

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

RESEARCH PROJECT ON ORGANISATIONAL TRAJECTORIES OF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE EUROPEAN YOUTH PROGRAMMES (RAY-LEARN)

CONCEPT NOTE FOR 2026 & 2027

20 JANUARY 2026

Please note that, to ease contract and project administration, we have used 2025 to switch from an annual mid-year cycle to a two-year calendar year cycle. The previous concept note and its accompanying budget covered half a year, from July 2025 until December 2025 – this was the first part of the switch. This concept note and budget, now cover 2026 and 2027 for a two-year cycle – the second & final part of the switch.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	CONTEXT AND RATIONALE	3
2.	AIMS AND OBJECTIVES	3
2.1.	OVERALL AIM OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT.....	3
2.2.	KEY OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT.....	3
3.	RESEARCH QUESTIONS	4
3.1.	CORE RESEARCH QUESTIONS OF THE PROJECT.....	4
3.2.	UNDERPINNING RESEARCH QUESTIONS OF THE PROJECT	4
4.	RESEARCH DESIGN AND INSTRUMENTS	4
4.1.	MODULE 1: CASE STUDIES	4
4.2.	MODULE 2: ANALYSIS OF SUPPORT OFFERS.....	5
4.3.	MODULE 3: THEMATIC QUESTIONS FOR RAY MONITORING SURVEYS.....	5
4.4.	MODULE 4: DISSEMINATION AND NETWORKING EVENT	5
5.	RESEARCH SCHEDULE	5
6.	RESEARCH OUTLOOK.....	6
7.	PARTNER CONTRIBUTIONS	6
8.	RESEARCH PARTNERS	6



1. CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

In 2018, the RAY Network started to explore and analyse strategies and practices for organisational learning and development of youth sector organisations and networks in the context of the European youth programmes (RAY-LEARN). While the coronavirus pandemic has interrupted and delayed about half of all national research activities, an interim transnational analysis has been developed on the basis of those national research activities that could be undertaken. This analysis shows that while many youth sector organisations and networks have implicit practices that foster organisational learning, they tend to struggle to systematise their organisational learning and development.

Our prior research project on competence development and capacity building in Erasmus+ Youth in Action (RAY-CAP) had already shown that youth sector organisations and networks struggle to systematically benefit, at organisational level, from training and support activities attended by their team members. Our interim analysis of the first half of national research activities in RAY-LEARN has now shown that these struggles extend to more—and frequently most—aspects of organisational learning and development.

At the same time, long-term accreditation of beneficiaries is given more and more importance in both European youth programmes. In this context, programme applicants and beneficiaries will be invited, and required, to think about learning mobility and solidarity actions in more strategic ways than before and to develop long-term strategies rather than rely on multiple ad-hoc approaches.

Against that backdrop, the RAY Network will continue RAY-LEARN as a longitudinal research project, which will follow the trajectories of some applicants and beneficiaries and how they use the opportunities of the programmes as a way to learn, develop and strengthen their groups/networks/organisations strategically. Ultimately, the project will explore how youth sector organisations and networks could be supported better by the European youth programmes in their efforts to establish ways of systematically learning at organisational level.

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

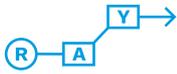
2.1. OVERALL AIM OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

This research project aims to explore and follow the trajectory of youth organisations/groups/networks involved in the European youth programmes over time, with a focus on approaches and methods to support the organisational learning and development of these organisations/groups/networks (RAY-LEARN).

2.2. KEY OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The key objectives of this research project are to

- explore, analyse and compare organisational learning and development phases and trajectories of different types of beneficiaries of the European youth programmes;
- explore, analyse and compare organisational learning and development support needs of different types of beneficiaries of the European youth programmes;



- explore, analyse and compare organisational learning and development support options that are available to beneficiaries of the European youth programmes;
- develop recommendations on strengthening support for organisational learning and development through the European youth programmes.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

3.1. CORE RESEARCH QUESTIONS OF THE PROJECT

The core research questions of the project are:

- What are organisational learning and development trajectories of beneficiaries of the European youth programmes, and how do they differ between different groups/networks/organisations?
- How can groups/networks/organisations be better supported, empowered and connected through the European youth programmes for their organisational learning and development?

3.2. UNDERPINNING RESEARCH QUESTIONS OF THE PROJECT

The underpinning research questions of the project are:

- What are the learning and development stages and trajectories of beneficiaries of the European youth programmes, and how do they differ between different kinds of groups/networks/organisations as well as different action/project types?
 - *New beneficiaries that are applying to the European youth programmes for the very first time*
 - *Beneficiaries of the European youth programmes expanding to new action/project types*
 - *Well-established beneficiaries of the European youth programmes using most or all action/project types*
- What role does international youth work play for groups/networks/organisations at different stages of their organisational learning and development? How do their approaches to and engagement with international youth work change over time?
- What are the learning and development needs of groups/networks/organisations at different stages of their engagement with international youth work and the European youth programmes?
- How do other large-scale programmes support organisational learning and development of their beneficiaries, and what can we learn from their experiences for the European youth programmes?
- Which changes are needed to strengthen the relevance and impact of the European youth programmes for the organisational learning and development of the programmes' beneficiaries strategically and systematically?

4. RESEARCH DESIGN AND INSTRUMENTS

4.1. MODULE 1: CASE STUDIES



Case studies of beneficiaries of the European youth programmes to analyse and explore their learning and development stages and trajectories, and in particular their strategies and practices for organisational learning and development through European youth work and the European youth programmes. Case studies will include different types of groups/networks/organisations at different stages of overall organisational development and different levels of engagement with the European youth programmes. Case studies will be conducted at national level by RAY Network partners in line with common guidelines, and will be complemented by a set of case studies at transnational level of European umbrella groups/networks/organisations.

4.2. MODULE 2: ANALYSIS OF SUPPORT OFFERS

A mapping of support offers and options specifically developed for the organisational learning and development of beneficiaries in the European youth programmes. No specific search for offers beyond the European youth programmes will be conducted, but should other offers appear relevant, these will also be described. The offer will be analysed regarding potential gaps, building on insights from module one.

4.3. MODULE 3: THEMATIC QUESTIONS FOR RAY MONITORING SURVEYS

Continue to improve the RAY Monitoring surveys (MON and SOC) building on the insights from RAY-LEARN. Covering key aspects of organisational learning and development processes and needs from the perspective of youth workers and youth leaders in the monitoring surveys, will allow the network to monitor organisational learning and development in the context of the EU Youth Programmes over time.

4.4. MODULE 4: DISSEMINATION AND NETWORKING EVENT

A transnational event for dissemination of results and for networking of partners and beneficiaries involved. The event will take place between the third and fourth rounds of data collection of the case studies. In this event, all RAY LEARN partners and some of the participant beneficiaries will be invited to come together and reflect on their experiences during the project and on the project findings so far.

5. RESEARCH SCHEDULE

The following table provides an overview of main activities at transnational and national level for the subsequent project phases (January 2026–December 2027):

Time period	Activities at transnational level	Activities at national level
01.2026 – 12.2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finalisation of case studies (round 4) at transnational level Transnational analysis of case studies Development of research and policy reports as well as fact sheets Research communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finalisation of case studies (round 4) at national level Development of national reports (optional) Research communication



6. RESEARCH OUTLOOK

While the next programme generation remains under development, no research outlook beyond 2027 can be usefully provided.

7. PARTNER CONTRIBUTIONS

The following table provides an overview of basic and optional contributions to the research project by project partners:

Basic contribution of partners	Optional contributions of partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Financial contribution to the transnational costs of the research project	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Participation in the working group of the research project
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Case studies of beneficiaries of the European youth programmes and their trajectories	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Translation of research reports and/or fact-sheets into national languages
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Support in distributing the findings of the research project at national level	

8. RESEARCH PARTNERS

Research partners of this project are the RAY Network partners in Belgium (Flemish Community), France, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Sweden. Further partners are always welcome to join.