

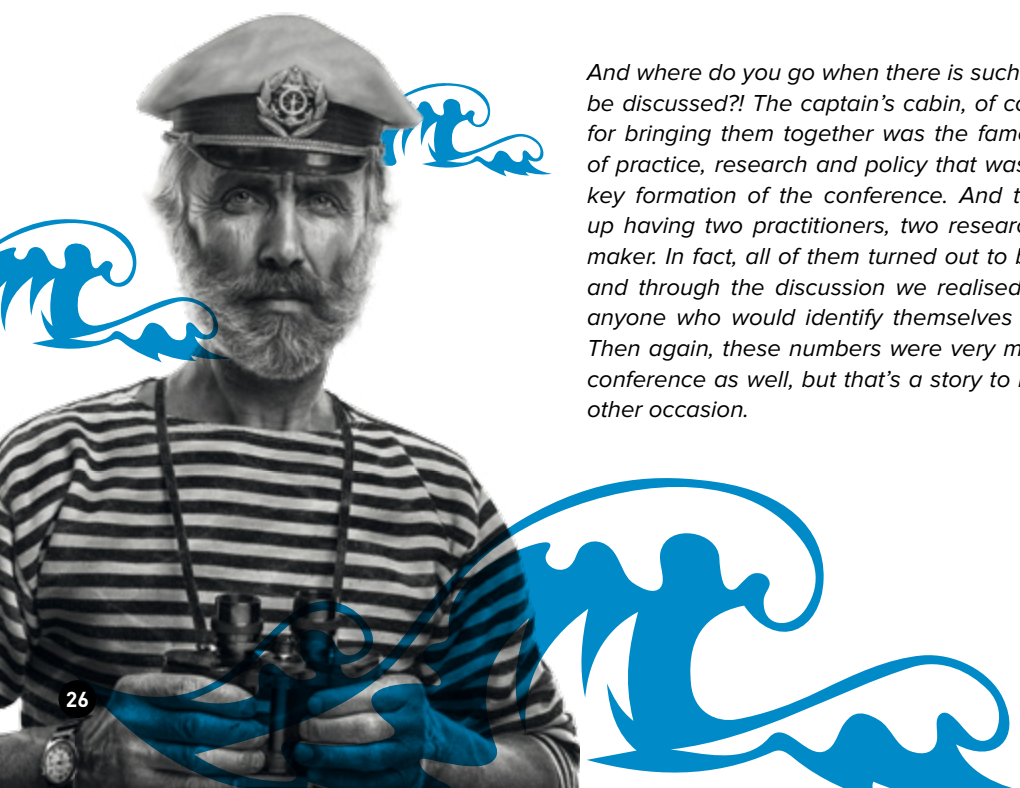


# How inclusive is the (Erasmus +) Youth in Action programme?

## A triangular perspective from the captain's cabin

By Snežana Bačlija Knoch

*On the evening of 8 October, a group of eloquent and dedicated people found themselves cruising on the Bosphorus, surrounded by the magnificent Istanbul lights that were shining through the chilly autumn darkness. Instead of enjoying drinks with their friends and colleagues, they were enthusiastic enough to spend quite a long time talking about some of the most interesting insights that came from the two previous days of various discussions in the context of the European Platform for Learning Mobility in the Youth Field Conference "Learning mobility in the youth field: towards opportunities for all – Evidence, experience, discourse". The main question to be explored by them was: how inclusive is the Youth in Action programme? Or in other words: is the programme walking the talk?!*



And where do you go when there is such an important topic to be discussed?! The captain's cabin, of course! The inspiration for bringing them together was the famous "golden triangle" of practice, research and policy that was supposed to be the key formation of the conference. And that's how we ended up having two practitioners, two researchers and one policy maker. In fact, all of them turned out to be a bit of everything and through the discussion we realised that we didn't have anyone who would identify themselves as the policy maker! Then again, these numbers were very much the reality of the conference as well, but that's a story to be explored on some other occasion.

## Interviews with...



**Bob McDougall**  
Freelance trainer and project manager, UK

*I am connected to the field in every way possible. That's all I do. All the training I deliver, all the projects I manage are somehow linked to Erasmus+. And inclusion.*

**Chip Veerle Haverhals**  
Member of the European Scout Committee, WOSM – World Organization of the Scout Movement

*In my role in the European Scout Committee, I am responsible for diversity and inclusion, which means that I am in the lead in taking strategic decisions, what our volunteers on the European level should be doing or should be working on. And on the other side, I am responsible for external relations and funding.*

**Marti Taru**  
Researcher, Tallinn University

*I've been doing research on young people and youth work, youth policy and more recently, I've been working with evaluation of the Youth in Action programme, through the RAY network.*

**Tony Geudens.**  
Project co-ordinator, SALTO Inclusion Ressource Centre

*Youth in Action is a very nice programme, but we need to make an extra effort, or have extra activities to make sure that young people with fewer opportunities, who would otherwise not find the way, still can benefit from programmes like Youth in Action. So, the question about accessibility of Youth in Action is very important to us.*

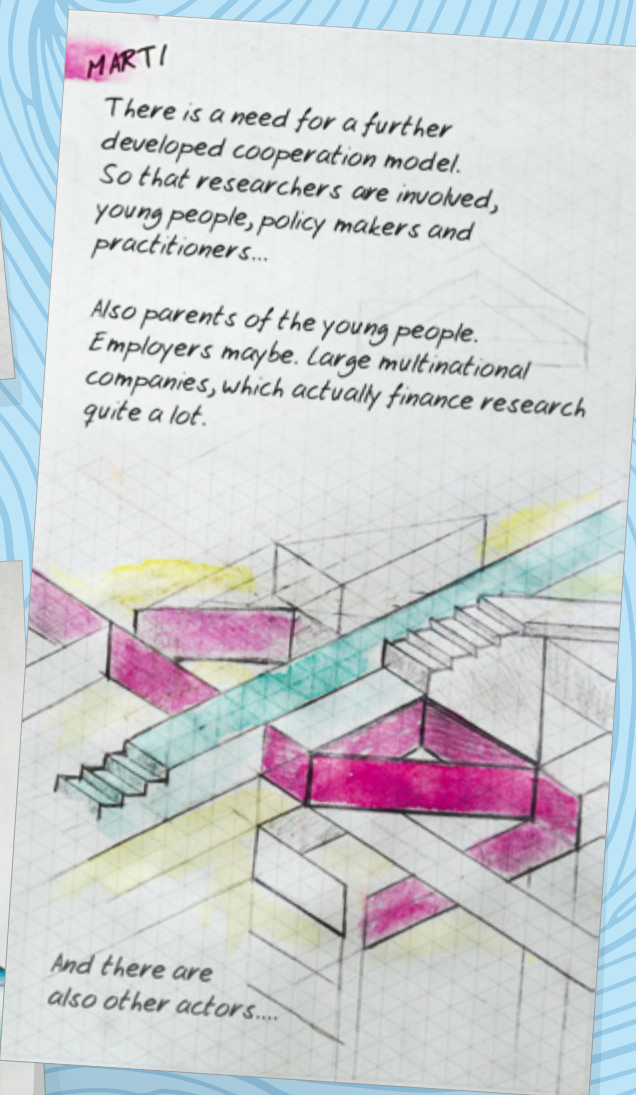
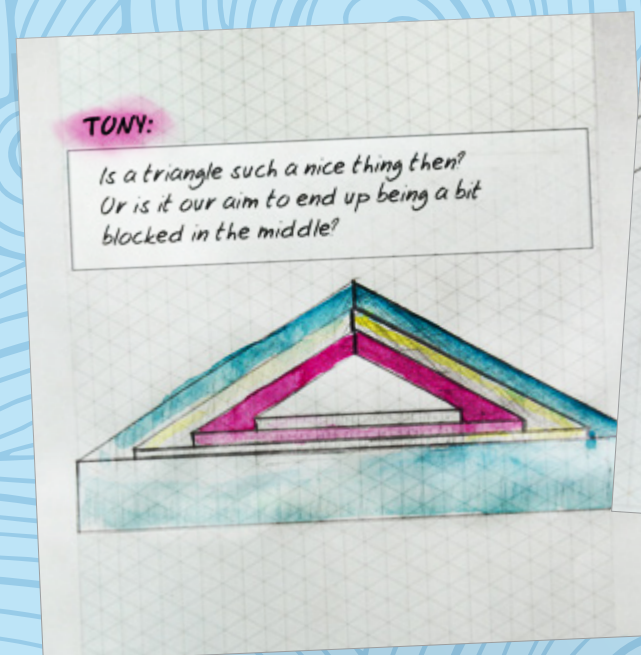
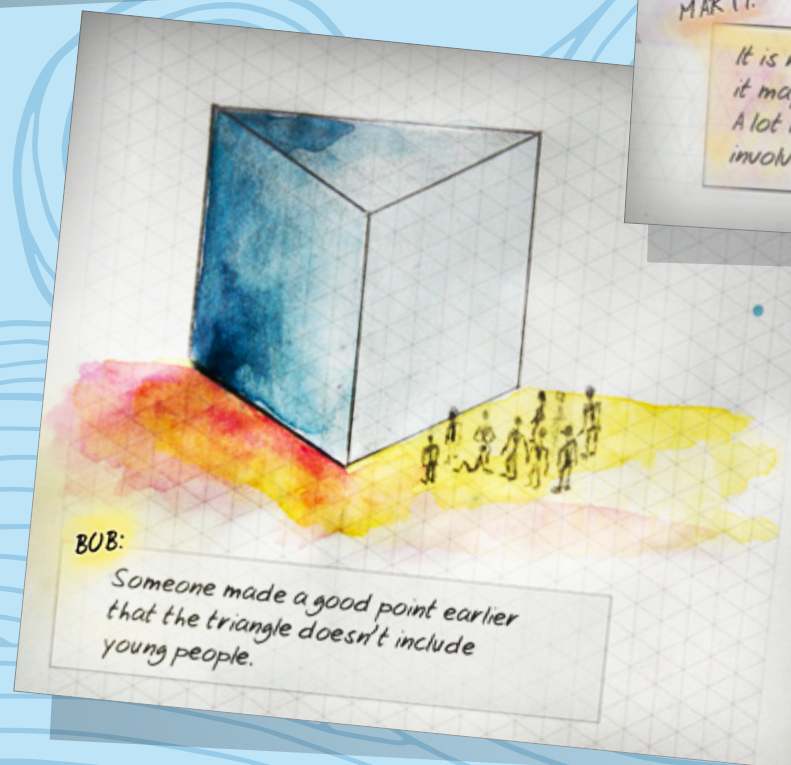
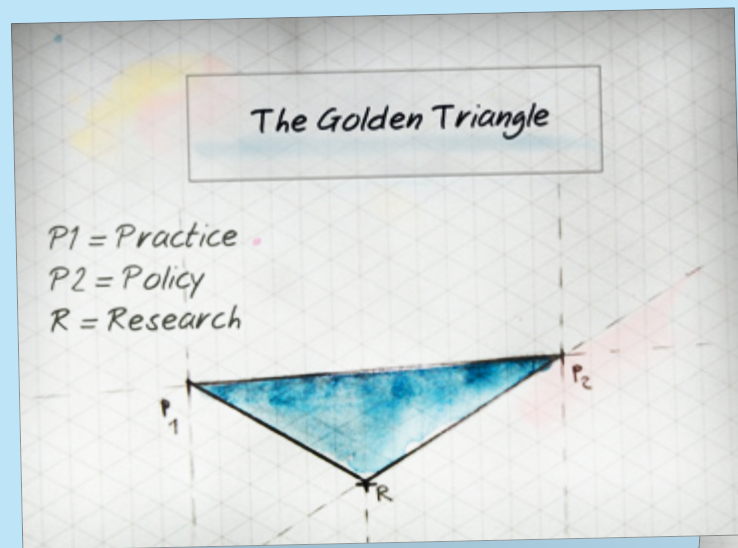
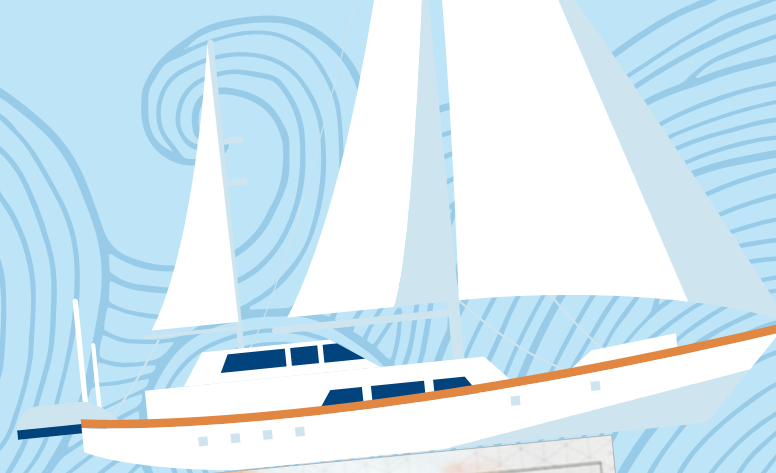
**Christiane Dittrich**  
Researcher, Goethe University

*I am interested in this topic because I have been a Scout and I had a lot of good experiences while travelling with the Scouts. And now I work on mobility as a research topic and I want to know why there are people who don't travel.*



## How inclusive is the (Erasmus+) Youth in Action programme?

Minutes after settling into the captain's cabin (after a few giggles and a couple more selfies), the conversation started to flow on its own. Before being asked the first question or even introducing themselves, the participants started to examine the inclusiveness of the golden triangle itself!





# How inclusive is the (Erasmus+) Youth in Action programme?

After warming up for a while discussing triangular and other related shapes, the conversation moved to the question that brought us all together to this unique and inspiring environment: how inclusive and accessible is the Youth in Action programme to different groups of young people?

Marti

I think that potentially everyone has a chance to get involved in a mobility programme, but not everyone actually gets involved.

Tony

To me it doesn't matter so much whether you call it accessible or inclusive. The question is whether Youth in Action is adapted to young people with special needs or with fewer opportunities or whatever you want to call them. And I think the projects of Youth in Action, exchanges and volunteering are accessible and very beneficial, as we saw in the RAY data for young people with fewer opportunities. Now, accessibility also sometimes refers to how easy is it to use the programme and I don't think it's for young people with fewer opportunities themselves to go and do all these application forms and all these kinds of things, so there, yes, we can make it more, I would call it, user friendly, also inclusive. It's maybe not so user friendly as it could be or as it has been in the past. There are reasons for this, we got together with all the educational sectors and they like these bigger structures and everything nicely squared off and stuff like that, which is maybe not so adapted to the youth field. But the projects for young people with fewer opportunities, yes they can change lives, just as they do for other groups of young people, I think. The big issue is: have we made it more difficult for organisations who work with the target groups? And then I think, yes, maybe, something went wrong there or we still have to streamline that part and make it more user friendly.

IT'S VERY NECESSARY TO HAVE PLATFORMS WHERE WE CAN INTEGRATE RESEARCHERS' KNOWLEDGE TO PRACTITIONERS, LIKE EPIM



IT'S NOT SUPERIOR KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER HERE, BUT IT'S WHAT'S NEEDED

Bob

I would tend to agree with that, when you are talking about the organisations. But what it comes down to is the choice that an organisation makes: is it an inclusive organisation or an organisation that offers opportunities to young people who approach them? I don't even think that the programme needs to make itself more accessible, the organisations need to choose what their priority is. I mean, yes, there are difficulties within the programme and the way that it's funded which make it harder for the organisations to focus on inclusion, but it's up to organisations to make the decision on what their priority is.



Chip

Exactly. I also have the feeling that the weight of being inclusive or not is completely on our shoulders, on the shoulders of the organisations. It depends on our projects, on what we decide and how we sell also our products. And maybe even if sometimes you are being inclusive in your project, but you don't reflect on it in, let's say, in the project like by writing it down in the application, you might even miss an opportunity to get some support. So we feel like that it became a sort of a trend, when you write, please quickly include something that sounds nice about being diverse and inclusive.

Chip

Because you will get it and it is often really true that maybe the main focus is not there, it is one of the tools, one of the means of these training programmes, of these events, but not the main focus. Which, also, in my opinion should not always be the main focus. But what if we don't focus anymore on this, as a huge organisation, then they wouldn't reach these people anymore and research would no longer have numbers.

Oh, because you are more likely to get the funding if it ticks a box?

Bob

## How inclusive is the (Erasmus+) Youth in Action programme?

*What about financial difficulties? For example, lack of financial support for European Voluntary Service (EVS) hosting and sending? Or very high travel (and visa) costs, in particular for some countries and/or regions that are totally disproportionate to what the programme offers? Even if it is expected from the organisations to fundraise locally, in many cases that is just not possible.*

Chip

The support structures are mainly structures, but where is the support? To do the applications, you, as a volunteer movement, need staff or professionals to fill it in. And then again, there are structures, yes, but erase the word support because the support is not really there.

Christiane

I think there is support, there is also financial support, but if you don't know that you can get financial support from these structures, you may not even bother to contact them.

Bob

I've seen many practical examples of people who have come to the UK on an EVS for example and complained about the cost of visas, but also on the whole process of having to travel to the embassy and all that. And all those costs are eligible to be covered, but, if the applicant didn't realise that, then they wouldn't think to apply for it. And that's almost "make or break" for some projects.

Tony

Yes, there is a lot more responsibility on the youth organisations, support structures, whatever you call them, and it's a missed chance that the programme makes access relatively difficult, so we will only reach the ones that are really into it, converted and stuff like that. If it were easier, then it would be more accessible.



Illustration by Sirri Taimla



photo by Marlies Pöschl

*Are there any data (we saw some from the RAY network today, whose validity you argued about) or other research that would prove in a way that the programme is inclusive?*

Marti

Not that I know of. There are no quality data that could be used for evaluating whether those who really need to be are included in the programme or not. There are data of course, but that data, as it stands now, would not give a very reliable or valid answer to the question. So we do not actually have a solid, empirical basis for analysis. Although we have something, yes, that is true.

Like I was saying before, there is also such a broad spectrum of who is considered to be disadvantaged. Like the people at the thin end of the wedge, would they be able to access the programme?

Bob

Christiane

I think that's a good point, because there is also the question: why should everybody travel? Why should everybody be mobile? So I think there needs to be more research about what young people think about youth mobility. And maybe you, or we, should ask people who are not mobile why they aren't.

Tony

But then we get back to the discussion that it's not an aim in itself, it's a tool. If youth workers or social workers see that it could be a lever for a young person to either stay out of trouble or get back on track or blossom or whatever, then use it. But indeed the question is not why don't all people go on a mobility programme, because maybe for some it's not an issue. They are just happy under the church tower, as we say in Dutch.

As I could ask why you are all not joining the Scout movement as it's sometimes really a personal choice. You don't like the scarf? [everybody laughs] I think sometimes we are also just being inclusive without noticing certain things and then not communicating about it. I think one of the strong points in our organisation is, for example, working with disabled persons. We have really strong programmes, and we do good things and we are working completely inclusively. Our local units work with all young people together or, if necessary, they have separate local units for those with special needs, very much focused on the individual needs of each person, but still enjoying the youth programmes or the Scout programme. But maybe we don't have the need or we don't see the need to communicate about it, to make it recognised, or to get involved with the policy makers or researchers. So maybe sometimes we do some things without shouting it out to the world: we do it, we do it!

Chip



## How inclusive is the (Erasmus+) Youth in Action programme?

Marti

I think the need to document outcomes and results is also very much linked to the need to be accountable to someone. So if you use public money then you have to prove that you really get value out of that money. But if you don't use public money, then it's your own business what you do with money and how you use it.



photo by Marlies Pöschl

Bob

That's a really good point. We are accountable as organisations using public money, we have to report on our projects and we have to see if we have met the aims that we wrote in the application. But, the separate issue that I have is how seriously is that taken? When our national agency is reading our final report, as far as I can tell, they don't look into the quality so much, they are counting the receipts and making sure that the money is accounted for. We ask them to come and see our projects so often: "Come along, see what we are up to, we are really interested to see what you think of what we are doing." They are not interested in that. They are much more interested in making sure that we got all our boarding passes. So, yes, you are right, we should be accountable, but to whom?

*We talked about how inclusive or accessible the programme is, but another question is, in the long run, does it really, as a tool, help young people? Does it empower young people with fewer opportunities and then include them in their communities back home? Do you think that is an effect of the programme?*

Bob

I think that, yes, it can be extremely beneficial, but it's not necessarily a foregone conclusion that it will be. I think you need to put effort into it. It can be even more beneficial in my experience for someone with support needs to do a programme like this, but again the organisations need to put the effort in, to make sure that there are follow-up activities. They may want to do something else, but with a little more responsibility next time, so that they are followed right through the process and it doesn't just turn into a holiday.

Marti

I of course agree, but I just want to point out another aspect to that. Tony has mentioned several times that this is just a tool which makes you think, but what is the goal then? Obviously, one of the goals is the change in the individuals who participate, but there could also be other kinds of goals, at the societal or collective levels. For instance, a lower unemployment rate is definitely one of the goals which are very important in youth policy at the European level, and also at national level with school dropout rates and voter participation. Health could be, but isn't for some reason, mental health especially. So definitely these could be alternative goals or goals in addition to the dominant ones. But, in any case, there is a difference between individual goals and goals for society as a whole. And even if you are successful at the individual level, and there actually is quite a lot of proof that for those who participate in the programme participation is beneficial, it's still might be that at the level of society, the change is marginal, if there is any change at all.

Bob

There was some research done last year specifically about EVS and employability: where the NGOs and co-ordinating organisations were surveyed, as were ex-volunteers and employers. It was basically to find out the skills and competences that you gain during an EVS placement and whether they are transferable and usable in the employment world. But the information gathered, from volunteers specifically, was quite useful as it compared skills that they had before their placement, skills they have now and to what extent they feel that they are more skilled in certain areas or whatever. So there is that research that exists.

There is a lot of research on the change of attitudes and beliefs. That is relatively easy to measure, easy to capture. But whether that actually changes behaviour, especially at least to increased probability of finding a job or continuing education, we're still a few steps away from finding out. There are other factors which also influence whether you get a job or not or whether you drop out of education or not. Even if there is proof that participation brings about a change in attitudes, it is only one factor. Therefore, you cannot be sure that behavioural changes will follow.

Chip

Over the last 15 years, we have discovered that, if people go on an international exchange or international projects, Jamboree for example, to talk in Scout terms, these young people, whether at the age of 15 or as a young leader at 22 years old, they stay longer in the Scout movement and they volunteer longer and are more likely, when they leave the Scout movement, to do something relevant to volunteering. We don't know why.

Christiane

I think it's because they are identified with an organisation and also they had the feeling that they were getting respect, that there were loved by the people from the organisation and maybe they don't get that at home. And I think if they get to know this, they will come back, because it's a good feeling.

Bob

So you are saying no one is ever truly altruistic?

Tony

The only thing... the reason why we do things is because we want to be loved.

Bob

Come here... :D

Chip

Where can I like this? Can you put it on Facebook?

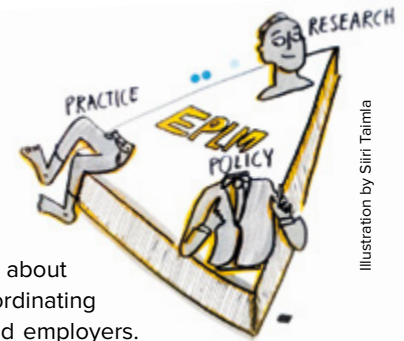


Illustration by Siiri Taimla



## How inclusive is the (Erasmus+) Youth in Action programme?

And with a little bit of warmth, fun and love, our magical time in the captain's cabin was over. There was no better way to end the conversation among incredibly invested and passionate people, who got very cosy in their new setting, supported by warm and approving looks and nods from our Turkish-speaking captain.

Have we managed to answer the question of how inclusive the Youth in Action programme is? Probably not, since there are a lot of aspects to be considered in making the final verdict. But hopefully the dialogue captured on these pages can give you some additional insight from very different perspectives.

That said, we are also aware that our "triangle" was not perfect and that are so many voices that deserve and, in fact, need to be heard on this question. Young people (beneficiaries of the programme) were highlighted by all of our participants in the conversation, but not only! So, if you have an opinion to whether, from your experience, the programme walks the talk, please do share it with us! We look forward to hearing from you!

### Munchausen's approach to youth work by Marti Taru

There was a mythical figure, Munchausen, who pulled himself out of the bog by his hair. In statistics there is also a term: bootstrapping, which basically refers to the same thing. Pull yourself out from the mud, by your hair, for instance. The thing is, to do this, you use your resources only, you do not get anything from outside. And I was just thinking that youth work is very much in the same position. To get recognition, youth work has to pull itself out by its hair. So if you really believe that this is a thing that is worth doing, you just need to continue doing it. Because to provide some kind of scientific proof that it's really, really beneficial will be very, very hard. It takes a lot of time. And it might be that in real life it is much easier to pull yourself up by your own hair instead of waiting until the researchers come and prove that youth work is really worth doing.



## Training plan for youth work — Inclu-fit & Mobi-Dance

By Triin Ilves and Marlies Pöschl

photos by Marlies Pöschl



It's January, Christmas is over, the cookies are gone, the plates are empty. Youth work looks at herself in the mirror, anxiously: "Have I got out of shape? Have I become rigid? Big? Exclusive?"



"I need to work on myself!" she thinks and jumps onto on the treadmill of self-optimisation. "Luckily, last year in Istanbul, a few people worked out a training plan, specifically for me. My very own personal Inclu-Fit & Mobi-Dance – a training plan for inclusiveness and mobility in youth work. What a privilege! I'm curious to see if it works," thinks youth work.

By sharing a few tips on how to get youth work on the track to inclusiveness, participants of the EPLM Conference had the chance to become mentors for youth work's special Inclu-Fit & Mobi-Dance. Each of them suggested one simple exercise or thought experiment. Here we go!

### Jump and watch out

We should all be jumping, so that we can see over walls; walls we usually don't even see anymore but that are keeping excluded people out. Jump, so you can see further and allow yourself to see the hurdles that young people have to overcome.

**JO DEMAN**  
EUROPEAN YOUTH  
FORUM, BRUSSELS



### Give everyone a racket

In table tennis, there are usually only two people playing, and the other people might get bored. But there is a version in which more people get rackets and all the players move around the table. They are always mobile and their roles are constantly changing so that everybody gets to play, and everybody becomes involved.

**ROMANA MYSULA**  
JECI-MIEC, UKRAINE

