

PROJECT REPORT

ERASMUS+ EU DRUG POLICY TRAINING AND STRATEGY SERIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE



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This is a project report on the ERASMUS+ Small Scale Partnership Project entitled "EU Drug Policy Training & Strategy Series for Young People" led by Students for Sensible Drug Policy International in partnership with YouthRISE. Project no: 2021-2-AT01-KA210-YOU-000050146.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are grateful to the policy stakeholders, civil society members, and youth advocates who have contributed to the development and organization of this training. We also give our thanks to the participants for engaging with such commitment and passion in our sessions and for choosing to advance this work as part of a Consortium. Finally, we would like to express immense gratitude to Erasmus+ for supporting the implementation of our project.



PROJECT SUMMARY AND OBJECTIVES

This project intends to increase the capacity of youth-led organizations that engage in drug policy reform and young people to advocate at the European Union level. As the protection of young people is often sighted as one of the primary goals of drug policies, it is of the utmost importance that the youth voice is present in drug policy creation and implementation processes. Young people who use drugs are also a particularly vulnerable population as they are often dependent on families or the government for financial stability, housing, and education. As a highly vulnerable group, policies that are created to protect youth must be influenced by the insights that youth hold about drug use.

To achieve our goal of increasing the capacity of youth-led organizations and young people to engage with EU drug policy, we organized a training series that equipped young people with the necessary knowledge, skills, connections, and strategy to be able to engage with the EU Drug Policy Creation process and create a youth-led dialogue around EU drug policies.

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This training has had a dual outcome of increasing the capacity of individuals and organizations to meaningfully engage with EU Drug Policy.



PROJECT SUMMARY AND OBJECTIVES

The project had four objectives:

KNOWLEDGE BUILDING

To build a base of knowledge regarding how the EU makes decisions regarding drugs and the historical context of drugs in EU policy

SKILLS BUILDING

To build a base of advocacy skills tailored to the EU context

CONNECTIONS

To build connections between young people and key stakeholders in EU drug policy (i.e. EU Decision Makers, Civil Society & Youth)

STRATEGY BUILDING

To bring the youth participants together to strategize on how they will further the youth voice in EU Drug Policy

These four objectives then informed the stages of our project:

Following a preparation phase, we began our project with three knowledge-building workshops focused on the EU Drug Policy Creation Process, the History of EU Drug Policy and the Current Drugs Strategy. These workshops ran between September and October 2022,

Participants had the opportunity to hear first-hand how policy develops in EU institutions from Panel Representatives from EMCDDA and the Civil Society Forum.



PROJECT SUMMARY AND OBJECTIVES

For Skills-Building, we met with participants in Dublin between 04.11.2022-06.11.2022 and engaged in advocacy, public speaking, and debate workshops. Following these sessions, we held a simulation of EU Commission proceedings and debated the Current Drugs Strategy. The participants took the role of member states representatives and looked to advance their country's interest in negotiations. Using role-playing, learning by doing, and speech-writing, participants enhanced their ability to successfully engage with stakeholders in EU settings.



Following this component, throughout November 2022, participants attended three networking events: one session with civil society representatives engaging with EU drug policy mechanism, one with youth actors and organizations promoting youth civic engagement in Europe, and one final session with national and regional decision-makers (Iga Jeziorska from Youth Organisations for Drug Action, Katrin Schiffer from Correlation, pro-sensible drug policies politician Aodhán Ó Ríordáin, and Lynn Jeferrys from the European Network of People who Use Drugs).

The final component of the project, Strategy Building, took place in Vienna between 09.12.2022 and 11.12.2022. Having gained the knowledge, skills, and networks necessary to engage with EU drug policy institutions, participants set common goals and milestones they wish to work towards as a group.

This led to the formation of the European Youth Drug Policy Consortium and the adoption of a working Strategy Document focused on four sectors of activity: Education, Community/ Social Action, Legal/ Political Action, and Health and Accessibility.



PROJECT SUMMARY AND OBJECTIVES



The common goals set used the SMART framework, thus aiming to be specific, measurable, achievable, and realistic. To pursue the milestones associated with these sectors, 4 corresponding Working Groups under the Consortium have been established, each having a point person reporting to the Consortium Secretaries. The Consortium will accept members and partners from across Europe, prioritizing youth and youth-led organizations, youth advocates, and PWUD. The Consortium will have its first official meeting since its founding in January/ February 2023.



ALIGNMENT WITH EU PRIORITIES AND ERASMUS+ KEY ACTIONS

Throughout its running, the project aligned with several EU Key Priorities. These included:

YOUTH

Promoting active citizenship, young people's sense of initiative, and youth entrepreneurship including social entrepreneurship.

HORIZONTAL

Common values, civic engagement, and participation, both by encouraging civic participation in the democratic policy

HORIZONTAL

Inclusion and diversity in all fields of education, training, youth, and sport, by building the capacity of young people who have been directly affected by drugs to be able to participate in and actively engage with the democratic processes that directly affect them

We also directly targeted several Erasmus+ Key Actions:

- **Key Action 2:** Cooperation Among Organisations and Institutions by fostering strong cooperation between youth advocates and youth-led organizations across the European Union in the area of drugs.
- **Key Action 3:** Support policy development and cooperation, by developing a unique platform in the form of the Consortium for youth dialogue regarding EU Drug Policy and meaningful engagement.

As the project has been entirely youth-led the development of the Consortium is conducive to sustainable youth dialogue and active citizenship, our activities have also aligned with EU Youth Dialogue Thematic Priority: Europe for YOUth - YOUth for Europe: Space for Democracy and Participation.



LEARNING METHODS

Throughout the training, participants have employed a robust range of learning methods and skills-building tools:

For the Knowledge Building component, participants made use of critical analysis and group discussion methods when considering the role of EU institutions in the Drug Policy Creation Process, specifically the EU Drugs Strategy. During the sessions, participants engaged in reflection exercises on topics such as the EU's balanced approach to drugs and the principle of subsidiarity in decision-making. They then had the opportunity to discuss their benefits and drawbacks in groups, as well as with policy stakeholders as part of the Panel with EU representatives.

During the Skills Building component in Dublin, the sessions prompted participants to use role-playing, learning by doing, and speech-writing as primary learning methods. As part of the Advocacy Workshop, participants were introduced to different lobbying strategies which they then had the opportunity to put into practice in different scenarios, including in potential interactions with political stakeholders, civil society organizations, and members of the public.

For the Public Speaking Workshop, participants reviewed the technical skills needed to deliver a speech and engage in conversation with stakeholders. Having considered these technicalities, the participants then analyzed a speech given by a civil society representative and its respective use of the tips and tricks previously discussed. They then debated a sample policy brief, wrote and delivered a short speech in favor of their subsequent stance on the brief.

By simulating the proceedings of the EU Commission, participants engaged in role play as country representatives, advancing the interests of their delegation in relation to the 2021-2025 EU Drugs Strategy.

They each delivered an opening speech stating their position on and hopes for the Strategy. Afterward, they introduced and debated several topical motions on the contents of the Strategy which then resulted in the voting and adoption of amendments.



LEARNING METHODS



Having consolidated their knowledge and skills in relation to the EU Drug Policy Creation Process, participants then engaged in learning by doing and mentorship as primary learning methods during the networking sessions, forging connections with civil society representatives, youth advocates, and decision-makers. Participants discussed and received accounts of the panelist's first-hand experiences with different advocacy strategies through Q&A-style sessions.

They built connections with the panelists and obtained advice on how to best implement the various skills they acquired during the Skills Building component, as well as gaining insight into the intricacies of drug policy advocacy from regional to EU levels.

Finally, as part of the Strategy Building component, the participants practiced learning by doing, goal setting, coalition building, and negotiating. They started by considering more abstract values and obligations that they envision to be upheld in Europe, which resulted in a few considerations.

These considerations were then contextualized, split into smaller milestones, and given a timeline. Participants then negotiated the goals that needed to be prioritized as a Youth Consortium, as well as the kind of structured organizing that would benefit these goals the most.



PARTICIPANTS PROFILES

Our cohort of participants has been representative of a diverse range of geographical, socio-economic and advocacy backgrounds. Our 30 participants came from 12 countries across Europe:



AUSTRIA



BELGIUM



GERMANY



GREECE



HUNGARY



IRELAND



ITALY



LITHUANIA



**NORTH
MACEDONIA**



PORTUGAL



SPAIN



**UNITED
KINGDOM**

The age of the participants ranges from 19-29 years old



PARTICIPANTS PROFILES

24 participants had been involved in grassroots advocacy efforts in the field of drug policy and harm reduction before starting their training. Two participants have come from the medical field and prevention services with little to no prior experience in advocacy before the commencement of our project.

Four participants enrolled in the training based on their previous academic engagement with drug-related issues. Six participants have identified themselves either as people who use drugs, people directly impacted by current punitive drug policies, or as people with friends/family impacted by drug use and drug policy.

The diversity of our cohort meant that participants were exposed to a variety of expertise, lived experiences, and opinions, which enriched their learning process.



DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION MEASURES

In line with the EU HORIZONTAL priority on inclusion and diversity in all fields of education, training, youth, and sport, our organizations have endeavored to maximize the participation of young people of various socio-economic backgrounds, abilities, and geographical positioning.

Our project has included funding for flights, accommodation, as well as daily expenses such as food and city transport for the components organized in Dublin and Vienna.

All participants have had their flights and accommodation fully covered, while more than 70 % of the participants have been issued refunds for food and city transport. Participants were also supported with visa recommendation letters when required.

We have also dedicated a part of our budget for participants data expenses during the running of the virtual components. Participants were invited to resort to the latter on a needs basis.

In addition, we have made sure that the spaces we used for the in-person components were wheelchair accessible. Catering options also included vegan, vegetarian, and gluten-free options, whilst also taking into account any other allergies disclosed by the participants.

All virtual events were recorded and made available to participants, alongside any other materials used (Powerpoint presentations, policy briefs, tables, etc).

Finally, we have made sure to encourage the participation of young people who use drugs or are affected by drugs, paying considerable attention to their insights in adjusting the training and strategy-building exercises.



MEASUREMENTS OF SUCCESS

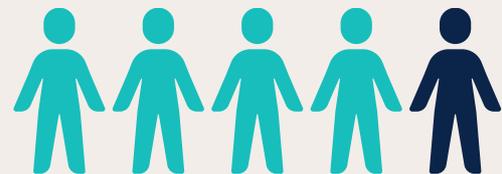
PARTICIPANTS' KNOWLEDGE AND ENGAGEMENT WITH EU DRUG POLICY BEFORE THE START OF THE TRAINING

Although a large proportion of our participants have had experience with drug policy advocacy and harm reduction work in their own countries, almost all of them expressed that they had limited working knowledge of the EU Drug Policy Creation process before the start of the training.

They identified the bureaucratic process as a major barrier to their engagement, which made it difficult to identify opportunities as young people. Only two participants felt reasonably content with the level of knowledge they had before the start of the training and that was, in part, due to previous participation in EMCCDA's Summer School.

In terms of our Knowledge Building objective, participants were asked to rate their knowledge of drug policy-making mechanisms within the EU from a scale of 1 to 5, with one representing no knowledge and 5 indicating a well-rounded understanding of institutions involved in drug policy, legislation, and drug strategies. 27.3% of participants situated themselves at the beginning of the training at 1, whilst 36.4 % opted for 2 and 27.3 % opted for 3. Only one participant rated their knowledge at 4 out of 5.

For Skills-Building, more people displayed confidence in their public speaking aptitudes, with 36.4 % of participants rating themselves a 4 out of 5 and 27.3 % opting for 2 and 3 out of 5 each.



In comparison, the ability of participants to engage and negotiate with stakeholders was largely rated a 2 out of 5 (45.5 % identified with this rating). 36.4 % in total have rated their ability at 3 or above, but none gave a rating of 5 out of 5. Only 2 participants gave themselves a rating of 1 out of 5.

MEASUREMENTS OF SUCCESS

PARTICIPANTS' KNOWLEDGE AND ENGAGEMENT WITH EU DRUG POLICY AFTER COMPLETING THE TRAINING

The ability of participants to engage with EU Drug Policy has improved significantly as a result of the training. Participants have expressed that:

“I FEEL MUCH MORE EMPOWERED TO ENGAGE WITH DRUG POLICY AT THE LOCAL AND EU LEVEL [...] I FEEL MORE CONFIDENT ABOUT THE DIFFERENT AVENUES TO ENGAGE AND PEOPLE TO COOPERATE WITH”

“ I AM MORE AWARE OF THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS TO ENGAGE WITH THE EU AND I BETTER UNDERSTAND HOW THE PROCESS IS ORGANIZED AND STRUCTURED”

The Networking element has particularly stood out to participants in terms of the project's benefits. Everyone has indicated that they have developed useful connections with stakeholders and advocates in the field and that they feel more connected to other young people working in drug policy advocacy. One participant stated that “it was awesome to be given the chance to meet so many interesting and amazing young people from all over Europe. Working on the same goals helped me strengthen my vision.” Another participant expressed that they found “connections, optimism for upcoming work towards a better and more rational understanding of drugs”.

In addition, participants have enhanced their working knowledge of EU institutions, legislations, and strategies. After the completion of the training, all participants rated their knowledge a 4 out of 5 compared to the initial 27.3 % at 1, 36.4 % at 2, 27.3 % at 3 and only 1 at 4 out of 5.

While this rating still shows that there are aspects related to knowledge building that still need to be improved, we are confident that these will be achieved as the Youth Consortium continues to develop its projects.



MEASUREMENTS OF SUCCESS

PARTICIPANTS' KNOWLEDGE AND ENGAGEMENT WITH EU DRUG POLICY AFTER COMPLETING THE TRAINING

In terms of building public speaking skills, we have also seen a general improvement in the ratings given by participants. The 4 out of 5 rating experienced an increase from 36.4 % to 54.5 %. 5 out of 5 also rose from 0% to 9.1%, whereas 3 out of 5 went to 36.4 %. No participant has rated their ability to speak publicly below 3 after the completion of the training.

While these results are not perfect, we believe participants will develop full confidence and ease in public speaking as they engage with the work of the Youth Consortium and get to apply these skills on a day-to-day basis, outside training sessions.

“STRUCTURING THE DISCUSSION TO PROGRESS FROM VISIONS OF LIBERATION TO THE CONSORTIUM FOUNDING WAS REALLY EFFECTIVE AND ALLOWED FOR US TO DETERMINE CONCRETE GOALS AND STEPS”

For stakeholder engagement and negotiation, we saw an identical increase in ratings, which shows the significant impact of our training. However, similarly to public speaking, participants need more time and opportunities in order to further cultivate these skills. The European Youth Drug Policy Consortium will constitute one viable avenue in this sense.

With regard to Strategy Building, participants found this component particularly useful and impactful:

“VISIONS OF LIBERATION AND GOAL SETTING WERE VERY USEFUL TO BRAINSTORM ACTIONABLE IDEAS WITH FELLOW ADVOCATES AND LEARN FROM THEIR PERSPECTIVES”

“I THINK WE UNDERPLAYED IT BUT THE STRATEGY BUILDING SERIES HAS BEEN VERY EMPOWERING AND AN INVALUABLE ASSET TO YOUTH”



MEASUREMENTS OF SUCCESS

PARTICIPANTS' KNOWLEDGE AND ENGAGEMENT WITH EU DRUG POLICY AFTER COMPLETING THE TRAINING

Therefore, participants went from seeing many barriers to engaging with EU drug policy to having a clear set of actionable goals and a community to work with.

Still, it is key to acknowledge that the Strategy Building component needed more time to be fleshed out. The discussion was condensed into one weekend which led some participants to flag the long hours of work: "It would be better next time to have more breaks between the sessions."

Additionally, some participants also felt that the Consortium Founding Conversation was not specific enough. This was mainly due to the limited time we had to discuss and set attainable goals, whilst simultaneously determining the most appropriate organizational structure to serve such plans. These discussions remain to be revisited by Consortium members at the first post-Strategy Building meeting. Moving forward, the Consortium's work will equally pay more attention to the allocation of work in order to address the participants' needs.

On the whole, we believe we have satisfactorily met the main goals of our project as participants successfully engaged in Knowledge Building, Skills Building, Networking, and Strategy Building. We will continue building on these goals within the Youth Consortium and in future training.



MEASUREMENTS OF SUCCESS

PARTICIPANT ENGAGEMENT THROUGHOUT THE TRAINING

While we had 30 participants originally enrolled in our program, virtual sessions were frequently attended by only 11-12 of the participants due to various work commitments throughout the week. However, most of the participants that could not attend the sessions watched the recordings and engaged with make-up exercises in their own time.

The first in-person component in Dublin saw 18 participants attend in person. This number is partly due to unforeseen visa issues, intersecting work commitments, as well as delayed planning of the event because of a change in the project coordination team.

However, due to the possibility to form connections with other young people and create a sense of community, sessions afterward saw a marked increase in attendance.

Virtual networking sessions saw a regular attendance of 15 participants while the in-person component in Vienna gathered 22 participants. Two participants were also offered, due to special circumstances, the opportunity to attend virtually the in-person sessions.

While these numbers are overall less than anticipated, the people that have engaged throughout the duration of the project have consistently displayed immense dedication and have remained representative of our target populations. The increase in virtual and in-person attendance also shows that despite initial planning difficulties, participant engagement not only remained stable but also increased at times during the training.



MEASUREMENTS OF SUCCESS

CAPACITY BUILDING OF YOUTH ORGANISATIONS

A particularly visible measurement of success also was the increase in both SSDP's and YouthRISE's capacity to engage with EU drug policy. Before the commencement of this training, both organizations had done little advocacy at EU level.

Through this project, SSDP was able to improve its reach in countries where it doesn't have current members including in Belgium, Greece, Portugal, Italy, and North Macedonia. SSDP also improved its opportunities to collaborate with other youth-led organizations from countries we do not have a presence in. SSDP has also gained more avenues to directly engage with people involved in harm reduction services and include their direct insights into our advocacy.

YouthRISE has benefited hugely from this project. We have had many members from the EU in our network over the years but we have not engaged in EU Drug Policy previously to this extent.

We now have communication with a diverse consortium of youth advocates and a strategy for advocating at the EU level. It has opened Youth RISE up for further impact in achieving our mission and vision statements.



MEASUREMENTS OF SUCCESS

GENERAL FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS

The feedback received from participants has been largely positive. One participant reported the following:

“I AM DELIGHTED I WAS PART OF THIS PROGRAM- NOT ONLY DID I LEARN USEFUL INFORMATION AND SKILLS, BUT THE TRAINING HELPED ME CONNECT WITH PEOPLE SHARING SIMILAR INTERESTS AND IDEAS. [...] DISCUSSING THESE TOPICS, EXCHANGING OPINIONS, AND SIMPLY LISTENING TO PEOPLE THAT HAVE EXPERIENCE FROM DIFFERENT FIELDS ENHANCED MY KNOWLEDGE AND LED ME TO FORM A MORE HOLISTIC VIEW OF DRUG POLICY.”

“THIS WAS AN EYE-OPENING EXPERIENCE THAT ALLOWED US TO DEVELOP EXISTING SKILLS AND REALLY PULL RESOURCES FROM OUR DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS FOR A COMMON GOAL.”

Nonetheless, participants have also highlighted a few aspects that were in need of improvement. Some expressed the need for the schedule to be stricter and for a predetermined spending allowance. These were considerations that at the time of the in-person components in Dublin and Vienna we were unable to provide due to the last-minute nature of venue and accommodation booking.

We instead chose to let our participants send us their city transport and food receipts after the in-person components were completed. We made the commitment to refund as much of the spending as we can. Later on, all participants that submitted a refund request for daily expenses were issued full refunds.

Another aspect that participants highlighted in their feedback was the need for more in-person networking opportunities especially at the start of the training, as these would have helped to build a stronger community before the Skill Building component in Dublin.

While participants found the virtual panels and Q&A sessions useful, they felt the need for deeper connections. This is a concern we hope to address in the upcoming work of the European Youth Drug Policy Consortium and in the structuring of future training.



PROJECT TAKEAWAYS AND NEXT STEPS

TAKEAWAYS FOR PARTICIPANTS

At the end of the project, a general sense of optimism, excitement, and possibility marked our cohort:

“THERE IS A LOT TO BE DONE WITHIN THE EU FRAMEWORK BUT I BELIEVE IT IS ACTUALLY DOABLE” [...] WE HAVE MORE POWER THAN WE THINK WE HAVE”

“I PLAN TO HELP REVIEWING OUR STRATEGY DOCUMENT AND ADVOCATE FOR THE GOALS WE’VE SET”

“I WILL ACTIVELY PARTICIPATE IN THE CONSORTIUM AND TRY TO ENGAGE WITH PEOPLE LOCALLY” [...] I HOPE TO PARTICIPATE AND HELP IN THIS GROUP, PARTICULARLY WITH EDUCATION GOALS”

Alongside a general commitment to continue the work outlined during Strategy Building, here are some key takeaways participants have revealed after completing the training:

- Advocacy is a complex process. There are different approaches and sides to EU drug policy that youth can focus on.
- The dynamism of young people should be harnessed despite how slow the policy-making process can be.
- The extent of the work put in by grassroots organizations and local groups is more significant than expected when aiming for change at EU level.
- There is like-minded youth in Europe willing to organize together for change.
- Uniting different stakeholders to create fluid bottom-up change is key to meaningful reform.
- The Consortium is a great vehicle to maximize opportunities for advocacy and stakeholder engagement within the European Union.



PROJECT TAKEAWAYS AND NEXT STEPS

TAKEAWAYS FOR PROJECT COORDINATORS

Throughout the training, project coordinators have also gained valuable insights that can aid youth advocacy organizing in the future. Some of these insights are:

There is an increased need for putting together in-person networking events and facilitating strategic development conversations

Young people need to benefit from mechanisms of engagement that go beyond simple training opportunities. They need to be provided with concrete steps to move forward in their advocacy journey and have opportunities to directly contribute to the shaping of these steps

There is a demand for increased organizational capacity when it comes to coordinating groups of youth advocates from various backgrounds and enhancing accessibility to policy-making mechanisms

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- The dynamism of young people should be harnessed despite how slow the policy-making process can be.
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PROJECT TAKEAWAYS AND NEXT STEPS

NEXT STEPS

As outlined in the Project Summary and the Learning Methods section of this report, our project resulted in the creation of a Strategy Document. The goals fleshed out as part of this document will be part of the activity of the European Youth Drug Policy Consortium split into 4 working groups: Education, Community/ Social Action, Legal/ Political Action, and Health and Accessibility.

The working groups will meet to consolidate their priorities and will report on their work in 6 months.

We are also planning to further disseminate the results of this Erasmus+ project with profile pieces on our organizations' blogs and as part of the SSDP podcast, the Sensible Drug Policy Show.

