

Youth in Action  
makes a difference!



Youth in Action (2007 to 2013) is a programme of the European Union that supports European youth projects. Youth in Action (YiA) fosters participation, active citizenship and competence development of young people, youth workers and youth leaders through non-formal education and learning, thus empowering them to meet the challenges of their respective societies. YiA also contributes to the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities as well as to the development of youth organisations, centres and groups, and thus to civil society. Overall, YiA contributes to the development of a democratic society with active citizens in Europe and beyond. YiA will find its continuation in the youth chapter of the EU Programme Erasmus+ (2014 to 2020).

### key messages

Recent research results show that the YiA Programme provides a space for *new learning experiences* for young people, youth leaders and youth workers through *on-going innovation* of educational design, methodologies and methods applied in funded projects. A *wide range of contexts and settings* which participants and project leaders become involved in is complemented by a *broad variety of methods* applied in YiA projects: this is inherent to YiA projects, covering the full spectrum of informal, non-formal and somewhat formal learning situations, with on average approximately half of the project time being dedicated to *non-formal education and learning*.

The learning environments created by YiA projects contribute to a great extent to the development of competences which are essential for *active citizenship and participation* in public and political life as well as in civil society, in particular *in a European context*. Projects are reported to contribute to the development of a European identity, interest in European issues, awareness of European values, appreciation of cultural diversity and the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities.

Furthermore, young people as well as youth workers and youth leaders involved in YiA projects indicate that they develop knowledge, skills, attitudes and values which are related to *all key competences for lifelong learning*<sup>1</sup> – which can be useful for their *professional development and employability*. This competence development is fostered by the combination of informal, non-formal and rather formal learning methods and settings occurring in YiA projects.

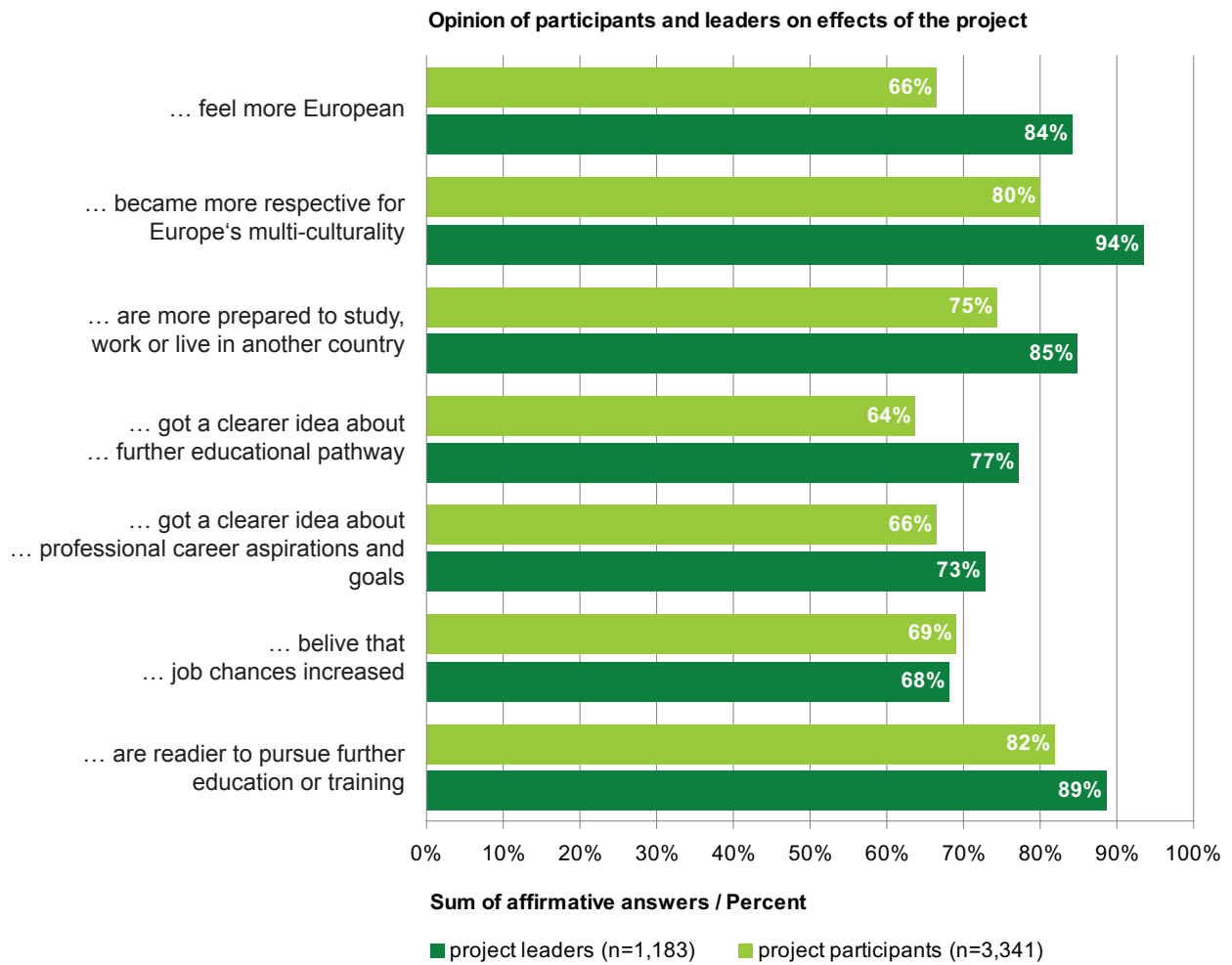
Research findings also indicate that the involvement in YiA projects stimulates both participants and project leaders to consider or actually plan *further educational activities* and their *professional development*, including studying, working or doing an internship abroad as well as further developing foreign language skills. 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 work.

As the programme period of YiA will be coming to an end in 2013, it is of utmost importance that the research evidence available is used for the implementation of the youth chapter of the new EU programme Erasmus+, which will continue to foster participation, active citizenship, competence development and the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities.

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<sup>1</sup> See [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/key\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/key_en.htm)

## Effects of projects on participants from the perspective of participants and project leaders



## setting the scene

During the past decades, youth work has increasingly been recognised as being relevant for policy development at national and European levels. Youth work is at the core of the European Commission White Paper ‘A New Impetus for European Youth’ (2000)<sup>2</sup> and of the EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering (2010-2018)<sup>3</sup>; youth work is also emphasised in the Agenda 2020<sup>4</sup>. The main role of youth work is to provide to young people opportunities for participation, personal development and non-formal learning. In such contexts, young people can also develop a range of competences as described in the framework of key competences for lifelong learning<sup>5</sup>. The latter is considered to be a positive factor in supporting young people’s employability or encouraging them to enrol in continuing or higher education.

In Europe, youth work has a history dating back more than a century. The internationalisation of youth work in Europe, involving also youth mobility and youth exchanges, started to become an increasingly important element of youth work after World War II (often as confidence building measures between former enemy countries) and evolved into out-of-school learning opportunities (now referred to as ‘non-formal learning’) over the following decades. In this context, the Youth for Europe Programme was established by the European Union in 1988. For the period 2007 to 2013 it was named ‘Youth in Action’ – in fact, the 25th anniversary of EU Youth Programmes was celebrated in 2013. The programme will find its continuation in the youth chapter of the Erasmus+ Programme (2014 to 2020).

The shift towards more evidence-based policy-making also presents a challenge to YiA, the only EU programme in the field of youth work and non-formal learning. Therefore, the project ‘Research-based analysis and monitoring of Youth in Action’ (RAY) was established. In order to develop and improve the programme, it is necessary to have a research-based analysis of the effects of the programme. RAY is dedicated to providing such an insight by exploring processes, outcomes and effects of YiA funded projects using a multi-method and a transnational approach.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/youth/documents/publications/whitepaper\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/youth/documents/publications/whitepaper_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-2444/Investing%20and%20Empowering.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/Resources/Forum21/Issue\\_No12/N12\\_Agenda\\_2020\\_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/Resources/Forum21/Issue_No12/N12_Agenda_2020_en.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/publ/pdf/ll-learning/keycomp\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/publ/pdf/ll-learning/keycomp_en.pdf)

# research-based analysis and monitoring of the youth in action programme

## aims and objectives

Research-based analysis and monitoring of the YiA Programme (RAY) is conducted by the RAY Network, which was founded in 2008 and currently includes the YiA National Agencies and their research partners in 16 countries<sup>6</sup>. RAY aims to explore the effects of the YiA Programme of the European Union, in particular the effects on young people, youth workers and youth leaders involved in YiA-funded projects as well as on their organisations and the communities where projects take place. Not only are the effects explored with respect to the intentions, objectives and priorities of the YiA Programme, but so are the unintended impacts of YiA projects in general. Furthermore, RAY aims to study how the actors involved in YiA projects are learning and, in particular, which contexts, settings, educational approaches, methodologies and methods used in the projects contribute to their learning and competence development.

In this respect, RAY aims to contribute to quality assurance and development in the implementation of the YiA Programme (and, subsequently, the youth chapter of Erasmus+) as well as to evidence-based and research-informed youth policy development. At the same time, RAY seeks to generate new knowledge about the processes and outcomes of non-formal education and learning mobility in general and more specifically about non-formal youth education activities with an international dimension.

## research approach

In principle, research-based analysis and monitoring of YiA uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative social research methods. Based on concepts and research instruments developed by the Institute of Educational Science at the University of Innsbruck in Austria (the research partner of the Austrian National Agency of YiA), two multilingual online questionnaires aimed at exploring the effects of YiA projects were created – one for participants and another for project leaders/team members. So-called ‘Standard Surveys’ using these questionnaires (now available in 16 languages) have been conducted on a regular basis since 2009 and will be continued until 2014 in order to collect data for most of the duration of the YiA Programme. In a second step, multilingual questionnaires for a ‘Special Survey’ on learning in YiA were developed in 2012 for the purpose of exploring the educational approaches, design, methodology and methods applied in YiA projects. Between October 2009 and May 2013, more than 100,000 participants and project leaders/team members of YiA projects were invited to take part in the RAY online surveys and more than 30,000 completed the respective questionnaires. Complementary to the surveys, a study using qualitative methods – interviews and group discussions – was conducted in 10 countries<sup>7</sup> in order to explore deeper the learning processes and outcomes of YiA projects as well as to further develop the research approach and instruments applied in RAY. Further qualitative studies on a variety of aspects related to YiA were conducted by individual RAY Network members at the national level.

<sup>6</sup> Austria, Belgium (Flemish-speaking community), Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia and Turkey; the Netherlands and Sweden were involved in the RAY Network until 2011/2012.

<sup>7</sup> Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, France, Hungary, Luxembourg, Poland and Turkey

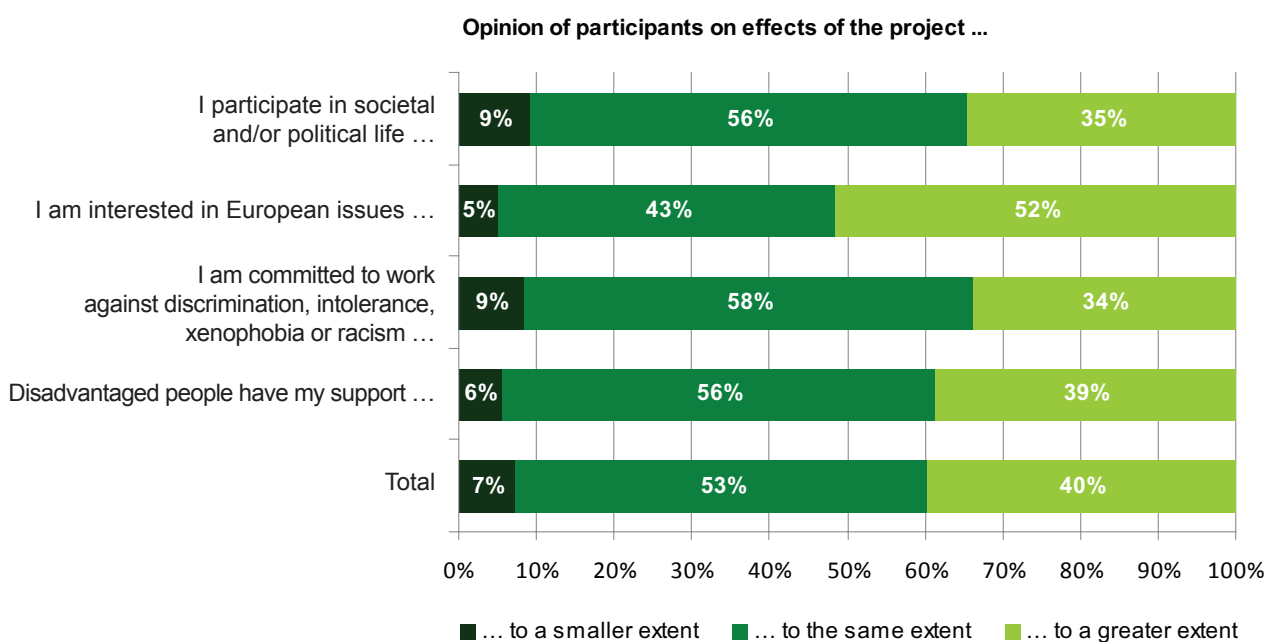
Furthermore, a study on competence development in Youth in Action projects was conducted in six countries<sup>8</sup> in 2012. The 'Special Survey' explored if participation in short-term mobility projects supported by YiA results in a significant increase in participants' competences and skills, independently of other factors. A quasi-experimental research design involving a comparison of levels of participants' and non-participants' competences was used. It was also taken into consideration that the competence levels were influenced by education, length and intensity of participation in other youth work activities, age and other background factors. The investigation included bivariate comparisons and regression analyses.

## main findings

### participation and active citizenship

The outcomes of the surveys suggest that the involvement in YiA projects contributes to the development of the four permanent priorities of the YiA programme<sup>9</sup>, especially to the development of citizenship competences in a broad sense and in particular to the development of interpersonal, social, intercultural and foreign language competences of both participants and project leaders. This includes the development of respective skills and knowledge, but also of attitudes and values, 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 issues; 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 increased participation in public and political life.

#### Participants' self-perceptions of effects the project had on them with respect to YiA objectives and priorities



<sup>8</sup> Belgium/Flemish-speaking community), Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland and Sweden

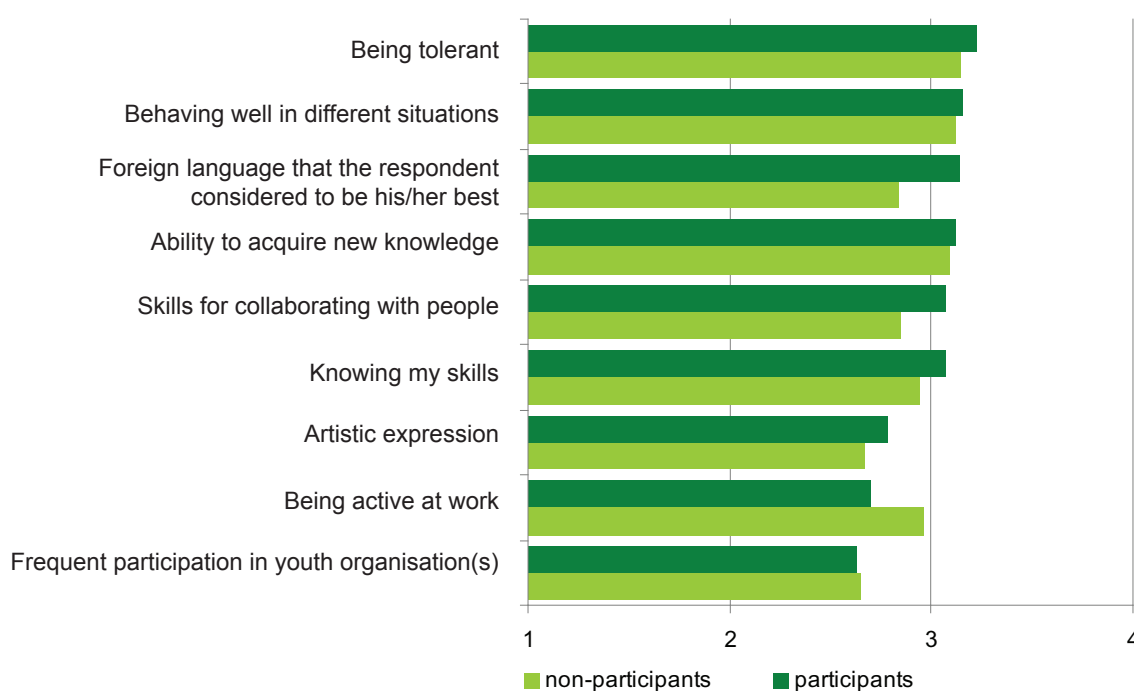
<sup>9</sup> The four permanent priorities of the YiA programme 2007-2013 are European citizenship, participation of young people, cultural diversity and inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities.

## competence development

The findings 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 competences as well as for communication in a foreign language, a significant development is also reported for sense of entrepreneurship, civic competence, cultural awareness and expression, and learning competence ('learning to learn'). In addition developments can be found for communication in the first language (mother tongue), mathematical competence and sense of initiative. The self-assessment of participants is confirmed by the project leaders' assessment of the participants' competence development, showing a highly significant correlation between self-perception and external perception.

These findings are partly confirmed by the 'Special Survey' on competence development in Youth in Action projects in six countries in 2012 (see 'research approach' above): participants in YiA projects tended to report higher levels of competences than non-participants – with a difference of up to 10 percentage points. Participants generally tended to consider each of the competences more important, assessed their competence levels higher and expressed more willingness to improve the respective competences in the future. There is one exception to the general pattern – being active at work was rated higher by non-participants than participants, but the difference was small. Two of the differences were statistically significant: the importance given to skills for collaborating with other people and the competence level for communicating in a foreign language. An in-depth analysis of the survey data confirmed that the two differences occurred indeed independently of other possible explanations such as educational attainment, size of municipality of residence, age, experience in other youth work environments, country of residence, etc. Further differences that were less pronounced but still relevant could be observed for the following: the skill of artistic expression, for which responses showed the most systematic positive differences for YiA participants; and the greater importance given by YiA participants to foreign language skills and collaboration skills – indicating that YiA participants developed the respective competences within their YiA project.

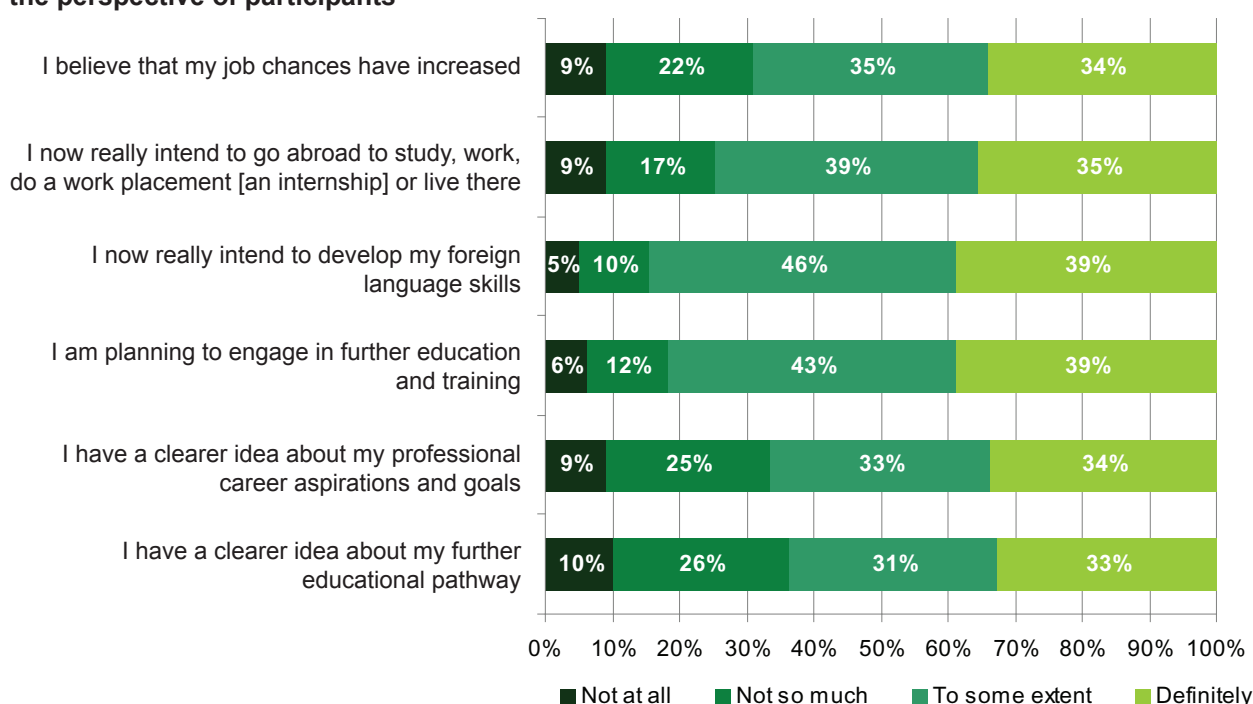
### Self-assessment of level of skill or personal characteristic (averages) compared to other people in general (1 = significantly below others' ... 4 = significantly above others')



## educational and professional development

The results of the surveys indicate that the involvement in YiA projects stimulates both participants and project leaders to consider or actually plan further educational activities and their professional development. Furthermore, a large majority of both participants and project leaders believe that their job opportunities have increased at least to some extent. This, together with the competence development outlined above, 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. Therein lies a significant effect that complements the social, cultural and political dimensions of the YiA programme. 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.

### Effects of the project with respect to educational and professional development from the perspective of participants



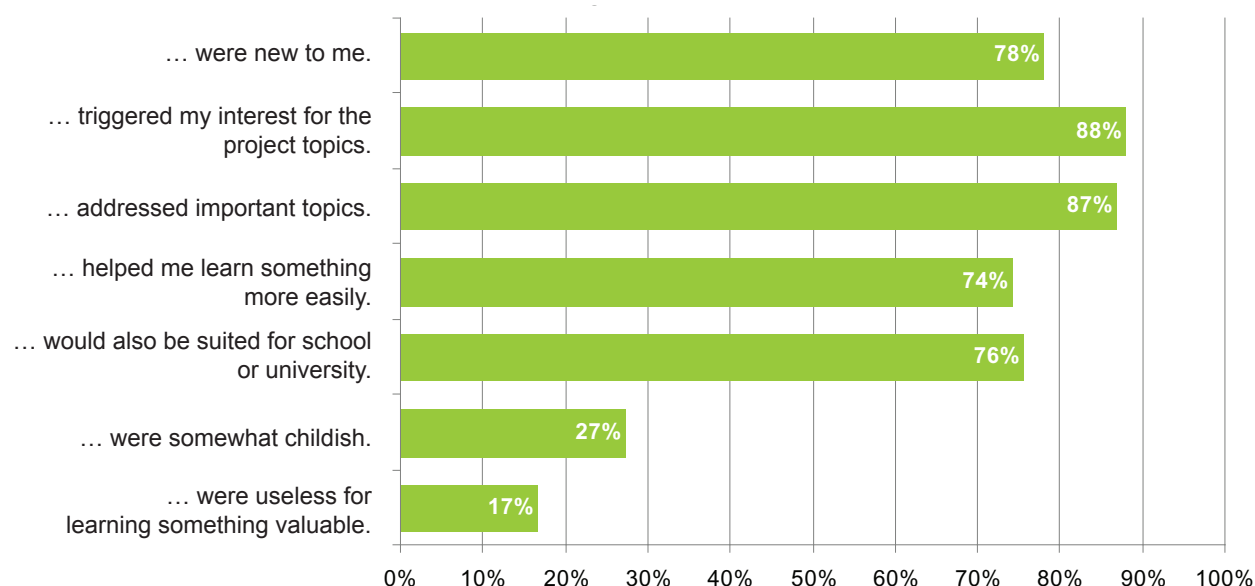
## youth in action – a space for new learning experiences

A majority of participants report that their project used exercises, games and methods that were new to them. Similarly, a majority of project leaders report that during their project they applied exercises, games and methods for the first time. This indicates that YiA projects are a space for trying out and experiencing new educational and learning methods – a laboratory for training, teaching and learning for both participants and project leaders. And these projects also provide for successful learning spaces: a considerable majority of participants indicate that these methods addressed important topics and triggered their interest for such topics, that they helped them to learn something more easily, and that they consider them to be suited also for school or university. Only a very small proportion of participants thought that the methods used were useless for learning something valuable or that they were somewhat childish.



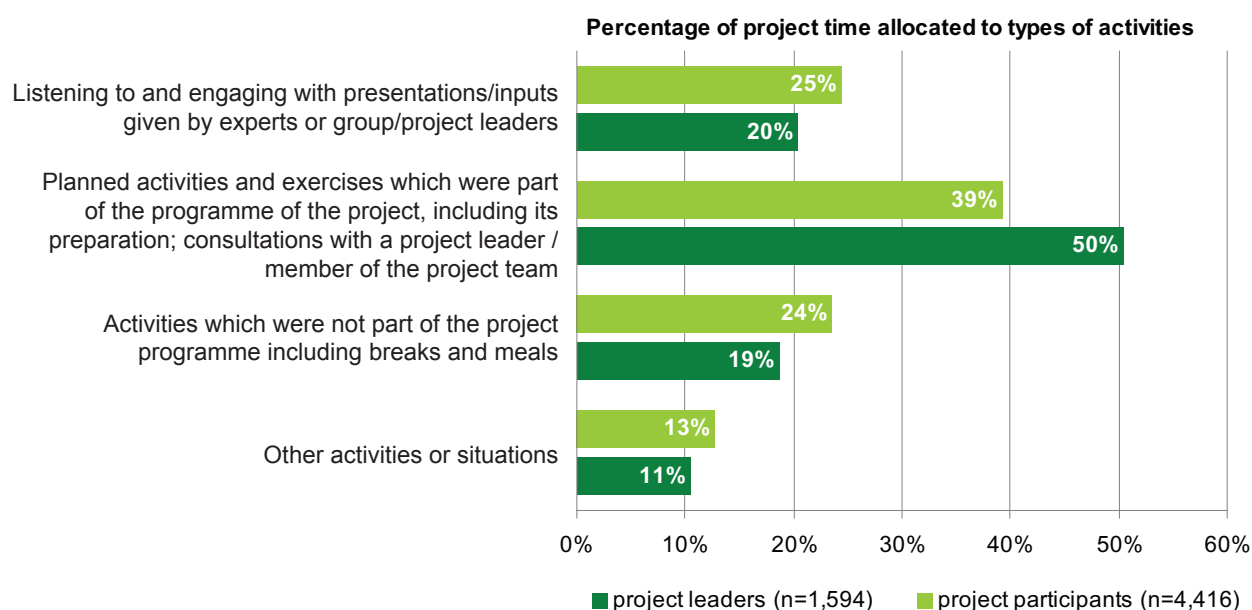
## Methods used in the project from the perspective of participants

„The projects used exercises, games and methods that ...“ N=5,398 (Somewhat true + Very true).



## youth in action projects providing the full spectrum between informal, non-formal and formal learning

Participants and project leaders report that between 40% and 50% of the project time was dedicated to non-formal education and learning methods. Between 20% and 25% of the project time was dedicated to activities which would rather correspond to formal education learning methods (i.e., presentations/ inputs given by experts or project leaders). Around 20% of the project time was not part of the project programme, providing opportunities primarily for informal learning. This indicates that YiA projects offer a broad spectrum of learning opportunities between more formal education activities at one end and more informal learning situations on the other, thus covering the full learning continuum<sup>10</sup>, with around half of the activities in the non-formal education/learning bracket.



<sup>10</sup> The full spectrum of formal, non-formal and informal learning.

## learning in youth in action projects

Research results indicate that in YiA projects the participants develop key competences through a combination of non-formal, informal and rather formal education/learning methods and settings. Non-formal education methods and activities which were part of the programme play the most dominant role, followed by informal experiences with people in and around the project. In particular, the responses indicate that the development of citizenship/civic skills is strongly supported through informal learning. Furthermore, taking part in the organisation of the project and applying what one has learned in the project are reported to contribute considerably to the development of selected skills for lifelong learning, thus confirming the relevance of a participatory approach and of practical experience for learning.

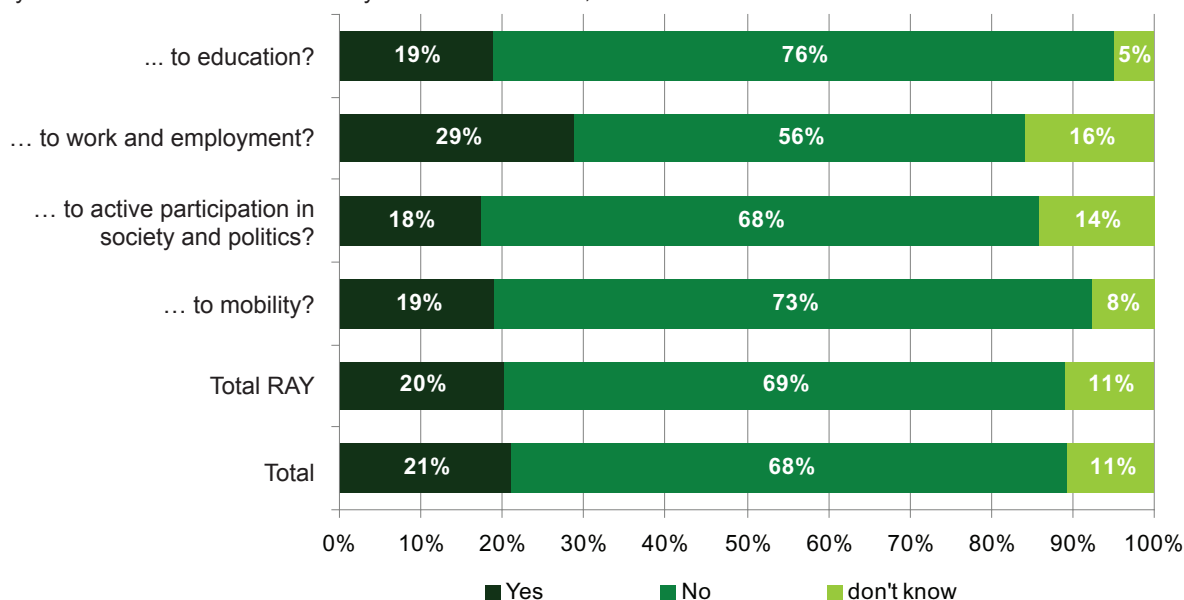
Similar to the participants, project leaders report having developed key competences for lifelong learning through a combination of different types of activities they implemented in their role as project leaders. Overall, project leaders report having developed the skills in question best through activities which are directly linked to designing, developing and implementing the project and also during organisational and administrative tasks. Designing the project, cooperating with youth workers from other countries and implementing project activities with and for participants are reported to be very effective for work-related learning in YiA projects.

## reaching out to *all* young people

A considerable proportion of participants in YiA projects are young people with fewer opportunities, which means that a major objective of the YiA programme, namely inclusion, has been met. Approximately 40% of the participants in youth projects indicate that they are confronted with obstacles in their access to education, work, mobility or participation in society. Furthermore, there is a high interest of beneficiaries, youth workers and youth leaders to include young people with fewer opportunities in YiA projects: a large majority of the participants in training and networking projects reported to be youth workers/leaders who work with young people with fewer opportunities.

### Obstacles to education, work, employment, mobility and participation in society and politics reported by participants

„Are you confronted with obstacles in your access ...“. N=3,470



## conclusions

Research evidence indicates that the YiA programme is very effective in meeting its objectives and priorities, in particular in fostering European citizenship, in encouraging young people to participate in society, in promoting cultural diversity and in including young people with fewer opportunities. Research findings also indicate that the effects of YiA projects go far beyond the YiA objectives, e.g. by contributing to the development of *all* eight key competences for lifelong learning and by supporting young people, youth leaders and youth workers in further developing their educational and professional career perspectives, which in turn can contribute to an increased level of employability. These effects reported by participants and youth workers involved in YiA projects are achieved primarily through non-formal and informal learning as an inherent element of YiA projects.

In this respect, research findings indicate that YiA contributes to reaching the goals of the EU Strategy 2010-2018 ‘Youth – Investing and Empowering’<sup>11</sup>, especially regarding the aims concerning non-formal education, participation as well as entrepreneurship. Therefore, the elements contributing to the success of the YiA Programme – in particular the non-formal learning approach – should be maintained in the youth chapter of the new EU Programme Erasmus+, which will follow the present EU Programmes in the fields of education, youth, culture and sports.

## policy implications and recommendations

### For the future it would be necessary to take the following steps:

- Enhance the recognition of non-formal education and learning, especially its contribution to the competence development and increased employability of young people, which is one of the fields of action defined in the EU-Strategy ‘Youth – Investing and Empowering’.
- Continue to support youth projects which foster democratic citizenship and the readiness of young people to be active in the interest of their community.
- Improve existing European mechanisms such as the ‘structured dialogue’ to foster youth participation on local, regional and European levels and establish new initiatives for enhancing participation of all young people in public and political life as well as in civil society.
- Recognise the potential of European youth programmes in reaching young people with fewer opportunities and improve and expand the inclusive approach of YiA in order to find new possibilities to reach even more young people with fewer opportunities through the development of specific strategies.
- Further develop opportunities for education and training of youth workers and youth leaders as key actors of (international) youth work through respective instruments in the youth chapter of Erasmus+. This will secure a high level of quality in youth work and the possibility for professional exchange and development.
- Ensure the supportive approach towards the target groups of the youth chapter of Erasmus+ through a network of National Agencies that has special expertise and competence in the youth field.
- Ensure research-based analysis and monitoring for the youth chapter of Erasmus+ in order to contribute to quality assurance and development in the implementation of the programme as well as to evidence-based and research-informed youth policy development. This includes the further development of research approaches and instruments in order to provide for a more comprehensive analysis of processes and outcomes of funded projects as well as of learning mobility at large.

<sup>11</sup> See <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2009:0200:FIN:EN:PDF>

## project identity

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Duration	2008 – on-going
Date	November 2013
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