

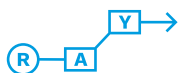
**Research-based  
analysis of European  
youth programmes**

# **SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS**

**RESEARCH-BASED RECOMMENDATIONS  
FOR THE EUROPEAN YOUTH PROGRAMMES**

**WHAT CAN BE LEARNED FROM RESEARCH  
FOR THE NEXT PROGRAMME GENERATION?**

24 MARCH 2024



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## 1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

The “Network for the Research-based Analysis of the European Youth Programmes” (RAY) is an open network carried by 35 National Agencies of the European youth programmes and their research partners. RAY conducts biennial monitoring surveys of the Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps programmes. The most recent surveys were completed at the end of 2023, gathering the perspectives of close to 24.000 project participants and more than 6.000 project team members.

The monitoring surveys are complemented by selected thematic research projects, among others on competence development for European youth work (RAY COMP), digitalisation in youth work (RAY DIGI), and long-term effects of participation in the programmes (RAY LTE).

This document brings together initial key findings from the analysis of the most recent monitoring surveys with key findings from the monitoring of the previous programme generation and from across our thematic research projects.

## 2. KEY STRENGTHS OF BOTH YOUTH PROGRAMMES

### 2.1. INTERCULTURAL LEARNING AT ITS BEST

**The European youth programmes are intercultural learning at its best: safe spaces to encounter differences with positive curiosity and explore them through constructive discourse and exchange.**

The programmes, across formats and beneficiaries, are an excellent framework for intercultural dialogue and intercultural learning. They strengthen the appreciation of cultural diversity among project participants, facilitate participation, and promote active citizenship, social inclusion and solidarity within and beyond Europe.

*92% of young people participating in Erasmus+ Youth and 91% of volunteers participating in the European Solidarity Corps have improved their ability to get along with people who have a different cultural background through their participation in the programmes.*

### 2.2. EUROPEAN POWERHOUSES FOR YOUTH WORK

**The European youth programmes are the most important European powerhouses for enhancing youth work at local, regional and national level with an international dimension.**

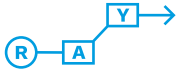
The programmes, across countries and contexts, are the most significant and most accessible opportunity for youth workers and youth leaders at local, regional or national level to bring an international dimension to their projects and programmes, in particular through capacity building, learning mobility, and strategic cooperation.

*90% of youth workers participating in Erasmus+ Youth and 87% of solidarity workers participating in the European Solidarity Corps are better able to strengthen the international dimension of their work after their participation in the programmes.*

### 2.3. FORCEFUL CATALYSTS FOR EMPATHY

**The European youth programmes provide equalising learning environments for young people, who develop and strengthen empathy through their participation.**

*As a result of their participation in the programmes, 80% of participants in Erasmus+ Youth and 81% of participants in the European Solidarity Corps say they have become better at empathising with others.*



## 3. KEY STRENGTHS OF ERASMUS+ YOUTH

### 3.1. LIVED DEMOCRACY

**Erasmus+ Youth is a crucial safe space for youth leaders, youth trainers and youth workers to practice and live participatory democracy.**

Youth work is a diverse practice across Europe, but based on a set of shared principles, chiefly among them that it is participatory. The programme offers a variety of formats to build the capacity of youth leaders, youth trainers and youth workers to develop and implement participatory youth projects with an intercultural and international dimension.

*85% of youth workers participating in Erasmus+ Youth are better able to strengthen youth-led youth work after their participation in the programmes.*

### 3.2. NON-FORMAL EMPOWERMENT

**Erasmus+ Youth empowers young people and youth professionals by drawing on non-formal learning as the basis for its educational approach.**

The programme successfully draws on and promotes the principles of non-formal learning, such as participatory learning approaches and peer learning settings; provides arenas to practice and experience citizenship, democracy and participation; and stimulates communities of practice that often persist beyond projects.

*89% of youth workers participating in Erasmus+ Youth have learned more about fostering non-formal learning in youth work through their participation in the programmes.*

## 4. KEY STRENGTHS OF THE EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS

### 4.1. LIVED SOLIDARITY

**The European Solidarity Corps provides a framework to live and experience solidarity in a local community context.**

The programme, through its solidarity projects, has established a format that allows young people to share and receive solidarity in their local communities. This new format is well perceived at communal level, allows for active participation and community involvement, and strengthens young people's policy skills and connection to their communities.

*61% of participants in solidarity projects are motivated by practicing and experiencing solidarity – and 65% of them feel more connected to their community after the project.*

### 4.2. VOLUNTEER EMPOWERMENT

**The European Solidarity Corps sustainably empowers young people to pursue and persist volunteering in a variety of successful formats.**

The programme has successfully introduced team volunteering as a new form of volunteering, providing another way for young people across Europe to volunteer, broadening access, and strengthening the diversity of possibilities for young people to get engaged in tackling societal challenges – which young people continue to do after their programme experience.

*86% of participants in volunteering projects either maintain or increase their commitment to and level of volunteering after their participation in the programme.*



## 5. KEY CHALLENGES OF BOTH YOUTH PROGRAMMES

### 5.1. LOOKING BEYOND MOBILITY

**The European youth programmes need to get better at recognising the democratic practices within the programmes as practices that can shape, and change, societies.**

While most learning mobility projects strengthen, either directly or indirectly, active citizenship and youth participation, many participants, beneficiaries and stakeholders think about them first and foremost as personal learning experiences – and to a much lesser extent as practices that support democratic citizenship and participation in civil society and democratic life.

*70% of project team members in Erasmus+ Youth say they explored participation practices in their projects, but only 40% say they also explored the role of participation for democracies.*

### 5.2. STRENGTHENING DIVERSITY

**The European youth programmes need to get better at strengthening, and reproducing, the diversity of European societies.**

While both programmes work very well for those young people that they manage to involve independent of their socioeconomic status, they remain overproportionately attractive for highly educated young people. Moreover, project teams tend to overestimate how many young people with fewer opportunities are involved – and tend to underestimate their needs.

*55% of project participants in Erasmus+ Youth and 63% of project participants in the European Solidarity Corps have completed a higher education degree – compared to 43% among all young Europeans<sup>1</sup> – and a total of 85% (E+/Y) and 89% (ESC) would like to pursue one.*

### 5.3. IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC

**The European youth programmes struggle to compensate for the impact of the pandemic on the strength and resilience of the youth sector.**

The impact of the pandemic on the youth sector has been profound. Within just a few months, operational budgets were reduced by 50% on average, followed by wide-spread reductions in staff and volunteering capacity. For most youth work organisations, rebuilding their reserves to pre-pandemic levels is an enormous struggle.

*Our research project on the impact of the pandemic on youth work across Europe (RAY COR) has shown how deeply the pandemic has shaken youth work. An analysis undertaken in 2022 and 2023 has also shown that recovery measures have yet to reach youth work in most European countries.*

## 6. KEY CHALLENGE OF ERASMUS+ YOUTH

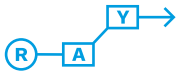
### 6.1. CONSISTENCY IN SHAPING POLICY

**Erasmus+ Youth needs to get better and more consistent at shaping youth policies, and at organising meaningful policy dialogue.**

While the programme has several policy-related objectives, and invests strategically into structured dialogues, policy aspects remain a weakness of project formats across the board. There

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<sup>1</sup> Eurostat (2023). *Population by educational attainment level, sex and age (%)*. [https://doi.org/10.2908/EDAT\\_LFSE\\_03](https://doi.org/10.2908/EDAT_LFSE_03).



is no clear strategy, and too few successful practices, of influencing policies and involving policy makers in ways that are meaningful for projects as well as policy.

*Project team members assess that the policy-related objectives of Erasmus+ Youth are achieved to a much lesser extent than the practice-related objectives of the programme. One example: 33% of project team members say their project contributed to strengthening cooperation at the level of organisations, compared to 8% who say their project contributed to strengthening cooperation at the level of policies.*

## 7. KEY CHALLENGE OF THE EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS

### 7.1. CONSISTENCY IN ENSURING QUALITY

**The European Solidarity Corps needs to get better at ensuring consistent quality across its volunteering projects.**

The consistency in quality has been a long-standing area of interest for the European Solidarity Corps (and the Youth in Action Programme prior to that). Most recently, the 2022 “Council Recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers across the European Union” included ten consolidated recommendations to enhance the quality of volunteering opportunities.

*One example for inconsistency: 19% of volunteers have observed or experienced safety concerns during their project, in team volunteering as well as individual volunteering. When asked whether these safety concerns were addressed adequately during the project, the median for team volunteering projects was 6,0 (on a scale from 0 = not addressed at all, to 10 = addressed in full). For individual volunteering projects, the median was only 4,5.*

## 8. KEY GAPS IN BOTH YOUTH PROGRAMMES

### 8.1. ADEQUATE APPLICATION FORMATS

**The European youth programmes need to courageously rethink how application procedures are conceptualised and managed.**

The current application procedures rely heavily on long texts, to be written in technically fragile and largely inaccessible web-based pdfs. For most project formats, the necessary investment into the application is too high. The potential of smaller project formats to trial different application approaches has so far not been used.

*In focus and discussion groups with programme officers across all formats, there are consistent reports of organisations choosing not to apply due to the misbalance between effort and outcome, in particular in countries where national and/or local funding alternatives exist. Discussions about alternative application procedures have been hopeful, but so far hypothetical.*

### 8.2. ADEQUATE STRUCTURAL EMBEDMENT

**The European youth programmes need to forcefully stimulate more and better strategic development of youth work across Europe.**

*In focus groups, TCA and NET officers observed that many — and oftentimes most — organisations active in the European youth programmes lack a clear organisational strategy. Where such a strategy exists, it rarely contains an expressive strategy regarding European youth work. Strategic thinking is not absent, on the contrary; but it is not articulated, and therefore remains inaccessible.*



## 9. KEY GAP IN ERASMUS+ YOUTH

### 9.1. CONTINUITY OF STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

**Strategic partnerships are an instrument of Erasmus+ Youth with enormous potential, but youth sector organisations struggle to use them consistently.**

Erasmus+ Youth has strengthened application strands and procedures that depend on a certain size, stability and professionalism of applying organisations, such as strategic partnerships and accreditations. Many youth sector organisations struggle to successfully apply in these strands – and can neither benefit more from nor contribute more to the programme.

*Interviewed Key Action 2 Programme Officers from 12 European countries unanimously observed that they do not receive enough applications for strategic partnerships from youth sector organisations and networks.*

## 10. KEY GAP IN THE EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS

### 10.1. EUROPEAN VOLUNTEER STATUS

**The rights of incoming and outgoing volunteers are subject to a variety of national frameworks and legislations; a European framework is missing.**

The 2022 “Council Recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers across the European Union” acknowledged the challenge and included recommendations to provide more clarity on the rights of volunteers. The participants of the 2023 Volunteering Conference in Podgorica went further and underlined that a Europe-wide “EU Volunteer Status” is essential.

*A key recommendation of the 2023 RAY Programmatic Study on the European Solidarity Corps was to create a unified legal recognition of volunteers that clarifies rights, improves benefits, and eliminates structural barriers for young welfare beneficiaries, young refugees and youth with disabilities.*