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 Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture
 Youth, Education and Erasmus+
Unit B.4 - Erasmus+ coordination

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**NOTE FOR THE ATTENTION OF THE ERASMUS+ AND
 EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS NA DIRECTORS**

Subject: Coronavirus – further specific guidance

The outbreak of Coronavirus in the EU and in the world has big implications for the Erasmus+ programme and European Solidarity Corps. The closure of education, training, youth and sport institutions and organisations - as well as the broader measures undertaken in many EU countries to restrict mobility of citizens and increase social distancing - hamper the regular implementation of most of the ongoing or planned Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps activities.

The Commission is acutely aware of the difficulties faced by National Agencies and project beneficiaries in this respect. Our foremost concern, that we know you share, is the safety and protection of all programme participants.

Further to Note 014 sent to you on 10/03/2020, this note aims to provide additional clarifications concerning the scope and application of the force majeure principle as well as to provide additional guidelines and general recommendations in order to support National Agencies in managing the exceptional circumstances.

Application of *force majeure*

The World Health Organisation officially declared, on Wednesday 11 March, the Coronavirus as a global pandemic. Therefore, it is justifiable for National Agencies to apply the principle of *force majeure*. Considering the principle of prudence, which underlines and inspires all of our activities, it would be difficult to do otherwise given the current circumstances, under which a large and important number of activities – planned or currently undertaken in the framework of already selected projects - have already been cancelled or will be postponed. However, in this particular situation, and taking in consideration each national framework, it will be a duty of National Agencies - following a case-by-case assessment - to consider the scope to which the *force majeure* principle is applied in their context.

The modalities of application of *force majeure* are those indicated in the Note 014 of 10/03/2020. In this context, it is worth clarifying that the guidance as regards additional costs is applicable to all types of decentralised actions, while the guidance as regards project duration currently covers all actions except TCA and NET activities, for which specific guidance will be issued. For the prolongation of projects under the School Exchange Partnerships, specific guidelines will be issued to help National Agencies steering the process in a coordinated manner, thus reducing the administrative workload.

The IT documentation setting out detailed guidance linked to cases of *force majeure* in Mobility Tool is currently being updated to address the most frequently asked questions. A Q&A document will also be posted on NAconnECt in order to reply to specific detailed questions raised by National Agencies in the last days.

Deadline for applications

Several deadlines for submissions relating to actions implemented - both at decentralised and centralised level - under the Erasmus+ programme and European Solidarity Corps have been extended. National Agencies have been informed of these prolongations through Note 016 of 16 March and Note 017 of 17 March. Please note that for the European Solidarity Corps Actions, the extension of the deadline to 7 May 2020 is valid for all four actions:

ESC11 –Volunteering projects

ESC21 – Traineeships and jobs

ESC13 – Volunteering partnerships - Annual grant requests

ESC31 – Solidarity projects

Furthermore, it will be possible to submit application forms without annexing the mandates requiring signatures of co-beneficiaries. However, only for selected projects, these documents will have to be sent to the National Agency before the signature of the grant agreement.

The websites of the European Commission and of the EACEA are being updated to inform the general public about these extensions.

Administrative deadlines

The Commission acknowledges the fact that the daily routine of staff in National Agencies and of people working for beneficiary organisations is severely impacted by practices introduced or recommended in many countries in order to contain the spread of the pandemic. Many people are asked to carry out distance-work or suspend their work; this implies the slowdown or suspension of non-critical activities. This will have an impact on the capacity of National Agencies to respect all the administrative deadlines for grant-lifecycle-management, as set in the Guide for National Agencies. In this context, it is the Commission's intention to update the Calendar on the use of funds annexed to the Guide for NAs, following a general principle of flexibility for National Agencies and beneficiaries.

This being said, and with due respect of specific situations in each country, the Commission:

- a) calls on every National Agency to adopt an approach of maximum responsibility and ensure to the greatest extent the execution of grant-management tasks, primarily to safeguard beneficiaries and participants.
- b) recommends National Agencies to identify as crucial any task that diminishes the risk for a beneficiary or for participants in selected projects to find themselves in difficult financial conditions (e.g. these tasks could be the payment of a due instalment which would allow a beneficiary to have sufficient cash-flow to cover costs of participants abroad, or the signature of a grant agreement which is a condition for a beneficiary to receive a loan, etc.).

Communication with stakeholders and participants

This unprecedented situation is having a huge impact on most stakeholders and participants. Erasmus+ mobility participants, especially students, who are experiencing a varying degree of disruption during their mobility, or had either to cancel or postpone their planned mobility period. We ask all NAs to strongly encourage their beneficiaries to be as flexible and pragmatic as possible to minimise any negative impact on their participants and, as regards students, to help facilitating the achievements of the learning outcomes indicated in their learning agreements. This can be done through alternative means such as digital tools for example, in particular for those students who already started their mobility period abroad.

Many host institutions are enabling mobile students to continue their studies remotely by either offering them to follow courses online or by doing assignments. In some cases, students have returned to their home countries but continue to follow courses at the host institutions through various solutions. Given these exceptional circumstances, please note that the Commission will consider any such remote studying arrangements as eligible, provided they contribute to achieving the learning outcomes of the learning agreements. We also hope all sending institutions will be as flexible as possible in order to allow students to have all the ECTS obtained through such remote studying arrangements fully recognised.

We are aware that many institutions, organisations and international relations offices are now closed or are working with a very limited capacity. We encourage all NAs to make sure that Erasmus+ participants in mobility, especially young people and students, are well informed about where they can access information about the situation in each country and where they can turn to for support if they are temporarily not able to reach the international relations office of their sending or receiving organisations and institutions due to the closings.

National Agencies are strongly invited to keep active communication channels open with local antennas of Erasmus alumni, former participants, Europeers, students' associations, former volunteers etc. to detect any major problem faced by mobility participants abroad, whenever these networks are still active. In this regard, we invite you to contact the local Erasmus Student Network (ESN) sections and student unions in your country to see how you can best cooperate with them to disseminate information quickly to mobile students and provide peer to peer support to those who are anxious or facing language barriers which make their situation more difficult.

In the most serious situations, e.g. where repatriation is needed, National Agencies are invited, whenever possible, to facilitate contacts with embassies and authorities of the home country.

Operational consequences for the European Commission

The Coronavirus has already had an impact on the working of the European Commission services. In recent weeks, we have cancelled all nonessentials trips, external meetings and conferences; reduced the number of internal meetings and increased the use of teleworking and videoconferencing.

As of Monday 16 March, we entered into a new phase, whereby the majority of staff members of the European Commission are obliged to telework.

We have prepared for this eventuality to the extent possible, however we ask for your understanding in this exceptional situation.

For further information or clarifications, please do not hesitate to continue to contact the Commission via your desk officer, putting in copy EAC-NA-COORDINATION@ec.europa.eu.

We would like to inform all National Agencies that notes from the Commission to National Agencies are not to be disseminated or published. The functional mailbox EAC-NA-COORDINATION@ec.europa.eu is only to be used by National Agencies, not by project beneficiaries. Please be informed that notes related to the Corona virus will always be sent for information to programme committee members, national authorities and the Croatian Presidency.

Kind regards,

Ute HALLER-BLOCK

Head of Unit