

Empowering Young Persons to be Active Citizens

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The European Union (EU) encourages young persons to actively participate in civic life by providing them with opportunities to participate in transnational projects that enhance their skills and entrepreneurial spirit.

According to the European Parliament Eurobarometer on 'European youth in 2014', 57% of young Europeans feel that in their own country, young people have been marginalised and excluded from economic and social life. This perception was shared by an absolute majority of the young persons interviewed in 16 different EU Member States. In order to encourage more active participation of young people, the EU makes available numerous funding programmes such as Erasmus+, which provides for Transnational Youth Initiatives.

These initiatives fall under the Strategic Partnerships key action of the Erasmus+ programme. They are intended to fund small scale projects that promote cooperation with other eligible countries to achieve innovation and the exchange of good practices. These Youth Initiatives act as a catalyst for integrating young people into the social, economic and political dimensions of our society. These projects are non-formal learning experiences that are devised, set up and implemented by the youths themselves.

Young persons participating in these projects have the opportunity to develop a set of personal skills that cannot be achieved within a formal learning environment such as at school or university. They are encouraged to try out new ideas, share practices and learn from their peers by being directly involved during all phases of the project. Youths are encouraged to discuss their ideas and come up with an overarching theme that captures the spirit of the activities they wish to carry out.

The theme of a project should allow the participants to tackle a multitude of current issues including, but not limited to, the environment, art and culture, media literacy, active citizenship and social entrepreneurship. These type of projects are aimed at fostering a new generation of young persons who identify themselves with the qualities associated with active citizenship by not only empowering them to voice their ideas, but also by equipping them with decision making and leadership skills that allow them to come out with solutions to persistent social problems as well as to play a greater role within their communities.

The issue of youth marginalisation is addressed by sensitising the youth agenda. Projects funded under Transnational Youth Initiatives may result in the establishment of youth associations, clubs and other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that help raise awareness about specific needs. Such sensitisation actions help stimulate civic commitment among young people by encouraging them to take part in debates and events that target their interests and the interests of society as a whole. Other projects can take the form of artistic and cultural initiatives that bring together youths with a particular set of skills and talents to perform in theatre plays, music performances and participate in exhibitions. Projects can also be of an altruistic nature whereby they not only afford the possibility for the participants to learn from each other but, moreover, be of direct benefit to the members of their respective communities. Activities may help vulnerable persons such as disabled individuals, the elderly, minorities and migrants.

Project proposals may be submitted by informal groups of young persons. Individuals interested in taking part in such a project, may apply with other like-minded persons to form a group that represents a particular interest. One of the members of the group would be required to assume the role of legal representative and assume responsibility on behalf of the whole group. Participants may be supported by a coach. The coach would not be part of the project itself but would support the group throughout the duration of the project, based on the needs of the group.

These initiatives aim at fostering international cooperation between at least two informal groups of persons from two different eligible countries. However, the participation of more project partners coming from different countries is encouraged. These projects can last for a period of six months up to three years. This would include the project preparation phase, the implementation of the activities and the dissemination of the results.

Should one be interested to tap funds under this strand, the first deadline to submit a project application is February 2, 2016 for projects starting between June 1 and September 30, 2016.

For more information about Transnational Youth Initiatives and other EU funding opportunities, contact MEUSAC on 2200 3300 or funding.meusac@gov.mt.