

Open Call for External Experts **(August 2019)**

Background

The European Union Programmes Agency (hereinafter, the Malta National Agency) is a body corporate with distinct legal personality set up by Legal Notice 128 of 2007 amended by Legal Notices 505 of 2011 and 21 of 2015, and by Legal Notice (Establishment Order) 401 of 2018. Within its remit, the Malta National Agency works towards supporting Maltese entities and individuals in availing themselves of funding allocated to Malta for activities under the youth sector. Currently, the Malta National Agency is committed to promote, implement and manage the Erasmus+ Programme and European Solidarity Corps in Malta.

Thus, the Malta National Agency is bound to provide full support to beneficiaries by following-up on project life-cycles to maximise the use of EU funds.

The Malta National Agency administers the ECVET and Eurodesk networks within the Erasmus+ programme and implements the Europass Network in Malta, thereby enabling it to further provide stakeholders and the public in general with relevant information, guidance and tools in the fields of education, training, funding, mobility and future employability.

Through its programmes and networks, the Malta National Agency aspires to further stimulate the exchange of good practices, experiences, innovation and mobility between stakeholders working in the field of education, training and youth.

The Erasmus+ Programme

The Erasmus+ is the EU Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport for the programming period 2014-2020.

The Erasmus+ Programme seeks to tackle unemployment by reducing the skills gap, empower young people to actively participate in democratic life, systematic reforms leading to cooperation through various instruments, and the potential of Europe's human and social capital through lifelong learning. Moreover, the Erasmus+ Programme supports the EU and the Member States in reaching its Europe 2020 Strategy and its flagship initiatives, namely Youth on the Move and the Agenda for New Skills and Jobs, the ET2020 Strategy along with the European Youth Strategy and the EU external action. The programme supports the implementation of policies and their priorities as agreed at European level in the framework for the Open Methods of Coordination.

Erasmus+ provides an array of opportunities in the fields of education, training and youth and has the potential to reach over 4 million Europeans. These opportunities shall be provided through a number of initiatives which also include the possibility of having transnational partnerships among institutions and organisations in the three main fields of the Programme. In addition, the Erasmus+ Programme offers the possibility of allocating funding to cross-sectoral project initiatives, providing greater accessibility through simpler funding rules than the previous programmes.

The Erasmus+ Programme is intended to contribute to the achievement of:

- The objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy, including the main education target;
- The objective of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training including the corresponding benchmarks;
- The sustainable development of Partner Countries in the field of higher education;
- The overall objectives of the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010 – 2018);
- The promotion of European values in accordance with Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union.

Under this programme 3 Key Actions are being supported:

- Key Action 1: Learning Mobility of Individuals
- Key Action 2: Cooperation for Innovation and the Exchange of Good Practices
- Key Action 3: Support for Policy Reform

Additional details on the Erasmus+ Programme and the Key Actions can be accessed at:

http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/sites/erasmusplus/files/files/resources/erasmus-plus-programme-guide_en.pdf

The European Solidarity Corps

The European Solidarity Corps is the new European Union initiative which creates opportunities for young people to volunteer or work in projects that benefit communities and people around Europe. The European Solidarity Corps (ESC) is conceived to offer people under 30 in Europe the chance to support a non-governmental organisation (NGO), local authority or private company active in addressing challenging situations across the European Union – for instance: rebuilding communities following natural disasters; addressing social challenges such as social exclusion, poverty, health and demographic challenges; or working on the reception and integration of refugees.

The Corps will develop its own distinct identity, rooted in the core EU values of engagement and solidarity. By joining the Corps, participants will express their commitment and willingness to devote a period of their lives to helping others. By supporting others, including the most vulnerable in our societies and communities, young people will not only put the core EU value of solidarity into practice, but also acquire skills and experience, including language skills, that can be valuable when looking for a job or considering further education and training.

The role of External Experts

The role of the external expert is very important in providing a fair, impartial, consistent and accurate assessment of project applications according to the objectives of the action and the policy priorities for the concerned action and field of education, training or youth.

The assessment is an essential part in the selection procedure. Based on the external experts' assessment, a list of applications per action and per field ranked in quality order is established, which serves as a basis for the Malta National Agency to take the grant award decision, following the proposal of an external Evaluation Committee. Based on the experts' comments, the Malta National Agency provides feedback to the applicants on the quality of their application.

Respecting deadlines is mandatory and of paramount importance. There shall be no exception for extending the set deadlines. External Experts are required to perform the assessment to the highest professional standards and within the deadline agreed with the Malta National Agency. Evaluations submitted shall be scrutinised for quality and the Malta National Agency reserves the right to request reassessment and may decide not to assign additional assessments in subsequent deadlines. The Malta National Agency retains the right to withhold payment in cases where the assessment carried out does not meet the required level of quality. Quality benchmarks are communicated by the Malta National Agency to all external experts. The External experts must take into account all feedback provided by the Malta National Agency to ensure a more streamlined and equitable approach in the assessment of project application.

External experts are bound by a code of conduct as set out in the contract of engagement. All information related to the assessment process is to be treated as strictly confidential. Therefore, external experts are not allowed to disclose any information about the applications submitted and results of the assessment to any third parties or the general public.

Depending on the action and the level of grant requested, the assessment of applications will be undertaken by two external experts. The Malta National Agency can decide to appoint external experts from another Erasmus+ and/or European Solidarity Corps Programme country/ies.

Technical Characteristics of External Experts

The external experts must have expertise in the youth sector as part of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programmes.

The External Experts must:

- i. have the necessary capabilities to judge the applications in terms of the Erasmus+ (Youth Sector) and European Solidarity Corps Programmes' objectives and policy priorities to provide good quality assessments;
- ii. be open and receptive to innovative ideas while actively applying their knowledge and experience in the selection process;
- iii. possess strong analytical skills;
- iv. be proficient in report writing;
- v. be able to collaborate effectively with other peer experts and the Malta National Agency;
- vi. be able to reach a mutually agreed consolidated statement with peer expert/s;
- vii. respect deadlines for evaluating and scoring the applications.

Key Duties of External Experts

The key duties are as follows:

- Be familiar with all the Programme reference documents, particularly the Programme Guide, the application forms, the Guide for Experts, the assessment forms and the OEET User Guide (Online Expert Evaluation Tool);
- Be fully knowledgeable about the assessment guidelines and award criteria established by the European Commission;
- Participate in compulsory training provided by the Malta National Agency;
- Provide clear, consistent and balanced comments on each award criterion of the applications in a polite, grammatically well-structured, objective and constructive manner;
- Score all criteria accurately and avoid giving average scores;
- Analyse the grant requested and suggest any reduction if necessary;
- Consider carefully the cost-benefit and feasibility implication of project outcomes between reduction in grant and allocating a lower score;

- Provide explanation on, substantiate and quantify any proposed grant reduction;
- Look into other elements of assessment, in particular to content elements that are included in the OEET Tool and which are to be marked by the external experts;
- Provide feedback on the OEET Tool in addition to comments and scores;
- Provide feedback to the Malta National Agency, in a clearly distinct manner from that provided to applicants;
- Cooperate with other experts and reach mutual agreement on instances of consolidated assessments;
- Conduct the assessment exercise to high quality standards and to redo/review their assessment exercise should the Malta National Agency deem fit to request it;
- Maintain impartiality at all times and to report immediately to the Malta National Agency at any stage of the assessment where impartiality and non-conflict may be compromised.

Non-Conflict of Interest and Impartiality Requirements

External Experts must not have a conflict of interest in relation to the proposals on which they are requested to give their opinion. To this end, every external expert is to sign a declaration provided by the Malta National Agency that no such conflict of interest exists at the time of their appointment and that they undertake to inform the Malta National Agency of both the existence and its nature should such conflict arise. The same declaration binds external experts to confidentiality.

Persons involved in a project application in the selection round for the action under assessment are considered as having a conflict of interest for that selection round and will not be appointed as external experts.

When a potential conflict of interest is reported by the external experts or brought to the attention of the Malta National Agency by any means, the Malta National Agency will consider the circumstances and decide either to exclude the external experts from the assessment of the given application or the whole selection round or allow the expert to take part in the assessment, depending on the objective elements of information at its disposal.

Experts who are directly involved in any of the applications submitted for a given selection round will be excluded from all assessment for that selection round.

Training

The Malta National Agency provides training to all external experts throughout the year. Attendance to these training sessions is compulsory. External experts who do not participate in the training session/s shall not be assigned project proposals for assessment. Training is intended to provide an opportunity for the external experts to familiarise themselves with the selection criteria, interpretation and the objectives of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programmes and their respective priorities, the relevance and impact criteria, target audiences and their relevance to the different actions as well as the expected outcomes of project proposals, and the financial mechanisms adopted in the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programmes under the different actions.

The training for the external experts engaged shall provide a clear explanation about the respective tasks to be undertaken and relevant background documentation. The Malta National Agency shall provide each external expert with a Guide for Experts as well as an IT User Guide. The training shall include detailed technical training on the IT system to be used by every expert engaged. The use of the IT tool provided by the European Commission in relation to assessment is mandatory.

The training sessions are envisaged to be an opportunity for the external experts to familiarise themselves with project applications forms as well as provide guidelines to reach comparable quality levels of assessments.

Feedback provided by the external experts is envisaged to be communicated to the applicants. Hence, training will be directed at coherent and comprehensive feedback as well as report writing skills. External experts are expected to provide sufficiently constructive and detailed feedback so as to ensure that applicants are able to capitalise on such comments and improve prospective applications submitted under future calls.

Ownership of the Assessments

The assessments carried out by the External Experts on behalf of the Malta National Agency shall remain the property of the Malta National Agency.

All data gathered and administered such as databases, software and supporting records or materials acquired, compiled or prepared during assessment procedures shall be the property of the Malta National Agency.

Remuneration

Key Action	Remuneration Budget Bands		
	Projects with budget < €60,000	Projects with budget €60,001 > <€100,000	Projects with budget > €100,001
Key Action 1	€ 40	€ 65	€ 80
Key Action 2	€ 40	€ 65	€ 80
Key Action 3	€ 40	€ 65	€ 80
ESC 11	€ 40	€ 65	€ 80
ESC 12	€ 40	€ 65	€ 80
ESC 21	€ 40	€ 65	€ 80
ESC 31	€ 40	€ 65	€ 80

Payment shall only be made after the Malta National Agency approves and accepts the assessment. Experts may be required to provide further feedback and clarifications on their assessment, or redo, or improve the assessment to a level of sufficient quality before the payment is authorised.

The Agency reserves the right to withhold payment for work of insufficient quality.

Claims for payment shall be submitted to the Malta National Agency through a VAT invoice.

Selection Process

Applicants will be assessed and selected on their practical ability to carry out the specific assessment tasks as well as on the knowledge of the relative sectors of expertise.

In the first stage of the selection process, the applicants will be provided with a sample application and they will be required to evaluate and assess the application according to the key duties, demonstrating analytical and technical competence as well as report writing skills. Experts who are currently engaged with the Agency and re-apply as External Experts under this Call will be assessed on basis of their past performance and will not be required to assess the sample application/s.

Applicants who pass the first stage will be called for an interview, where they are expected to demonstrate sufficient expertise and knowledge in their respective area of competence,

Additionally, applicants must specifically have:

- high proficiency in the English language, both in written and spoken form. Preference will be given to those applicants who are also able to write and speak in the Maltese language proficiently;
- proficiency in office automation software (word processing, spreadsheets, email clients, online tools).

Applications are to be submitted together with detailed *curriculum vitae* in Europass format highlighting academic qualification and experience related to the key area/s of competence under the framework of Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps.

Applicants shall be informed of the selection results on completion of the evaluation process.

No right of appeal is envisaged once the final selection decision has been taken.

External Experts whose contract has been renewed are not required to re-apply.

Submission requisites

Interested candidates are to submit:

- a signed copy of the application form as per Annex 1.
- *Curriculum vitae* in Europass format

Duly complete applications bearing subject: **External Experts Application – CALL 2019** are to reach EUPA offices either:

- via email – hr.eupa@gov.mt OR
- by hand/post – delivered at EUPA offices at ex-Royal Navy Military Hospital, Triq l-Imtarfa, L-Imtarfa MTF 1140.

Receipt of applications will be acknowledged.