

Executive summary

The results of the standard survey, Monitor, for 2015-16 by RAY, are reported in this publication. The survey was conducted within the 'Research-based Analysis of Erasmus+: Youth in Action' (RAY) by the RAY Network, which includes the National Agencies of Erasmus+: Youth in Action and their research partners in currently 29 countries. The survey has been conducted to measure the effect and outcome of the current Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme (2014-2020). Erasmus+: Youth in Action is part of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union and supporting European youth projects.

RAY is a self-governed European research network 'Research-based Analysis and Monitoring of Erasmus+: Youth in Action' ('RAY Network') representing 31 National Agencies of Erasmus+: Youth in Action Programme from 29 countries and their research partners. It was founded on the initiative of the Austrian National Agency of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action and its consortium partners Interkulturelles Zentrum and the Institute of Educational Science of the University of Innsbruck.

The Danish National Agency for Erasmus+: Youth in Action became a member of the RAY network in 2015 and participates in the standard survey, Monitor, for the first time.

The data for this study was collected through multilingual online surveys, which were conducted in 25 languages by the RAY Network between October 2015 and April 2016. The surveys addressed participants and project leaders/team members involved in projects funded through the European Union Programme Erasmus+: Youth in Action (2014-2020). The research project was designed by the Institute of Educational Science at University of Innsbruck and the Generation and Educational Science Institute in Austria in cooperation with the RAY Network.

The data in the Danish part of the standard survey is based on responses from 244 participants and 42 project leaders and team members (The survey was distributed to 606 respondents).

Main findings

The participants have in general a solid experience in travelling abroad. Their purpose of participating in the project is to obtain new experiences, to meet new people, and to get acquainted with foreign culture. Likewise, the content and aims of the project chosen have been crucial for the decision to participate. To only a few, improving employability or obtaining better employment has been part of the considerations whether or not to participate in a project.

The project leaders have indicated how many of the central value principles (priorities), which Erasmus+: Youth in Action is based upon, that were addressed in the specific project that they participated in. Most often, and mentioned by more than half of the project leaders, were mentioned 'cultural diversity', 'non formal and informal learning', 'personal development', 'democracy', 'active citizenship and participation in civil society and democratic life'.

Moreover, the project leaders have evaluated to what extent the project contributed to a list of 18 objectives of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action Programme. At least 3 out of 4 stated that all objectives have been addressed. The goals most strongly achieved were 'to promote young people's respect for cultural diversity' and 'to enhance intercultural dialogue' as well as 'to enhance the international dimension of youth work' following the goals 'to promote European cooperation in the youth field' and 'to increase the quality of international youth projects'. Also among the highest ranked goals were 'to develop key competences of young people' and 'to support the recognition of non-formal and informal learning'.

The project leaders have evaluated the effects of the projects on the participants. According to the project leaders, the largest effects of the projects have been that project participants appreciate cultural diversity more and they have become more self-confident. Moreover, participants have become better aware of their strengths and weaknesses, and they intend to develop joint activities or projects with people they got to know through the project. Additionally, they plan to engage in further education and training activities.

The least strong effects have been that participants should have increased their job chances, or that they should be more interested in contributing to the development of youth policy.

The project leaders conclude that the participants have increased their communicative skills and that they have improved their ability to collaborate. It is especially emphasised that the ability to cooperate in teams and the ability to communicate with people speaking a foreign language have been improved. Furthermore, it is underlined that the participants have developed appreciation for cultural diversity.

The ability to produce media content on their own is the only field where the project leaders estimate that the projects have contributed less to improve the competencies of the participants.

The participants have also been asked about their learning and competence building. In general, the participants state that they have benefitted from the projects. From six to nine out of ten participants indicated that they have benefited from all the learning elements that they should evaluate.

The most significant impact of the project is on the participants' social relations and collaboration. Among other kinds of effects most often mentioned by the participants are the ability to communicate in a foreign language, to get along with people who have a different cultural background, to negotiate joint solutions when there are different viewpoints, and to achieve something in the interests of the community or society.

Least often, the participants mention personal competences as well as intellectual and creative competences as an effect of the project.

The participants express great satisfaction with the projects and they are willing to recommend the project to people they know. Furthermore, large shares of participants are interested in participating in similar projects, and half of the participants declare that they are considering to participate in the planning of future projects.

In general, values and pedagogical praxis seem very important areas for the participants, while learning more specific skills seems less important. Learning about cultural diversity was most important, but still half of the participants mention learning about European issues, youth work, informal/non-formal learning and personal development. Learning outcomes, such as knowledge about environmental issues, health, the media and ICT were only mentioned by a few.

The most important learning outcomes, which were reported by the project leaders, are the engagement with people with a different cultural background and the ability to communicate with people in a foreign language. However, improved collaboration skills, as well as professional and personal development, have also been emphasised.

The project leaders highlight a better understanding of required future learning and competence development as their personal benefit of participation. Specifically, they want to improve foreign language skills. However, more generally they want to improve their competencies on a broader scale. The majority believe their employability has been improved, and they conclude that they acquired a better understanding of the potential of their personal career development. Further benefits have been the establishment of personal relations with colleagues abroad.

Among the participants, the project participation has opened a door to the world. They emphasise the establishment of personal networks with people from abroad, and they state their increased motivation for going abroad for study or work.

Participating in the projects has had an effect on general attitudes. Between one and two out of three project leaders tell that they have got a more positive view on society and upon societal engagement after their participation. Likewise, two out of three participants acknowledge cultural diversity more after participating in the project. Almost half of the participants more strongly have a feeling of being a European. Also the societal engagement has been strengthened, however only one fifth intends to be more active in political life.

The European dimension has been strengthened through the project participation. Half of the participants declare that their perception of the EU has been improved, and only one out of twenty claims that their perception of EU has worsened. The positive impact on the perception of EU seems to be higher among men and among participants above 20 years old.

Core issues in the projects

Inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities: The Erasmus+: Youth in Action projects have a special focus upon inclusion of and support to young people with fewer opportunities or special needs. Fewer opportunities and special needs are defined very broad. By young people with fewer opportunities the Erasmus+: Youth in Action Programme means young people who are disadvantaged compared to their peers for social, economic, educational, cultural, health or geographical reasons or due to a disability (young people with special needs).

The project leaders report that young people with fewer opportunities and special needs participated in half of the projects. The young people with fewer opportunities face two main problems. They are primarily of economic character or that the young people are being geographically marginalised. Less often lack of education is registered, or being part of a cultural, ethnic or religious minority. Less mentioned are young people living in families that are challenged or living in deprived areas.

Among the participants, only one fourth has given information about the topic, and it is just one out of seven that report that they have been involved in projects where this problematic has been addressed. Looking at the participants, only one out of eight characterise themselves as persons who are not getting a fair share of opportunities when compared with other people of their age. However, when asked differently, one fourth have experienced obstacles in getting access to the labour market, but only one tenth have met obstacles getting access to education. One sixth belong to a cultural, ethnic, religious or language minority.

So the large part of the participants sees themselves as privileged, and one third says they are getting more than a fair share of opportunities when compared with other people at their age.

Youthpass: The Youthpass certificate is offered to the participants in the Erasmus+: Youth in Action projects. Half of the participants hold a certificate, and almost all have received it in the project. Only a few are able to contribute with specific information or experience about the use of the Youthpass certificate.

Structured Dialogue under Key Action 3: Very few have knowledge about this activity, and even fewer have been involved in the Structured Dialogue under Key Action 3.

The organisation's benefit of the project

Most project leaders state that by participating in the project the organisation have obtained further competencies in providing non-formal and informal learning activities, as well as in creating better understanding of cultural diversity and in establishing more contacts and partnerships abroad.

Moreover, the project has attracted more young people to the organisation, and it has led to increased knowledge transfer within the organisation, but also strengthened the links with the local society.

Concerning the effects of the project on the local society that hosted it, the project leaders are unable to make clear statements. They have the impression that projects were well received in the local society; that local societies got actively involved, and that synergies were created between projects and local societies.

Furthermore, it was the impression that the European dimension and the intercultural dimension were addressed positively by the local society, so that the local communities would be interested in similar projects in the future.

Evaluation

The overall evaluation made by the project leaders states that the projects were well prepared. The preparatory meetings had significant importance for the success of the projects. Furthermore, prior experience in project collaboration was important.

Online tools to locate prospective project partners have only been used by a minor share of the project leaders.

The project leaders declare that the implementation of the project was characterised by mutual respect and good cooperation between the project leaders and members of the project teams. Moreover, the overall project management was appropriate and satisfactory, and pedagogical implementation of the project was of high quality.

Finally, the workload for the implementation of the projects was reasonable, the outcomes of the projects seem to be sustainable, and the results have been disseminated appropriately.

Profiles of projects, participants and project leaders

The project leaders represent projects that have been carried out in 16 different countries. Three out of eight project leaders have participated in a project in Denmark, a similar number have participated in a project in another country within the EU. Finally, one fourth of the project leaders have participated in a project in a country outside the EU.

Almost three out of four have participated in a youth exchange project. One out of five has participated in a project concerning the mobility of youth workers. A few have participated in the voluntary service or the structured dialogue.

The participants took part in projects in 37 different countries. One third of the projects were carried out in Denmark. Half of the projects were carried out in another country within the EU. Finally, one out of six projects had been established in a country outside the EU.

The large majority of the participants took part in a Key Action 1 project, and among these, the majority participated in youth exchange.

The project leaders have beforehand received information about Erasmus+: Youth in Action primarily from their own organisation or their personal network. The National Agency is mentioned as source of information by one fourth. The participants got to know about the project through the organisation that enabled their participation, or from persons in their network. Other sources to information about the projects seem only to have minor importance.

One third of the project leaders state that they have received funding from the National Agency in their home country. In general, they have positive impressions about the application procedures. The only critical remarks are directed at the online tools for application, reporting and Youthpass; a minor share did not find the tools easy to use. Asked about whether it was easy for them to cover the costs for participating in the project, only one out of ten participants claim it has been difficult to get the costs covered.

Six out of seven project leaders have previously participated in a project funded by the EU. The participants are less experienced. Half of the participants have prior experience with participating in similar projects, however only one third indicates that it has been a project funded by Erasmus+: Youth in Action.

Half of the project leaders carried out both pedagogical and administrative tasks in the projects. One third carried out only pedagogical tasks, and one out of six carried out only administrative tasks. Almost all project leaders were full time engaged in the project. Half of them had an employment contract; the other half participated as voluntary workers.

Among the project leaders, there is an equal distribution of men and women. Concerning age, one third is below 30 years old, one third is between 30 and 40 years old, and one third is above 40 years old. Among the participants that have contributed to the survey, the number of women exceeds the number of men. The relation between women and men is 3:2. Age-wise, nearly one third are below 20 years old, a third are between 20 and 25 years old, and the rest are above 25 years old.

The geographical distribution shows that one tenth of the participants are residents in a rural area, while two thirds are residents in a city with more than 100,000 inhabitants. Measured by education, the main characteristic of the participants is that they have a higher education or are on their way to achieve one (i.e. they are attending upper secondary school). Their parents show similar characteristics. Two thirds of the mothers as well as the fathers either have an upper secondary school education or further education.

One third of the project leaders speak Danish as their native tongue. Among the remaining project leaders 15 different languages are represented. More than one fourth says that they belong to a cultural, ethnic, religious or linguistic minority.

Overall, the participants did not report that language skills caused problems in participating in the projects. Support from project leaders and other participants as well compensated when language difficulties arose. Moreover, one fourth reports that it was possible to interact in the project using more than one language.