

National evaluation of the European Solidarity Corps in the Netherlands

Final Report

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List of abbreviations

ESC	European Solidarity Corps
EU	European Union
MDT	Civic Service (Maatschappelijke Diensttijd, a programme for youth volunteer work in the Netherlands)
NA	National Agency
NAU	National Authority
NJI	Netherlands Youth Institute
NL	The Netherlands
OCW	Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschappen (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science)
RAY	Research-based Analysis of Youth in action
TCA	Transnational Cooperation Activities
VWS	Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport (Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport)

Executive summary

This report presents the findings of the national evaluation of the European Solidarity Corps programme in the Netherlands. It covers both the previous programme period (2018-2020) as well as the current period (2021-2027). The evaluation answers questions from the Commission regarding 5 different criteria: effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence and EU added value. The results are based on triangulation of multiple sources, including focus groups and interviews amongst different stakeholders (NAU, NA, project leaders, non-beneficiaries, individual participants), surveys amongst project leaders, existing studies and data including existing RAY-surveys, and monitoring data from the NA. Below we present the main findings of this report, including the main recommendations to improve the ESC programme in the Netherlands.

Effectiveness

Overall, the study finds that the ESC-programme is generally effective when it comes to impact on participants and organisations. For participants, the largest effects are reported on personal skills and competences, and international competences (volunteering). For organisations, the main contribution lies in the enhancement of both the quality policies and support services for volunteers, and the increase of the network. For all stakeholders, including local communities, a broadened horizon is an important contribution of ESC. One footnote we make with these effects is that they are based on self-assessments, which can sometimes lead to a bias.

Although the effects on participants and local communities are also evident for solidarity projects, there are challenges in reaching the targets of the number of participants, mainly because it is hard to get and keep youth involved. It is indicated that youth organisations and youth workers are crucial players in reaching young people, but the nature of the solidarity projects is not completely aligned with this need for support. Especially at the start of the programme, it was very hard to get young people involved in these projects. The Dutch NA has exerted quite some effort to increase the numbers, which they partly succeeded in. There is still room for improvement in this the coming years.

Despite efforts at both project level and at the level of the NA, visibility of the ESC-programme could be increased. Almost all projects are disseminating their results mainly via social media. The Dutch NA also has different channels to disseminate the results of the programme. Because we see that 'word of mouth' is a crucial factor in getting to know the programme, more efforts should be allocated towards 'sharing the stories.'

Efficiency

The evaluation shows that there could be some improvements made in the efficiency of the ESC-programme. In all years since the start of the programme, the budget for solidarity projects has not been fully used, resulting in re-allocations towards the volunteering strand. If the programme manages to increase budget uptake for solidarity projects in coming years, this will be at the expense of the volunteering strand. Generally, the budget for volunteering projects has been too low given the demand. **One of the reasons for a lower budget uptake is that the administrative burden of solidarity projects is too high considering the target group.** A substantial portion of the applicants find that the administrative burden is high (especially with regard to the application process), and 40% doubts whether they would apply another time in the future. Another point mentioned is that, although budgets at project level are generally sufficient, more room for guidance would be very much welcomed, both for solidarity as well as volunteering projects, especially when it comes to offering more space to vulnerable groups.

On management level, the NA reports a very high workload, especially at the beginning of the new programme period, due to COVID19, high staff turnover and IT problems. A big problem both for the NA as well as individual projects is the poor working of the Beneficiary Module,

leading to all sorts of problems. Still, beneficiaries are generally very satisfied with the guidance from the NA, and this has improved over the years. Finally, there are signs that attention given to the decentralized ESC-activities could be increased at Commission level.

Relevance

Overall, the evaluation concludes that ESC is a relevant programme, as it is sufficiently in line with societal challenges and development. Overall, youth membership of associations is decreasing, which gives a key role for programmes such as ESC to fill this gap. Solidarity projects specifically seem to respond to the fact that young people are more likely to organising activities on a more ad hoc basis. However, as seen from the previous sections, efforts must be made to increase this potential. Time competition among youth is increasing, making commitments for a longer period harder.

The horizontal priorities of the programme are truly relevant. Especially inclusion and diversity lie very close to the nature of the programme, and has been very much prioritized by the Dutch NA. One concern this evaluation makes is that reporting on the number of youths with fewer opportunities has some ambiguities to it. Over- or underreporting is a serious challenge in this regard. The study therefore concludes that it is important to use other sources, such as the RAY-survey, to get a more comprehensive overview of the characteristics of the participants.

Regarding changes in the programme from the previous to the current period, the evaluation shows that these were generally welcomed by the stakeholders. However, plans to increase the focus on volunteering teams is not beneficial to the Dutch situation. A large part of the volunteering work in the Netherlands is on individual basis, and it is indicated that this is an easier way into the programme.

Coherence

Although the evaluation concludes that the ESC has its own position, it also places some questions regarding the coherence of the ESC-programme in the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, there are some alternatives which are quite similar in nature to ESC-activities, most notably the Civic Service MDT (Maatschappelijke Diensttijd). This is a large programme for volunteer work for young people in the Netherlands. The main difference with the volunteering strand of ESC is the international component which is not present for MDT. ESC thus still has its own position, but actively seeking for synergies is important. Especially regarding solidarity projects, MDT has more room for guidance, and it could be easier for young people to get involved in MDT rather than solidarity projects. Work is currently underway to strengthen both programmes by more references to each other.

Added value

Overall, the evaluation concludes that the ESC-programme definitely has added value, but there is room for improvement, specifically regarding the solidarity strand of the programme. This added value is for example illustrated by the fact that most projects would not have been carried out in the same way without the support of ESC. Furthermore, regarding organisations it is shown that ESC enhances the international network of organisations, which is particularly important for organisations with an international focus (also on other terrains than volunteering work). ESC also seems to contribute to more knowledge about Europe, and participants report feeling closer to Europe after the project. **Although the solidarity projects have potential, and effects on participants are generally high, the study does conclude that added value could be increased for this strand.** The number of participants remains low because it seems hard to engage young people, administrative burden is too high (especially the application process) considering the target group, and there are other opportunities in the Netherlands which could sometimes be an easier substitute for young people. A solidarity project asks a lot from young people, while the scope for guidance is limited.

Recommendations

Volunteering strand

- As demand for volunteering projects is higher than the available budget, the Commission should increase the budget for volunteering projects in coming years. *(current programming period)*
- Given the significant role of individual volunteering in the Netherlands, the Commission should not (strongly) shift the focus of volunteering projects to team volunteering but enough room and flexibility for both individual and team volunteering should be kept. *(current programming period)*
- When assessing the length of volunteering periods, the Commission should preserve the right balance between flexibility for young people and practical suitability for organizations and achieving sufficient impact. *(current programming period)*

Solidarity strand

- Involving organisations is necessary to increase the reach of young people to set up a solidarity group. The Commission should adapt the design of the programme to allow for more guidance from organisations (including financial room for this guidance). *(As this involves a change in the design of the programme, it might only be possible to fully make this change in the next programming period. However, it is important to look what already can be done in the current period)*
- Because young people's plans change quickly and other issues come into the picture, it is important that the NA ensures that the decision-making period on awarding solidarity project applications is as short as possible. *(current programming period)*
- The administrative burden of applying for solidarity projects should be reduced, making it more suitable for the target group. Innovative ideas such as replacing part of the application procedure with spoken words, video's, presentations, etc. should be considered by the Commission. *(current programming period)*

Programme overall

- Make sure that the IT-tools work properly, and especially improve the Beneficiary Module, making it more reliable and easier to work with. *(current programming period)*
- Definition and registration procedures of 'youth with fewer opportunities' are ambiguous. Both the Commission and the NA should use the RAY-survey as an inspirations and complementary source to what extent certain groups are reached. Simplify the accountability obligations for youth with fewer opportunities. *(both current and next programming period)*
- Because impact is hard to measure in these types of programmes with soft outcomes, using the RAY-network to conduct more advanced studies (i.e., baseline and repeated measurements) should be considered. *(both current and next programming period)*

1. Introduction

1.1 The European Solidarity Corps (ESC)

The European Solidarity Corps (ESC) launched in December 2016 and was established in two phases. It initially operated within the context of eight different EU programmes which offered volunteering, traineeships, and job opportunities. It builds on 25 years of experience in the field of youth and solidarity, especially the success of the European Voluntary Service (EVS) from the Erasmus+ programme. The ESC transferred most of the EVS from Erasmus programme to the ESC initiative.

The ESC was established to offer individuals aged 18 to 30 the opportunity to volunteer or work (traineeships and jobs) in projects in their own country or abroad that benefit communities and people all around Europe. A precondition for organisations to participate in volunteering activities is a quality label.

Another type of projects are solidarity projects. A solidarity project is a non-profit solidarity activity initiated, developed and implemented by young people themselves for a period from 2 to 12 months. More than 90% of granted subsidies under the ESC programme in the Netherlands go to volunteer projects and less than 10% to solidarity projects.

Participation will not only benefit those providing and receiving the help but also assist national and local authorities, non-governmental organisations, and companies in their efforts to cope with various challenges and crises. The objective of the initiatives is to put into practice EU values of solidarity, help tackle challenges in society, environment and natural disasters and enable young people to help where it is needed most. In line with this, the motto of the programme is "the power of together".

The ESC programme of 2021-2027 is aligned with the European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027 and the Erasmus+ programme to support, amongst others, youth participation in democratic life and European values. It includes five transversal priorities, three of which are unchanged in 2021-2023. These are: inclusion and diversity, participation in democratic life, and digital transformation. In 2021 the priority 'prevention, promotion, and support in the field of health' was added in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022 and 2023, it was replaced by sustainable development, environmental protection, and climate action.

The European Commission works with National Agencies to manage the European Solidarity Corps. The aim is to bring it as close as possible to participants and make sure it works well across different countries. These National Agencies, do the following:

- provide information on the programme
- select projects to be funded
- monitor and evaluate the programme
- support applicants and participants
- work with other National Agencies and the European Commission
- promote the European Solidarity Corps
- share success stories and best practice

In the Netherlands, this is the responsibility of the NJI, which also has the role of the NA for the Youth component of the Erasmus+ programme.

1.2 The assignment

The European Commission has requested the Netherlands to submit a national report on both the implementation and impact of Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) for the Mid-Term Review (Erasmus+ and ESC 2021-2023) of the programmes, as well as for the evaluation of the previous programmes (Erasmus+ 2014-2020 and ESC 2018-2020).

The focus of the national reports is on the decentralised actions/activities of the programmes implemented at national level by NA.

The task involves producing two reports based on thorough research into the implementation and impact of both the Erasmus+ and ESC programmes in the Netherlands, specifically within the fields of Education & Training and Youth. The reports are expected to provide a comprehensive overview of the Dutch situation based on rigorous research, with a focus on various substantive policy areas. Additionally, the reports should offer concrete recommendations for the current and future programs, based on an analysis of the current programmes' strengths and weaknesses. **The underlying report concerns the evaluation of the European Solidarity Corps (ESC).**

1.3 Methodology

The methodological approach was developed in the inception phase and agreed with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport. To provide answers to the evaluation questions and to provide conclusions and recommendations, a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods were used. The following research methodologies have been applied: desk research, interviews, sectoral focus groups and an online survey amongst project leaders of both volunteering projects as well as solidarity projects.

Desk research

Desk research formed an integral part of the evaluation. The desk research reviewed all the relevant documentation provided by the NA, and other relevant documents found by the research team. Among other things, this included existing research into the European Solidarity Corps, yearly reports from the National Authority, and existing surveys under project leaders and participants from the Ray Network.

Interviews

The interviews involved people from the responsible Ministry, sectoral organisations, non-participating organisations, project leaders and individual beneficiaries. Appendix A includes a list of all participants involved in the study.

Focus groups

A focus group was conducted with volunteer projects. The focus group has been supplemented by interviews with project leaders of volunteering projects as well as group leaders and coordinators of solidarity projects.

Online surveys

An online survey was designed to gather information from beneficiaries in the volunteering projects and solidarity projects. Originally one survey was planned for both volunteering as well as solidarity projects, but due to their different natures, separate questionnaires were created. For the survey among solidarity projects, an additional approach via WhatsApp and a small incentive were used to increase the response. The results of the surveys can be found in Annex B (volunteering projects) and Annex C (solidarity projects).

Analysis of national specific RAY-data

NJI mediated that the researchers had access to country-specific survey data for NL of RAY-surveys among participants of volunteering projects and solidarity projects in 2021-2023. The main results are presented in Annexes D and E.

A more detailed overview of research activities can be found in Annex A.

1.4 Aim and structure of the report

The report is structured according to the evaluation criteria effectiveness (chapter 2), efficiency (chapter 3), relevance (chapter 4), coherence (chapter 5) and EU added value (chapter 6). Under each evaluation criteria, the Commission constructed multiple research questions. The conclusions in chapters are linked to these research questions. In Annex G, one can find an overview table of all the research questions, including where the answers to the questions can be found in the report. For some research questions, the study did not provide a concrete answer. In these cases, the reason behind this is explained in the table.

In the report, we also present one or more policy pointers under each conclusion. For each policy pointer we state whether this should be taken up in the current or the next programming period. This is mainly based on the importance of the recommendation and whether there should be modification to the structure and design of the programme, which is likely not possible in the current period.

2. Effectiveness

Effectiveness refers to the extent to which expected effects have been obtained and objectives have been achieved. We assessed whether the ESC programme contributed to reaching the objectives of the programme.

Conclusion 1: Programme target values are generally achieved for the Volunteering strand, whereas the Solidarity strands is lagging behind

When looking at the number of participants in the activities in the yearly reports from the NA (Annex F), we see that the targets for the Volunteering strand of ESC are being met in almost every year since 2018. 2021 is the only exception to this. The main reason for not meeting the target in 2021 is a combination of becoming acquainted with the budget rules of the new programme (2021-2027) and the COVID-19 crisis. The targets for the number of organisations that receive an ESC Quality Label were also met in almost every year, even though the NA did not actively promote ESC under new organisations due to budget constraints (see conclusion 8). Again, 2021 is the exception. This is mainly because of postponing due to COVID-19. In most years, the number of applications is higher than what can be approved based on the available budget, which points towards high demand for these activities. Given the numbers in the yearly reports, the Volunteering strand of ESC is also highly successful in reaching participants with fewer opportunities: the target of 40% is reached with big margins. In most years, the share of participants with fewer opportunities lies above 60%. However, there is some debate on the validity of these numbers (see the section on Coherence).

For the Solidarity strand of ESC, it has been more difficult to reach the targets. Especially in the earlier years of the programme, visibility and knowledge about the existence of the strand was low. As an illustration, the target number of participants in Solidarity projects was 225 in 2019, but the realisation was only 45 participants. Next to a lack of visibility of the strand, the quality of the proposals was also low in the first couple of years. However, the NA have exerted quite some effort to lower the thresholds for potential applicants for example by joining events with young people, organising brainstorming and workshops with youth workers and young people, and experimenting with WhatsApp consulting hours. This resulted in an increase from 45 to 165 participants in 2020. However, partly due to Covid restrictions, these numbers dropped to 130 in 2021. This number remained constant in 2022. Besides Covid, the NA reports multiple issues regarding this strand: complex process for the type of beneficiaries (informal youth groups), lengthy period between idea and grant award result and other, often easier, opportunities in the Netherlands (like funds, municipalities and MDT; see relevance). However, the NA states that there is good hope that the numbers will increase in the coming years.

The discontinuation of the Jobs and Traineeships (J&T) strand in the new 2021-2027 programme period was justifiable from the Dutch point of view. For Jobs, there were zero applications in the whole period from 2018-2020, and for Traineeships the target for the number of participants was only reached in 2020. The NA stated that, although there was some interest in the contents of this strand, the financing model was not relevant/interesting enough for Dutch organisations (see the section on Relevance).

Conclusion 2: Involvement of youth in the solidarity projects is a challenge

On project level, getting and keeping youth involved is a challenge in solidarity projects. Almost half of the respondents to our survey indicate that not all planned activities of the project were carried out (in comparison: for volunteering projects only 9% of respondents indicate that not all planned activities were carried out. Almost 40% even indicate that there were more activities carried out than planned) (Figure 5 in Annex B and Figure 25 in Annex C). The main reason for this is that the target group is difficult to reach and challenging to retain. For instance, in some projects there was a significant dropout rate among young individuals who had lost their motivation in some of the projects. Several interviewed organisations argue

that there should be some room for 'failure' because of the nature of the strand, i.e., the focus is more on the learning experience of making a difference and it is a bit more 'experimental'. Especially regarding youth with fewer opportunities. They argue therefore to give more flexibility to the solidarity projects, for example with respect to the time frame.

On the one hand, the concept of solidarity projects is that the ideas come strongly from young people themselves and that they concern informal youth groups. On the other hand, it is indicated that volunteers and youth organisations and youth workers are crucial players in reaching young people to set up a solidarity project. Various stakeholders also indicate that the possibility of coaching is essential for the success of solidarity groups and that the current preconditions for this (such as the rate) are clearly inadequate (see efficiency). Especially regarding youth with fewer opportunities, it is deemed to be unrealistic to assume that they can easily comply with all the criteria and manage the financial side of things on their own.

Policy pointers

- Ensure enough flexibility within the solidarity projects to align with the type of projects, especially when it comes to projects with youth with fewer opportunities. (*current programming period*)
- Involving other organisations is necessary to increase the reach of young people to set up a solidarity group. (*As this involves a change in the design of the programme, it might only be possible to fully make this change in the next programming period. However, it is important to look what already can be done in the current period*)

Conclusion 3: Impact on participants and organisations is quite high, broadened horizon is an important impact for all stakeholders

Based on self-assessments from both participants and project leaders from multiple sources (own surveys, surveys from the RAY-network and interviews/focus groups), the impact of ESC activities is quite high on various levels. When it comes to participants, the highest impact is related to the skills and competences of participants. In our own survey amongst project leaders, respectively 95% (Volunteering, Figure 7 in Annex B) and 86% (Solidarity, Figure 27 in Annex C) of respondents (strongly) agree with the statement that the professional and personal knowledge, attitudes and competencies of participants improved because of the ESC-project. Furthermore, when it comes to international competences (mainly Volunteering) and the feeling that someone can make a difference in their own environment, the impact of ESC is high. Some examples of impact on participants mentioned by project leaders include learning to look beyond their own environment, a European network and better knowledge about their future possibilities.

On the level of the organisations, the primary contribution lies in the programme's enhancement of both the quality policy and the support services provided to volunteers. Aside from this, most organisations state that because of ESC they have more capacity to operate at an international level (Figure 9 in Annex B). For receiving organisations, receiving volunteers from abroad gives a positive boost to the organisation, for example because of a 'fresh perspective'. Organisations also often state that the contact is not only relevant for the period when the volunteer is active, but that the connection is more durable, enhancing the (international) network of the organisation (long term impact).

There are also positive contributions of ESC to the local community where the project takes place, mainly regarding the social cohesion within the local communities. However, when it comes to the societal problem that the project was aimed at, the assessment of the impact is somewhat more reserved (Figures 8 and 28 in Annexes B and C) (see the section on Relevance). Regarding solidarity projects, the main contribution to the local communities is increasing the awareness of the value of 'doing something good' and 'helping each other'.

Across all stakeholders, including the project leaders themselves, a common theme is the 'broadened horizon'. It is often mentioned that the activities of ESC lead to a change in perspectives; because stakeholders operate in a different environment than what they are used to, they broaden their horizon. This impact is mentioned at all levels: participants, local communities, organisations and project leaders.

Generally, the intended results of projects are achieved. For Volunteering projects, results are achieved more often than for solidarity projects (76% versus 67%, Figure 10 and Figure 29 in Annexes B and C). For solidarity projects, the main reason for not achieving the results is related to the fact that it is hard to keep participants involved. Regarding volunteering projects, some respondents mention the Covid crisis and financial constraints. Financial constraints are mostly related to the high inflation in recent years, and therefore the high costs of living for volunteers which must be covered by ESC. For receiving countries, an extra barrier is that finding housing in the Netherlands is very hard in these times. These issues could even be a barrier for organisations to apply for ESC.

One possible negative side effect of ESC is that it could increase the brain drain from more remote areas to central regions/countries. This was for example mentioned by a project leader active in the Caribbean. When mobility to Europe is increased via volunteering work, the chance of people staying in Europe for a longer period increases. The hope is that they will eventually return, but this is uncertain.

One footnote to be made with the abovementioned conclusions is that every impact measure is based on self-assessment. Both in the interviews, the survey, and the focus group, the point has been raised that impact is very hard to measure in the context of ESC. Considering that the impact on different actors is very qualitative, e.g. a change in attitudes or behaviors, there is no good alternative than to directly ask the beneficiaries what they see as the impacts of the programme. This can however lead to a positive bias, because organisations (and participants) are not completely neutral¹. This brings into question how relevant the quantification of certain indicators is in the context of ESC. Some beneficiaries stated that the evaluation of the projects (using forms that must be filled in by the participants) is quite outdated and not suited for the target group. Suggestions were made to make more use of 'illustrated stories'.

Policy pointers

- Look for ways to improve the evaluations of the projects to make them more suitable for the type of programme and the target group. *(next programming period)*
- Precisely measuring behavioural change, the development of soft competences and this type of phenomena requires good indicators and a good strategy. In fact, retrospective measurements are generally not sufficient to properly map out results. Ideally, there should be a baseline measurement before and a repeated measurement after the project. However, this is not realistic given the target groups and beneficiary types as this requires even more administrative burden. Perhaps experiments can be conducted within the RAY network, using such an approach. *(both current and next programming period)*

Conclusion 4: Horizontal priorities are very relevant but also difficult to incorporate for some beneficiary types

Inclusion of people with fewer opportunities is a very relevant priority in the ESC-programme and has also been very much prioritized by the Dutch NA. This is already reflected in the fact that the targets for the share of people with fewer opportunities have been reached every

¹ This point of a possible bias in the impact indicators due to the use of ex-post perceptions of participants also applies more generally to the RAY surveys (and therefore also to other countries that use this source).

year with big margins (see conclusion 1, yearly reports NA in Annex F). Furthermore, the Dutch NA actively looks for ways to improve the share of people with fewer opportunities within the projects, for example by conducting a study on the situation of diversity and inclusion in Dutch projects, and studying reasons why some organisations struggle with this priority.² In this study it is also stated that the impact of ESC-activities is bigger for people with fewer opportunities mainly regarding self-confidence and sense of responsibility.

Next to the number of people with fewer opportunities, we also see that respondents are quite positive regarding the effects on awareness of the value of inclusion and diversity (85% (Volunteering, Figure 7 in Annex B) and 92% (Solidarity, Figure 27 in Annex C) of respondent agree with the statements that participants have become more aware of the value of inclusion and diversity). The priorities on climate change and digitalization are somewhat less relevant. Climate change is also reflected in the fact that in the new programme period, the target share of projects addressing this topic is not reached (see the section on Relevance).

Although we see that the horizontal priorities, and especially diversity and inclusion, are very relevant, we also see quite some differences between types of beneficiaries. First, when it comes to Volunteering, we notice from the interviews and focus groups a difference between sending and receiving organisations. In general, receiving organisations are less likely to incorporate horizontal priorities into their projects. Receiving organisations often receive only a small number of volunteers to work in their organisation. The main criteria for selecting these volunteers are whether the organisation thinks they are capable of doing the work, and what motivates them. Organisations state that it is not always clear whether an applicant is someone with fewer opportunities and they feel uncomfortable directly asking these personal questions to the applicants. Moreover, quite a few organisations are working with vulnerable groups themselves, which requires volunteers to be very capable of working with these groups.

Next to this, we also notice a difference between small, new organisations and bigger, more established organisations. For smaller organisations applying for the first time, it can be time-consuming to apply for ESC and to get to know the programme. For these organisations it is often more difficult to also consider the horizontal priorities, especially if this is not the core expertise of the organisation.

Policy pointers

- Look for possibilities to 'differentiate' within the objectives of the horizontal priorities. More established organisations should put more effort into horizontal priorities than new organisations. (*next programming period*)

Conclusion 5: Social media is the most important platform to disseminate results of ESC, however visibility could be increased

86% of projects (volunteering, Figure 16 in Annex B) and 73% (solidarity, Figure 35 in Annex C) disseminated the results of the project via social media, mainly via Facebook and Instagram.

This is also quite an important source for participants to get in touch with the programme. A RAY-survey under participants of volunteering projects shows that 20% of participants heard about the project via social media (Table 1 in Annex D). Other important sources are directly through the organisation, or from friends. The 'word of mouth' is therefore also important for the visibility of the programme. However, despite the efforts to disseminate the results, overall, the visibility of the programme remains quite low. According to some of the interviewees, many young people are unaware of the existence and possibility of both Erasmus + Youth as well as ESC. A possible idea shared by respondents to increase the visibility is to ask for more from both organisations as well as participants in 'spreading the news'. For example: ask participants

² For example, the study: *Deelname van Inclusiejongeren binnen Erasmus+ Jeugd en het European Solidarity Corps*

whether they want to actively share their experiences, for example via a presentation on school(s) (or let the organisation take care of the presentation).

The NA has multiple ways to share and communicate about the programme and the results. It makes use of social media, digital newsletter, annual magazine, (online) information campaigns etc. Although the absolute numbers of people that are involved in the activities of the NA are quite low, the numbers are increasing. For example, the number of subscriptions to the digital newsletter more than doubled in 2022. An important note here is that the NA's communication initially focused on organisations. Volunteer work among young people is promoted via Eurodesk/Go Europe³. With the arrival of solidarity projects, young people became a direct (new) target group, which are difficult to reach because they are poorly organized. The greatest opportunities seem to lie in involving other organisations that work with young people. In recent years, the NA indeed makes more use of these organisations to reach young people.

Policy pointers

- Keep investing in innovative ways to share the results of the programme. 'Word of mouth' is very important for this programme, so make sure that organisations and participants share their stories. (*current programming period*)

Conclusion 6: Direct influence of ESC-programme on (national and regional) policies not evident which is inherent to the nature of the programme

On system level, the ESC-programme could potentially influence national or regional policies regarding youth participation and volunteering work. This is not directly an objective of the programme but could be a positive (unintended) effect. One of the advantages of the Dutch situation is that the NA is directly placed under the 'Netherlands Youth Institute (NJI)'. NJI is a lot broader than only the ESC and Erasmus+ Youth programmes and, being a knowledge institute, it plays a vital role in (indirectly) shaping the policies around youth work and youth participation in the Netherlands. Being a part of NJI, the NA has better access to relevant trends and developments on those topics, and it gets better support in reaching out to relevant target groups (e.g. by participating jointly in working groups and by having access to relevant national seminars). Next to this, the NA plays a role in discussions around voluntary work, for example via meetings with other national initiatives and the ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport.

Despite this, the direct influence of ESC-projects on national and regional policies is not so evident (compared to for example Erasmus+). The bridge between small scale projects from generally smaller organisations, or even from informal youth groups, and national and regional policies is not so easily made. It is therefore more relevant (which is acknowledged in the intervention logic of ESC) to look at direct influence on local communities themselves, instead of policies.

³ <https://go-europe.nl/>

3. Efficiency

Efficiency refers to the extent to which the intended outcomes are achieved against reasonable costs in the Netherlands. The execution and organisation of the programme, as well as flexibility and obstacles for beneficiaries and participants were assessed.

Conclusion 7: Financial implementation rates were satisfactory for Volunteering, not for Solidarity strand

The budget commitment rates for the Volunteering strand of the programme were satisfactory (almost 100%) in every year except for 2020 (yearly reports NJI). In 2020, the commitment rate was only 65%. According to the NA, the main reason for this was that quite some grant agreements were not issued due to the Covid19 crisis. The success rate of applications was also quite high for volunteering projects. In almost every year, the success rate lies above 90%, pointing towards high quality proposals. For the earlier years, this is mainly because many of the beneficiaries were experienced organisations from the previous EVS-programme. Over the years there is however a continuation of new, small organisations being granted a project.

For solidarity projects, the commitment rate has not been higher than 52% (2020). In the last years, the commitment rate was 39%. This led to the fact that a large part of the budget had to be re-allocated towards the volunteering strand. As explained in the section on effectiveness, in the earlier years the low commitment rates were caused by low visibility and low quality of the applications (in 2019 a success rate of 53%). In later years, apart from the Covid crisis, the NA reports multiple issues regarding this strand: complex process for the type of beneficiaries (informal youth groups), lengthy period between idea and grant award result and other, often easier, opportunities in the Netherlands (see also section on relevance).

Conclusion 8: The allocation of the budget is not completely efficient

On a general level, given the high success rates of the Volunteering strand, almost all the applications can be rewarded within the programme. However, because the budgets for the solidarity strands are not completely used, budgets are relocated towards the Volunteering strand. The NA states that the demand for volunteering projects is higher than what can be awarded based on the budgets. Therefore, they do not actively promote the Volunteering strand of ESC on a large scale. Although the NA is satisfied with the flexibility of reallocating budgets from one strand to another, a risk that can occur in this regard is that the budget will be (even more) insufficient for the Volunteering strand if the budget for the solidarity strand will be completely used in coming years. This might result in reduction of annually available budgets for organisations that already have a quality label as a lead organisation.

Policy pointers

- Ensure that the total financial envelope for the ESC-programme remains sufficient, also if in the coming years solidarity projects will take up more of the assigned budget. The budget for Volunteering projects in the Netherlands seems too low at this moment. *(current programming period)*

Conclusion 9: The budgets at project level are generally sufficient to achieve the results, but more room for guidance is needed

The majority of respondents to the survey indicate that the budgets are sufficient to achieve the results of the project, pointing towards cost-effective activities of the ESC-programme. This is more the case for solidarity projects (80%, Figure 30 in Annex C) than for volunteering projects (67%, Figure 11 in Annex B). The main reasons mentioned by organisations that are stating that the budget is not sufficient, are the rising costs due to high inflation in the Netherlands. Organisations in the overseas territories have the specific situation that they must work with the rates of the Netherlands, while the costs of living are higher. Next to this, some organisations mention that not all costs are eligible (for example transport costs can be higher than what is

covered by the budget; this is sometimes caused by the calculation method for reimbursement of transport costs by the distance calculator). This could be a disadvantage for those who live in more remote areas.

Most organisations are also satisfied with the balance between efforts in terms of time and resources that must be put into the projects compared to the results. Again, this indicates that projects are generally perceived cost-effective. For both strands, more than 70% of respondents indicate that efforts and results are quite balanced (Figure 12 in Annex B and Figure 31 in Annex C). Aspects of the programme such as requirements for the project (both content-related as well as financial), the necessary information and documentation that must be supplied with the application, the assessment criteria of the project plan and which activities are and are not covered by the subsidy are all deemed (very) clear by the majority of the respondents (Figure 19 in Annex B and Figure 39 in Annex C).

Many aspects of the programme are valued by the respondents to the surveys. This includes the connection with the needs of the organisation and the explanation about the application and assessment procedures. The only thing which respondents are (very) negative about is the usability of the Beneficiary Tool (this is elaborated on more in the next conclusion) (Figure 17 in Annex B and Figure 37 in Annex C).

The budgets for guidance of participants are perceived to be too low. As mentioned in the effectiveness section, guidance is very much needed when getting the target group involved, especially when it concerns youth with fewer opportunities. It is important to provide enough room for guidance, both financially as well as in the nature of the programme. There is even an example of an organisation which tried to help a group of youth with applying for a solidarity project but got rejected with one of the arguments that they would provide too much guidance during the project. According to the evaluators, the level of guidance did not match the nature of the programme, in which it is expected that youth should cover most aspects of the execution themselves. Although this is understandable from a learning perspective, it deemed to be quite unrealistic for certain groups. This problem is more relevant for the solidarity strand of ESC, but there are also some problems concerning Volunteering projects. Project management is deemed to be quite complicated and there is often not enough budget to place a good project leader on a project. For example, one foundation stated that the board of the foundation takes on the project management (partly voluntarily) because of this.

Policy pointers

- To make solidarity projects a success, it is important that they offer sufficient space for guidance, both in financial terms and sufficient room for support during the application and implementation. *(As this involves a change in the design of the programme, it might only be possible to fully make this change in the next programming period. However, it is important to look what already can be done in the current period)*

Conclusion 10: IT problems, COVID19 and high staff turnover at NA hindered efficient working processes

Especially at the start of the new programme in 2021, there were quite some issues that hindered efficiency. COVID19 led to a lot of uncertainty regarding the number of projects that would be carried out in this year. Next to this, the NA had a lot of replacements of staff within the organisation. Finally, there were (and still are) quite some problems with the IT tools of the programme, most notable the Beneficiary Module. In every year, the NA flags this as a significant risk of the programme. This is also flagged as one of the main problems encountered by the project leaders. The module is quite difficult to get acquainted to, leading to problems in transferring tasks to other members of the organisation. Furthermore, the tool is down quite often leading to problems for beneficiaries in submitting final reports, which in turn leads to

delay in payments. At the end of 2022, the NA flags this risks as 'extremely acute and problematic'. Organisations also state that the Beneficiary Module did certainly not improve from the previous to the current programming period. In the survey, more than half of the respondents (both volunteering and solidarity) indicated that the usability of the module was (very) bad.

Although the NA experiences quite some challenges and a high workload, beneficiaries are generally happy with the support of the NA. They also state that the support of the NA has improved a lot over the years. The survey shows that most respondents value the support of the NA at different stage (application, implementation, completion and dissemination) in both volunteering and solidarity projects (Figure 16 in Annex B and Figure 36 in Annex C). Some outstanding differences are that solidarity projects value the support at the dissemination stage very much (86% finds this (very) good), while this is least valued in volunteering projects (50% finds this (very) good). Conversely, the support for the completion of the project is highly valued by volunteering project leaders (75% finds this (very) good), but this is least valued in solidarity projects (55% finds this (very) good). The NA states that the workload is too high which leads to the fact that some parts remain less developed such as monitoring (getting closer to organisations), support (training of organisations which are stranding on too low scores for the application) and impact (more elaborated approach on impact and dissemination).

Another point that has been made by multiple receiving organisations (volunteering strand) is that differences in EU and Dutch financial regulations (regarding the fixed lump sum contributions) are complicating the implementation of EU volunteering. One of the solutions mentioned is to establish a European (legal) status for EU Volunteers.

Regarding solidarity projects, it is also a question whether the programme is fully aligned with the regulation framework of (social assistance) benefits. We received a signal from one respondent where this misalignment ultimately led to a temporary freeze in benefits.

The mechanisms in place to prevent and detect fraud are sufficient. The NA also states that the risk of fraud in this area is very small given the nature of the organisations involved.

Policy pointers

- Make sure that the IT-tools work properly, and especially improve the Beneficiary Module, making it more reliable and easier to work with. *(current programming period)*
- Establish the European status for EU Volunteers. Applying such a legal status for all volunteers active in the European Solidarity Corps would bring more visibility as well as clarity on the rights and responsibilities of the volunteers across Europe and helps national governments to support organisations and to facilitate a better implementation of the programme. *(As this requires a change in ESC regulations, this might only be possible for the next programming period. However, it is important to look what already can be done in the current period)*

Conclusion 11: Quality label: high effort, high reward

From the survey, we see that more than 2/3rd of the organisations state that the administrative burden of applying for the Quality Label is high or very high (Figure 16 in Annex B). This is quite a bit higher than the administration of applying for a project and around the execution of the project. From the interviews and focus groups, we do however conclude that most organisation find the high efforts are justified when looking what they get in return. Having the Quality Label gives more certainty to organisations and leads to much easier processes when applying for individual projects. The NA also acknowledges the added value of the Quality Labels, as a good structure and durability is necessary for the volunteering sector (they must provide mentorship, housing, etc).

Conclusion 12: The administrative burden of applying for solidarity projects is too high

Given the target group of the solidarity projects, informal youth groups, the administrative burden for applying is too high. In our own survey we see that 67% of respondents state that the administrative burden of applying is high or very high (Figure 39 in Annex C). Next to this, more than 40% of the respondents state that they doubt whether would apply another time in the future. Again, the main reasons for this are the complexity of the process leading to a lot of time to invest in the application. Some specific examples include the fact that every participant needs a registration number, which can sometimes be quite a lot of work. It is also mentioned that the application asks for so much information and descriptions that it is hard to keep overview of everything. Clear indications of what is and what is not mandatory to deliver (not only for the application but also for the justification afterwards) are very much welcomed.

The NA puts quite a lot of effort into assisting young people in applying for the solidarity projects. Generally, they find that when people get in touch with the solidarity project officer in time, they can always be guided to an approval of the project application. In the validation workshop, several innovative ideas such as replacing part of the application procedure with spoken words, videos or presentations were suggested to make the process more suitable for the target group.

Policy pointers

- Reduce the administrative burden of applying for solidarity projects, making it more suitable to the target group. Innovative ideas such as replacing part of the application procedure with spoken words, video's, presentations, etc. should be considered. *(Reducing administrative burden: as much as possible in the current programming period, taking up innovative design for application procedure; next programming period)*

Conclusion 13: Attention to decentralized ESC-activities could be increased at Commission-level

The National Authority of the ESC programme in the Netherlands is the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport. Several times a year the ministry takes place in meetings with the Commission regarding ESC (and Erasmus+ Youth). Because of the difference in size of the programme, ESC does get less attention compared to the Erasmus+ programme. This is illustrated by shorter time stamps for the meetings and late sharing of relevant documents to the meeting. Next to this, the representation of Member States is also quite low regarding ESC. Although the Netherlands is almost always present, in some meetings, only a few Member States are involved. Formally, there is room for discussion, but in practice it is quite hard to make use of this due to the high pace of the meetings. There is less time available for the ESC-meetings (compared to E+), but the topics are sometimes just as complicated, which requires more time to prepare and discuss.

Furthermore, the Commission seems to put more emphasis on the central parts of the programme such as Humanitarian Aid and DiscoverEU. The risk of this increasing focus towards central parts of the programme is that this will be at the expense of the indirect management parts, which lie at the core of the ESC-programme.

Policy pointers

- Although the ESC-programme is smaller compared to Erasmus+, it should be getting enough attention to increase the visibility and effectiveness of the programme. *(current programming period)*

4. Relevance

Relevance refers to the extent to which ESC adequately links to the needs as identified in the Netherlands. The relevance of the ESC is assessed, as well as for specific sectors and target groups.

Conclusion 14: Given the modest size of the programme and the judgments of the project leaders, no major effects on social changes should be expected. Conversely, the programme is sufficiently in line with societal changes.

In the survey, the project leaders of volunteer projects and solidarity projects are moderately positive about the effects of projects on societal problems (Figure 8 in Annex B and Figure 28 in Annex C). However, they are much more cautious here than with related questions about the effects on the competencies of the participants. For example, 40% of respondents of volunteer projects indicate that as a result of the project, the social problem in the area where the project focused on, has been reduced. 55% indicate "neutral" here. In solidarity projects, half of the respondents are neutral or indicate that they see no effects on social problems. This shows a certain modesty about what the projects can mean. Almost 80% indicates that social connectedness has improved in the area where the project took place. Participants also indicate that their social involvement has increased, which can therefore also be expected to have knock-on effects in the longer term.

When considering the role in social changes, it should also be borne in mind that this programme involves relatively modest amounts of a few million euros per year. From the perspective of this relatively limited scale alone, the effects on societal changes will be limited. By comparison: a programme such as MDT (Civic Service), which also focuses on volunteer work by young people in the Netherlands, has a budget that has risen to 100 million euros per year.

Viewed the other way around, the question is whether the programme sufficiently responds to societal changes. A trend mentioned in interviews is that youth membership of associations is decreasing. However, young people are open to organizing an activity together on a more ad hoc basis in a more informal (looser) manner. The solidarity projects seem to respond to this, but sufficient routes must be found to reach these groups. Time competition among young people is increasing, which makes commitments for these types of activities more difficult. Another trend mentioned is that participants in international volunteer work have an increasing need for more short-term periods. The current programme also offers sufficient scope for this. An important note about a trend towards shorter volunteering periods is that there are also disadvantages, especially if it concerns a substantial shift towards relative short periods. For receiving organizations, participating in the programme then becomes less attractive because of the time needed for onboarding. For participants, the impact is greatest when it concerns a substantial period.

Another question is whether the horizontal themes are sufficiently in line with social trends among young people. According to respondents, this appears to be quite the case. However, additional other themes that play a role among young people and youth policy are mentioned, in particular mental health and radicalization. Some also find the climate/green theme less suitable or important for this programme. One respondent even goes so far as to say that this is actually contradictory to the nature of the programme, in which mobility plays such a major role. He therefore suggests concentrating mobility much more on neighbouring countries.

Policy pointers

- When assessing the length of volunteering periods, a balance must be found between flexibility for young people and practical suitability for organizations and achieving sufficient impact. (*current programming period*)
- Because young people's plans change quickly and other issues come into the picture, it is important that the decision-making period on awarding (solidarity) project applications is as short as possible. (*current programming period*)
- The programme must be used sufficiently flexibly so that (other) themes that affect young people, such as mental health, can also be embedded in projects. (*next programming period*)

Conclusion 15: The development of competencies and increasing social involvement are both reflected in the programme. The former plays a somewhat larger role in volunteer projects and the latter more in solidarity projects.

When considering motives for participating in a volunteer project, developing personal competencies (language skills, learning something new, getting to know new people) is mentioned more often than motives aimed at contributing to social needs (RAY survey participants, Table 1 in Annex D). With (the limited number of) participants in the RAY survey of solidarity projects, the accents are the other way around (Table 7 in Annex E).

This difference is also reflected among project leaders in the surveys. Project leaders of volunteer projects give (even) higher scores to the impact on personal competencies than to aspects related to (increased) social involvement. Again, for project leaders of solidarity projects, it is more the other way around, i.e., social involvement plays a larger role. (Figure 7 in Annex B and Figure 27 in Annex C)

Policy pointers

- The programme offers sufficient balance in the development of personal competencies and increasing social involvement and does not require changes in this respect.

Conclusion 16: The definition and registration procedures for lower opportunity youth are ambiguous. The RAY survey provides some distributions of participants with more clearly defined demarcations.

Figures in NA Youth's annual report regarding the share of participants with fewer opportunities are quite high: for volunteering teams around 60%. The target was (more than) achieved for almost all years. A few comments must be made around these figures, which can both lead to over- and underreporting. There is a formal formulation of which groups belong among those with fewer opportunities, but it is not always clear how these groups are demarcated. This can be interpreted quite strictly, but also broadly. The possibility of underreporting is mentioned by the NA⁴ because project leaders want to prevent stigmatization and there is no incentive to indicate that they are working with disadvantaged groups if they do not use the special facilities that the programme offers for this purpose. An earlier Erasmus+ midterm evaluation (which included the European Voluntary Service) concluded that the definitions and registration procedures for lower opportunity youth are ambiguous⁵.

The surveys of RAY give the opportunity to know more about the characteristics of participants of ESC. First, we see a lot more women than men taking part in the programme: 75% of participants in volunteering projects (both sending and receiving) are women (Table 2 in Annex D). In majority, most of them think they are getting their fair share of opportunities compared to other people of their age in their country (Table 3 in Annex D). A large share has a higher

⁴ The NA has commissioned a few small-scale studies into the registration of vulnerable groups within projects.

⁵ Ecorys (2017), Midterm Evaluation Erasmus+, National report for The Netherlands.

education background (63%)⁶; in projects in a sending role this is somewhat lower. Also, the parents of the participants are relatively high educated. Nevertheless, 38% report that they have barriers to reach their full potential. Not having enough money is the most mentioned barrier. Also 34% report that they are member of a group that is discriminated against. Sexuality (12%), gender (7%) and colour/race (7%) are most often mentioned in this respect.

In the survey of volunteer projects, more than half made a (very) strong effort to involve young people with fewer opportunities or special needs as volunteers in the project. In the survey of solidarity projects, it is also indicated that young people with fewer opportunities participated in the project group, especially young people with a health problem or disability and from an economically disadvantaged situation. (Figure 6 in Annex B and Figure 26 in Annex C)

Some interviewed project leaders of volunteer projects confirm that they do make efforts to involve vulnerable groups, but that they also do look at whether young people can handle it. In some activities, for example volunteering work in the healthcare sector, unsafe situations must be prevented from arising. Project leaders acknowledge that the programme offers special facilities for participants from vulnerable groups, but they indicate that the accountability requirements for making use of these are (very) high. That is why they sometimes omit this.

Policy pointers

- The RAY survey should be used as an important complementary source to what extent certain (target) groups are reached and to what extent progress is made in this area. This means that publications should (also) present national specific data. (*current programming period*)
- The accountability obligations for groups with fewer opportunities should be simplified. (*next programming period*)

Conclusion 17: Some applied or planned changes in the programme, such as the elimination of the occupational strand, are welcomed, others seem less appropriate, such as the heavier emphasis on volunteering teams.

Project leaders did not notice much of the change in the programme from EVS to ESC, even when it became a separate programme from Erasmus+. However, the structure surrounding applications has been overhauled in the new period. According to project leaders, this is a substantial improvement. Applying for the Quality Label is an investment, but then you also have 7 years of much easier procedures. The NA notices that there are some differences: EVS was more strongly focussed on long-term experience abroad. EVS focussed merely on personal development; ESC has an additional focus on the solidarity and active citizenship aspect: the power of together.

Regarding changes in the programme, it is also mentioned that the age limit has been raised. This is a shame according to some sending organisations because there is a lot of potential among those under the age of 18. On the other hand, a receiving organisation indicates that it is better and safer for them to receive young people over 18 from Europe.

As mentioned before, occupational strand in the programme 2018-2020 was not successful in the Netherlands because the financing model was not relevant/interesting, although there was interest in the content. Where in EVS funding for housing and pocket money was available, this line did not cover these kinds of expenses and only covered the travel expenses. The host

⁶ This is comparable to the share of higher educated in the European Voluntary Service in the former Erasmus+ programme. An earlier monitoring study of Erasmus+ in the Netherlands using RAY-data, reports a share of 57% higher educated in EVS: C. Boomkens, S. Awad, J. Metz (2017), *Monitoren impact Erasmus+ Jeugd*. Amsterdam: Lectoraat Youth Spot.

organisation also received no contribution for investing in a temporary worker. So, the fact that this strand was not continued in the new programme suited the situation in the Netherlands.

The Commission indicated that it wants to increase the share of volunteering Teams. However, the current practice in the Netherlands (both sending and even more receiving) is that many participate in individual volunteering. From interviews, it also turns out that for new organisations, the step to first join the programme is easier for individual volunteering. So, a strong focus on volunteering teams can limit the entry of new organisations. Those that already have experience with individual experience are more likely to develop team volunteering in a later stage.

Policy pointers

- The focus of volunteering projects should not (strongly) shift to team volunteering but keep enough room and flexibility for both individual and team volunteering. (*current programming period*)

5. Coherence

Coherence refers to the extent to which ESC offers a coherent programme regarding its different strands and with respect to other (international, national and regional) initiatives.

Conclusion 18: The ESC programme partly has its own position, but - especially for Dutch volunteers - there are also other programmes with similarities.

The programme has a rather unique position when it comes to working with volunteers from other countries. This applies less to the participation of volunteers from the Netherlands itself and solidarity projects. This is reflected in the survey question of what respondents would have done without ESC. In some cases, other sources of financing are mentioned. This concerns national sources and not European programmes. People for example mention municipalities and funds. MDT is also sometimes discussed in the interviews (but not in the surveys as an alternative). If European sources are mentioned in the interviews this concerns Erasmus+ Youth. Some organisations are working with both Erasmus+ youth and ESC, but the projects do have their own accents.

MDT⁷ ("Maatschappelijke Diensttijd"; Civic Service) is a large programme for volunteer work for young people in the Netherlands. MDT offers young people the opportunity to actively contribute to society, stimulate their personal development and gain valuable experience. The biggest difference between MDT and ESC is the foreign mobility aspect and the scope (length) of the volunteer work⁸, otherwise there is overlap. A difference with solidarity projects is that MDT projects are more strongly driven by organisations (increasingly also educational institutions and municipalities). These often involve large projects. Some organisations for volunteer work are looking into whether it can be combined, but this is not yet possible. In some of the interviews, the suggestion is also made to connect the two programmes more by pointing out to (former) participants in MDT that they can take a next step in solidarity through volunteering projects or solidarity projects of ESC. This also increases the reach for solidarity projects. The NA has regular contact with programme management of MDT. The NAU initiates quarterly consultations on young volunteers (NA and MDT are part of this consultation). Efforts are also being made to improve referrals between both programmes, for example via

⁷ www.doemeemetmdt.nl

⁸ In MDT young people volunteer approximately 2.5 hours a week for six months and are guided towards personal learning goals. In total they work at least 80 hours in six months, but this can also be more. The 80 hours includes coaching and training. European Volunteering regards full time volunteering for a period of two to twelve months.

brochures and the website. However, it remains difficult that MDT is such a large programme, which can reduce the visibility of ESC.

One of the differences mentioned is that in MDT projects there is more (financial) room for guidance, which also means that certain groups, such as the less educated, are reached more often. At the same time, reaching young people is a difficulty in the development of solidarity projects. As mentioned in the earlier sections, although it might change the nature of the projects (i.e., informal youth groups setting up projects) more room for guidance (such as in MDT projects) would increase the effectiveness of solidarity projects.

Policy pointers

- Continue to actively work on synergies between other national initiatives such as MDT. Also look where ESC could learn from these national initiatives. *(current programming period)*

Conclusion 19: ESC as a separate programme apart from Erasmus+ has both advantages as well as disadvantages.

Since 2018, ESC has operated as a separate programme independent of Erasmus+. **One of the key advantages of maintaining ESC as a separate programme is the ability to offer room for customization for the volunteering and youth sector**, which has a completely different character than the education sector, with many small, more informal and grassroots type organisations. Having a tailored programme design with sufficient room for flexibility and customization is a pre-condition for realising the programme objectives and impact. However, the question is whether this is fully utilized at the moment as the high administrative requirements and extensive grant agreements still appear to be strongly inspired by working with (large) educational institutions. A second advantage of ESC as a separate programme is that it is a tool to implement the European Youth Strategy and other youth (work) related policies. It is therefore also important that decisions for youth related formats are made by representatives of youth ministries who have knowledge with respect to both European and national youth (work) policy developments. Lastly, it is important that the solidarity aspect (the power of together) remains one of the main objectives of the programme, as it is now in the ESC.

There are also (potential) advantages of merging. Firstly, Erasmus+ is much more visible. ESC is a small programme with a shorter history and is therefore much less well known. Moreover, Erasmus+ Youth and ESC are both strongly linked to the European Youth Strategy. The objectives are therefore very similar. So, with a joint programme you can make the vision even stronger, and this also seems more logical to organisations. Additionally, a smaller programme like ESC is more susceptible to being influenced by political decisions. On a political scale, Erasmus+ holds greater visibility and strength, making it less likely to be deemed redundant. Conversely, smaller programs such as ESC may be more readily considered for elimination in the event of budget cuts. This fear is explicitly mentioned by multiple stakeholders when asked about the advantages and disadvantages of ESC as a separate programme.

Policy pointers

- It is important that the potential room for flexibility and customization is fully used. The design of the programme (particularly the administrative requirements) is currently still too directly derived from Erasmus+, and not enough tailored to the specifications of the Volunteering and solidarity sector. *(next programming period)*

6. European added value and sustainability

European added value and sustainability refers to the extent to which ESC supports the promotion of matters relevant to the EU and the extent of the sustainability of project results in the Netherlands.

Conclusion 20: Most projects would not have been carried out in the same way without the support of ESC

Approximately 72% of both volunteering and solidarity projects would not have been carried out or would have been executed to a lesser extent without ESC (Figure 13 in Annex B and Figure 32 in Annex C). For volunteering projects, merely 10% indicated that there would be no difference without ESC. Among these projects, the majority would have financed these initiatives using their own resources, while a smaller portion might have used external sources or subsidies. Concerning solidarity projects, none stated that there would be no difference without ESC. Nevertheless, in comparison to volunteering projects, more solidarity projects would have been undertaken to a reduced extent rather than abandoned altogether without ESC support. Overall, discontinuing of ESC would directly lead to less basis for these types of projects in the Netherlands.

Based on feedback gathered from (validation) focus groups and interviews, the main sentiment is that there have not been many notable differences compared to the period preceding 2018 when volunteering was integrated into the Erasmus+ programme (EVS). Stakeholders primarily emphasize improvements in administrative procedures. The key distinction highlighted by stakeholders was the introduction of the new programme name, which required increased visibility and adjustment. Regarding the programme's impact, no immediate changes were observed.

Conclusion 21: Enhancing the international network one of the main contributions of ESC to organisations

Concerning volunteering organisations, one of the main contributions of ESC is that they have more connections to relevant organisations in different countries. Especially for sending organisations, which do not have the benefits of receiving volunteers contributing directly to their organisation, the most important added value of sending volunteers abroad is that they increase their network. Most sending organisations are also active on various parts of youth work, and building an international network is especially useful and important for these kinds of organisations.

Conclusion 22: ESC seems to contribute to enhancing knowledge about Europe

International competence (including knowledge about Europe) is one of the main impacts of Volunteering projects on participants according to project leaders. 90% of project leaders (strongly) agree with the statement that the international competences of participants increased because of the project (Figure 7 in Annex B). Furthermore, the Ray survey amongst participants to Volunteering projects shows a sharp increase in the indicator 'feeling close to Europe'. Before the start of the projects, the average score of this indicator was 5.5, and this increased to 7.4 after the project (Table 5 in Annex D). It should be noted that this is likely subject to positive bias, as the respondents were asked to look back on how they felt about Europe prior to the start of the project. This is generally hard to answer, and answers are likely subject to social desirability. Also, for solidarity project the average score increased from 4.6 to 6.3. Here it should also be noted that there were only 7 respondents to the survey (Table 14 in Annex E).

Conclusion 23: Added value of volunteering projects is quite high, for solidarity projects this could be increased

Based on all the previous conclusions regarding the ESC-programme, we conclude that the added value for the volunteering strand is quite high. Volunteering projects are generally

perceived to have an effect on both organisations and participants, the demand is relatively large, and there are clear differences to other national and local opportunities. Especially the European aspect of volunteering projects is more direct, as most project have an international aspect to it. However, a small concern regarding the coherence of the programme has been made regarding Dutch volunteers. As there are quite some initiatives in the Netherlands, including one big programme called MDT, there are similar opportunities for Dutch youth, slightly decreasing the added value. However, these programmes rarely provide the opportunity to do volunteering work abroad. Moreover, volunteering projects in the framework of ESC concern a longer period and therefore a more long-term experience, which also makes the step to participation a bit greater.

With regards to solidarity projects, the added value could be increased. The effects of solidarity projects on participants are high, especially when people with fewer opportunities are involved. However, the demand for this strand is still quite low, and it is hard to engage the target group in these projects. Next to this, the coherence of solidarity projects is more of an issue, as the European aspect to this strand is much less evident. As mentioned, there are similar initiatives in the Netherlands which are often easier to access for young people. The complementarity of the solidarity projects' downside is that the barriers are high, especially for (less educated) target groups. The added value of solidarity projects should be increased primarily by removing obstacles (lack of possibilities for guidance, complex application procedure, lengthy period between submission and award) and increasing the number of participants in the programme.

Policy pointers

- There should be an active discussion on what is expected from solidarity projects, how this could be achieved (how do you activate young people) and how this fits within other similar initiatives on national level. (*current programming period*)

Annex A – List of activities carried out in the evaluation

Research activity	Number of participants
Existing data	
RAY surveys (participants)	Country-specific data for NL received for participants volunteering projects and solidarity projects in 2021-2023. Some main results are presented in Annexes D and E. Earlier publication (Boomkens and others 2017) also presented national specific data on predecessor programme European Voluntary Service (EVS) in Erasmus+ context for the years 2014/2015.
Yearly reports National Authority	The yearly reports (2018-2022) contain data on targets and results on different programme indicators (for example number of participants in projects, share of youth with fewer opportunities, etc.) Next to this it contains administrative information on number of projects, quality of applications, etc. Lastly, it contains financial information on budgets and commitments. See Annex F for an overview of programme indicators.
Own surveys	
Survey among project leaders of volunteering projects	21 responses (of 53 approached) See also some main results in Annex B
Survey among group leaders of solidarity projects	15 responses (of 59 approached). See also some main results in Annex C
Interviews	
National authority (Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport) and the National agency (NJI)	In total 4 interviews
Sectoral organisations	Association of Dutch Volunteer Work Organizations (NOV), Maatschappelijke Diensttijd (MDT), Dutch National Youth Council (NJR)
Focus group with project leaders of volunteering projects	Carried out with 4 project leaders
Individual interviews with project leaders of volunteering projects	3 project leaders (of which 1 was also interviewed being a coordinator of solidarity projects)
Individual interviews with project leaders of solidarity projects	5 project leaders (of which 1 was also interviewed being a coordinator of volunteering projects)
Individual participants	4 participants
Non-participating organisations	6 organisations

Annex B – Online survey – volunteering projects

For this study, we have conducted an online survey under project leaders of both volunteering and solidarity projects. With regards to volunteering projects, we received answers from 21 out of 53 project leaders, giving a response rate of almost 40%.

Background of the project leader and project

FIGURE 1: HOW MANY ESC VOLUNTEER PROJECTS HAVE YOU BEEN INVOLVED IN AS PROJECT LEADER SINCE 2018?

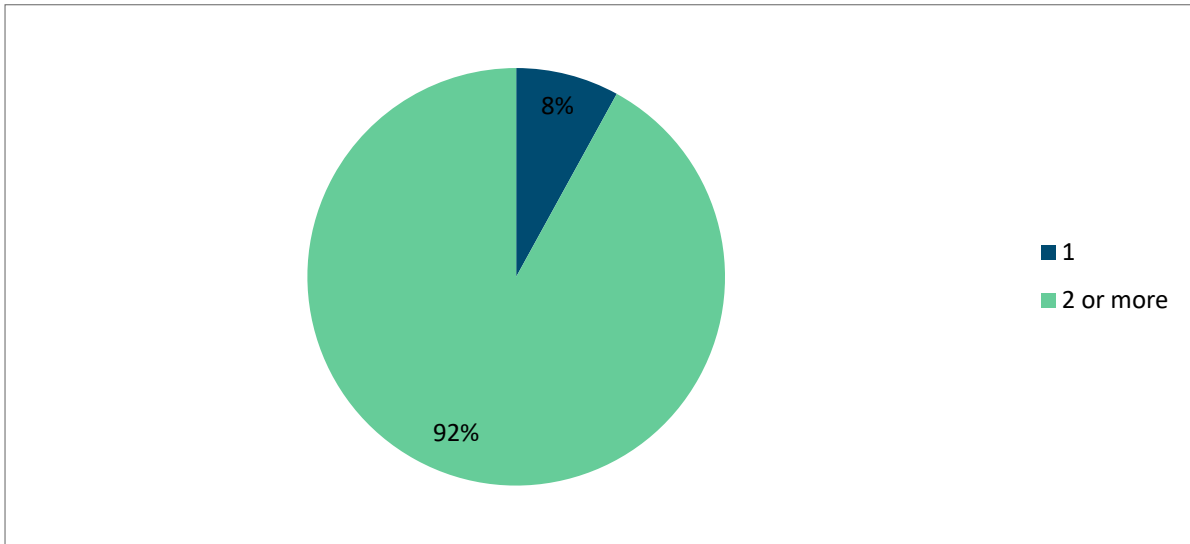


FIGURE 2: DID YOU DO THIS PROJECT FROM A ROLE AS A SENDING OR RECEIVING ORGANISATION?

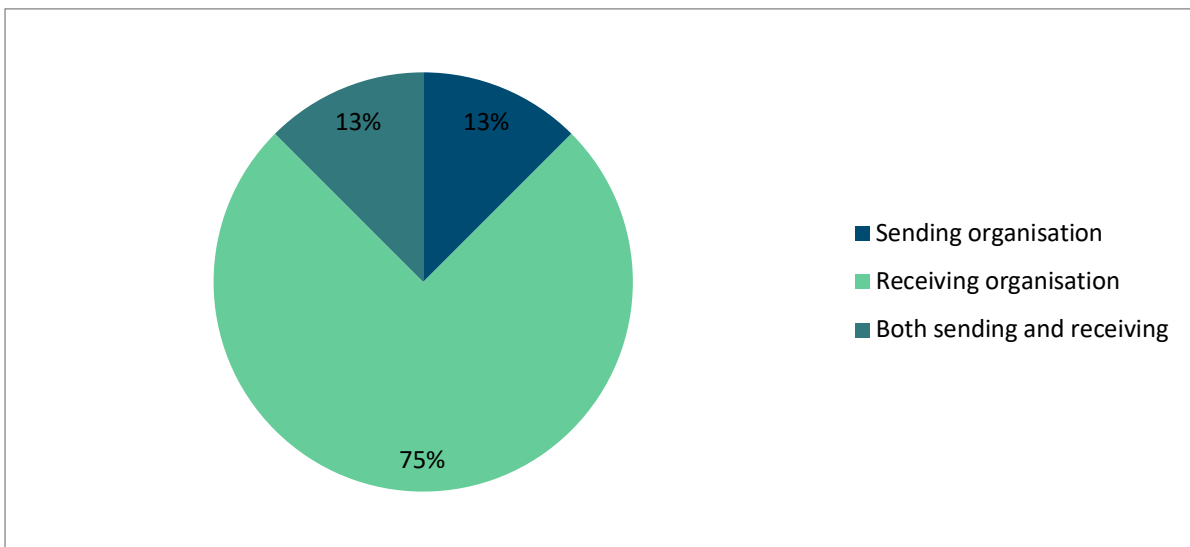


FIGURE 3: IN WHICH YEAR DID THE PROJECT START?

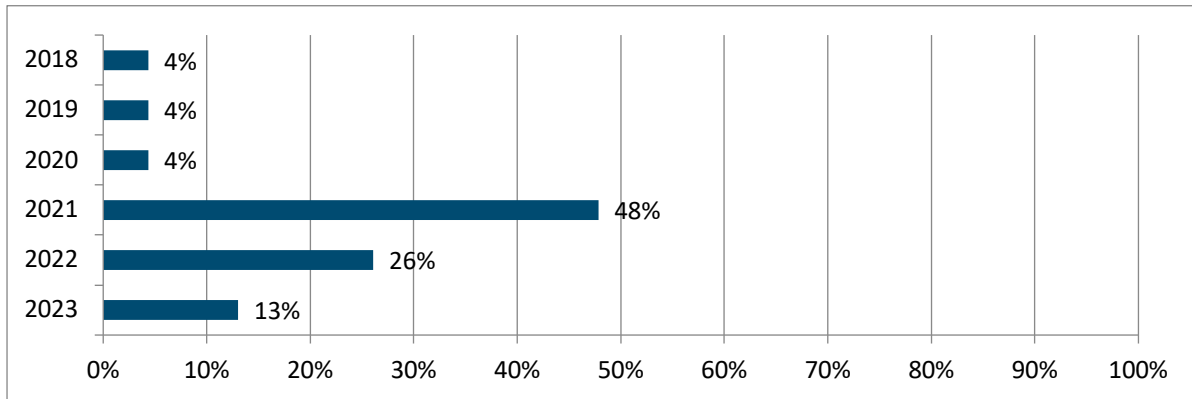


FIGURE 4: WHICH SOCIAL CHALLENGE DID THE PROJECT FOCUS ON?

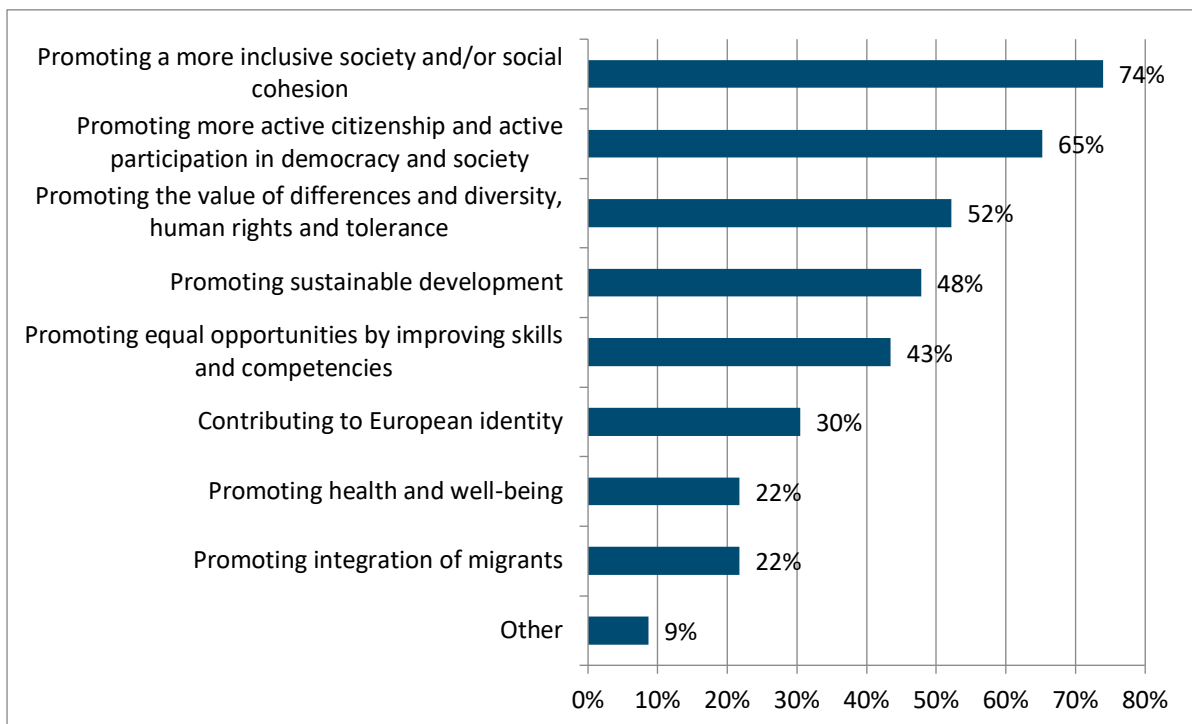


FIGURE 5: HAVE THE ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE PROJECT BEEN CARRIED OUT AS ORIGINALLY PLANNED?

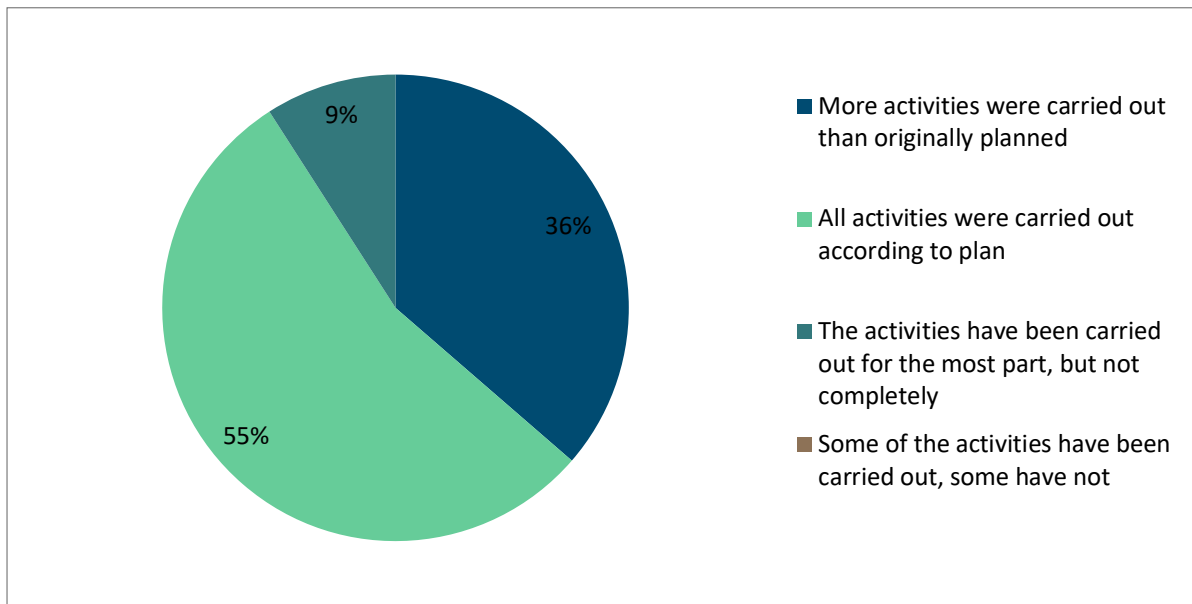
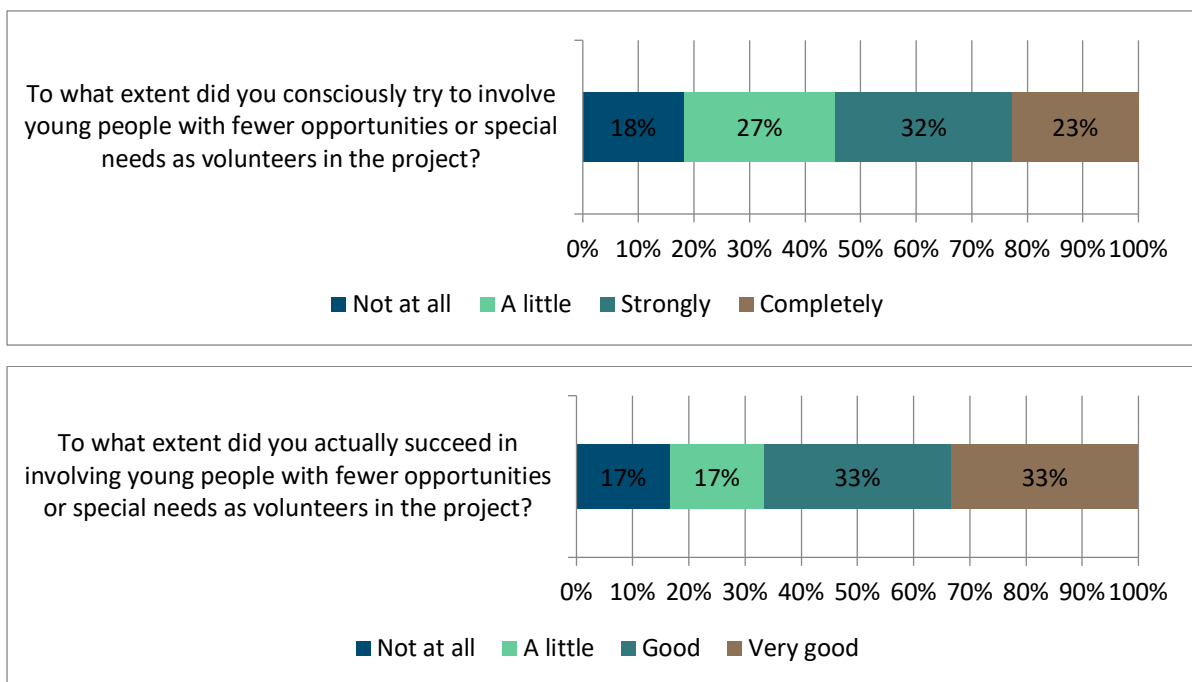
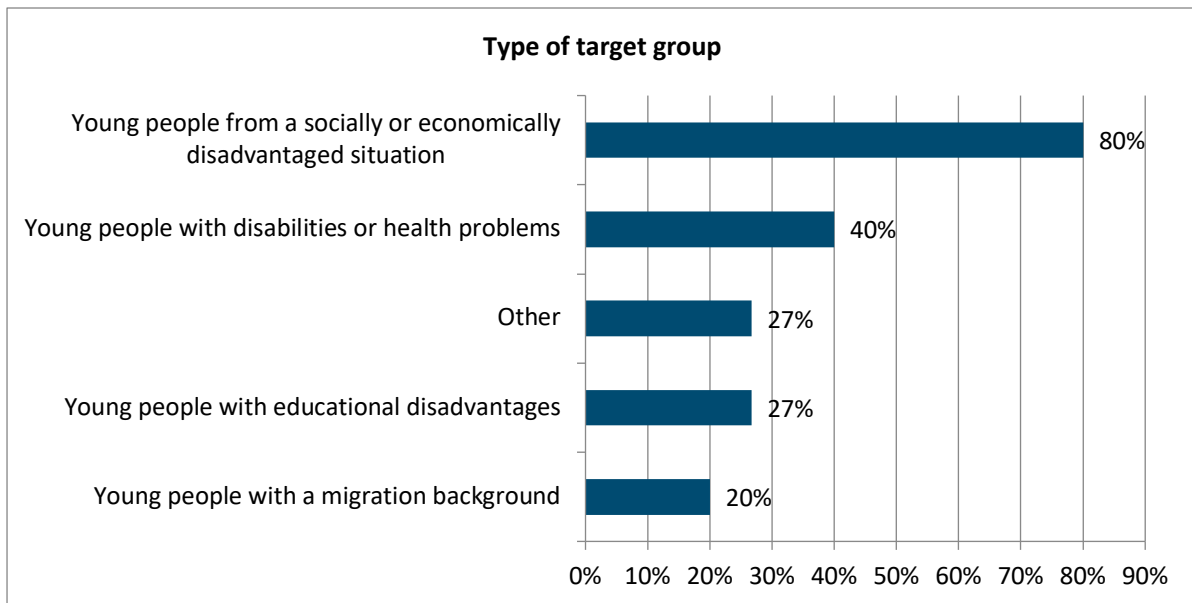


FIGURE 6: INVOLVEMENT OF YOUTH WITH FEWER OPPORTUNITIES





Impact of the project

FIGURE 7: TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU (DIS)AGREE WITH THE STATEMENTS PRESENTED BELOW ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE ESC PROJECT TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PARTICIPATING YOUNG PEOPLE?

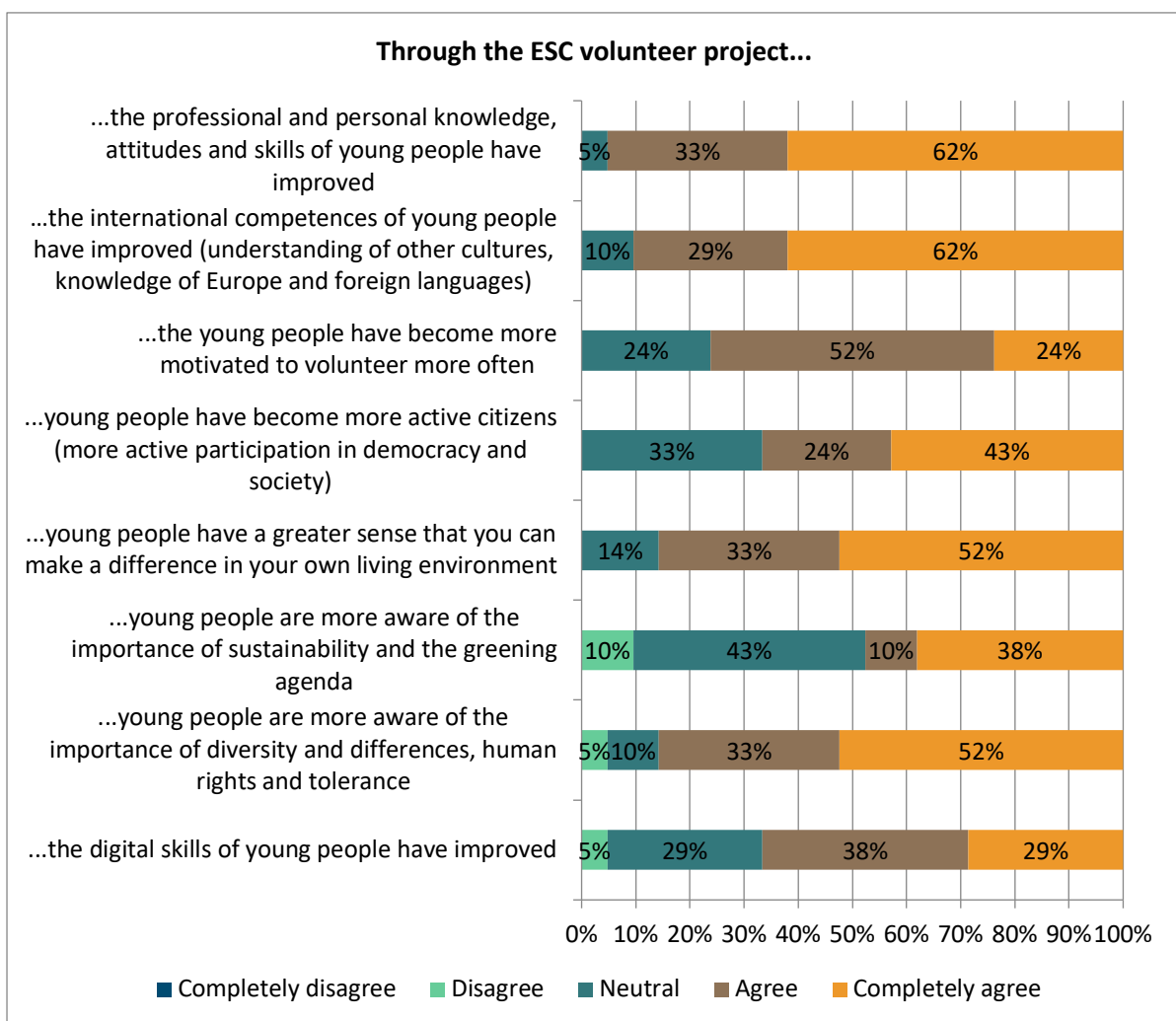


FIGURE 8: TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE STATEMENTS PRESENTED BELOW ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE ESC PROJECT TO THE ENVIRONMENT WHERE THE PROJECT TOOK PLACE?

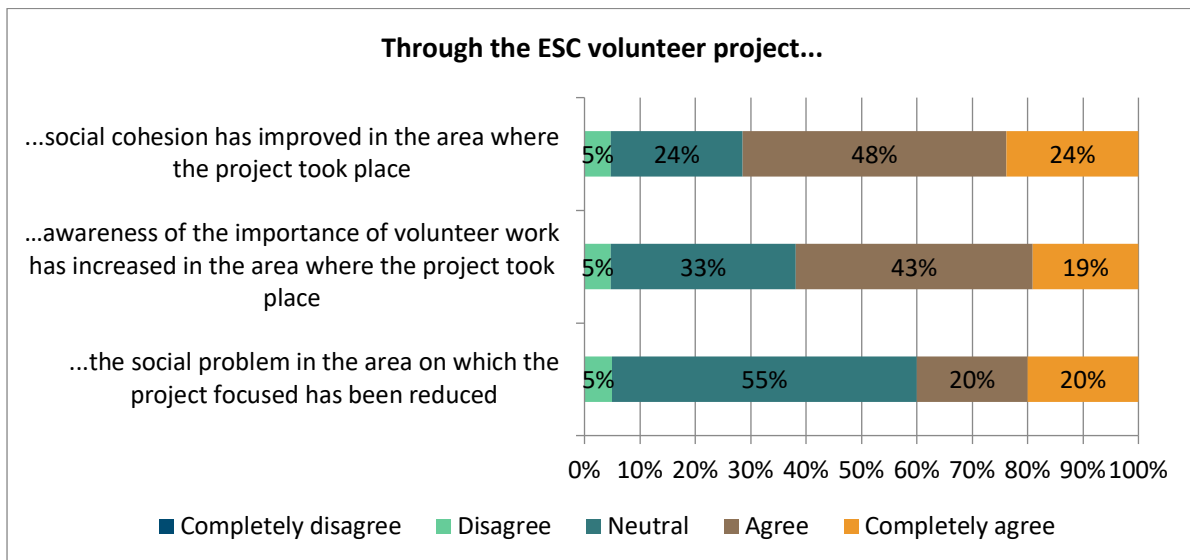


FIGURE 9: TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE STATEMENTS PRESENTED BELOW ABOUT PARTICIPATION IN THE ESC PROGRAMME FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUR ORGANISATION?

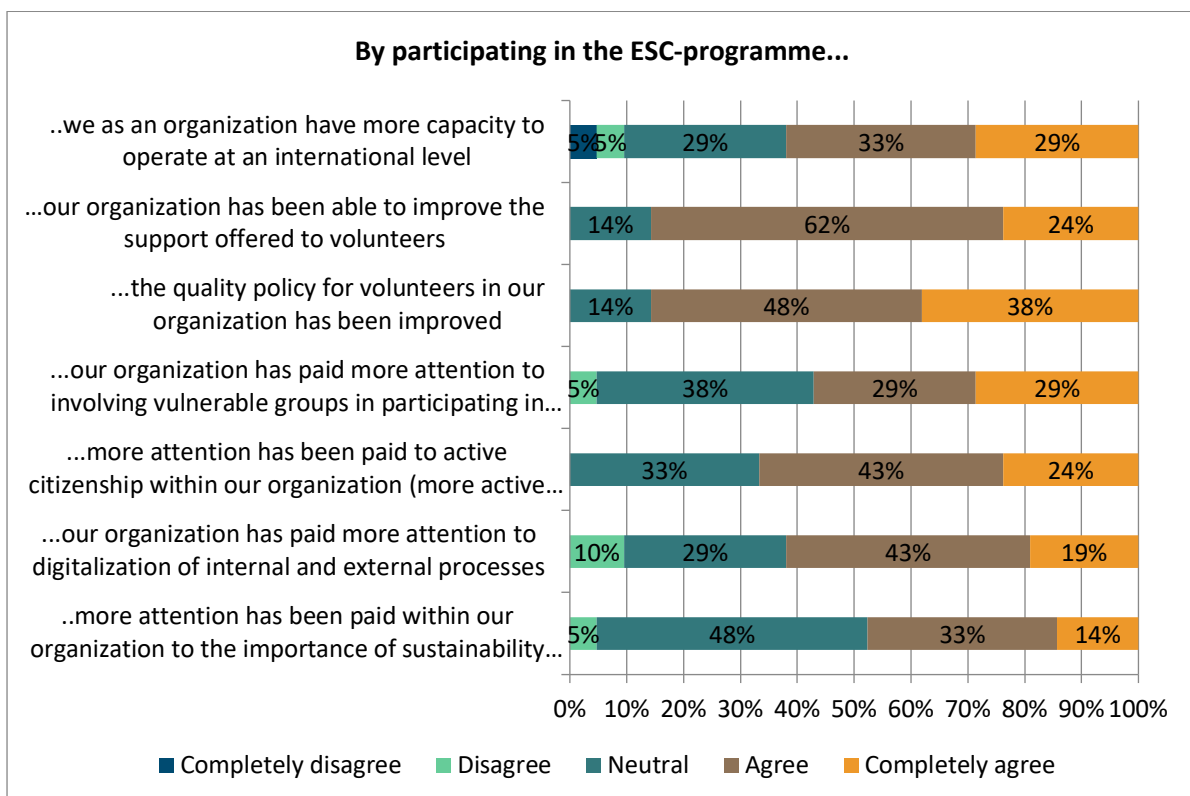


FIGURE 10: EXTENT TO WHICH RESULTS AND GOALS WERE ACHIEVED

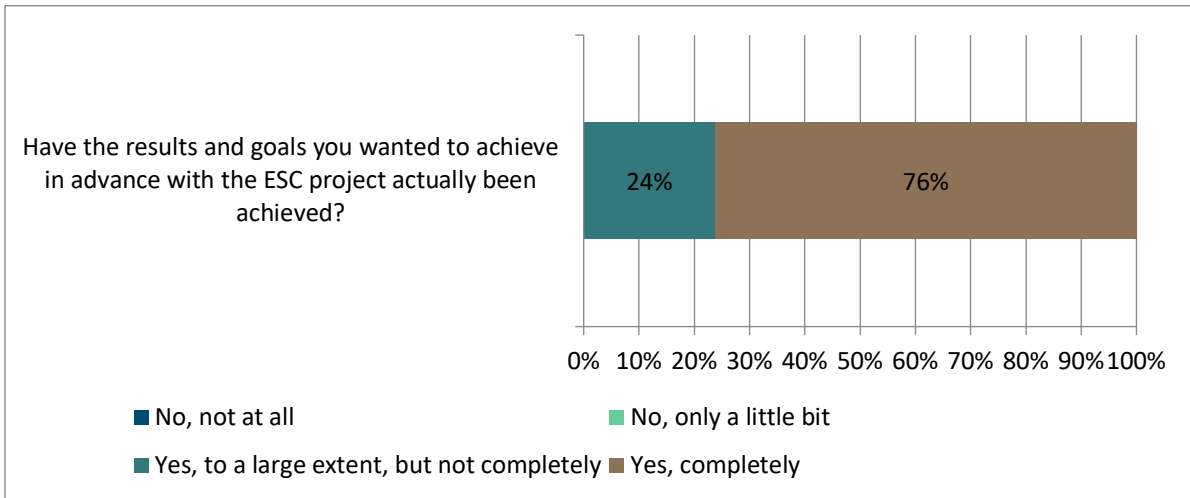


FIGURE 11: WAS THE FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTION FROM ESC SUFFICIENT TO CARRY OUT THE PROJECT?

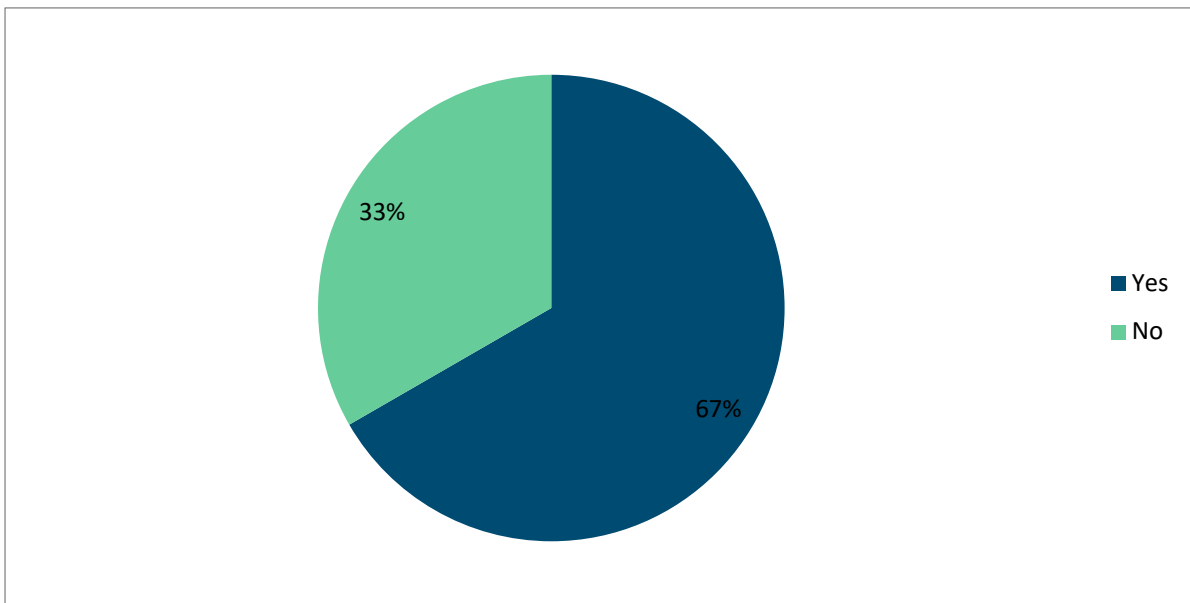


FIGURE 12: HOW DO YOU PERCEIVE THE RELATION BETWEEN THE INVESTMENT IN TERMS OF TIME AND MONEY AND THE RESULTS ACHIEVED?

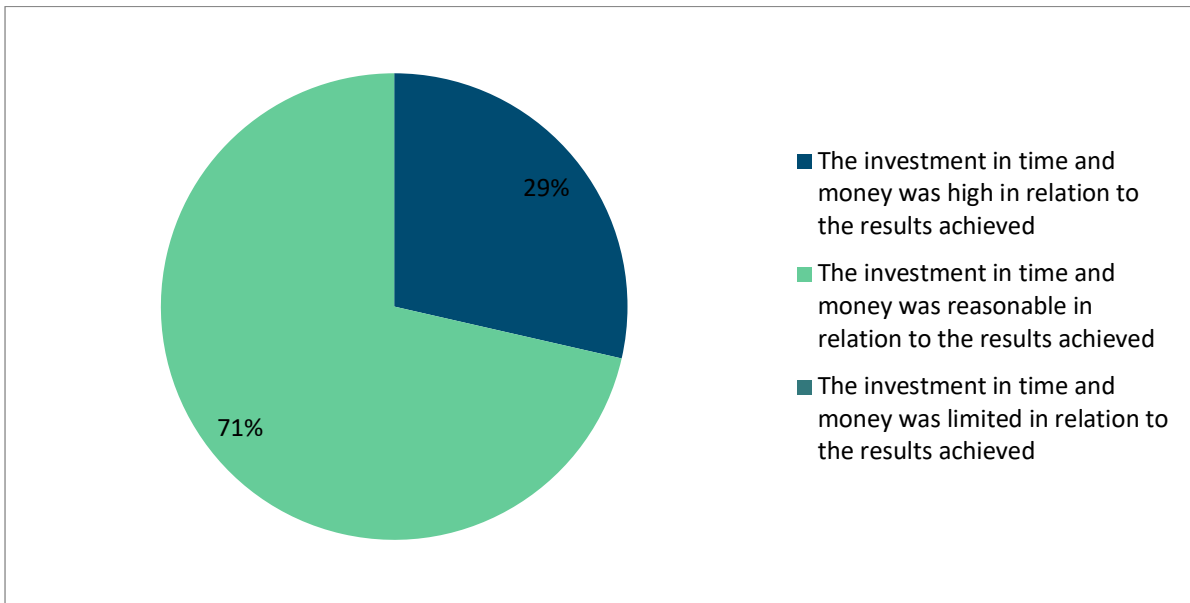


FIGURE 13: WOULD YOU HAVE CARRIED OUT THE PROJECT WITHOUT ESC?

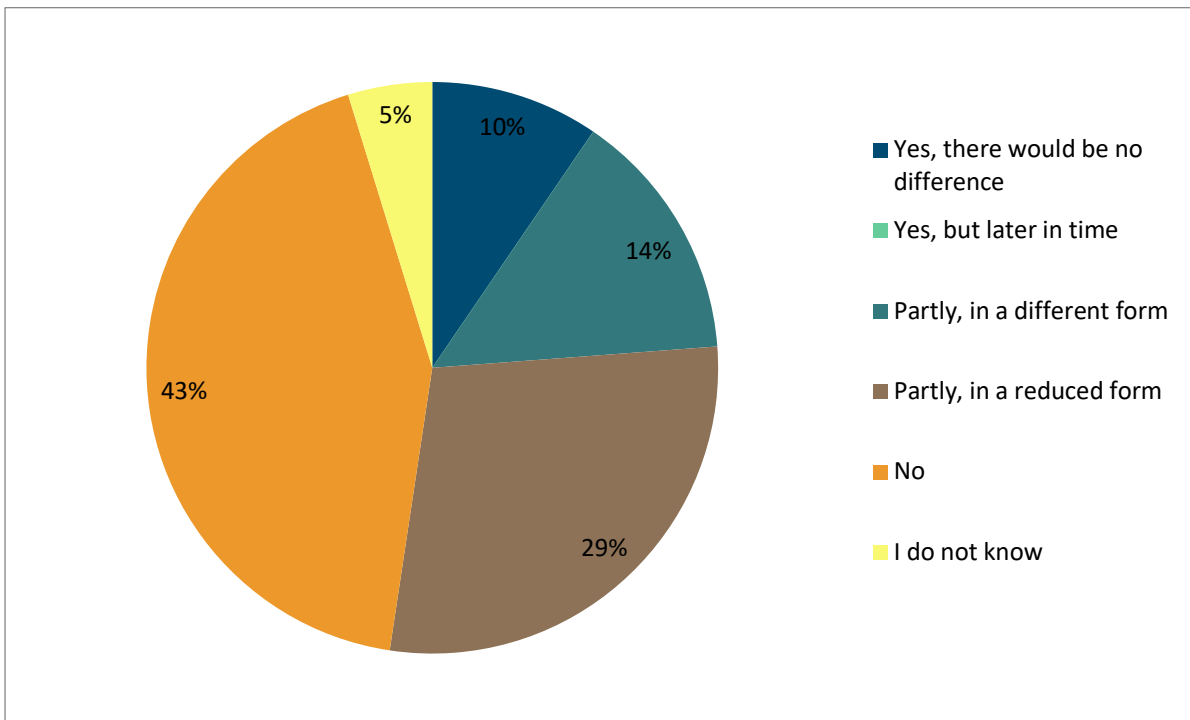


FIGURE 14: IF SO, WHAT SOURCE OF FINANCING WOULD YOU USE IN THAT CASE?

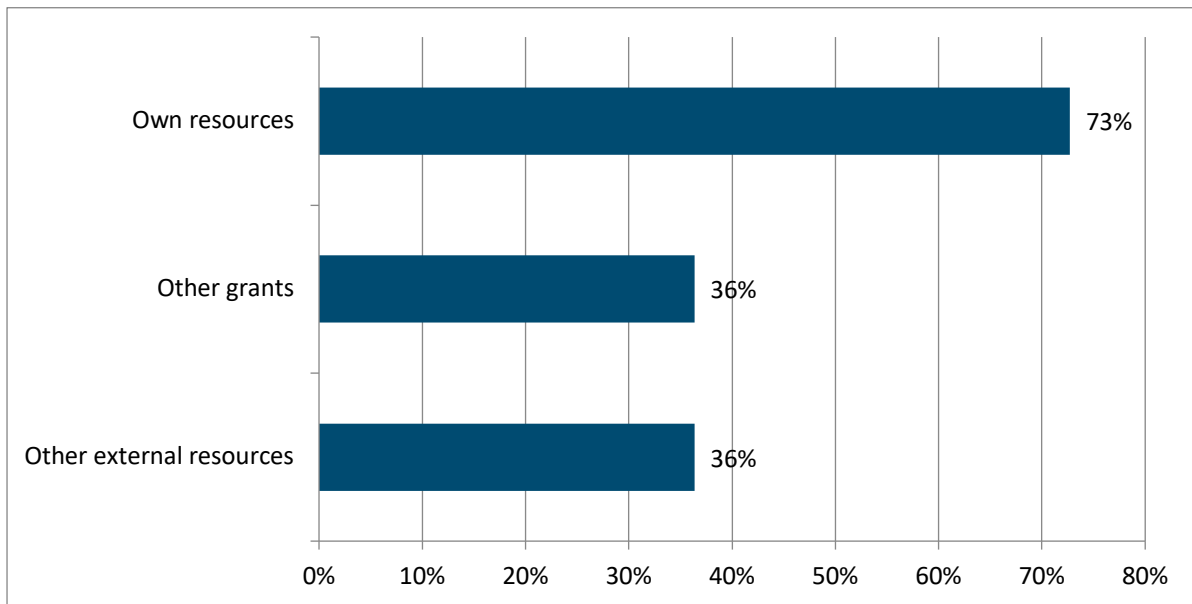


FIGURE 15: WOULD YOU SUBMIT A NEW APPLICATION IN THE FUTURE?

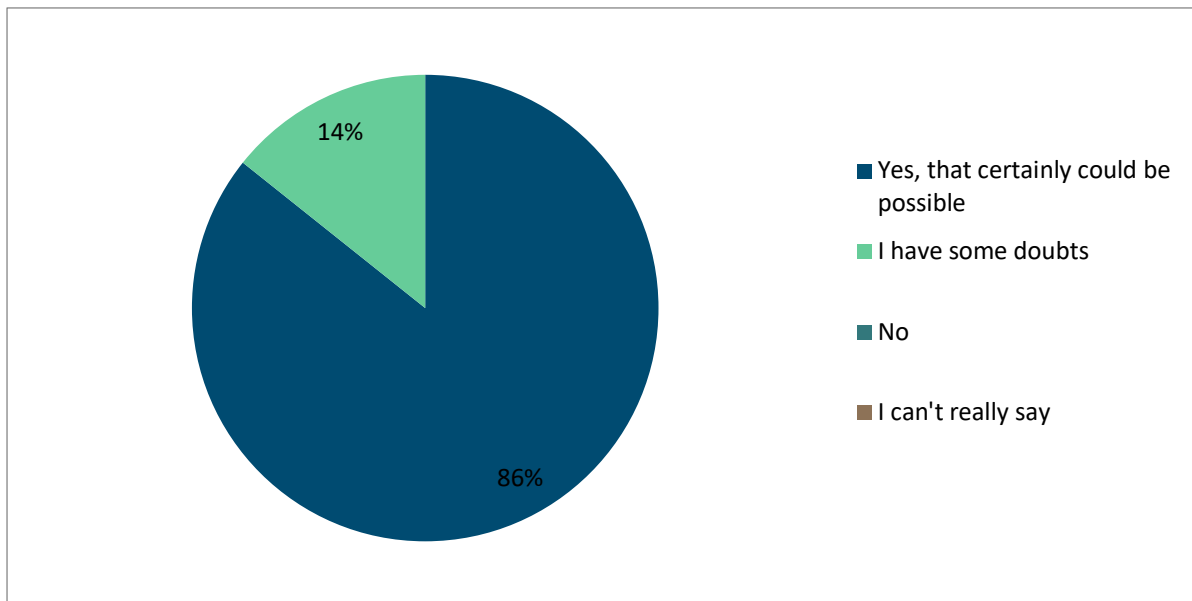
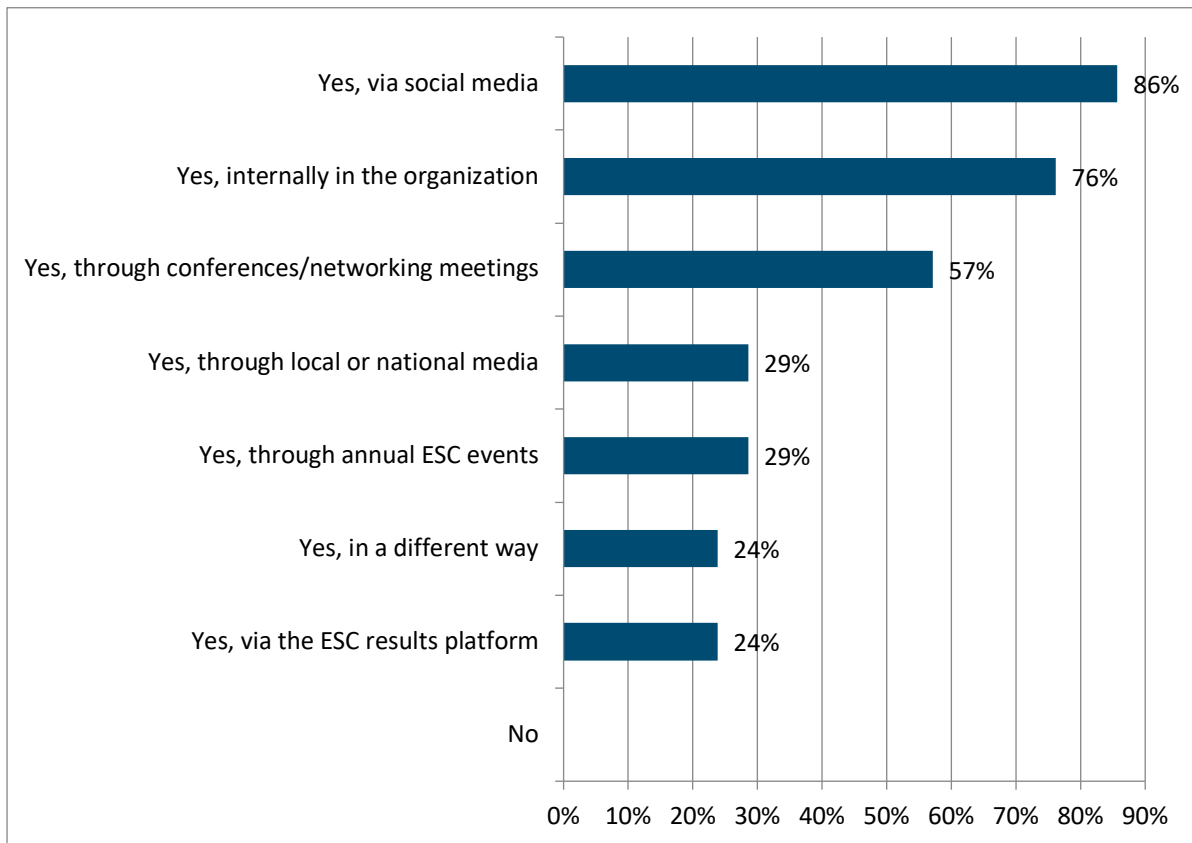


FIGURE 16: HAVE THE OUTCOMES OF THE PROJECT BEEN DISSEMINATED TO A WIDER AUDIENCE?



Implementation and administrative burden of the project/programme

FIGURE 17: HOW DID YOU PERCEIVE THE NATIONAL AGENCY'S SUPPORT IN:

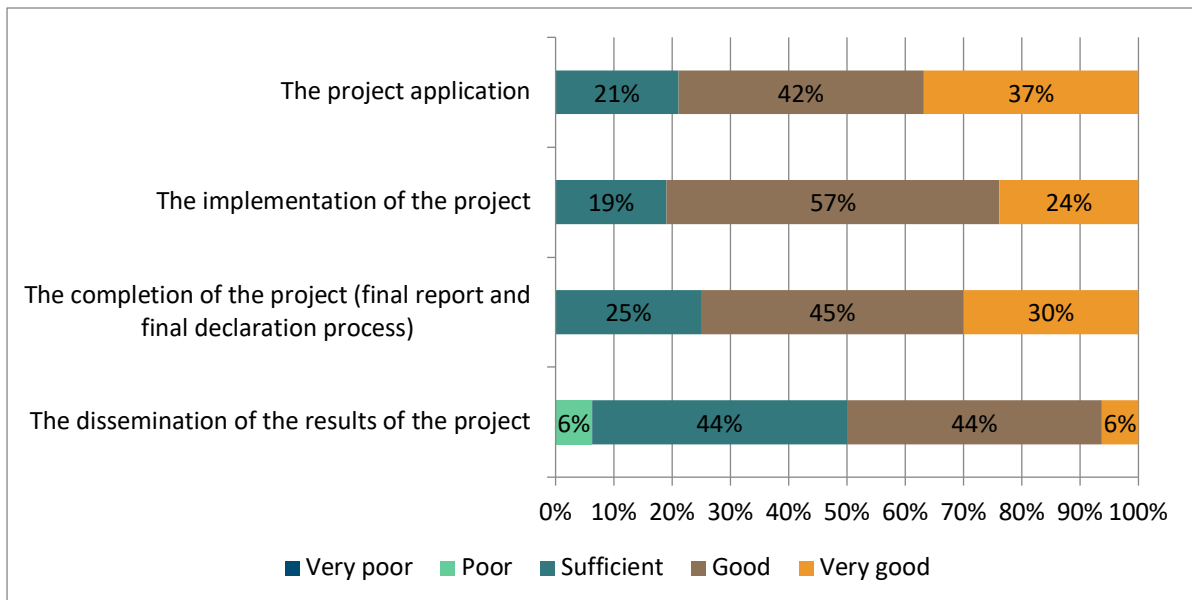


FIGURE 18: HOW DO YOU ASSESS THE FOLLOWING ASPECTS OF THE ESC PROGRAMME SURROUNDING THE APPLICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT?

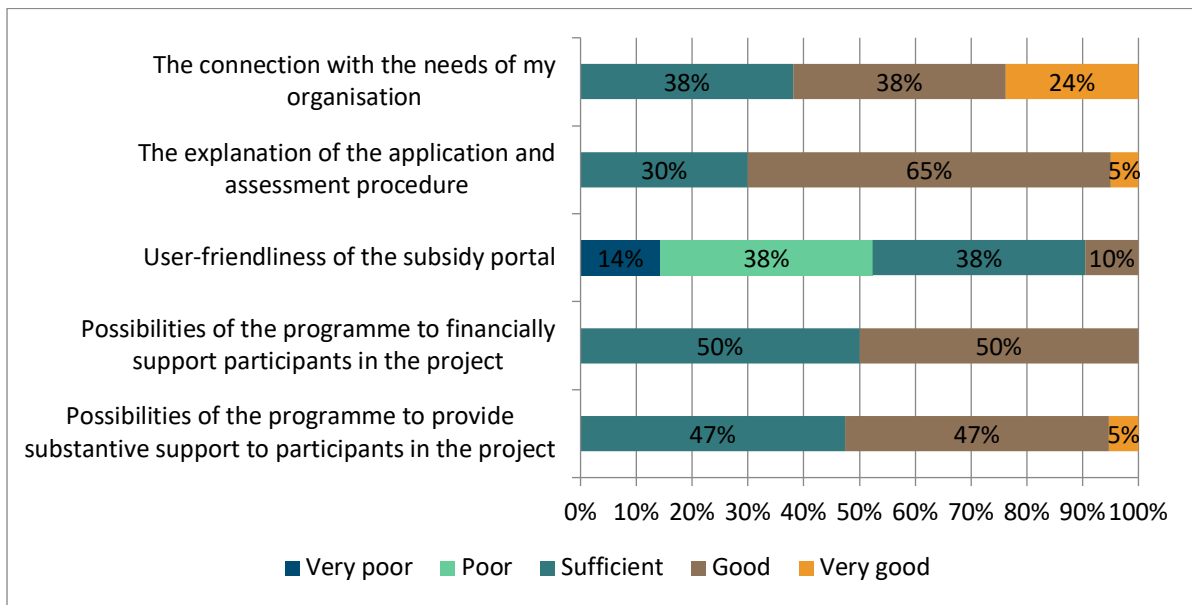


FIGURE 19: HOW (UN)CLEAR DID YOU FIND THE FOLLOWING ASPECTS OF THE ESC PROGRAMME REGARDING THE APPLICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT?

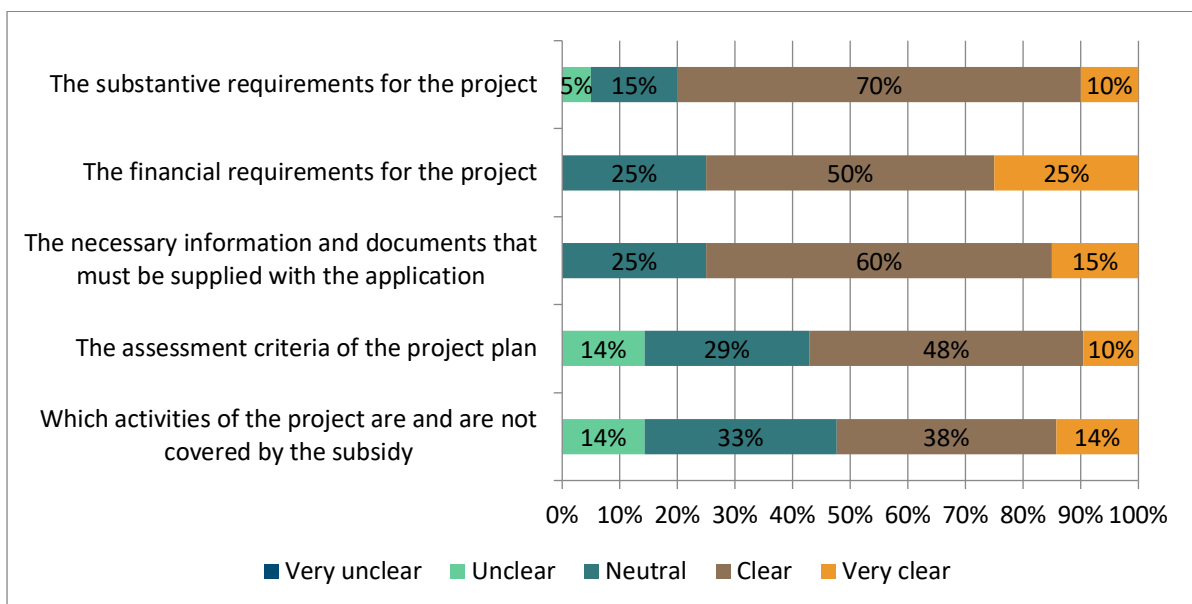
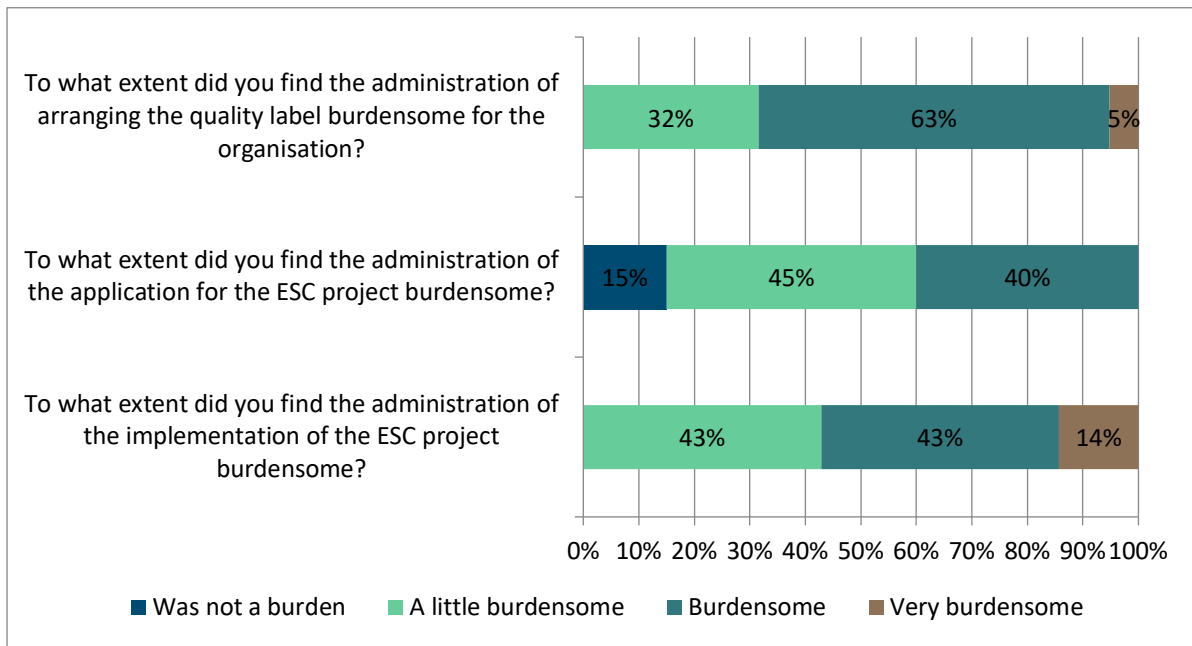


FIGURE 20: ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN OF DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF THE PROGRAMME



Annex C – Online survey – solidarity projects

For solidarity projects, we received answers from 15 out of 59 project leaders, a response rate of 25%.

Background of the project leader and project

FIGURE 21: HOW MANY ESC SOLIDARITY PROJECTS HAVE YOU BEEN INVOLVED IN AS PROJECT LEADER, GROUP LEADER OR ADMINISTRATIVE CONTACT PERSON SINCE 2018?

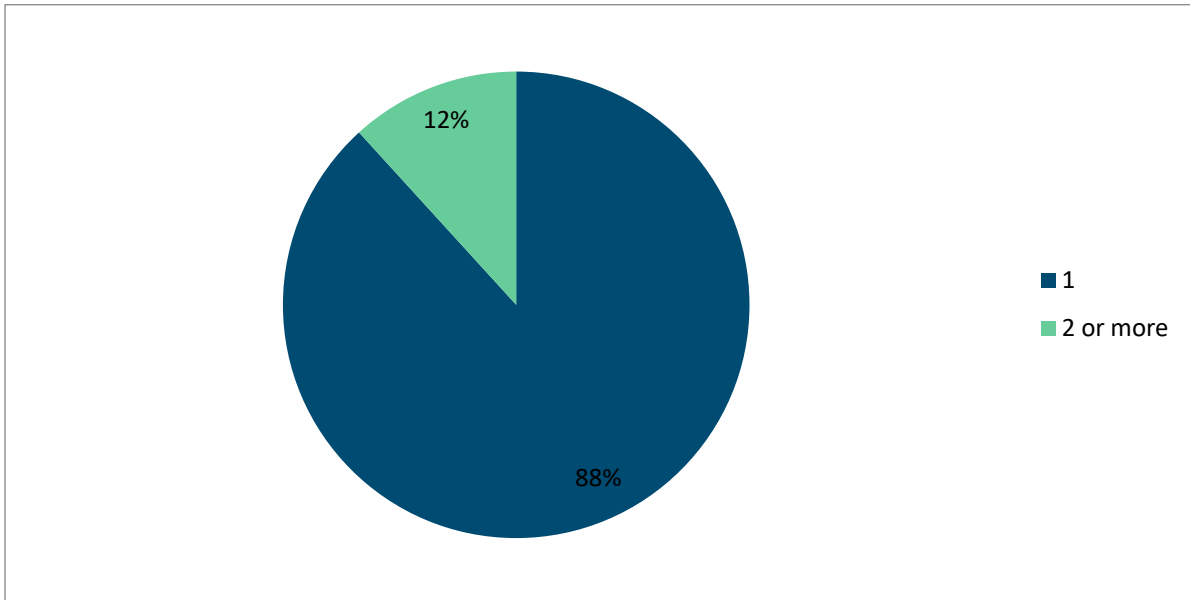


FIGURE 22: WHAT ROLE DID YOU HAVE IN THIS SOLIDARITY PROJECT?

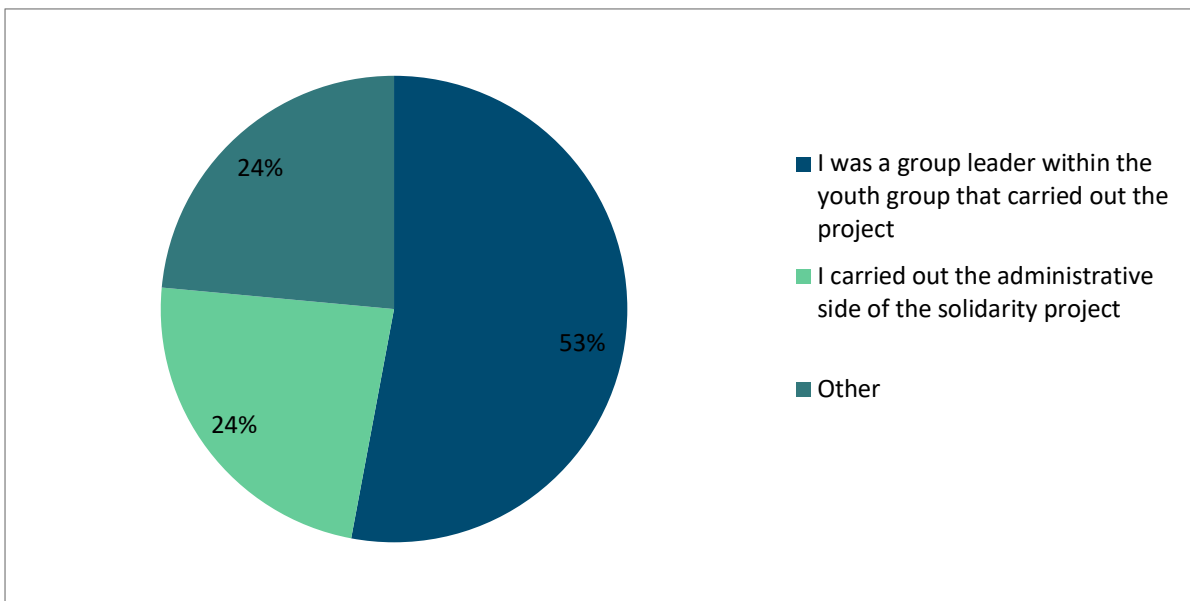


FIGURE 23: IN WHICH YEAR DID THE PROJECT START?

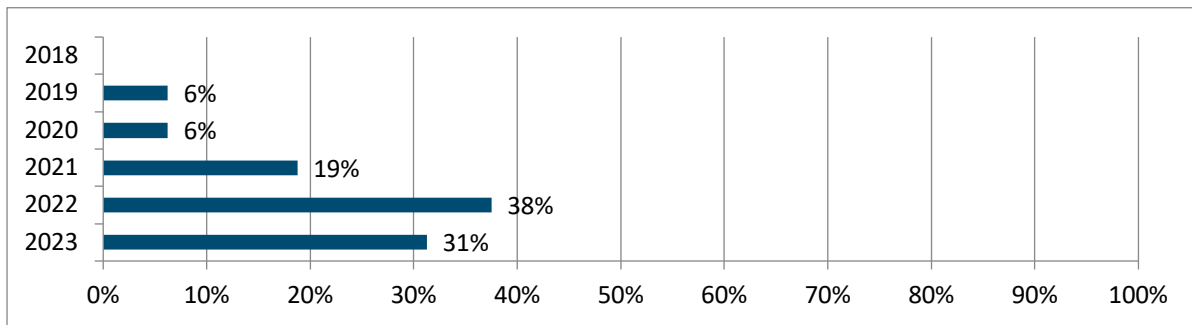


FIGURE 24: WHICH SOCIAL CHALLENGE DID THE PROJECT FOCUS ON?

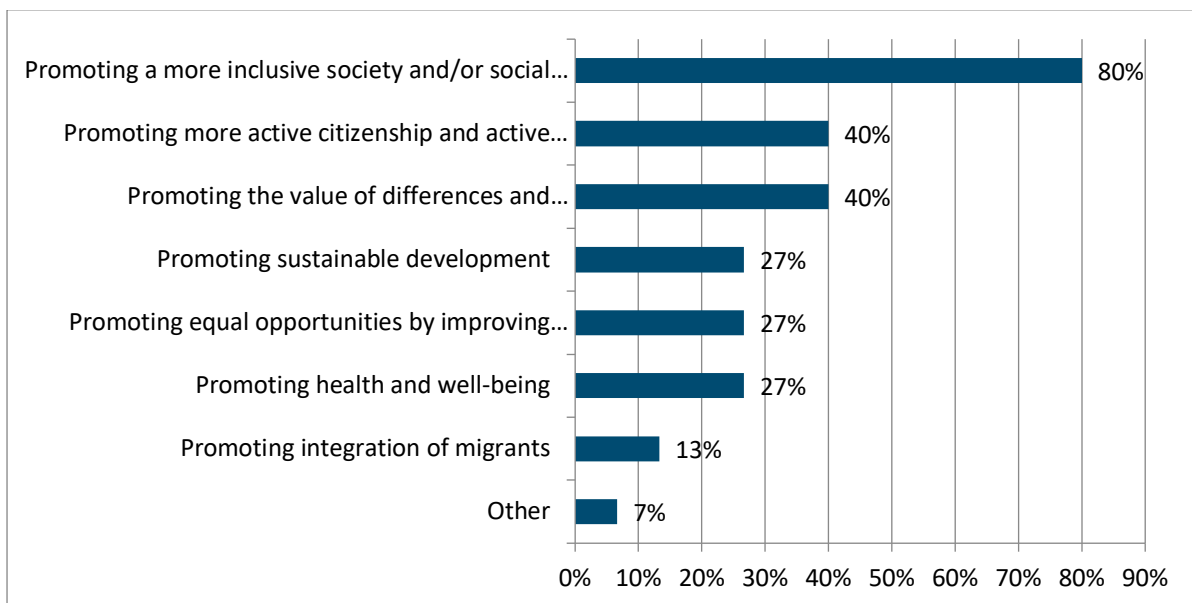


FIGURE 25: HAVE THE ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE PROJECT BEEN CARRIED OUT AS ORIGINALLY PLANNED?

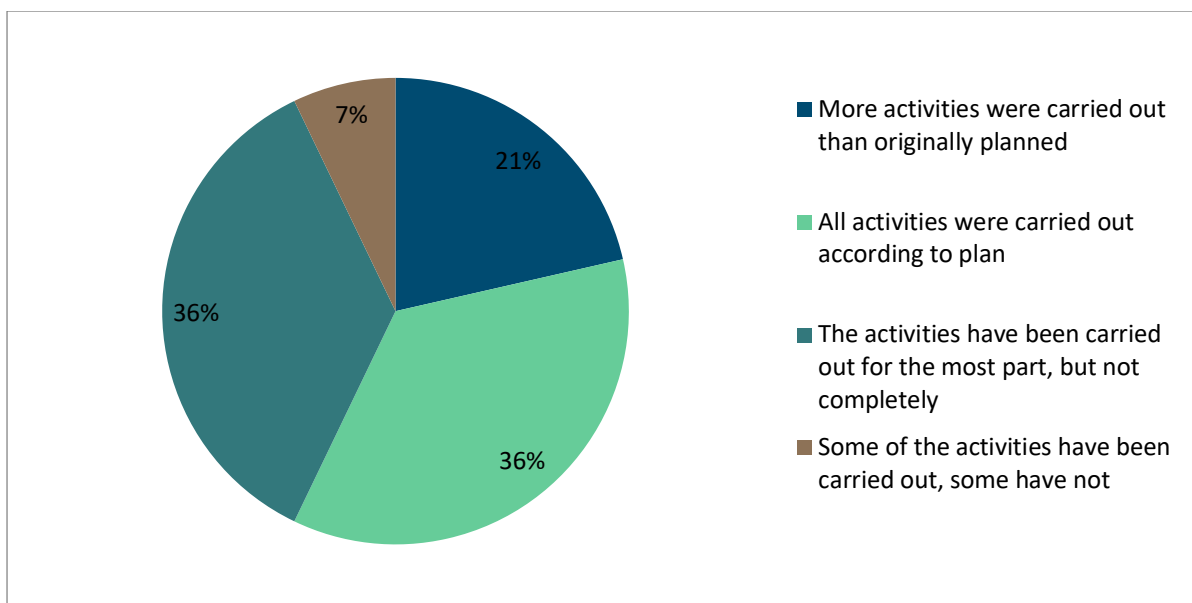
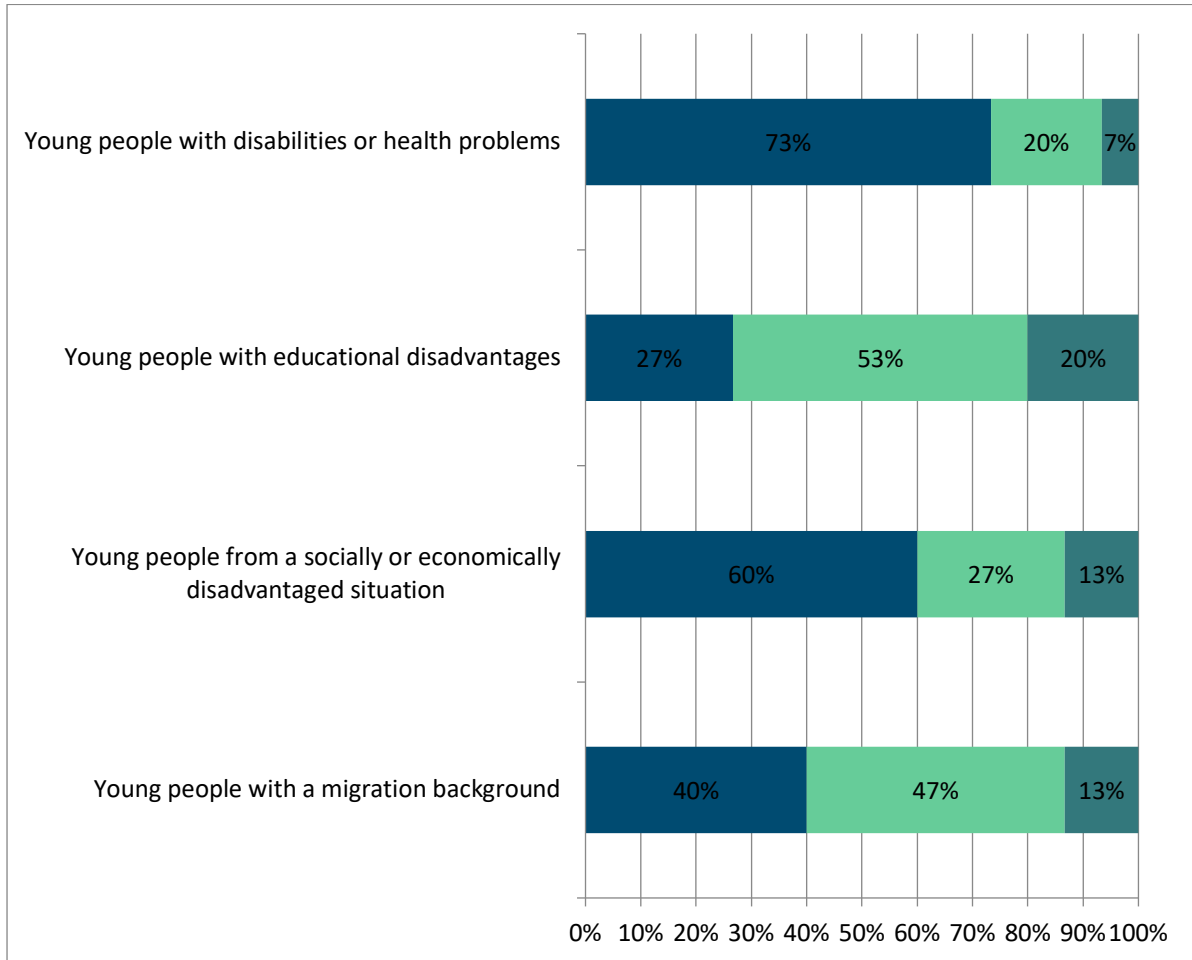


FIGURE 26: WERE THERE YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE PROJECT GROUP WITH ONE (OR MORE) OF THE FOLLOWING BACKGROUNDS?



Impact of the project

FIGURE 27: TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU (DIS)AGREE WITH THE STATEMENTS PRESENTED BELOW ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE ESC PROJECT TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PARTICIPATING YOUNG PEOPLE?

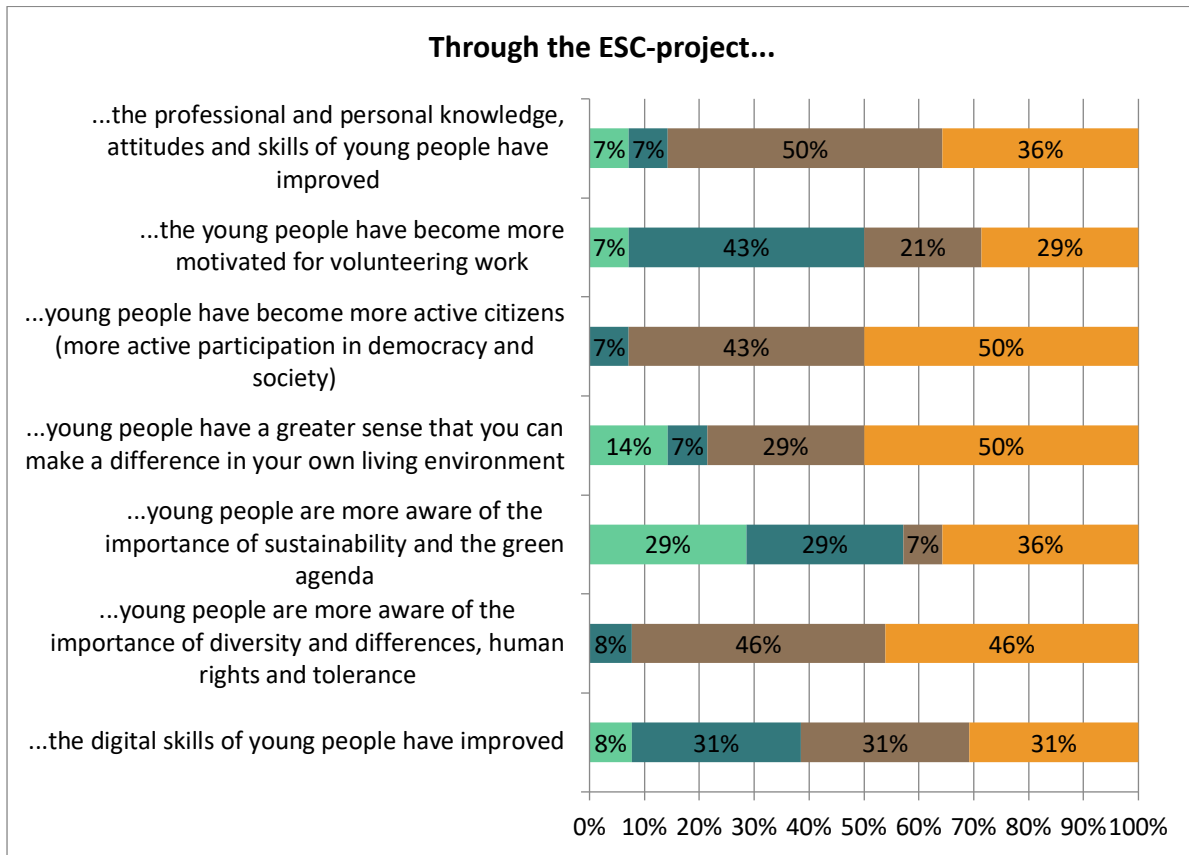


FIGURE 28: TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE STATEMENTS PRESENTED BELOW ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE ESC PROJECT TO THE ENVIRONMENT WHERE THE PROJECT TOOK PLACE?

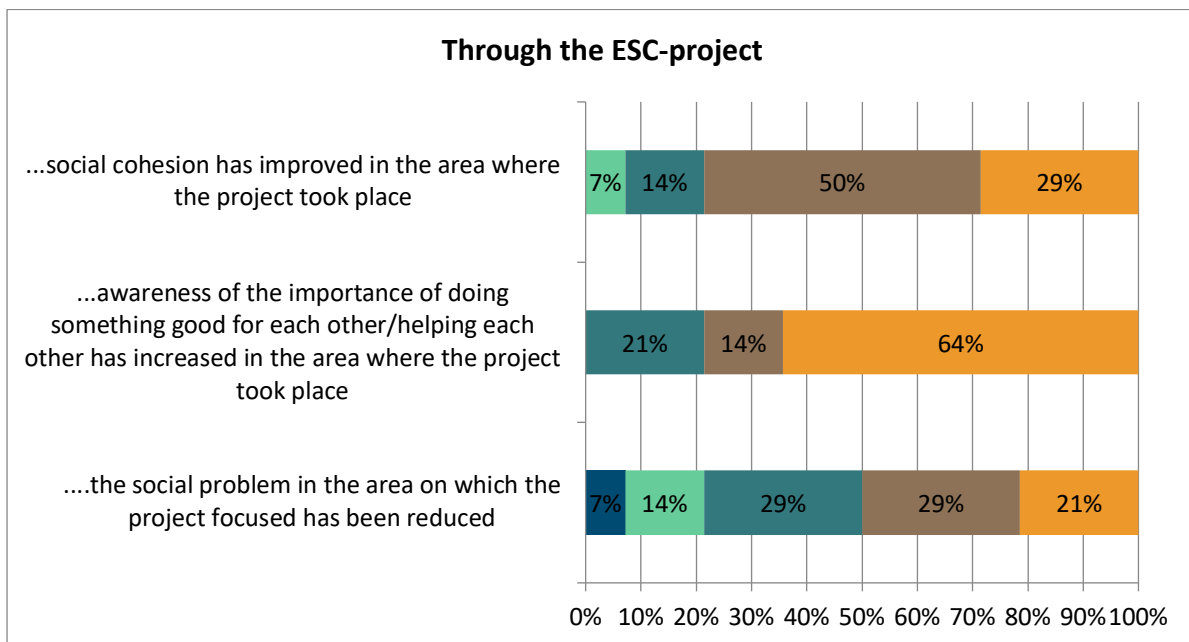


FIGURE 29: EXTENT TO WHICH RESULTS AND GOALS WERE ACHIEVED

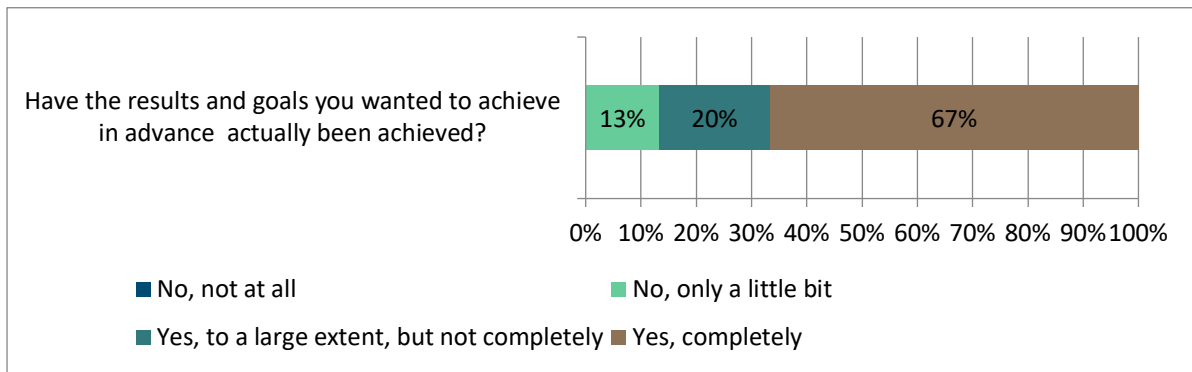


FIGURE 30: WAS THE FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTION FROM ESC SUFFICIENT TO CARRY OUT THE PROJECT?

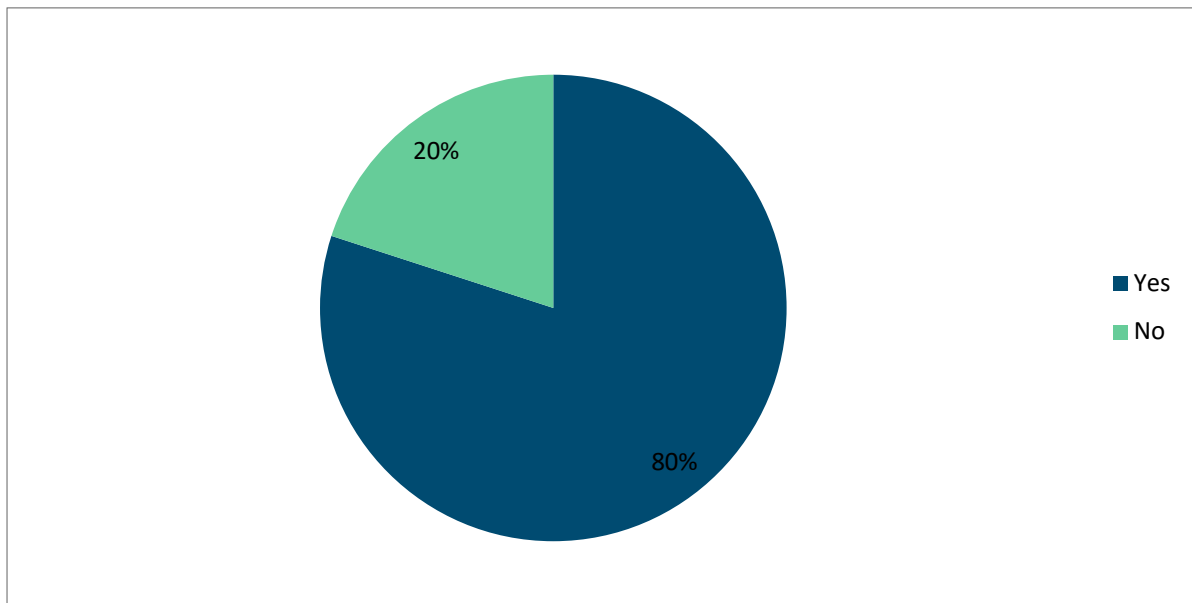


FIGURE 31: HOW DO YOU PERCEIVE THE RELATION BETWEEN THE INVESTMENT IN TERMS OF TIME AND MONEY AND THE RESULTS ACHIEVED?

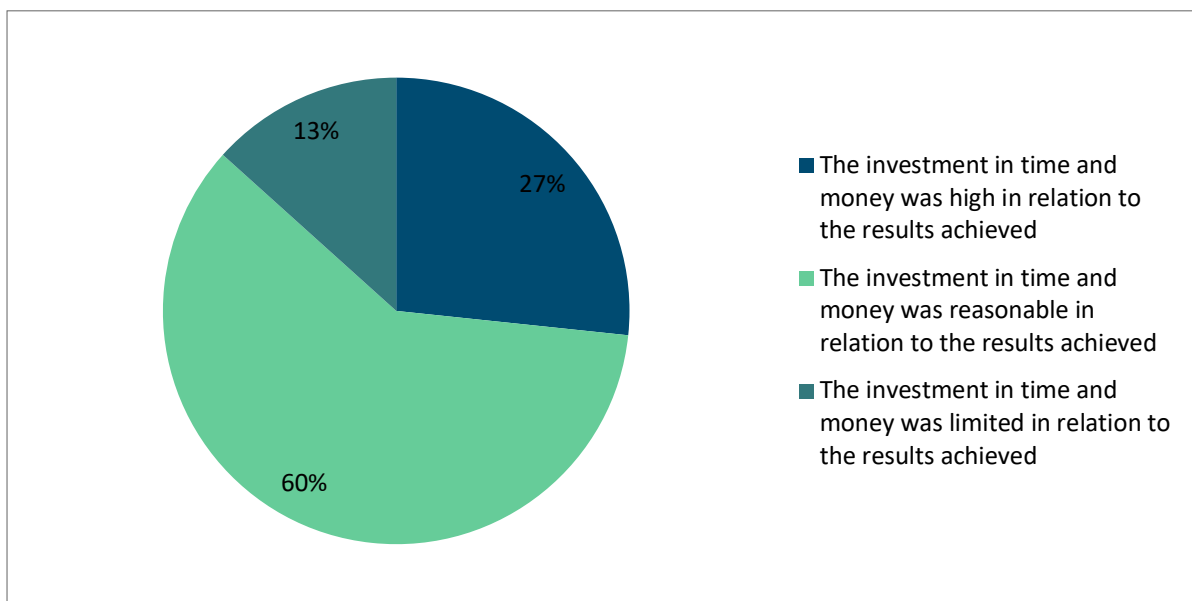


FIGURE 32: WOULD YOU HAVE CARRIED OUT THE PROJECT WITHOUT ESC?

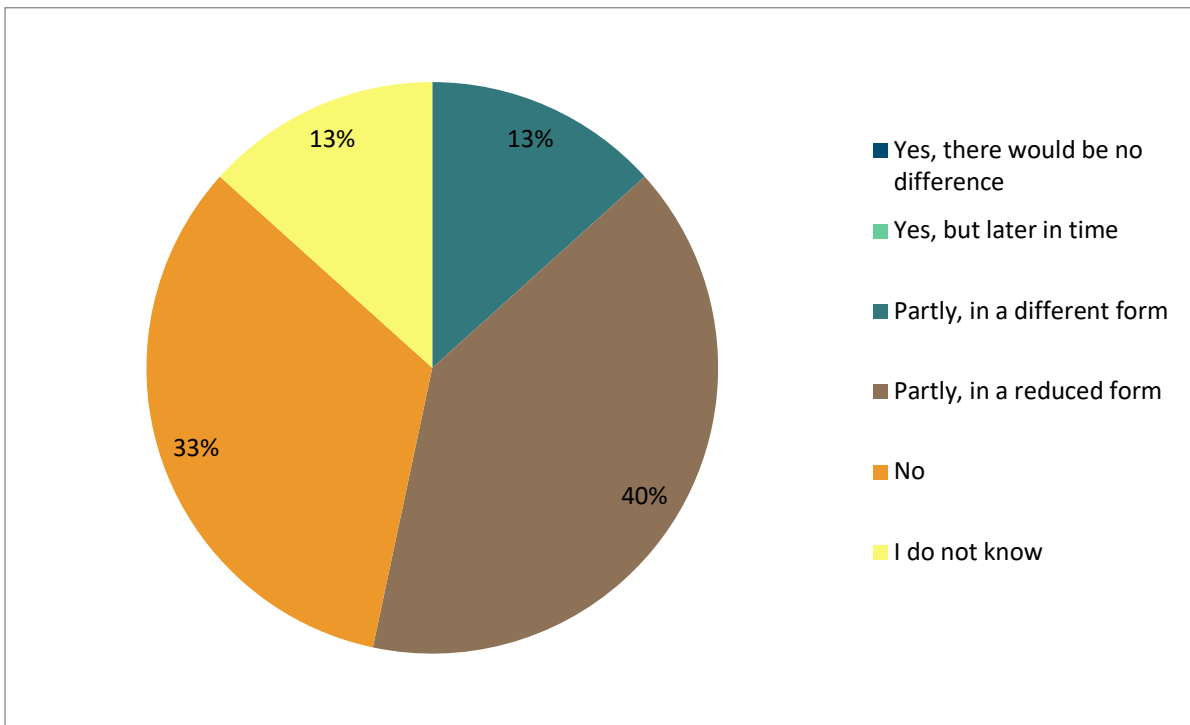


FIGURE 33: IF SO, WHAT SOURCE OF FINANCING WOULD YOU USE IN THAT CASE?

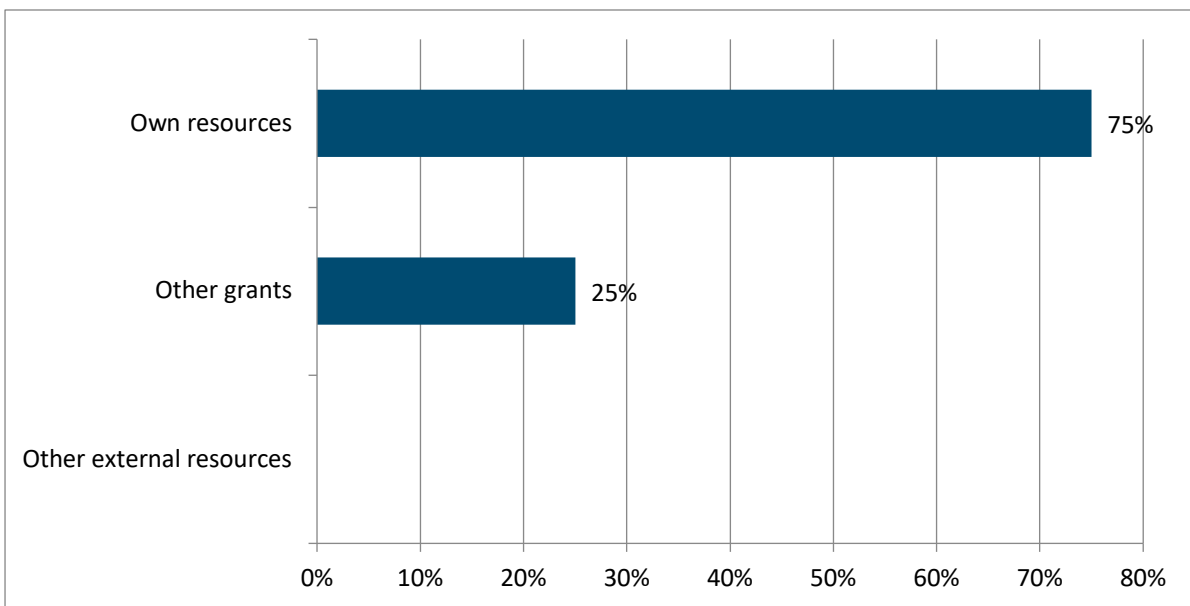


FIGURE 34: WOULD YOU SUBMIT A NEW APPLICATION IN THE FUTURE?

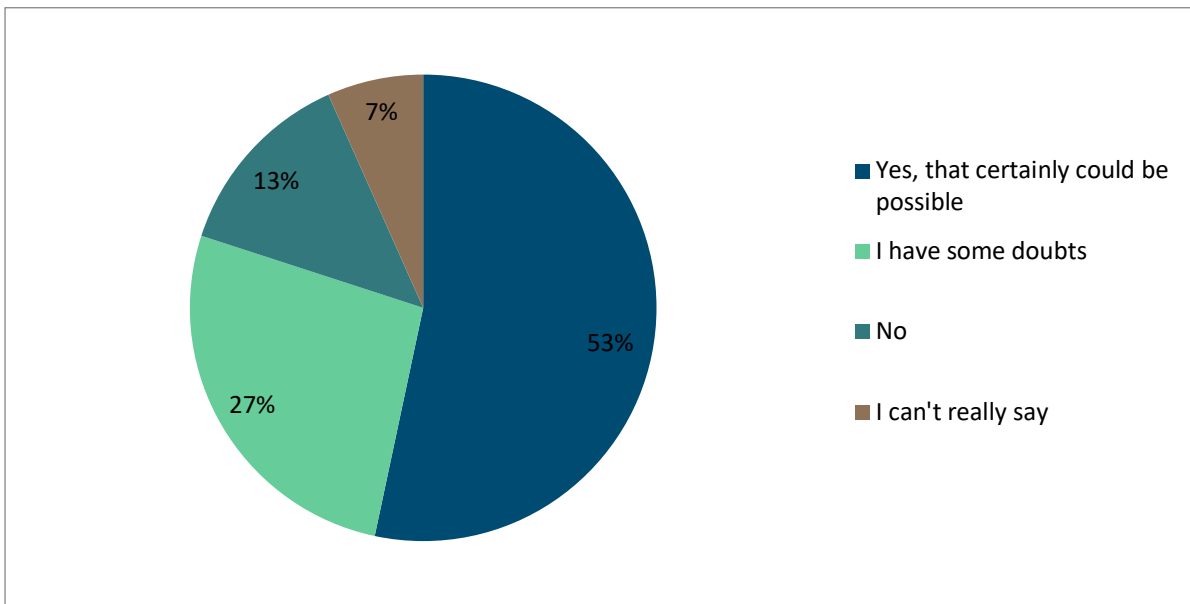
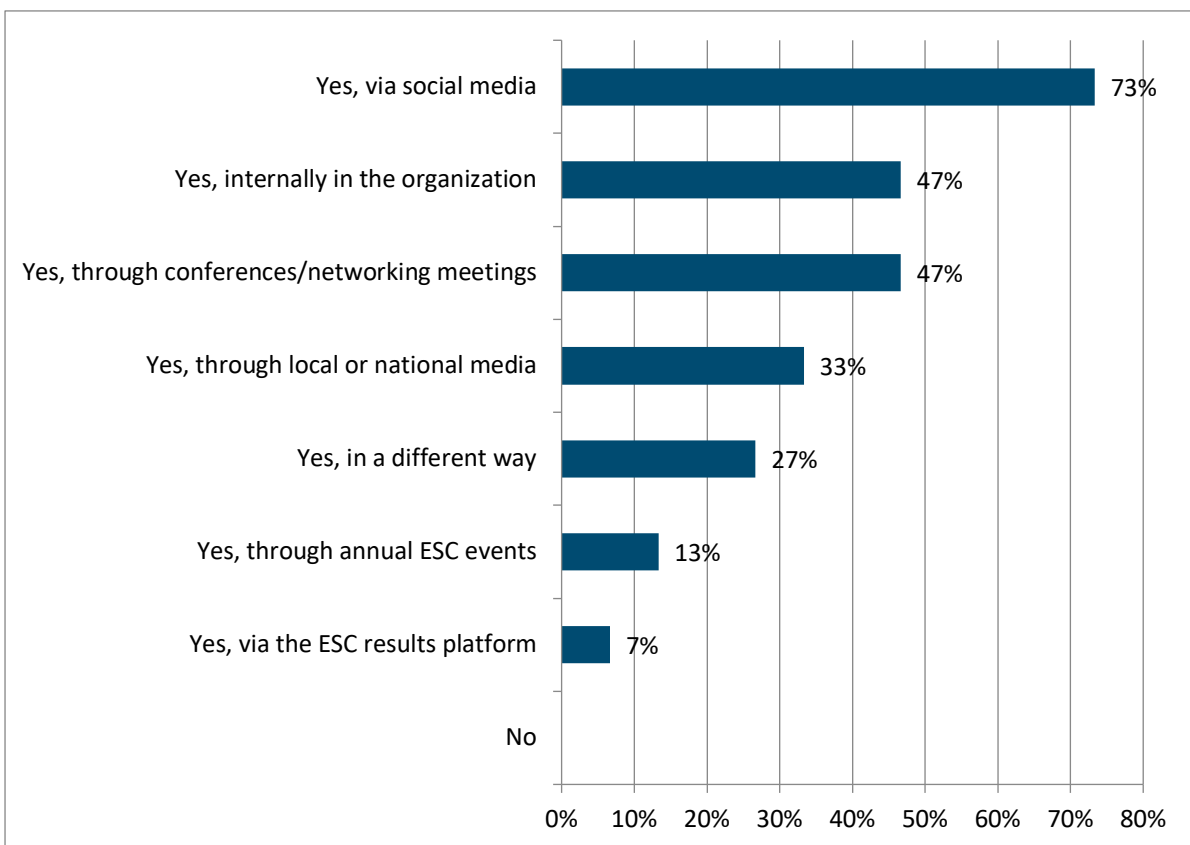


FIGURE 35: HAVE THE OUTCOMES OF THE PROJECT BEEN DISSEMINATED TO A WIDER AUDIENCE?



Implementation and administrative burden of the project/programme

FIGURE 36: HOW DID YOU PERCEIVE THE NATIONAL AGENCY'S SUPPORT IN:

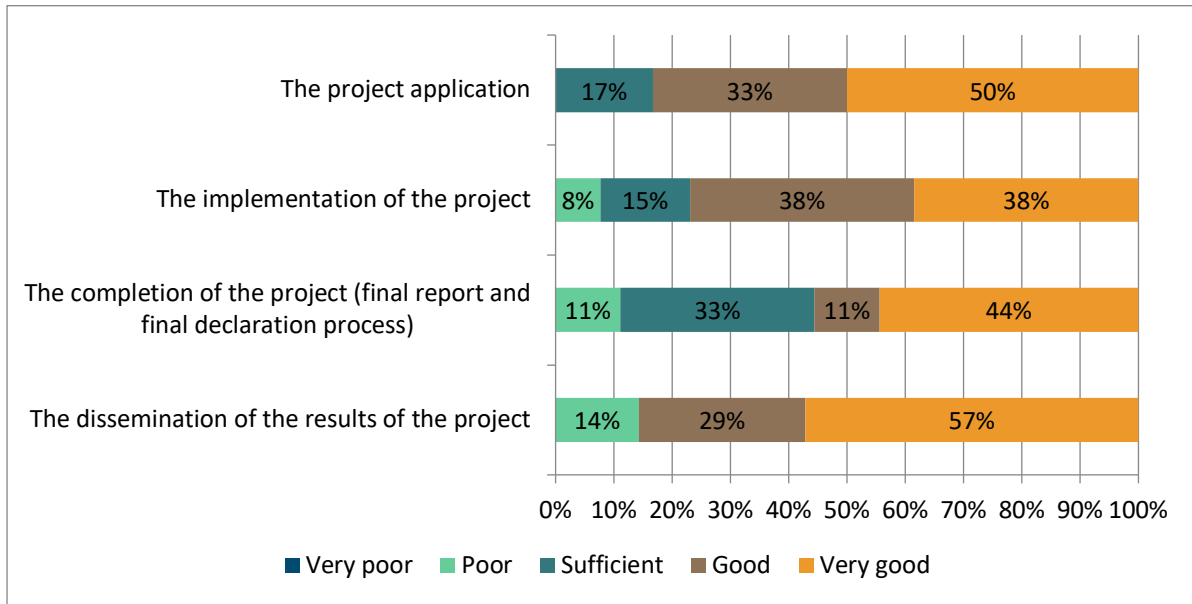


FIGURE 37: HOW DO YOU ASSESS THE FOLLOWING ASPECTS OF THE ESC PROGRAMME SURROUNDING THE APPLICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT?

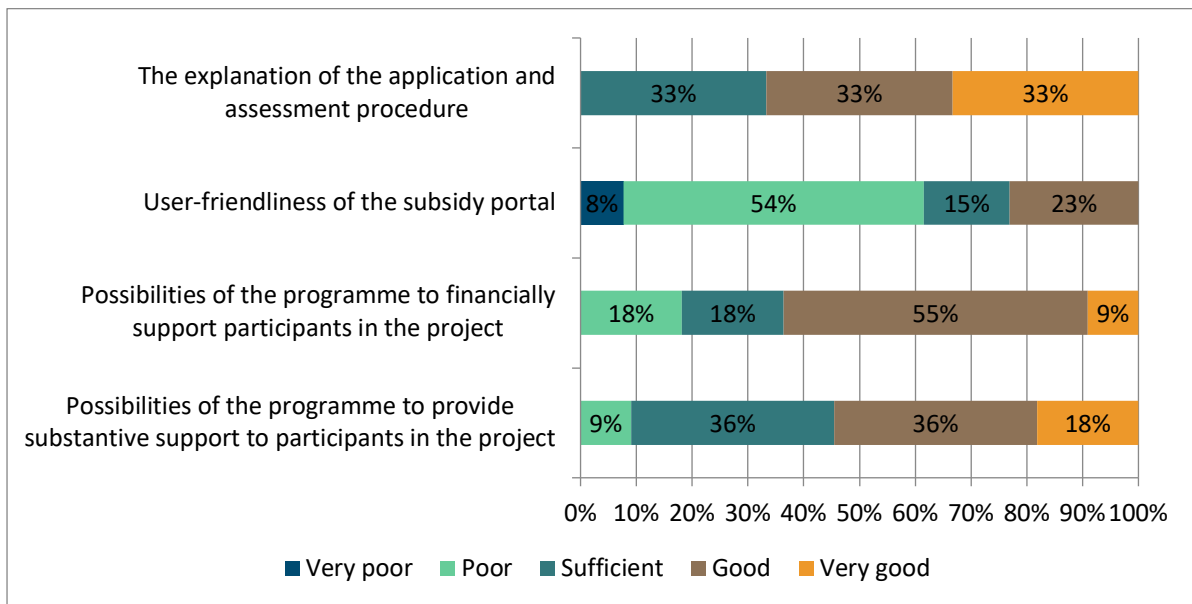


FIGURE 38: HOW (UN)CLEAR DID YOU FIND THE FOLLOWING ASPECTS OF THE ESC PROGRAMME REGARDING THE APPLICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT?

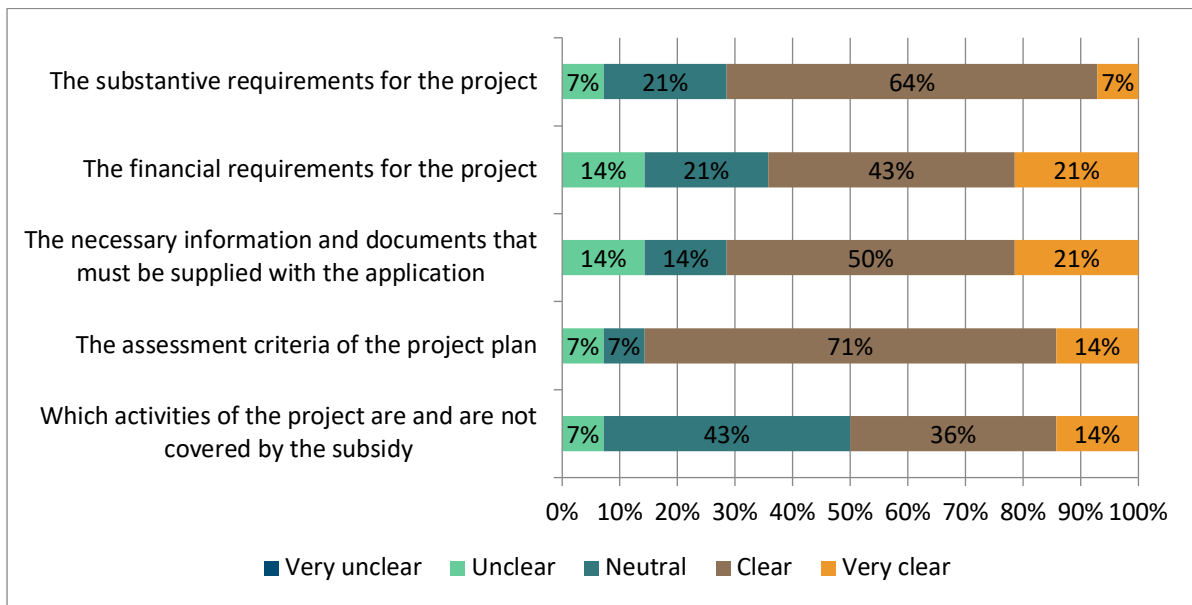
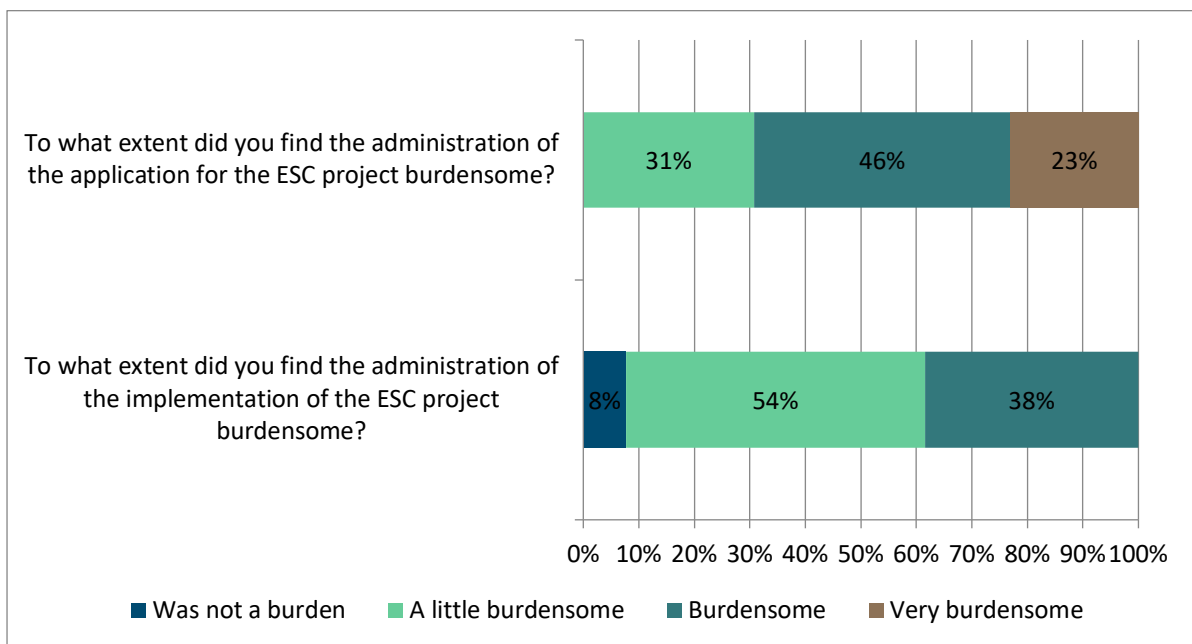


FIGURE 39: ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN OF DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF THE PROGRAMME



Annex D – Results survey of Ray-Network among participants ESC – volunteering projects

The RAY Network – Research-based Analysis and Monitoring of European Youth Programmes – is an open and self-governed European research network. The idea is to have joint transnational research activities related to the Erasmus+ Youth in Action programme and the European Solidarity Corps. The activities include surveys among participants and project leaders.

For this Annex we use the data of a survey among individual participants who participated in volunteering projects of ESC during the current programme (2021-2023). From the whole survey, we have selected participants who joined a programme in which a Dutch organisation was a receiving or sending organisation. In total 112 respondents were selected. In the tables below we present a selection of results of the survey. For some question we make a distinction between participants with the Dutch NA being involved in a sending or receiving role.

TABLE 1: AWARENESS AND REASON FOR PARTICIPATION

<i>I got to know the project...</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Through friends	27%
Through colleagues	2%
Through mentors	8%
Through social media	20%
Through an organisation	35%
Through a national agency	4%
Through a SALTO Centre	2%
Through Eurodesk	5%
<i>Reasons for participating in the project</i>	
To help building a more inclusive society	37%
To support people in need	32%
To get engaged in tackling societal challenges	33%
To develop language skills	46%
To learn something new	75%
To get to know new people	74%
To experience solidarity	48%
To help a community in need	24%
To have fun	59%

TABLE 2 CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS

	Percentage		
	Receiving	Sending	Total
Gender			
Women	74%	75%	75%
Men	21%	22%	22%
Other	4%	2%	3%
Total	100%	100%	100%
Currently completed level of education			
Completed Junior Cycle	2%	0%	1%
Completed Senior Cycle	18%	40%	28%
Further Education leading to Post Leaving Certificate	9%	3%	6%
Higher Education leading to bachelor's degree	41%	23%	33%
Higher Education leading to master's degree	30%	31%	30%
Higher Education leading to doctorate degree	0%	3%	1%
Total	100%	100%	100%
Desired level of education			
Completed Junior Cycle	0%	0%	0%
Completed Senior Cycle	4%	2%	3%
Further Education leading to Post Leaving Certificate	6%	0%	3%
Higher Education leading to bachelor's degree	28%	22%	25%
Higher Education leading to master's degree	55%	57%	56%
Higher Education leading to doctorate degree	6%	17%	11%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Highest education level mother			
Left school after the end of primary school	4%	2%	3%
Completed Junior Cycle	13%	0%	7%
Completed Senior Cycle	15%	5%	10%
Further Education leading to Post Leaving Certificate	11%	10%	10%
Higher Education leading to bachelor's degree	28%	32%	30%
Higher Education leading to master's degree	25%	35%	30%
Higher Education leading to doctorate's degree	0%	5%	2%
I do not know	4%	10%	7%
Total	100%	100%	100%
Highest education level father			
Left school after the end of primary school	2%	0%	1%
Completed Junior Cycle	4%	5%	5%
Completed Senior Cycle	21%	2%	13%
Further Education leading to Post Leaving Certificate	11%	22%	16%
Higher Education leading to bachelor's degree	34%	15%	26%
Higher Education leading to master's degree	19%	40%	29%
Higher Education leading to doctorate's degree	2%	2%	2%
I do not know	6%	12%	9%
Total	100%	100%	100%
Description of doing around project			
Paid work			21%
Education			18%

Unemployed and actively looking for a job	9%
Unemployed, wanting a job, but not actively looking for a job	6%
Volunteering	41%
Doing care work	5%
Total	100%

TABLE 3: QUESTIONS RELATED TO INCLUSIVENESS

	Receiving	Sending	Total
Compared to other people of your age in your country, do you think....			
That you are getting your fair share of opportunities	55%	55%	55%
That you are getting more than your fair share of opportunities	15%	28%	21%
That you are getting somewhat less than you fair share of opportunities	19%	18%	18%
That you are getting much less than your fair share of opportunities	11%	0%	6%
Total	100%	100%	100%
How easy was it for you to afford participating in the project? (Scale 0 – 10)			
	7.3	7.6	7.4
Faced with barriers to achieve full potential (%)			
Barriers related to			
Health problems	5%	8%	6%
Low educational achievement	3%	2%	3%
Living in remote area	5%	0%	3%
Not having enough money	16%	16%	16%
Your social background	13%	4%	9%

Your gender	3%	4%	4%
Family responsibilities and/or ties	6%	8%	7%
A history of unemployment in your family	0%	2%	1%
Living in a deprived area	5%	4%	4%
Member of group that is discriminated against (%)	32%	38%	34%
Grounds groups is discriminated against			
Colour or race	5%	10%	7%
Nationality	6%	6%	6%
Religion	3%	0%	2%
Language	3%	4%	4%
Ethnic group	3%	6%	4%
Age	2%	0%	1%
Gender	6%	8%	7%
Sexuality	10%	14%	12%
Disability	2%	4%	3%

TABLE 4 PROJECT EXPERIENCE

	<i>Receiving</i>	<i>Sending</i>	<i>Total</i>
Overall, my project experience has been (Scale 1-5)	4.3	4.1	4.2
How meaningful was the project for you?(Scale 0 – 10)	8.9	8.1	8.3
In your experience, how well was the project received by the local community (Scale 0 – 10)	7.6	7.3	7.4
The project, overall was.... (scale 1-10)			
Digital	4.8	4.7	4.7
Inclusive	7.5	7.8	7.6
Participatory	8.2	7.3	7.8

Sustainable	7.2	6.4	6.9
Safe	8.5	8.1	8.3

TABLE 5 RELATIONSHIP WITH EUROPE

<i>How close do you feel to Europe</i> (scale 0 - 10)	
Before the project	5.5
Now	7.4

TABLE 6 INFLUENCE OF RECENT CRISES

	Receiving	Sending	Total
<i>How much have the recent crises influenced your experience</i> (Scale 0 – 10)	5.8	4.1	5.0
<i>How much have the recent crises influenced the project</i> (Scale 0 – 10)	5.5	3.6	4.7

Annex E – Results survey of Ray-Network among participants ESC – solidarity projects

The RAY Network – Research-based Analysis and Monitoring of European Youth Programmes – is an open and self-governed European research network. The idea is to have joint transnational research activities related to the Erasmus+ Youth in Action programme and the European Solidarity Corps. The activities include surveys among participants and project leaders.

For this Annex we use the data of a survey among individual participants who participated in solidarity projects of ESC in the Netherlands during the current programme (2021-2023). In total 7 respondents to the survey took part in a solidarity project in the Netherlands. In the tables below we present a selection of results of the survey. Because of the limited number of respondents, we present the results in terms of numbers and not in percentages. The limited number of respondents also means that the results are only indicative.

TABLE 7 REASONS FOR PARTICIPATION

	<i>Number (out of 7)</i>
<i>Reasons for participating in the project</i>	
To help buiding a more inclusive society	7
To support people in need	1
To get engaged in tackling societal challenges	6
To develop language skills	0
To learn something new	4
To get to know new people	3
To experience solidarity	2
To help a community in need	0
To have fun	1

TABLE 8 CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS

	<i>Number (out of 7)</i>
<i>Gender</i>	
Women	6
Men	1
<i>Currently completed level of education</i>	
Completed Junior Cycle	0
Completed Senior Cycle	0
Further Education leading to Post Leaving Certificate	0
Higher Education leading to bachelor's degree	3

Higher Education leading to master's degree	4
Higher Education leading to doctorate degree	0
Highest education level mother	
Left school after the end of primary school	1
Left school after primary school but before the end of junior cycle	1
Completed Senior Cycle	1
Further Education leading to Post Leaving Certificate	1
Higher Education leading to bachelor's degree	1
Higher Education leading to master's degree	3
Higher Education leading to doctorate's degree	0
I do not know	1
Highest education level father	
Left school after the end of primary school	0
Left school after primary school but before the end of junior cycle	2
Completed Senior Cycle	0
Further Education leading to Post Leaving Certificate	0
Higher Education leading to bachelor's degree	1
Higher Education leading to master's degree	3
Higher Education leading to doctorate's degree	0
I do not know	1
Description of doing around project	
Paid work	6
Education	4
Unemployed and actively looking for a job	0
Unemployed, wanting a job, but not actively looking for a job	0
Volunteering	4
Doing care work	0

TABLE 9 QUESTIONS RELATED TO INCLUSIVENESS

	Number (out of 7)
Compared to other people of your age in your country, do you think....	
That you are getting your fair share of opportunities	3
That you are getting more than your fair share of opportunities	4
That you are getting somewhat less than you fair share of opportunities	0
That you are getting much less than your fair share of opportunities	0
How easy was it for you to afford participating in the project? (Mean; Scale 0 (not at all easy) – 10 (very easy))	
	7.7
Faced with barriers to achieve full potential	
Yes	1
No	6
Member of group that is discriminated against	
Yes	1
No	6
Have you participated in similar European projects?	
No	6
Yes/other	1

TABLE 10 PROJECT PROCESS

	Mean scores
How fairly were the responsibilities distributed in your group (Scale 1 (not at all fair) -10 (very fairly))	7.1
How easy was the application process for your group (Scale 0 (not at all easy) – 10 (very easy))	5.3
How easy was the reporting process for your group (Scale 0 (not at all easy) – 10 (very easy))	5.9

TABLE 11 PROJECT EXPERIENCE

	Mean scores
Overall, my project experience has been (Scale 1-5)	4.4
How meaningful was the project for you? (Scale 0 – 10)	7.9
In your experience, how well was the project received by the local community (Scale 0 – 10)	7.0
In your experience, how actively involved was the local community in the project (Scale 0-10)	6.7
The project, overall was.... (scale 1 – 10)	
Digital	7.1
Inclusive	8.9
Participatory	7.9
Sustainable	7.7
Safe	8.9

TABLE 12 COMPETENCES DEVELOPED

	Number (out of 7)
In the project I learned something about ...	
Using different languages for communication	1
Applying logical thinking	2
Using digital technologies	4
Dealing with complexity	4
Cooperating with others	7
Developing arguments	3
Acting upon opportunities	4
Expressing myself with empathy	4
Expressing ideas creatively	6
None of the above	0

TABLE 13 STATEMENTS ABOUT EFFECTS

	Mean scores
--	-------------

Statements (Scale 1 (agree strongly) – 5 (disagree strongly))	
The project made a positive change in the local community	1.7
Through the project, I improved my ability to interact with policy and decision making	2.1
Through the project, I improved my ability to engage in tackling societal challenges	1.9
After the project, I feel that I am more self-confident	2.1
After the project, I feel that I am better at empathising with others	1.9
(Scale 1 (less than before the project) – 3 (more than before the project))	
After the project, I actively stand up for solidarity	2.9
After the project, I feel connected to my community	2.9

TABLE 14 RELATIONSHIP WITH EUROPE

How close do you feel to Europe (scale 0 - 10)	Mean scores
Before the project	4.6
Now	6.3

TABLE 15 INFLUENCE OF RECENT CRISES

	Mean scores
How much have the recent crises influenced your experience (Scale 0 – 10)	4.3
How much have the recent crises influenced the project (Scale 0 – 10)	5.0

Annex F – Overview of programme indicators

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Number of participants in awarded Volunteering projects					
Target	160	300	350	275	225
Achieved	224	354	489	239	368
Number of participants in awarded Solidarity Projects					
Target	40	25	175	300	300
Achieved	45	45	165	130	130
Number of participants in Traineeships in awarded Traineeships and Jobs projects					
Target	0	30	10		
Achieved	0	4	18		
Number of participants in Jobs in awarded Traineeships and Jobs projects					
Target	0	10	5		
Achieved	0	0	0		
Number of organisations who have received the European Solidarity Corps Quality Label - Volunteering					
Target	5	25	15	40	8
Achieved	5	19	27	30	8
Number of organisations who have received the European Solidarity Corps Quality Label - Traineeships					
Target	2	10	7		
Achieved	1	8	6		
Number of organisations who have received the European Solidarity Corps Quality Label - Jobs					
Target	2	5	3		
Achieved	1	4	2		
% of participants with fewer opportunities participating in Volunteering Activities					
Target	40%	40%	40%	40%	45%
Achieved	60%	55%	77%	60%	61%
% participants with fewer opportunities participating in Solidarity Projects					
Target	15%	40%	20%		
Achieved	0%	100%	30%		
% of participants with fewer opportunities participating in Traineeships					
Target		10%	20%		
Achieved		50%	50%		
% participants with fewer opportunities participating in Jobs					
Target		10%	20%		
Achieved		0%	0%		
% share of applications for Volunteering reaching the minimum quality threshold for selection					
Target	70%	90%	95%		
Achieved	86%	93%	97%		

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
% share of applications for Solidarity Projects reaching the minimum quality threshold for selection					
Target	70%	50%	50%		
Achieved	86%	53%	69%		
% share of applications for Traineeships and Jobs reaching the minimum quality threshold for selection					
Target	70%	90%	90%		
Achieved	86%	100%	100%		
% share of final reports reaching the minimum quality threshold for acceptance without grant reduction based on quality grounds					
Target		95%	98%		
Achieved		100%	100%		
% share of timely received final beneficiary reports					
Target		70%	95%		
Achieved		100%	91%		
% share of final beneficiary reports with financial adjustments below 2%					
Target		70%	80%		
Achieved		50%	45%		
Share of volunteering activities that address climate objectives					
Target					65%
Achieved					45%

Source: yearly reports NJI, 2018-2022

Annex G – Overview table of research questions and answers in the report

The table below presents the overview of the evaluation questions, including where the answers to the questions can be found in the report. Not all questions have been answered completely in this report. In these cases, an explanation on why this has not been covered in the report is provided.

<i>Evaluation question</i>	<i>Location in report</i>	<i>Reason for not answering</i>
Effectiveness		
To what extent have the three programmes European Solidarity Corps 2018-2020 and 2021-2027 delivered the expected outputs, results and impacts? What negative and positive factors seem to be influencing outputs, results and impacts? We are interested in the impact of all elements of the two programmes. We are also interested in the impact of elements that have been discontinued between the period 2018-2020 and the period 2021-2027 of European Solidarity Corps and/or the European Voluntary Service to the extent that it might help to design the future programme.	Conclusions 1-3	
With regard to the inclusion priority, what are the main concrete impacts of the European Solidarity Corps programmes 2018-2020 and 2021-2027 on the participants who are young people with fewer opportunities?	Conclusion 4	
What have been the unintended effects and their magnitude of European Solidarity Corps 2018-2020, if any?	Conclusion 3	
With regard to European Solidarity Corps 2021-2027, what can be done in order to increase the number of participants in short-term activities (e.g., volunteering teams and solidarity projects) and, as a consequence, the number of participants in the whole Programme?	Conclusion 2	This is only answered for solidarity projects, as increasing numbers for volunteering was not relevant in NL
To what extent are the effects of the solidarity activities likely to last, for both participants and local communities, after the end of the intervention?	Conclusion 3	
To what extent are the programmes' results adequately disseminated and exploited?	Conclusion 5	
Efficiency		
What is the cost-effectiveness of the various operational actions of European Solidarity Corps 2018-2020 and 2021-2027?	Conclusion 9	
What is the cost-effectiveness of the quality support measures (training and evaluation measures, inclusion, online linguistic support, etc.)?	N.A.	The study lacks detailed information about cost-effectiveness of quality support measures. This is mainly because this is hard to measure, and some parts were less developed (see conclusion 10).
To what extent is/was the size of budget and the funding models appropriate and proportionate to what European Solidarity Corps 2018-2020 and 2021-2027 set out to achieve?	Conclusions 7-9	

What were the financial absorption levels across National Agencies? Has the target number of participants in solidarity activities been achieved?	Conclusion 1 and 7	
To what extent has the portal replaced the functions of supporting organisations? Are there any duplications between the portal functions and the role of supporting organisations?	Conclusion 10	
To what extent is the implementation of actions in indirect management appropriate, efficient, and well-functioning? How efficient is the cooperation between the European Commission and National Agencies, and to what extent does the European Commission fulfil its guiding role in the process? How has this evolved over time? What are the areas for improvements?	This is more an overarching question regarding efficiency, so it involves all conclusion under the efficiency criterium (conclusions 7-13). Cooperation between EC and NA is mentioned in conclusion 13.	
To what extent are the monitoring mechanisms applied by the National Agencies efficient/cost effective? What are the areas for improvement, considering the need for a smooth and effective implementation of the programme?	Conclusion 10	
To what extent are the management support tools (e.g., E+ Link, eForms, Mobility Tool, Lifecard NAM, Youth Portal, PMM, BM, Application Forms, EU Academy, eGrants) adequate and sufficient to support a sound management of the programme?	Conclusion 10 (partly)	The evaluation does not go into detail about all the mentioned support tools. There is mainly information about the Beneficiary Module.
To what extent have the anti-fraud measures allowed for the prevention and timely detection of fraud?	Conclusion 10	
Relevance		
How many and what types of positive societal changes have been induced by the programmes at national level?	Conclusion 14	
Based on assessment, is the European Solidarity Corps 2021-2027 perceived as a programme about the learning dimension of young people or more on addressing societal changes? To what extent is it both? What type of activities are offered to young volunteers and participants in solidarity projects? What are the predominant types of participating organisations: volunteering or youth organisations? Has the number of volunteering organisations involved in the 2018-2020 European Solidarity Corps programme increased compared to the European Voluntary Service (EVS)? What about 2021-2027 European Solidarity Corps programme compared to EVS?	Conclusion 15	The study did not make direct (quantitative) comparisons with the EVS programme in terms of number of organisations involved.
To what extent is the design of European Solidarity Corps 2021-2027 oriented and focused towards people with fewer opportunities? What factors are limiting their access and what actions could be taken to remedy this?	Conclusion 16	
Based on the analysis of the impact of European Solidarity Corps 2018-2020, are there any elements that have been discontinued (i.e. are not included in European Solidarity Corps 2021-2027) and could have a possible value added in future generation of the	Conclusion 17	

European Solidarity Corps programme?		
Coherence		
To what extent has the action "Volunteering in high priority areas" complemented and added value to the indirect management volunteering projects?	N.A.	This action was not implemented by the National Agency in the Netherlands.
To what extent have the European Solidarity Corps 2018-2020 and 2021-2027 been coherent with relevant EU programmes with similar objectives such as Erasmus+, Cohesion policy programmes funded under ESF+ (European Social Fund Plus) and/or (ERDF European Regional Development Fund), Horizon Europe? To what extent have European Solidarity Corps 2018-2020 and 2021-2027 proved complementary to other EU interventions/initiatives in the fields of youth?	N.A.	The evaluation mainly focused on coherence with national initiatives. Still, there were no signs of overlap between other EU funds in this study.
To what extent have the European Solidarity Corps 2018-2020 and 2021-2027 been coherent with various interventions pursued at national level which have similar objectives? To what extent have European Solidarity Corps 2018-2020 and 2021-2027 proved to be complementary to other Member States' interventions/initiatives in the field of volunteering in support of humanitarian aid and in the field of youth?	Conclusion 18	
Do programme priorities reflect the expectations of the society? Is it effective to update priorities every year?	Conclusion 14	This was answered under relevance, as it is more related to this in our view.
EU added value		
What is the additional value and benefit resulting from EU activities, compared to what could be achieved by Member States at national and/or regional levels? What did the European Solidarity Corps programme 2018-2020 and 2021-2027 offer in addition to other education and training support or solidarity schemes available at national level?	Conclusion 20	
What is the benefit and added value of the European Solidarity Corps programme 2018-2020 and 2021-2027 compared to the benefit of the European Voluntary Service?	Conclusion 20	
What would be the most likely consequences of stopping the European Solidarity Corps programme as a stand-alone programme?	Conclusions 20-24	
Are there national schemes that could effectively replace the European Solidarity Corps if no funding is allocated in the future?	Conclusion 18	This was answered under coherence.
To what extent did the European Solidarity Corps programme 2018-2020 and 2021-2027 promote cooperation between participating countries?	N.A.	As this is a national evaluation, the study did not look at cooperation between Member States.

