way, it requires considerable effort and also a different timing, since it makes no sense to simply flip 5-day events into the digital format. It is a pity that E+ actually wants to promote innovation and this is simply stifled by the 35%. THE EU should have a different claim towards youth work and also towards adult education, because with the current handling it actually confirms to have no real idea about the effort of non-formal education. [1 mention]
- **Other comments:**
    - For Staff Trainings in LA2 only 15% of the individual support is payed. We could only make such a activity possible through local co-funding, which cost us a lot of time and energy. [1 mention]

- Particularly in the case of events lasting several days, which are limited to much shorter formats, the organizational costs decrease to such an extent that they hardly justify the application effort. [1 mention]

(12) What was the added value, if any, of implementing the activity as a hybrid versus a digital-only activity? (answered. 30 / skipped: 10)

- Group and team processes, social interactional time with peers, community togetherness, and enhanced networking [15 mentions]
- No added value [2 mentions]
- Participants leave their familiar environment at least for a certain period of time/ mobility is made possible. [2 mentions]
- Increased knowledge sharing, enrichment, inspiration, attention [4 mentions].
- Higher motivation to participate. [1 mention]
- Use of methods, e.g., adventure, theatre pedagogy possible [1 mention].
- More intensive experience [1 mention]
- Team can interact better (e.g. via streaming from a "seminar room") [1 mention].
- There is no one-size-fits-all answer, it is very specific and depends on the participants whether hybrid works better or worse. Also, our experience is that hybrid participation makes more sense for the participants in the room than for those connected externally. [1 mention]
- It is important to meet in "real" to enable meeting. This works maximally hybrit [1 mention]. [1 mention]
- No experience. [1 mention]

(13) Answered: 40 / Skipped:



Results of the survey "Digital 100% Erasmus+" on digital and hybrid activities in the Erasmus+ Youth in Action program.

(14) How many of your European partner organizations' existence is threatened by the cut in funding for digital activities? (answer: 40 / skip: 0)

Total of all responses: 360 partner organizations.
There may well be duplications here.

In addition, responses from question 16:

- Do not know [3 mention].
- Even before the pandemic, Erasmus+ did not sufficiently cover the (personnel and administrative) costs of our and our partner organizations. [1 mention]

(15) With how many young people do you estimate you are losing contact because of less activity as a result of funding cuts? (answered: 40 / skipped: 0)

Total of all responses: 2625 young people

Additional from question 16:

- About 20% [1 mention]
- more likely to establish new contacts more difficult [2 mention]

(16) Please note the following (optional): (answered: 22/ skipped: 18)

Only answers that relate to the topic of the survey are represented here.

- In a short term, e.g., educational institutions can be maintained through, among other things, funds or short-time work. However, a permanent shift to online education without "living and learning in other places" would mean the end for many of these institutions.
- The ERASMUS + agency must fund digital technology to help young people in difficulty: This is its mission.
- I think the force should be focused more on making physical formats safe, for example through vaccination and testing.
- Supporting KA3 activities without staff cost is a challenge in itself, which is intensified by long project duration due to COVID and digital activities.
- However, face-to-face meetings are the most effective and enjoyable for participants. Face-to-face meetings foster European integration.
- Our funding focus is on KJP, which now pays 100% for digital and hybrid programs.
- If we take the average number of participants per meeting/project as a basis, in our case about 160-170 young people are affected, with whom we are estimated to lose contact because we carry out fewer activities due to the cut in funding.

Results of the survey "Digital 100% Erasmus+" on digital and hybrid activities in the Erasmus+ Youth in Action program.

- Our European partner organizations are currently not threatened in their existence by the reduced funding for digital activities, but the participants perceive the possibility of exchange less as an interesting/meaningful perspective for their own competency development.
- Partnerships exist when they are actively lived. At the moment, all participants are in a habitual position, which is absolutely counterproductive for the relationships. Clear and good/meaningful/practical frameworks are essential for all involved to continue the important work.
- The low number of young people reached and motivated makes it more and more difficult to carry out any activities at all. Restarting everything after the pandemic will be very difficult, as many things build on each other. Above all, peer learning is no longer possible because 1-2 years have partially fallen away.
- In parliament, politicians are allowed to sit together. Why are the participants also not allowed to come together. These human meetings are very necessary now. I really hope that we will soon have the opportunity to implement activities. In Croatia, Malta, Finland there are already great relaxations.
- Digital formats have proven that they cannot replace the traditional face-to-face activities. This can be seen from the mass postponement of projects. Therefore, it is necessary to create priorities for international meetings. The informal part of international meetings cannot be replaced at all and is of particular importance.
- Thank you for the survey. It is quite important for educational institutions to lobby non-formal education and international education!!!
- Thank you for this very important initiative. It is not only important to support digital and hybrid formats more because of the pandemic, but also with regard to accessibility and connectivity (e.g., we were able to connect with participants from the Global South more easily through digital formats) and emissions from traveling by air.