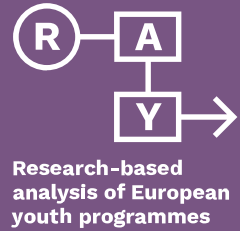


**RAY-
COMP**



**Approaches to competence
development and capacity
building in the European
youth programmes**

**2021
–
2024**

**Key
findings**

April 2025



APPROACHES TO COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT AND CAPACITY BUILDING IN THE EUROPEAN YOUTH PROGRAMMES



RAY COMP: KEY FINDINGS

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KEY INSIGHTS FOR YOUTH WORKER TRAINING

The RAY COMP project examines competence development in youth work through training within the European Youth Programmes, with a focus on identifying areas for improvement. It explores different perspectives, including training providers' rationales for developing training offers, youth workers' perceptions of their professional needs, and trainers' insights on delivering effective training. By analysing training strategies, frameworks, and stakeholder experiences across seven countries and at the European level, the project identifies emerging needs, quality standards, and systemic improvements to enhance the relevance and effectiveness of training initiatives. These findings, drawn from 71 case studies across four modules, serve as a foundation for strengthening training practices and ensuring their long-term impact across local, national, and European levels. At the end of these insights, readers will find targeted action points for various stakeholders to enhance youth worker training.

1. EYP trainings are instruments for professional development

European Youth Programmes (EYP) training activities are recognised as crucial tools for professional development. These trainings provide youth workers with opportunities to develop both core and context-specific competencies, aligning with the European Training Strategy. Data from the Research-based analysis and monitoring of Erasmus+ Youth in Action (RAY-MON) and Research-based analysis and monitoring of the European Solidarity Corps (RAY-SOC) surveys support this, showing that 96.4% of participants in Youth Worker Mobility (YWM), Training and Cooperation Activities (TCA), and Networking (NET) activities reported their participation had already had an impact on their work. Participants highlighted how these trainings contributed significantly to their professional competence, making them feel more equipped to engage with youth work in diverse settings.

2. Thematic variety and matching demand

While there is general satisfaction with the variety of themes in the training programmes, the alignment between supply and demand varies by topic. According to the RAY-MON/-SOC data, a large percentage of participants expressed satisfaction with learning about themes such as youth empowerment, learner-centredness, and peer learning. However, the data also indicates mismatches in demand and available training offers, particularly in specialised topics like sustainability and digital youth work, which are often underrepresented. Training providers also acknowledged an oversupply of cer-

tain topics, which can dilute participation in other critical areas.

3. Socio-political changes and emerging global challenges drive evolving training needs of youth workers

The need for training on mental health and well-being has grown significantly due to the lasting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, rising Euroscepticism has led to an increased demand for training that promotes a positive understanding of the EU, while political education and anti-discrimination training have become essential in response to global democratic erosion and the rise of misanthropic ideologies. Peace-building, cyberbullying, and digital youth work are other prominent emerging needs.

4. Training providers, trainers, and participants are increasingly concerned about the quality of European trainings

The shift towards entertainment-focused activities at the expense of deep learning is particularly of notable concern. The focus of training sessions has shifted towards providing high-visibility and entertaining experiences. However, these trainings often remain superficial, prioritising immediate engagement over lasting competence development. This shift can be traced back to NGOs having to increase quantity and attractiveness to secure sufficient funding in a precarious youth work environment and National Agencies having to comply with quantitative controlling measures, such as high levels of satisfaction and high participant numbers.

5. Balancing top-down and bottom-up approaches

Training providers often find themselves navigating the tension between the top-down programmatic goals set by European Youth Programmes and the bottom-up needs expressed by participants. Trainers play a pivotal role in mediating this tension, adapting the training objectives to meet real-time participant needs while maintaining the integrity of programme goals. The flexibility of trainers to modify content on the spot is crucial, and both trust and pedagogical freedom are key factors in ensuring effective training delivery. Providers acknowledged that allowing trainers this autonomy results in more participant-centred learning.

6. Professional development is personal development

Youth workers strongly identify with their roles, seeing professional development as a deeply personal process. Youth workers often feel that their engagement in non-formal learning and participation in training activities goes beyond professional skills—it also fosters personal growth and contributes to their self-perception and sense of purpose. This connection between personal and professional development encourages higher motivation for attending these trainings and applying the lessons learned in their daily work. Furthermore, youth workers commonly express a high level of emotional engagement in their role.

7. Lifelong learning perspective enables a holistic approach to competence development

While non-formal training plays a critical role in youth work development, it is only one piece of the overall learning journey. A lifelong learning perspective enables a holistic approach to competence development for youth workers, integrating various learning experiences, including formal education, non-formal trainings, and informal learning. The European Training Strategy (ETS) is seen as a potential tool to guide this approach, although more clarity and support for implementation are needed.

8. A systematic approach to competence development

Youth workers face two main challenges in navigating trainings. First, without structural support to assess training quality and adequacy for their professional needs, they have to employ self-directed, creative methods to identify appropriate activities. Second, trainings are often seen as isolated opportunities, with no coherent educational path. Youth workers described piecing together their learning experiences like assembling a mosaic. The ETS provides a structured framework to professional development and needs to be strengthened in its capacity to guide cohesive competence development journeys.

9. Long-Term Training Activities: High threshold, high reward

In interviews, youth workers consistently expressed a strong appreciation for long-term training activities (LTTAs), viewing them as transformative and highly rewarding. Participants emphasised that these trainings fostered deeper professional and personal growth as compared to shorter programmes. However, many acknowledge that high participation thresholds—such as balancing time commitments with the demands of regular work over an extended period of time—can present hurdles. Nevertheless, LTTAs offer a high reward for the investment they require, making them a crucial element in the professional development landscape of European youth work.

10. The ability to transfer learning from EYP training heavily depends on national and local youth work structures

Youth workers from countries with robust local infrastructures reported greater ease in applying what they learned, while those from countries with youth work architectures in need of development often struggled to integrate their new knowledge. To fully capitalise on the benefits of EYP trainings, stronger national and local structures are needed. Therefore, we recommend fostering better alignment between training opportunities and the development of youth work structures across Europe; for example, by systematically integrating the training sector into the Bonn process.

RECOMMENDED ACTION POINTS TO ENHANCE YOUTH WORKER TRAINING

ACTION POINTS FOR NATIONAL AGENCIES

Flexibility and responsiveness:

- Maintain flexibility beyond long-term strategies to allow the training sector to respond quickly to unforeseen developments.
- Simplify and speed up application processes to enable spontaneous participation in short-term training.
- Intensify outreach to raise awareness about the ETS and ensure that youth workers, including newcomers, are able to access its resources.
- Translate and contextualise ETS materials for local relevance to ensure effective implementation in diverse national contexts.
- Provide transparent information and funded career development opportunities for trainers, including needs assessments by National Agencies and long-term training programs.
- Advocate for the labour market recognition of youth work competencies.

Support for training development:

- Provide resources to enhance the quality and inclusiveness of training selection processes.
- Facilitate systematic accreditation processes for TCA and KA2 strands to ensure structural stability and quality.
- Strengthen connections between local, national, and European youth work sectors.

ACTION POINTS FOR TRAINING PROVIDERS

Proactive development:

- Develop innovative training topics and formats to anticipate future trends and challenges.
- Coordinate activities with other training providers to reduce redundancies and improve efficiency.

Quality and inclusiveness:

- Share good practices in needs assessment and content selection to improve training quality.
- Establish transparent communication throughout the training process to manage expectations effectively.
- Encourage co-development approaches—particularly in participant selection—to align objectives with real-time needs.

Support for trainers:

- Provide trainers with timely contracts and payment assurances in case of cancellations.
- Empower trainers with the autonomy to adapt training content to participant needs by:
 - Establishing trust and allowing on-the-spot adjustments.
 - Allocating resources for tailored approaches during sessions.
 - Designating time in training agendas to listen to participants' needs.
- Expand mentoring programmes and provide professional development pathways for trainers.

ACTION POINTS FOR TRAINERS

Autonomy and development:

- Utilise trust and pedagogical freedom to adapt activities in response to participant needs.
- Apply self-assessment tools, such as learning journals, to track and reflect on personal growth.
- Participate in long-term training opportunities to deepen expertise and competence when possible.

Career support:

- Advocate for transparent information on career pathways and support from National Agencies.
- Engage in structured mentoring systems for ongoing professional development.

ACTION POINTS FOR POLICYMAKERS AND KEY DECISION-MAKERS

Structural and policy alignment:

- Involve local and national policymakers in identifying synergies between youth work sectors and training initiatives.
- Advocate for recognition of completed training courses and certificates in the labour market, especially for high-investment, long-term trainings.
- Promote policies that strengthen the national and local youth work infrastructure to enable better implementation of EYP training outcomes.

ACTION POINTS FOR YOUTH WORKER PARTICIPANTS

Take advantage of accessible and relevant opportunities:

- Engage with follow-up activities to sustain enthusiasm and apply new knowledge effectively.
- Utilise mentoring systems and long-term training options to build deeper connections within the youth work community.

Holistic development:

- Use training activities to foster a sense of belonging to the youth work community through networking and shared learning.
- Actively engage in reflective processes, such as self-assessments, to align training activities with personal and professional goals.

ACTION POINTS FOR THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND ETS STAKEHOLDERS

Simplified guidance:

- Provide simplified, practical guidance for ETS implementation so training providers and trainers can incorporate it more easily.
- Promote local adaptation of ETS materials to diverse national contexts.
- Utilise ETS-linked trainings to raise awareness of EYWA-related goals and inspire participation in the Bonn Process.
- Align ETS with other European frameworks to foster consistency in competence development.

Quality standards:

- Develop flexible quality standards that balance structured approaches with adaptability to evolving socio-political needs.
- Build on existing quality approaches in youth work to enhance training impact.

Sector cohesion:

- Support professional development alongside the structural development of youth work practice.
- Embed the training sector into the Bonn Process to enhance systemic cohesion.
- Organise national-level meetings for communities of practice to encourage peer learning and tackle shared challenges.

More recommendations and detailed insights will be available in the full report to be published soon. Stay tuned to researchyouth.net/reports for updates.

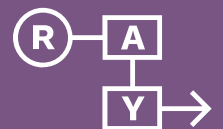
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