



EuroPeers Strategic National Agency Cooperation (SNAC)

Co-ordinated and monitored by the Estonian National Agency
Organised by the network of **National Agencies of the Erasmus+**and **European Solidarity Corps Programme**

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This guide is based on materials from the EuroPeers network's history and has been completed with valuable contributions from interviews with:



- **Heike Zimmermann** (German National Agency, founding member of the EuroPeers network)
- Laura Kiviselg (Estonian network coordinator)
- Magdalena Szykor (Polish network coordinator)
- · Simona Musteata (Romanian network coordinator)

Additional written contributions were provided by **other current national coordinators and individuals** closely involved in building the network.



The guide was created as part of a Long-Term Activity (LTA) led by the Estonian National Agency.

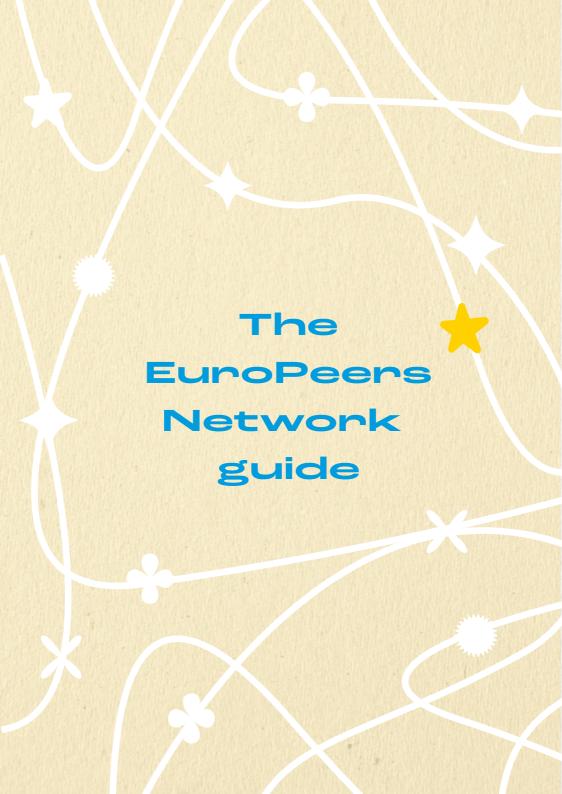
Tallinn, Estonia, 2025.











Introduction

Welcome to the EuroPeers network guide - your gateway to an active and expanding community of young individuals who have enriched their lives through EU youth programs like Erasmus+Youth and the European Solidarity Corps (ESC).





You might be wondering - what are the EuroPeers?

EuroPeers is an alumni network, in which members are dedicated to sharing their transformative European experiences and promoting European youth opportunities to their peers. For that, the network members organize youth-led events while encouraging conversations about Europe's future and values like solidarity, democracy, and equality.

This guide will walk you through the journey of the EuroPeers network, looking back at its history from its grassroots origins to its current internationally coordinated structure. It explores the network's key roles and responsibilities, successful strategies for establishing and maintaining national networks, and the benefits the network provides to its members and national agencies. The guide is a great resource for anyone seeking to understand EuroPeer's impact, working structure and the possibilities that the network has to offer.

This guide's information is compiled from materials dating back to the early days of EuroPeers, along with insights collected from interviews with former and current colleagues involved in the EuroPeers network - Heike Zimmermann (program officer in German National Agency who was a part of founding the EuroPeers network), Laura Kiviselg (Estonian network coordinator), Magdalena Szykor (Polish network coordinator), Simona Musteata (Romanian network coordinator). Contributions were made in a written format by other current national coordinators and by people who have been closely involved in the network building process.



EuroPeers Network Guide

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Chapter 1

Network history



n this first chapter, you will find an outline of the EuroPeers network history including important milestones from the very first moments to the current reality.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, a shift from an economically driven Europe to a more citizen-focused Europe led to the launch of EU youth programs including Youth for Europe (1989-1999) and YOUTH Program (2000-2006). These programs helped young people connect informally with their peers across Europe. These informal connections, built on shared experiences and a desire to connect, laid the groundwork for the EuroPeers network. Although the network didn't spring into existence overnight, rather it emerged organically due to European youth programs evolving and program participants' passion for sharing their experiences. Here's a timeline of how the network started to come to life:







Emergence of an informal community (2005)

By 2005, the informal connections among young people began to evolve into a more organized network. The German National Agency (German NA) initiated a project for European Youth Week by inviting young individuals with experience in EU youth programs to organize 100 events to promote European youth mobility programs to their peers. This emphasized a decentralized, peer-to-peer approach instead of a single large-scale event and allowed for greater reach and engagement within the country - over 100 youngsters took part in preparatory training and in a few months, they organized over 100 different type of events in various locations throughout Germany during European Youth Week. This strategy was deemed highly successful by both the German NA and the youngsters. The project generated significant media attention.

Heike Zimmermann, who has been closely involved along the network building process since the beginning, recalls the moments when the idea of a peer-topeer approach came to life:



hen we were informed by the commission that there will be European Youth Week in 2005, we sat together with our colleagues and decided that it would not be a good idea to have one single large-scale event as we would not reach a lot of young people that way. Why not have a lot of different events all over Germany? And what if it's not us trying to get young people, but it's young people themselves trying to reach their peers?

The birth of EuroPeers (2006)

After the European Youth Week project in 2005, an evaluation meeting was held by the German NA. Over 60% of the participants, who were a part of European Youth Week in Germany, attended and expressed a desire to continue their involvement and contribution in spreading the word about European youth programs. As the German NA representatives believed in the peer-to-peer concept and were willing to support this movement, the idea of an alumni network called EuroPeers was born.

Heike Zimmermann looks back at the evaluation meeting:



When we invited the youngsters who took part in organizing European Youth Week to an evaluation meeting, we felt very astonished that 60% of the participants wanted to come and evaluate the project. And this evaluation meeting was a really strong starting point to decide - this is not a one-time thing, but this has to be continued. So this was a moment, together with the EuroPeers, to decide how we should go on.





Expansion and refinement (2006-2014)

The EuroPeers network expanded organically, driven by shared experiences and the dedication of its members. Subsequent meetings of the EuroPeers helped to define the network's identity, mission, and structure.



The peer-to-peer approach, where young people share their experiences directly with each other, remained central to the network's methodology. This approach was supported by training programs designed to empower and equip young members with skills in storytelling, public speaking, and project management.

The first signs of internationalization started to emerge, and by 2010, the German-speaking countries of Austria and Switzerland were involved in the training sessions. In 2011, the first German-speaking international training course took place in Luxembourg.

Internationalization (2014-2020)

In 2014 Germany, Poland, Austria, Estonia, Norway, and Belgium collaborated to establish the European network's international structure.

For years, colleagues from the German National Agency had been presenting the EuroPeers project to other NAs and the European Commission, generating interest and several attempts to launch similar initiatives in other countries.

In Austria and the Netherlands small EuroPeers projects were initiated in 2010.

In Belgium, there was a project called EU.xxpress, Poland had the EU Ambassadors initiative running for some years.

Based on various discussions with NA colleagues, the growing interest from other National Agencies, and the start of the new program generation, the German NA organized a strategic planning meeting in 2014 to develop a shared understanding and vision for the internationalization of the peer projects that were already in place at the national level. Over the years, other countries joined the international network as well.



Heike Zimmermann pinpoints this pivotal moment:



think that in 2014 the meeting of six countries establishing a European structure, that was an important milestone. From that moment on, there was a European network. There was a unified wish to grow. From that point on, it didn't feel like selling the German project, but rather different countries coming together and advocating for a European level network and structure.



In 2017, the EuroPeers concept was adopted by BIBB (which implements the vocational education branch of Erasmus+ in Germany), who launched their own alumni network called EuroApprentices. This is now an European-wide network for Erasmus+ vocational education participants, which is closely modeled on EuroPeers and built using their training concepts.

Formalization of a strategic partnership (2020-present)

A significant milestone was reached in 2020 with the creation of a strategic partnership, now led by the Estonian National Agency. This partnership was created through the joint efforts of national agencies that valued the EuroPeers network, aiming to align on shared goals and expand the network's outreach.



The recruitment of a dedicated network coordinator marked a shift toward more coherent network management, increasing transnational cooperation and improving the network's coordination and efficiency.



The Long Term Activity project (LTA) launched in 2021, aiming to formalize the network's structure, enhance its digital presence, expand inclusivity to reach young people with fewer opportunities, and strengthen national-level partnerships.



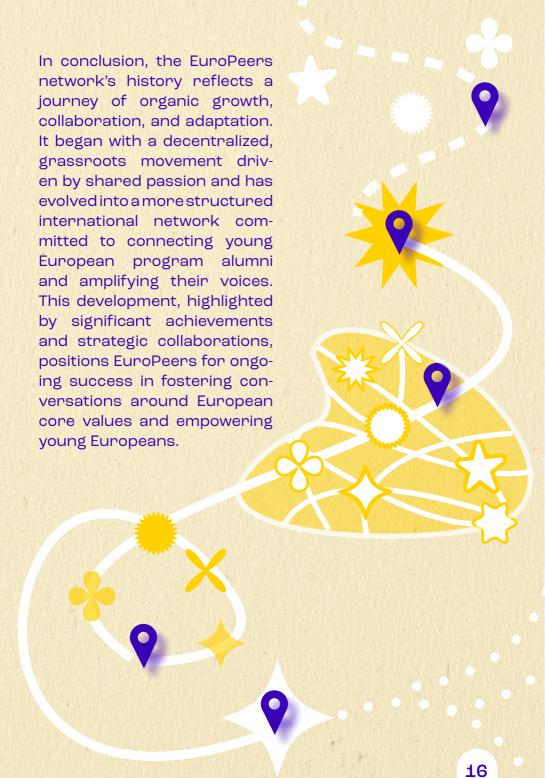


A <u>handbook</u> for developers of EuroPeers training courses was created to align the training content in on-boarding courses. Additionally, a training manual was developed by the partners, a common visual identity was renewed and enlarged for stronger branding, and the EuroPeers Instagram page (<u>@europeers.eu</u>) and international website (<u>europeers.org</u>) were launched.





Members hosted and attended training courses on storytelling, mental health, and training design. In addition to playing a vital role in supporting the promotion of EU youth programs such as Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps (ESC). The EuroPeers also encourage dialogue about European values. By acting as important multipliers, EuroPeers increase the visibility of mobility and participation opportunities, reaching youth from diverse backgrounds who might otherwise find it challenging to access these options.



Chapter 2

Overview of the current international network structure



as a Long Term Activity project (LTA) led by the Estonian National Agency.

Fourteen active countries are involved, each with their own national coordinator(s) and group of EuroPeers. These national networks are integrated within the international network, which cultivates a vibrant alumni community, where different networks work together to broaden the EU youth programs' visibility and impact, welcome new members, and maintain the network's structure. The LTA partners enter into contracts committing to co-funding, actively participating in the development of a yearly work plan, committing to hosting international activities and collaborating with the international network coordinator. This dynamic structure, combining central coordination with distributed responsibility, ensures the network's adaptability and sustainability. As of 2025, the current partners are...





Key network roles and responsibilities

Let's have a look at the key roles within the EuroPeers network - national coordinators, international coordinators and EuroPeers network members.

National Coordinators



Each participating country designates one or more national coordinators, mainly National Agency (NA) staff members, to manage the national EuroPeers network. Some countries also contract freelance trainers or external support staff based on their needs and available resources. The responsibilities of the National Network Coordinators are multi-faceted and involve various aspects of network management and community building, such as:

Community management



This includes regularly recruiting and onboarding new members for the national EuroPeers community, maintaining communication with existing members, understanding their needs and national contexts, and supporting their personal and professional development.

Hosting network events



Often in cooperation with the EuroPeers, the national coordinator plans, delivers, and hosts national and international network events like annual meetings and training courses.

Content creation

Coordinators (together with their national EuroPeers) contribute content (articles, updates) to the international EuroPeers website and networks' own national channels, keeping the platforms dynamic and relevant.



Active participation

This entails active participation in bi-monthly check-in calls with the international network co-ordinator and other national network coordinators, attendance at annual in-person meetings and other events, and taking responsibility for hosting international trainings and topical workshops.



Working group participation

When working groups are formed (e.g., a core group of at least two NAs providing feedback and support to the international network coordinator), active involvement and contribution are expected.



Sharing of good practices

Coordinators actively engage in exchanging good practices and providing support to other partners within the network, fostering collaborative relationships.



Managing the resources

Coordinators support managing the resources contributed by the National Agency to the network.



International Network Coordinator



This role oversees the entire international network. The International Network Coordinator is responsible for several key areas:

Strategic planning



Developing and implementing the annual work plan, coordinating activities across all participating countries.

Network oversight



Managing and monitoring network processes, initiating projects and ensuring work packages are executed effectively.

Stakeholder liaison

Representing the EuroPeers network to external stakeholders and partners.



Inter-network communication

Facilitating communication and collaboration between national networks.



Standardization and quality assurance

Working to standardize procedures (e.g., training materials, reporting processes) and ensure high quality across the network.



Administrative tasks

Managing administrative tasks, such as procuring facilitators, handling payments, and forming and managing working groups.



A core group of national EuroPeer coordinators provides regular feedback to the international coordinator, contributing to the ongoing development and refinement of network processes.

EuroPeers network member



A EuroPeer is a program alumni who has firsthand experience with the Erasmus+ and/or European Solidarity Corps (ESC) opportunities. Motivated to remain engaged after their participation, they share their authentic experiences with other young people to encourage wider participation in the programs and empower youngsters to become informed, motivated and active citizens of Europe. The tasks of an EuroPeer might include:



Active participation

EuroPeers attend regular meetings of their national networks, both in person and digitally.





They put their ideas into practice by organizing various initiatives such as information sessions for peers, experience sharing events, and other activities.



Representation

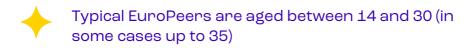
EuroPeers may be invited by their National Agency to represent the network at events.

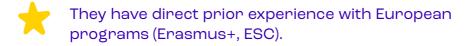


Project implementation

Some EuroPeers take the initiative to write and implement their own projects.

Here are some common characteristics of an EuroPeer:





- Motivated by a strong belief in the value of these opportunities.
- Desire personal growth and sharing experiences with others.
- Some networks include older alumni (approaching 30) to support younger generations in accessing opportunities.
- Becoming a EuroPeer enhances their positive experiences and community engagement from European programs.
- A strong desire for community and peer-to-peer engagement is a common characteristic.



Chapter 3

Benefits of having EuroPeers



While the EuroPeers network offers numerous benefits for the parties involved, we invited representatives from the National Agency to highlight some of the most significant advantages for the NA from the involvement of EuroPeers.

Here's what they shared:



Effective recruitment

EuroPeers organize targeted recruitment activities, raising awareness and expanding participation in programs like Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps, especially among harder-to-reach groups like NEET (youth not in employment, education or training). By engaging young people through grassroots connections, EuroPeers improve access to EU youth programs, fostering inclusivity across diverse backgrounds.

Direct feedback channel

EuroPeers act as a crucial link between NAs and youth, providing valuable feedback on programs. By sharing their experiences, stories, and opinions, young people help ensure that agency initiatives align with their needs, fostering more relevant programs and encouraging greater youth participation.



Sustained active engagement

EuroPeers enable young individuals to remain active citizens after their involvement in European youth programs, often participating as proactive members of the (inter)national youth community. Active citizenship and community building are core aims of EU youth programs, and EuroPeers exemplify success in these areas through their initiatives.



EuroPeers support NAs by participating in and organizing events, as well as promoting youth programs, which can help ease the demands on agency resources. For example, EuroPeers have done presentations and workshops on EU programs which were previously done by an NA representative.

In summary, the EuroPeers network serves as a vital asset that enriches EU youth programs and empowers young citizens, ultimately promoting a more engaged, inclusive European community.

Chapter 4 National network set-up



his chapter details the practical aspects of establishing a national EuroPeers network, drawing on experiences from multiple National Agencies. It outlines successful activities, typical yearly cycles, the profile of a typical EuroPeer, and key lessons learned.



Successful practical activities for national network set-up

Establishing a thriving national network requires more than just a strong vision; it demands practical, effective strategies. Here are some key activities proven successful in building and sustaining a network:

Phase 1: foundation & structure



Identify a coordinator

A dedicated individual within or closely connected to the National Agency is crucial. This person will act as the initial coordinator, providing consistent leadership and facilitating communication. For some agencies it's the Eurodesk coordinator, for others a program officer - here we trust your national realities on choosing who would be best. In France, two people within the NA are in charge of the network and three external network facilitators from their pool of trainers. In Finland, the network coordinator is also outsourced and working in close cooperation with NA staff.



Develop a clear framework

Establish a framework outlining the network's goals, membership criteria, communication protocols, and planned activities. This provides a foundation for consistent operations. If the strategy of the network is based on an inclusive approach, consider how it affects planned resources and structures.

In France, a concept note helps to organize the network, which includes external facilitation, terms and conditions of participation, EuroPeers activity to strengthen the motivation (mostly kick-off meetings), number of EuroPeers, and internal management.

Phase 2: engagement & empowerment



Regular interaction

Implement regular communication using various channels (e.g., Messenger or WhatsApp chat groups, Discord, Padlet or other platforms). This ensures participants stay informed and connected. In some channels, the NA coordinators are included, but the EuroPeers can also have a separate channel for their own communication. Some networks also have their newsletters (for example in Norway), where possibilities and important updates are communicated.





Communication inside the NA

The network coordinator should keep in mind that not all of the colleagues in the National Agency know about the possibilities of EuroPeers. The network coordinator should actively promote the EuroPeers network, leveraging it as a valuable resource. This can be achieved by mentioning EuroPeers during meetings, utilizing the network in discussions, and advocating for its benefits in NA Network Meetings and interactions with other organizations.

Laura Kiviselg shares her experience in spreading that information inside Estonian National Agency:



Kiviselg

hat I've had to do a lot in my work is to make sure that my colleagues in the National Agency understand and recognize the EuroPeers network, its values and principles, and to keep reminding them that the EuroPeers exists. It can take years of dedication and work, but I have now come to the point where my colleagues know the possibilities of how they could incorporate EuroPeers into other activities.



Meaningful Activities

Organize regular events and activities. This could include workshops, training sessions, networking events, and community projects. Additionally, sending EuroPeer delegations to important national and European events (such as youth conferences, ESC returnee events, and European Youth Week activities) can help promote the network and increase its visibility. A good practice is to create an environment where young people can take initiative and engage actively, rather than simply organizing activities and events for them.





Empowerment & ownership

Foster a sense of ownership and shared responsibility among members. Give as much responsibility to the EuroPeers as possible, allow them to make a decision on topics and logistical questions rather than offer them ready-made solutions. In Finland, ownership and engagement is created via national advisory group. In Rumania, an external community organizer was brought on board to teach EuroPeers the philosophy of a community.



Phase 3: sustainability & evolution



Continuous evaluation

Regularly assess the network's effectiveness, and adapt strategies based on feedback from members. In Poland, organizing least two activities per year and participating in one residential meeting is essential to be an EuroPeer network member, which helps to maintain the activeness of the network.



Knowledge sharing

Create platforms for knowledge exchange and peer-to-peer learning. This strengthens the community and enhances collective expertise. In Estonia, EuroPeers are often integrated into activities as helpers and facilitators to involve them more in the process.





Mentorship & training

Offer mentorship opportunities and training to enhance participants' skills and knowledge. Participation in the international network allows the National Coordinator to learn from the experiences of other national networks. In Romania, a "Buddy System" is implemented where an experienced EuroPeer becomes a mentor for 3-4 newcomers.



By prioritizing these practical activities, National Agencies can build successful networks that foster collaboration, promote shared goals, and achieve lasting impact. However, it's crucial to remember that establishing a national network involves a process of trial and error, and learning from mistakes is essential for ongoing success.

4.2 Yearly activities in national networks: a detailed look

Structured core activities

Annual national meeting (typically spring/autumn)

This is the flagship event, usually a multi-day in-person gathering. It serves as a primary venue for:



Community Building

Strengthening the network's social fabric through team-building activities, informal gatherings, and social events. An example from the Netherlands is the online Secret Santa winter meeting, where each EuroPeer crafts a gift for another member and sends it to them. During the meeting, everyone opens their presents together, fostering connection and camaraderie among participants.





Training

Providing learning and development opportunities, often tailored to alumni's needs and interests. This could include workshops on skills like communication, project management, or specific areas relevant to the participants' tasks in the network.



Strategic Planning

Involving alumni in the planning process for the upcoming year's activities, fosters a sense of ownership and shared responsibility. EuroPeers are invited to be a part of thematic working groups based on policy priorities (for example, inclusion working group).





Regional Gatherings

localized events in various parts of the country to facilitate greater participation from alumni in different regions.



Social media campaigns

initiatives leveraging social media to promote network activities, publicize opportunities, and engage alumni. These campaigns take place both on dedicated EuroPeers platforms and on National Agency channels.



2. Monthly/weekly online meetings (on-going)

These are regularly scheduled (often virtual) meetings, frequently facilitated by the alumni themselves or an external facilitator, ensuring continuous engagement throughout the year. Common formats include discussions on topical issues, sharing of resources and best practices, and fostering peer support. The informal nature of these meetings promotes a relaxed and engaging atmosphere, allowing for the organic emergence of initiatives. The NA representative can, but often does not participate in those meetings.

3. Onboarding training or meeting for new network

This often includes brainstorming sessions, working group formation, and the establishment of concrete action plans for specific initiatives. In Germany, Open Space or Barcamp session is organized during a hike or other outdoor activity.members:

Typically, a dedicated event is organized for new members of the network to familiarize them with the EuroPeers concept and create an opportunity for them to connect with one another before fully integrating with the rest of the network.

4. Other events, workshops and initiatives (throughout the year)

These events respond to emerging needs and opportunities. They might include:



Thematic Workshops, trainings and working groups

focused on specific skills, topics, or areas of interest identified by the alumni. In Germany, the EuroPeers Lab enables participants to work on network development topics over a weekend, with organizational support from the National Agency. In France, EuroPeers are invited to be a part of thematic working groups based on policy priorities (for example, inclusion working group).





Regional Gatherings

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Advisory groups

In various networks, EuroPeers are invited to participate in advisory groups to provide insights on the development and implementation of youth programs and initiatives.



International opportunities

many networks consider participation in international training and annual meetings crucial, providing young people with valuable international experience and opportunities to network with EuroPeers from other countries. There are also examples of multiple national networks working together, like Estonian and Latvian cooperation projects.





Microgrants

EuroPeers Norway is introducing microgrants for EuroPeers, to foster the promotion of activities and engage the network.





Thematic focus & alumni-led initiatives

An important part of the annual program is its ability to respond to the interests and needs of the alumni. Many national networks invite alumni to suggest and lead workshops, initiatives, or events. The topics discussed often reflect current trends, skills that need to be developed, or specific interests within the alumni community. This way, alumni can take charge, while the national coordinator acts as a supporter and mentor, offering guidance and help when it's needed. EuroPeers are also encouraged to organize their own local actions, for example, school visits, to share their experience and promote the EU youth programs.





Flexibility and adaptability

It is essential to highlight that the annual program, although it provides a structured framework, remains flexible and adaptable. The specific activities, how often they happen, and their format are often changed based on feedback from alumni, available resources, and new opportunities that come up. This flexible nature of the network allows it to keep evolving, which strengthens its relevance and impact on the alumni community. The ability to respond to changing needs and include spontaneous events makes the network dynamic and maintains its lasting appeal.

4.3 Suggestions for setting up a EuroPeers network



Communication and connections

Maintain regular communication with other coordinators and the international coordinator. Casual conversations can strengthen connections. Leverage the advantages of the international network and explore job shadowing opportunities.



Facilitators

Consider hiring external facilitators for network management. Laura Kiviselg shares her experience with hiring a facilitator from inside the network:



Laura Kiviselg

hen bright and active youngsters join the network, offering them a small monetary salary for their contribution (for facilitating the network meeting for example) can be a great way to make them feel more involved and recognized. This is a chance for them to start building their career and gain experience. While hiring a young network member, keep in mind that they need a lot of support and feedback.



Empowerment of youth

Dare to give responsibilities to young people, allowing them to experiment and learn from failures. Encourage a self-driven approach by allowing EuroPeers to take initiative in their activities rather than doing things for them. Foster processes to enable this structure. Polish EuroPeers network coordinator Magdalena Szykor shares her viewpoint:



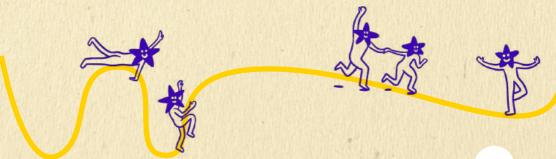
Magdalena Szykor

et EuroPeers take initiative. Foster the process of decision making, so that the youngsters are empowered to do things themselves. They are the ones who are building the network, and once they take ownership of their ideas, they feel more connected. The process can be long and ongoing, but it's worth doing.



Adaptability

Be open to changing methods and adapting to new circumstances as needed. Youngsters, the programs and life around us is constantly evolving, and so should the network. Learn from your own practice (and from the experiences of other networks) and adapt your network's way of working.





Understanding personal lives

Acknowledge that young participants have their own lives and commitments; their involvement is voluntary. Romanian network coordinator Simona Musteata highlights an important learning:



With each year of coordinating the network we realized that we have to take young people as they are. Sometimes the people who you think will be involved for a long time, something suddenly happens and their life changes - they get a job in another country, go to a new university or something else. Do not give judgments but remind yourself that these are young people and they are allowed to change their minds.



Inclusion of minors

Although many countries can not include minors in their activities due to different restrictions, consider exploring the options to involve minors in the program to allow them to share their experience and contribute to the mission of EuroPeers.



Resource considerations

Ensure that the project manager has youth work experience or that they are willing to try youth work approaches. National Agencies should assess their resources for facilitating the network and consider subcontracting if necessary.



Care for participants

Show genuine concern for EuroPeers by inviting them to NA events and involving them in agency activities. Often, the EuroPeers offer the only way for a National Agency to be in direct contact with youngsters. Magdalena Szykor emphasizes the importance of a feeling of partnership with the youngsters:



ou cannot be "the lady in the office", you have to have more like a partner relation with the youngsters. We are involved in their activities, not standing in the back of the room and looking at what the group is doing. We were there with the youngsters doing all the tasks with them as a team member.





EuroPeers as a youth participation

Example: The network provides a platform for active citizenship, enabling young alumni of EU youth programs to contribute long-term after their active program participation, whether through local actions in schools and youth centers, writing solidarity projects, or organising youth exchanges. The EuroPeers community provides youth with a safe space to develop skills, launch initiatives, and grow as leaders. A good example for youth participation in the EuroPeers community is the work with Advisory or Steering Groups: in some national networks the coordinator works with a Youth Advisory Group consisting of representatives from the EuroPeers community who are involved in decision making and planning of activities of their network. Another great way to involve our members in the development of network activities are paid junior trainer positions and social media content creation.

By incorporating these recommendations, National Agencies can build sustainable and impactful EuroPeers networks, ultimately enriching the experiences of young alumni and promoting the European program possibilities to a wider audience.



Conclusion

Over the years, the EuroPeers network, born from the shared experiences of young European program alumni, has blossomed into a significant international collaboration.

This guide outlined the network's development, from its early days to its current internationally coordinated structure, including some guidelines on why and how to best establish a national network.

We sincerely thank Heike Zimmermann, Laura Kiviselg, Magdalena Szykor, Simona Musteata, and all other colleagues who contributed and shared their invaluable insights.

Fueled by member passion and dedication, the EuroPeers network offers a platform for youngsters to share their life-changing experiences and make an impact.

We hope this guide will be a valuable resource for anyone wishing to participate in or establish this vibrant community.

Interested in more? Head over to

https://europeers.org/contacts/

and find out where in Europe you can find active EuroPeers!









