

**Research-based
analysis of European
youth programmes**

EXPLORING INCLUSION IN ERASMUS+ YOUTH IN ACTION:

EFFECTS OF SOCIAL INEQUALITIES ON LEARNING OUTCOMES

SUMMARY

CHRISTIANE MEYERS
MARTIN MAYERL
HELMUT FENNES



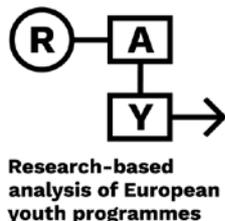
‘Erasmus+: Youth in Action’ is part of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union and supporting European youth projects. The ‘Research-based Analysis of European Youth Programmes’ (RAY) is conducted by the RAY Network, which includes the National Agencies of Erasmus+ Youth in Action and of the European Solidarity Corps together with their research partners in currently 34 countries*.

This study explores how social inequalities affect the learning outcomes of young people who participated in Erasmus+ Youth in Action projects and is based on a secondary analysis of data collected through the RAY surveys between October 2017 and May 2018 within ‘Research-based Analysis and Monitoring of Erasmus+ Youth in Action’ (RAY-MON), designed and 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 RAY Network. It was co-funded within the Transnational Cooperation Activities (TCA) of Erasmus+ Youth in Action and by SALTO Inclusion & Diversity.

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Authors:

Christiane Meyers, University of Luxembourg

Martin Mayerl, Austrian Institute for Research on Vocational Education and Training

Helmut Fennes, Generation and Educational Science Institute

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1. INTRODUCTION: YOUNG PEOPLE WITH FEWER OPPORTUNITIES AS KEY TARGET GROUP OF EUROPEAN YOUTH POLICY

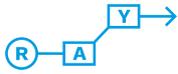
‘Erasmus+ Youth in Action’ is the youth component of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union (2014–2020). It aims at developing key competences of young people as well as to promote active citizenship, intercultural dialogue, social inclusion, solidarity and participation in democratic life and in the labour market, in particular through increased learning mobility opportunities for young people, youth leaders, youth workers and others active in youth work and youth organisations. Special emphasis is given to the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities (YPFO) in the programme. ‘Equity and Inclusion’ is one of six important features of the overall Erasmus+ Programme. Inclusion and diversity projects should have a positive impact on the situation of young people with fewer opportunities. These are young people who are at a disadvantage compared to their peers because they face one or more of the exclusion factors and obstacles defined for E+/YiA (disability, health problems, educational difficulties, cultural differences, economic obstacles, social obstacles and geographical obstacles).

‘Research-based Analysis and Monitoring of Erasmus+ Youth in Action’ (RAY-MON) aims at contributing to monitoring and developing Erasmus+ Youth in Action (E+/YiA) and the quality of projects supported by it by exploring a broad scope of aspects of E+/YiA. One of the objectives of this research project is to explore the level of access to E+/YiA for young people (in particular of YPFO) as well as organisations, bodies and groups in the youth field – thus exploring if and in which way the respective objective of E+/YiA is achieved. In line with this objective, this particular report will explore the question of whether and how learning outcomes differ according to different dimensions of social inequality. In other words, whether the learning outcomes of participants with fewer opportunities differ from those of other participants.

2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH: ANALYSING THE LEARNING OUTCOMES OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITH FEWER OPPORTUNITIES IN ERASMUS+ YOUTH IN ACTION

Learning outcomes achieved within the framework of E+/YiA projects can be manifold. In the present analysis, the focus on learning outcomes is limited to a small segment within the broad concept of lifelong learning. The central research question aims to find out whether the effects of participation for the young people on personal development in E+/YiA projects differ depending on various dimensions. Consequently, the central empirical research question is defined as follows: How do social inequalities affect the learning outcomes of young people who participated in E+/YiA projects?

For analysis we use data of the RAY-MON surveys conducted by the RAY Network in 2017/2018. For this analysis, we use a restricted dataset (participants aged 18 to 30 years), with a sample size of 16,997 respondents. On the basis of this data set, we have defined various dimensions of social inequality, in particular educational inequality, employment inequality, participation inequality, mobility inequality, and inequality resulting from migration or belonging to a



minority. We used advanced analytical methods to investigate whether the learning outcomes of E+/YiA projects differ according to these dimensions of social inequality. We examined the following dimensions of possible learning outcomes: 1) active participation¹, 2) learning and personal development² and 3) intercultural interaction³. A special feature of the method used is that effects of individual projects were also included in the analysis.

3. MAIN RESULTS

3.1. YOUNG PEOPLE AFFECTED BY INEQUALITIES BENEFIT FROM E+/YIA PROJECTS EQUALLY AS OR EVEN MORE THAN OTHER PARTICIPANTS

The analysis generally shows that learning outcomes differ only slightly between participants with respect to their social characteristics. Social characteristics have little explanatory power to explain differences in participants' learning outcomes⁴. Nevertheless, we have discovered small differences in the analysis:

- **Educational inequality:** Participants whose parents have a low educational attainment and who experience obstacles in accessing education tend to have better learning outcomes (e.g. in the dimension *learning and personal development*) than participants whose parents have a higher level of education and who do not experience subjective obstacles to education. But the observed effects are very small and hardly perceptible.
- **Employment inequality:** The results indicate that young people who had experienced unemployment during the year prior to the project indicate significantly lower learning outcomes in the dimensions *active participation*, *learning and personal development* and *intercultural interaction* than people who were not unemployed. On the other hand, young people who feel disadvantaged in accessing employment, say that they benefit significantly more from the project experience regarding the outcome dimensions *active participation* and *learning and personal development*.
- **Participation inequality:** The results show that in two dimensions, *active participation* and *learning and personal development*, young people with perceived obstacles to active participation in society and politics show slightly better learning outcomes than people who do not perceive such obstacles. In the dimension *intercultural interaction* there are no effects observed.

¹ Composite indicator comprising "... to develop an idea and put it into practice", "... to say what I think with conviction in discussions" and "... to achieve something in the interests of the community or society".

² Composite indicator comprising "... to plan and carry out my learning independently", "... to learn or to have more fun when learning", "... to think logically and draw conclusions" and "... to identify opportunities for my personal or professional development".

³ Composite indicator comprising "... to get along with people who have a different cultural background" and "... to communicate with people who speak another language".

⁴ In fact, participants indicate that they either 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with a statement such as "... I improved my ability to develop an idea and put it into practice". The answers to this question provide a subjective view of the participants' own learning outcomes. However, this subjective assessment may not be consistent with genuine learning outcomes of participants.



- **Inequality due to migration or belonging to a minority:** A second-generation immigration status of participants has a slight effect on the learning outcomes in all dimensions. Participants with a second-generation immigration status indicate significantly higher learning outcomes. But on the other hand, we see no effect of belonging to a minority in general on the learning outcomes.
- **Mobility inequality:** Young persons who have never been abroad before the participation in the project report higher learning outcomes in all dimensions. However, the difference in the dimension *learning and personal development* is particularly high. Young people who perceive obstacles to mobility have slightly higher average outcomes than those who do not perceive obstacles to mobility.

From these results we can derive an important finding: contrary to the commonly observed ‘Matthew Effect’ in educational contexts, E+/YiA projects do not lead to further inequalities among young people in learning outcomes related to selected skills relevant for lifelong learning. In fact, YPFO who participate in an E+/YiA project achieve, in general, similar learning outcomes as other participants. In some dimensions (educational attainment of parents, migration background, never having been abroad, and subjective perceptions of obstacles in accessing education, work, mobility or participation in society or politics) there is even a subtle indication that young people with fewer opportunities achieve better learning outcomes.

3.2. LEARNING OUTCOMES OF PARTICIPANTS ARE STRONGLY AFFECTED BY THE SPECIFIC FEATURES OF THEIR PROJECT

Interestingly, the results also show that the project level has the highest explanatory power for the learning outcomes. The higher explanatory power of the project (with all its facets such as project design, project themes, methodology, implementation etc.) points to one of the strengths of the E+/YiA programme which is the high diversity of the projects and the activation of a young person's own resources by a project. The influence of the project seems reasonable, as it is the interaction of learners among each other and with the project leaders in the specific context of the countries involved in the project and based on a topic that creates learning opportunities.

3.3. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

However, there are central limitations regarding the interpretation of the results in this report. First, this analysis focuses only on selected skills developed through the project participation. It is recommended to do further research on other dimensions of learning in these non-formal settings. This concerns, for example, the development of values, attitudes and knowledge as well as effects in relation to active citizenship and the further development of educational pathways. Secondly, the learning outcomes are measured by the subjective method of self-assessment. Although this allows individual subjective expectations and reflections to be taken into account, it also raises the question of the comparability of the results. This method is always highly sensitive to different group-dependent perceptions. In this context, it is difficult to say whether the described differences are actually due to real differences in outcomes or whether these differences are due to group-specific response behaviour, such as cultural background, gender-specific assessments etc. Thus, no conclusions can be drawn about the level of learning, but only about subjectively assessed learning outcomes.