

Hello again to the Inclusion and Diversity Kitchen - the podcast about inclusion and diversity at national agencies for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps.

Hi Greg, how's your level of hunger today? Shall we get started with the cooking?

Hello Rahel, it's good to be back! And yes, I'm starving, let's do this!

Today, we're talking about who is responsible for promoting inclusion and diversity in the European programs for youth, right? I'm curious to know who's our guest... or guests?!

Guests!! My conversations took me to Finland and Belgium... and we'll hear from Paavo and Bob about their experience.

I'll let them introduce themselves, first up **Bob Demunter** from Jint, the national agency in Belgium Flanders:

My name is Bob. I work for Jint... I do everything...logistically... that is quite a lot. Quite a wide range of things to do. Try to be specific... office management... building maintenance... keeping with ...renting out meeting spaces... colleagues, external people. All types of things... during covid... I mainly made sure the building remains there... standing.

Thank you, Bob! Now, I'm curious to meet Paavo!

Here we go with Paavo Pykönnen from the Finnish National Agency:

"My name is Paavo..."

In terms of cooking, what would happen if Paavo and Bob were here with us making this meal?

Oh they would get along just fine! Because basically, we would end up with....

Italian Food! Here's their favourites:

That is quite easy... I like to make spaghetti. Don't bother with separate parts... make it all yummy. Every dish ...all comes together in one single unit.

The favourite food I like to order... ...

Ooooooh, does that mean we can also order today? Remember I'm hungry!

Sure... I'll order us a pizza!

Oh thank you!

So while we wait for our delivery, let's explore today's question: who's responsible for inclusion and diversity at the national agency?

Paavo already gave us a very clear statement when introducing himself, right?, saying that he believes that everyone is responsible for inclusion and diversity at the national agency.

Yes, full disclosure though, Paavo has been the inclusion and diversity officer in Finland in the past, so I'm quite sure he's had his share of experience of encouraging everyone to get onboard.

Speaking of the inclusion and diversity officer... What's their responsibility again?

They definitely play an important role... that often includes reaching out to organisations that work with diverse youth, making sure **young people with fewer opportunities** find their way to the programmes, supporting colleagues in making events and programs inclusive, connecting with other national agencies, guiding the drafting process of the national inclusion and diversity strategy, etc.

That role is different in each country though. Sometimes, it's a full-time job for someone, in other cases, it's an additional responsibility of someone who also has another role... as program officer, or training responsible, etc.

Interesting... What I see as a danger here is that someone might think "oh, we have an inclusion and diversity officer who is responsible for this area, so I shouldn't have to worry about this topic". Do you think this could happen?

Yes, absolutely. And I think this is why having an ongoing conversation about these topics at the office is so crucial. For example, although Bob - who works at the reception and in logistics - feels he's not at the forefront of the discussion, he still realizes just how important is to keep this topic always present:

You have to keep repeating...keep making sure it's one of the big topics...vital parts of your ideology when creating the programs...every time again and again. ~~Why it is important to make sure it's a big topic.~~

What stood out for me when talking to Bob was just how deeply rooted inclusion was in the way he talked about his work.

Here are little small things...we do ... jint... everyone holds morals... It is something we hold dearly... It's small things... taking care of people... the colleagues themselves... taking care of them...making sure their dietary restrictions are met... jint facilities...the building to have accessibility to people with disabilities...

Look at our favourite topic on this podcast, food, being an excellent example for us to see diversity and inclusion put into practice at work.

Yes, totally, Bob talks about organizing food for his team but also for external guests and it becomes very clear how much he cares about getting it right:

By default... it is different to colleagues ... inside... we have a really clear view of our colleagues...what their background is, religiously... and dietary needs... will include... meat... it's allowed... but there is one colleague... that we ...half fully vegan, half meat based.

Oh I wish every place had a Bob taking care of their food! Food is such a powerful way to be inclusive.

Totally! As a vegan I highly appreciate this attitude...

Now, Paavo works in a totally different area. Today, he works in Training and Cooperation Activities (known as TCA) and is in charge of organizing training and events.

So, how does the topic of inclusion and diversity appear in his work?

It's so self-evident that we think that way. Selecting participants for trainings. Target organisations that we'd like to take part. We prioritize them in selection. When we send participants we have the principle that we'll pay all the costs... wherever you live. It's a different thing traveling from up north than from the capital. You might have to spend the night somewhere... it would be unequal that just everyone gets 500... for somebody it would be plenty ... for other it would not be enough. Whatever the costs... it doesn't depend on wealth or where you live. That's one of the general ideas that has been very strong in our view.

Here, if you allow me, I would like to highlight a section of the implementation guidelines for the 2021-2027 Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes¹ which reinforces the importance of using **TCA and NET budgets** for the promoting of inclusion and diversity in the programs. It goes like this:

National Agencies and the Resource Centres need to organise training, networking and showcasing moments for organisations active in fields relevant for inclusion and diversity at both national and supra-national levels.

And it's not just about organizing trainings and networking opportunities for beneficiaries of the programs... there are also a lot of resources available for NA staff ... trainings and resources of SALTO.

Does the implementation guide also address the diversity of staff members or the pool of evaluators?

Oh yes, I found that part here. It says:

National Agencies are invited to include people with fewer opportunities in their pool of evaluators and evaluation committees with a view to building on their expertise and sharing it with other evaluators, to raising awareness and to ensuring a better evaluation of projects.

That's actually something that Paavo also touched upon when talking about assessing applications for trainings:

"But there are other examples where inclusion is always dealt with. It comes with assessment of applications. You pay attention to who are the young people / organisation... what is their experience. " We always think (...) that we will give a chance to everyone... new comers. Who don't have to know ... or a very good job with the application. This is a program of learning by doing. When you do you learn. You get better on the way.

When listening to Bob and Paavo, I became really curious to know if they already had a connection to the topic of inclusion and diversity before joining the NA!

That's a great question!

"As a gay kid in a rural town in the 80s. You don't see anyone to identify with. You think you're the only one in the world. (...)

When coming out... I started paying attention to people with immigrant backgrounds... who just got so much negative opinion... I wish I could do something about it. Through this work I have more tools than as a private person. This work ..."

Reflection on growing up and how it helps us understand other inequalities.

Bob also shared that being part of one of the groups that are considered "of fewer opportunities" helps him understand better what inclusion means... even if he wouldn't consider himself as being a person with "fewer opportunities". ~~How has that been in your experience?~~

Yes, and here is something that is central... How can our experiences contribute to the promotion of ...

.... Yes, it's personal. How our identities intersect etc...

And what kinds of **tips** did you get from Bob and Paavo for other NA staff members who want to be more inclusive?

Oh that's the 1 million dollar question right there... let's see:

It's how you see your work altogether. Many times NA staff think of themselves as admins. They pay a lot of attention to the admin of the program...

In the youth sector there are a lot of aspects that may be overlooked... the idea of supported approach. We are supposed to support them in run their projects. If you understand that in practical terms ... it easily becomes a training activity. Maybe creating approachable materials... we have the training budget which is substantially large. It's not just percentage... lump sum. We have to organize lots of activities... it becomes a hands-on task. People don't understand how fulfilling and interesting and exhilarating the hands-on job are... you meet the people.

I think people should think about it as a way to get better at their jobs. Being involved... with applicants. Only then you can understand what is really needed and how to help.

Otherwise, you'll have a more boring job if you're just fiddling in with numbers.

Bob on the other hand shared about the importance of being inclusive ...even when you don't know if people of certain groups will be present.

Make sure... that even without knowing ... even without having evidence... a person of a certain group is within the event... make sure it is taken care of.. Everybody feels welcome... has the same accessibility. .. to anything. Then perhaps learn afterwards that you did a good job. That those needs are met... but before it's hard to know. Just by doing it, thinking proactive... making sure your space / is accompadeted to those neds. You learn through evaluation that you did something good and continue to do that. Listen to those people...

Oh and there's another tip from Paavo which is about looking for our biases in the team and trying to diversify our perspectives:

"We as white, middle-class Finish people might not fully understand what it is to be second-generation immigrants"...

Paavo said his team doesn't often hire new people since Finland is a small country with a small NA, but whenever possible, they have been trying to diversify, for example including people with migrant background in the team.

Ooooooh...that's our pizza!!

But before we start eating, I have one more thing, maybe this one we discuss over the food, what do you think?

Yes... sure!! Oh this smells amazing!! So did you want share?

An important value Paavo points out for promoting inclusion and diversity in the team is how they deal with doubts and controversial topics. He talks about there being openness to address things, to discuss them and find sensible ways of dealing with them.

PAAVO 11 - falta ainda!!!

That is crucial, right? Having an work environment that allows us to have conversations....

And it's also about being able to make mistakes....

And how can we create the environment that is safe enough...

You know how we talked earlier about the importance of vulnerability...

Well, this is already the end of this episode in which we talked to Paavo Pyykkönen about...

By the way, before you head out grabbing a bite yourself ... In our next episode we are talking to no one less than XY while exploring XY! So don't miss it!

~~OPTION FOR CLOSING 2~~