

# **Research-based Analysis of Youth in Action**

**Results from the surveys  
with project participants and project leaders  
in November 2010 and May 2011**

## **Transnational Analysis Executive Summary**

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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 15 countries.

This 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 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.

This executive summary is taken from the Transnational Analysis of surveys conducted within RAY in 2010/11 (Fennes, Gadinger, & Hagleitner, 2012).

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# 1. 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, but at the same aiming 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 15 countries. 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 is being prepared and will be implemented from autumn 2012 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 not only aimed 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 the 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. 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 the 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 and 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>1</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 creating ‘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 – also if project leaders were involved as volunteers.

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 also indicate that the involvement in YiA projects stimulated both participants and project leaders to consider or actually plan further educational activities and their

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<sup>1</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’.

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>2</sup>

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

As for the profile of the young people participating in YiA projects, a divide can be observed. 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 depending on the specific contexts. 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 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.

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<sup>2</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.

## **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 on average or above; that there are ‘specialists’ such as YD projects, SD projects and TCP activities with a few effects (considerably) above average, but otherwise relatively weak effects; and that 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).

A differentiated analysis by ‘hosting’/‘sending’, in particular effects of projects depending on whether the project took place in the participant’s, project leader’s or organisation’s (‘hosting’) country of residence or in another country/abroad (‘sending’). This analysis 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 in many cases.

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 (socio-) demographic and geographic conditions, different political, economic, social and cultural conditions, differences in youth policies and youth structures, differences in youth cultures, and by 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.

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.

## **Further research activities**

Another survey using slightly modified questionnaires was implemented in November 2011, now involving also Belgium (Flemish-speaking community), Luxembourg and Turkey, being accessible now in 14 languages (with French and Turkish additional to the 12 languages the survey employed thus far). In the meantime, France has also joined the RAY network and a separate survey for projects funded by the French National Agency was launched in May 2012.

At the time of writing this report, a new survey specifically focussing on learning in YiA projects was developed, with an emphasis on studying which methods, settings and conditions foster learning in YiA projects. Complementary qualitative studies from autumn 2012 onwards will allow for more in-depth analysis of the processes and outcomes of projects funded by the YiA Programme.

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