



# **Exploring Youth in Action**

**Effects and outcomes of the Youth in Action Programme  
from the perspective of project participants and project leaders**

**Transnational Analysis 2011 – Executive Summary**

**Helmut Fennes**

**with**

**Susanne Gadinger**

**Wolfgang Hagleitner**

**Research Project Direction:**

**Lynne Chisholm**

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'Youth in Action' is a Programme of the European Union supporting European youth projects. The 'Research-based Analysis and Monitoring of the Youth in Action Programme' (RAY) is conducted by the RAY Network, which currently includes the Youth in Action National Agencies and their research partners in 16 countries.

This study presents a transnational analysis of the results from surveys in November 2010 and May 2011 with project participants and project leaders involved in Youth in Action projects. The study was implemented by the Institute of Educational Science at the University of Innsbruck and the Generation and Educational Science Institute in Austria in cooperation with the National Agencies and their research partners in Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Liechtenstein, the Netherlands, Poland, the Slovak Republic and Sweden (the Flemish speaking community of Belgium, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal and Turkey joined the RAY network after the surveys for this study were conducted). National research reports can be requested from the respective National Agencies and their research partners. The study was funded with contributions from the National Agencies in the respective 12 countries.

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The full version of this study can be retrieved from [http://www.uibk.ac.at/bgl/projects\\_networks/projekte.html.en#p14](http://www.uibk.ac.at/bgl/projects_networks/projekte.html.en#p14)

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## Abbreviations

YiA	Youth in Action Programme
PP	Project participants
PL	Project leaders/members of project teams: Youth workers, youth leaders, trainers or other actors who prepared and implemented YiA projects for/with young people or youth workers/leaders, at least in an education/socio-pedagogic function, but frequently also with an organisational function; normally, in particular in the case of projects with participants from two or more different countries, these projects are prepared and implemented by project teams with two or more project leaders.
RAY	Research-based Analysis and Monitoring of Youth in Action. The RAY Network consists of the Youth in Action National Agencies and their research partners involved in the RAY project.
NA	National Agency
Type of project (also ‘project type’)	The analyses partly differentiate by ‘type of project’ combining Youth Exchanges from Action 1.1 and Action 3.1 and combining training and networking activities from Action 4.3 and Action 3.1; combining these similar types of sub-Actions (the main difference being the eligible countries) results in higher numbers of respondents in the respective categories and, thus, in more meaningful results.
YE	Youth Exchanges (Action 1.1 and 3.1)
YI	Youth Initiatives (Action 1.2)
YD	Youth Democracy Projects (Action 1.3)
EVS	European Voluntary Service
T&N	Training and Networking (Action 4.3 and 3.1)
TCP	Training and Cooperation Plan
SD	Structured Dialogue – meetings of young people and those responsible for youth policy (Action 5.1)
Project category	One question in both questionnaires differentiates by three project categories: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ projects with young people (sub-)Action 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 3.1/Youth Exchanges, 5.1)</li><li>▪ European Voluntary Service projects;</li><li>▪ projects with youth workers and/or youth leaders (sub-)Action 4.3, 3.1/Training and Networking, TCP activities (taking place within the Training and Cooperation Plan).</li></ul> This question was used as filter question in order to enable specific additional questions which are relevant for only one or two of these project categories
Activity start/end	the dates when, within a funded project, the core activity starts/ends, for example a youth exchange (when young people from different countries meet in one country), a seminar, a training course, etc.
Project start/end:	the dates when a funded project starts/ends; the duration of a project is normally much longer than that of the core activity (see activity start/end) – the project also includes the preparation of and the follow-up to the core activity; for example, a youth exchange project might have an activity duration of one week while the project duration might be three months or more.

Residence country	Country of residence at the beginning of the project (the country of the partner organisation who the participant was part of)
Funding country	Country in which a project was funded through the respective National Agency of YiA
Venue country	Country in which one or more core activities within a project – in particular meetings of young people or of youth workers/leaders (in most cases from different countries of origin) – took place; also referred to as ‘hosting country’
Sending	This refers to PP or PL who came from a ‘sending’ partner, i.e., they went to another country for their project
Hosting	This refers to PP or PL who came from a ‘hosting’ partner, i.e., they were involved in a project taking place in their residence country

YiA Programme countries:

These are EU member states, EEA countries and EU candidate/accession countries

YiA Partner countries:

These are countries from Southeast Europe, countries from Eastern Europe and the Caucasus region as well as Mediterranean countries.

RAY countries:

RAY Network members participating in these surveys (= funding countries)

AT	Austria
BG	Bulgaria
CZ	Czech Republic
DE	Germany
EE	Estonia
FI	Finland
HU	Hungary
LI	Lichtenstein
NL	the Netherlands
PL	Poland
SE	Sweden
SK	Slovakia

Key competences for lifelong learning (KC)

KC1	Communication in the mother tongue
KC2	Communication in the mother tongue
KC3	Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology
KC3a	Mathematical competence
KC3b	Basic competences in science and technology
KC4	Digital competence
KC5	Learning competence (learning to learn)
KC6	Social and civic competences
KC6a	Interpersonal and social competence
KC6b	Intercultural competence
KC6c	Civic competence
KC7	Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship
KC7a	Sense of initiative
KC7b	Sense of entrepreneurship
KC8	Cultural awareness and expression
ML	Media literacy.

## **Executive summary**

This study was implemented as part of the project ‘Research-based Analysis and Monitoring of the Youth in Action Programme’ (RAY) which aims to explore the effects of the Youth in Action Programme (YiA) of the European Union, in particular on young people, youth workers and youth leaders involved in the projects funded by it, but also on the organisations, groups and other bodies promoting it and on the local environments and communities where these projects take place. The RAY project aims to study these effects in general, not only with respect to the explicit intentions of the YiA Programme, therefore seeking to contribute to the generation of new knowledge about the processes and outcomes of non-formal education activities, in particular in the youth field. At the same time, the RAY project aims to contribute to quality assurance and development in the implementation of the YiA Programme and to evidence-based and research-informed youth policy development.

The RAY project, founded in 2008, involves National Agencies of the YiA Programme and their research partners in 16 countries (see Chapter 2). The research on the YiA Programme is based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative social research methods. As a first step, online surveys using multilingual questionnaires for young people participating in YiA projects and for youth workers/youth leaders have been developed and implemented since 2009. The initial Transnational Analysis of surveys conducted in 2009/10 was published in 2011 (see Fennes, Hagleitner & Helling, 2011). A study using qualitative research methods was implemented in 2013 in order to produce additional findings and provide a deeper analysis of the survey findings.

The present study represents the second transnational analysis of surveys implemented within the framework of the RAY project. The surveys were conducted in November 2010 and May 2011 by National Agencies and their research partners in twelve countries: Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Liechtenstein, the Netherlands, Poland, the Slovak Republic and Sweden, coordinated by the Institute of Educational Science at the University of Innsbruck in Austria. More than 14,000 project participants and 6,600 project leaders and members of project teams (referred to further on as ‘project leaders’) were invited to complete a questionnaire aimed not only at exploring the effects of the projects funded by the Youth in Action (YiA) Programme, but also at retrieving data on the development and implementation of the projects as well as the profile of the participants, project leaders and organisations involved. Around one third of the individuals invited to take part in the surveys completed the respective questionnaires (one for the participants and one for the project leaders). For this transnational analysis, only a proportion of these responses could be used in order to arrive at a coherent set of respondents (3,470 participants and 1,215 project leaders).

The analysis of the data from the surveys in November 2010 and in May 2011 largely confirms the results of the surveys in 2009/10 (see Fennes et al., 2011) but also provides for some new conclusions and goes into more detail, in particular by differentiating the analysis according to various parameters such as types of projects/(sub-)Actions of Youth in Action or countries of residence of the participants and project leaders. The following main conclusions can be drawn:

### **Participation and active citizenship**

The outcomes of the surveys suggest that involvement in YiA projects contributes to the development of citizenship competences in a broad sense, in particular interpersonal, social,

intercultural and foreign language competences of both participants and project leaders.<sup>1</sup> This includes the development of respective skills, but also of attitudes, values and knowledge – for example respect for other cultures and appreciation of cultural diversity; solidarity, tolerance and individual freedom; ‘feeling as a European’ and being interested in European topics; new knowledge about Europe, inclusion, youth and youth policies; awareness of European values and of inequality in society. The responses also indicate that involvement in the projects results in an increased participation in social and political life. The development of civic skills and competences for political participation in a more traditional way is less distinct, as is the acquisition of new knowledge on discrimination, people with a disability, gender equality and minorities.

## **Competence development**

The findings also indicate that participation in YiA projects contributes to the development of *all* key competences for lifelong learning. While the most distinct development is reported for interpersonal, social and intercultural competence as well as communication in a foreign language (as could be expected), a significant development is also reported for sense of entrepreneurship, civic competence, cultural awareness and expression as well as learning competence (learning to learn). Distinct developments can also be found for communication in the first language (mother tongue), mathematical competence and sense of initiative.<sup>2</sup> All other competences are reported to be developed for a minority of participants. The self-assessment of participants is confirmed by the assessment by the project leaders of the participants’ competence development, showing a highly significant correlation between self-perception and external perception by the project leaders.

## **Learning organisations**

A significant finding is that YiA projects also have an effect on the development of the organisations, groups and bodies involved, thus contributing to the creation of ‘learning organisations’.

On the one hand, this is demonstrated by an overall competence development reported by the project leaders resulting from their involvement in the project – similar to the competence development observed for the project participants (see above). Beyond the development of the key competences for lifelong learning, youth workers and youth leaders also report that their youth work competences were developed, in particular with respect to non-formal education and international youth projects. This development of general and specific competences reflects ‘workplace learning’ or ‘work-related learning’ and contributes to professionalisation and organisational development – and no less so where project leaders were involved as volunteers.

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<sup>1</sup> It needs to be noted that this study builds on *perceptions* by participants and project leaders. More specifically, this study refers to ‘effects’ and ‘competence development’ as *perceived* by participants and project leaders. Methods or instruments actually measuring competences and competence development (e.g., with pre-/post-tests assessing competence levels before and after the project) were not used. Nevertheless, the perceptions expressed in the responses are relevant since they are shared by large proportions of participants, since perceptions of participants are confirmed by perceptions of project leaders (and vice-versa), and since these perceptions are confirmed by responses to other questions. The RAY network plans studies aimed at verifying the findings of the present study, in particular by involving control groups and by developing instruments for actually measuring competence development through participation in YiA projects.

<sup>2</sup> Some of the eight key competences defined in the European reference framework for key competences for lifelong learning were divided into sub-competences. In particular, ‘interpersonal, social, intercultural and civic competence’ was divided into three sub-competences: ‘interpersonal and social’, ‘intercultural’ and ‘civic’.

On the other hand, project leaders and participating youth workers/leaders also report that their projects have had a significant effect on their organisations, groups and youth structures as such, in particular with respect to an internationalisation of the organisations and their activities, an increased promotion of participation and active citizenship in their organisations, and organisational development in general: this suggests that organisations, groups and structures involved in YiA projects are developing into ‘learning organisations’.

## **Educational and professional pathways**

The results of the surveys further indicate that the involvement in YiA projects stimulated both participants and project leaders to consider or concretely plan further educational activities and their professional development. Furthermore, a large majority of participants and project leaders believe that their job opportunities have increased at least to some extent: together with the competence development outlined above, this reflects an effect on the professional development of the actors involved in the YiA Programme beyond the youth field and civil society, especially in view of their involvement in the work domain. This points to a significant effect complementing the social, cultural and political dimensions of the YiA Programme.

## **Political participation**

Independent from their involvement in a YiA project, participants were asked about their opinions with respect to political participation. YiA participants value political participation very highly, with more than two thirds believing that it is definitely important to discuss political and social issues and to make use of their rights to have a say in political decisions affecting them directly. Around half of the participants believe that it is definitely important to be involved in European politics and to have the opportunity to come into direct contact with political actors – indicating a sense of European citizenship and an interest in interactive political participation.<sup>3</sup>

## **Inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities**

As for the profile of the young people participating in YiA projects, a divide becomes evident. On the one hand, there is a group of participants who clearly belong to the anticipated target group of the YiA Programme: young people with fewer opportunities who are confronted with obstacles to their access to education, work, mobility and participation in society. The size of this group is hard to grasp because it is difficult to assess who is actually disadvantaged in the specific contexts at hand. On the other hand, a considerable majority of participants are well educated, in education or training, employed or volunteering/doing an internship; they come from the majority population with respect to language and cultural/ethnic background; and many of them have already participated in similar projects. These characteristics point to a group that is not disadvantaged. Nevertheless, there is a clear interest and effort on the part of project promoters to include young people with fewer opportunities: a vast majority of the participants in training and networking projects are reported to be youth workers/leaders who work with young people with fewer opportunities.

## **Profile of project leaders**

A large proportion of project leaders report a relatively high educational achievement and share a European identity. Many of them are involved in YiA projects on a voluntary basis, which indicates that they are highly motivated and thus they provide the project participants with role

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<sup>3</sup> It needs to be noted that the respondents are not representative of young people at large and that there was no control group to provide for a comparison with a representative sample.

models for active citizenship. A large majority had previously been involved in YiA projects, and frequently in more than one. This can have positive effects with respect to the quality of the projects since they can build on an accumulated competence for project development and implementation. At the same time, this could limit the access of new organisations to the YiA Programme. A majority of project leaders report that they simultaneously had an organisational and an educational role in the projects, suggesting that there are insufficient resources available from project promoters for organising European youth projects resulting in a limitation on educational work at the expense of organisational tasks. Overall, the findings from the surveys indicate precarious employment situations of a considerable proportion of project leaders, thus confirming a high level of motivation for their activities – but also raising questions about employment conditions and career prospects extant in the youth and community education sectors.

### **Differentiated analyses by project types**

A differentiated analysis by project types/(sub-)Actions of YiA confirms that there are ‘all-rounders’ such as YE and T&N projects with a broad range of effects and effects which are mostly at average level or above. Equally, there are ‘specialists’ such as YD projects, SD projects and TCP activities with a few effects (considerably) above average, but otherwise relatively weak effects. Finally, there are project types (such as EVS and YI projects) which are somewhere in between – with partial effects (considerably) above average and partial effects (considerably) below average. The effects are mostly in line with the objectives and requirements for the different Actions, but with respect to some aspects the ‘all-rounders’ show equal or stronger effects than the ‘specialists’ for the respective aspects. Furthermore, there is no indication that the project duration has an effect on the responses on effects, e.g. that projects with a continuous engagement on a day-to-day basis (such as EVS or some YI projects) have a stronger/more effect than projects with short intensive phases (such as YE or T&N projects). This is an intriguing finding that requires further and closer inquiry in the future, since at first glance it is counter-intuitive.

A differentiated analysis by ‘hosting’/‘sending’<sup>4</sup> illustrates that for both ‘sending’ and ‘hosting’ participants, project leaders, organisations/groups/bodies and local environments/communities there are positive effects resulting from their involvement in the project, and that the effects on the ‘hosting’ side are at least as strong as on the ‘sending’ side – possibly even stronger under some circumstances.

A differentiated analysis by country (normally the country of residence) typically provides a very diverse and heterogeneous picture. Sometimes, patterns of differences between countries becoming EU member states in 2004 or later and countries which became EU member states before 2004 can be recognised, but to a large extent the different results are likely to be caused by different country-specific conditions, e.g.

- different (socio-) demographic and geographic conditions,
- different political, economic, social and cultural conditions,
- differences in youth policies and youth structures,
- differences in youth cultures and
- differences in the access to the YiA Programme, in the promotion of YiA by the NAs, in the image attached to YiA and in the overall implementation of the YiA Programme by the respective National Agencies.

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<sup>4</sup> ‘Hosting’ refers to participants, project leaders, organisations and local environments *hosting* a project, thus hosting participants and project leaders from other countries; ‘sending’ refers to participants and project leaders who went abroad during their project, thus were *sent* by their organisations to another country.



Overall, it can be concluded that the funded projects contribute to the objectives of the YiA Programme and that the majority of participants and project leaders responding to the questionnaire are satisfied with the programme, although some of them are critical about the administrative requirements for receiving funding.<sup>5</sup>

### **Further research activities**

Another ‘standard survey’ using slightly modified questionnaires was implemented in November 2011, involving also Belgium (Flemish-speaking community), Luxembourg and Turkey; the questionnaires were then accessible in 14 languages (with French and Turkish additional to the 12 languages the survey employed thus far). Since then, France, Norway and Portugal have also joined the RAY Network; as a result, the questionnaires became accessible in 16 languages, now including also Norwegian and Portuguese. An additional ‘standard survey’ was conducted in May 2013 and a separate ‘standard survey’ for projects funded by the National Agencies of new RAY Network members in November 2013. These surveys result in a large and solid database which allows analysing the implementation of the YiA Programme over most of the programme duration and in around half of the programme countries.

In 2012, a ‘special survey’ specifically focussing on learning in YiA projects was developed and implemented, with an emphasis on studying which methods, settings and conditions foster learning in YiA projects. Complementary qualitative studies from autumn 2012 onwards analysed more in-depth the processes and outcomes of projects funded by the YiA Programme. An interim transnational analysis report is available and a final report is scheduled for the end of 2012. Furthermore, a study on competence development was developed and implemented in 2012; this study also confirms the findings of the present study, in particular by involving control groups.

Further studies are planned for 2014 and beyond with a view at research-based analysis and monitoring of the Erasmus+ Youth in Action Programme (2014 to 2020).

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<sup>5</sup> It needs to be noted that the methodology of this study involves some limitations, in particular with respect to the reliability of the results being based on perceptions of participants and project leaders, but also with respect to the representativity of the sample (see chapter 4 Methodology).

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