

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

RESEARCH PROJECT ON THE RESEARCH-BASED ANALYSIS AND MONITORING OF THE EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS (RAY-SOC)

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.

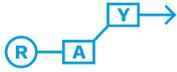


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1. CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

In 2008, the RAY Network was founded with the aim to contribute to quality assurance and quality development in the implementation of the European Union's Youth in Action Programme (2007–2013). To that end, the initial network partners developed a framework for the first and core research project of the network: standard surveys for project participants and project teams. These standard surveys were further developed at the start of the next programme generation, Erasmus+ Youth in Action (2014–2020), resulting in a core research project on the research-based analysis and monitoring of Erasmus+ Youth in Action (RAY-MON), which was subsequently complemented by this research project on the research-based analysis and monitoring of the European Solidarity Corps (RAY-SOC).

During the 12+ years of monitoring the European youth programmes, a number of key characteristics framing our work have changed considerably. The commendable increase of interest in evidence-based policy making has led to more research in the youth sector, with an impact on research and respondent fatigue. It's not uncommon that project participants are requested to respond to three surveys from different stakeholders about just one project, and these surveys are not always coordinated well enough to avoid duplication.

At the same time, access to the internet has drastically changed since the RAY Network started its work. Eurostat reports that the share of EU-27 households with internet access had risen to 90% in 2019, from 64% in 2009¹. Young people in particular, Eurostat also observes, access the internet much more frequently with their mobile phones rather than a laptop. In 2019, 92% of young people used their mobile phones to access the internet, compared to 52% using a mobile computer, with a clear tendency towards that device gap widening².

Against that backdrop, the RAY Network will continue to strengthen RAY-SOC as one of its core activities, with an emphasis on iteration in order to refine and improve the newly developed monitoring surveys, and on continuing to implement our open data approach in order to launch the first version of the new open data portal.

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

2.1. OVERALL AIM OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

This research project aims to contribute to quality assurance and quality development in the implementation of the European Solidarity Corps (2021–2027), to evidence-based and research-informed policy development and practice, and to a better understanding of volunteering, learning and youth activism in the context of solidarity actions of young people.

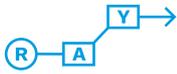
2.2. KEY OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The key objectives of this research project are to

- explore the effects of projects funded through the European Solidarity Corps on project participants and project teams and their communities, networks and organisations;
- study the profiles of project participants, project partnerships, project teams, and support teams, both at individual and organisational level;
- explore the implementation of the European Solidarity Corps through the lens of key programme stakeholders, both at project and programme level;

¹ Eurostat (2020). *Digital economy and society statistics – households and individuals*. Based on data extracted in September 2020. Accessible at https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Digital_economy_and_society_statistics_-_households_and_individuals.

² Eurostat (2020). *Being young in Europe today – digital world*. Based on data extracted in July 2020. Accessible at https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Being_young_in_Europe_today_-_digital_world.



- make the data collected through the monitoring surveys available to and explorable for the European youth field through our new open data portal.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

3.1. CORE RESEARCH QUESTIONS OF THE PROJECT

The core research questions of the project are:

- What are the effects of European Solidarity Corps projects on project participants and project teams, on their groups/networks/organisations, and on their communities and contexts?
- What is the environment of European Solidarity Corps projects, in particular regarding access to and the implementation of the programme, the individual and organisational profiles of actors, and the development, implementation, management and support of projects?
- How can the findings of this research project strengthen the implementation of the European Solidarity Corps and support evidence-based and research-informed youth policy development and youth work practice?

3.2. UNDERPINNING RESEARCH QUESTIONS OF THE PROJECT

The underpinning research questions of the project are:

- What are the effects of participating in European Solidarity Corps projects on the development of key competences of project participants and project teams?
- What are the effects of participating in European Solidarity Corps projects on the educational and professional pathways of project participants and project team members?
- What are the effects of European Solidarity Corps projects on the youth work competences and practices of youth workers and youth leaders involved in the programme?
- How and to which extent do European Solidarity Corps projects contribute to the aims, objectives and priorities of the programme?
- How do effects differ between different formats and types of volunteering and solidarity projects, as well as different roles and tasks in these projects?
- What are the profiles of project participants, project partnerships, project teams, and support teams, and what does this say about access to the programme?

4. RESEARCH DESIGN AND INSTRUMENTS

4.1. MULTILINGUAL ONLINE SURVEYS

In order to explore the research questions above, the research design is based on multilingual online surveys of project participants and project teams. This approach allows to survey actors involved in volunteering activities and solidarity projects funded through the European Solidarity Corps several weeks after their activity/project ended. The timing facilitates a more deliberate and nuanced reflection on their experience. The surveys will be conducted every two years, in 2023, 2025 and 2027 – in parallel with the monitoring surveys for the Erasmus+ Youth Programme.

4.2. CORE SURVEY MODULES

As part of the modularisation of the RAY monitoring surveys, we have developed core modules which every respondent is asked to complete. These core modules cover all essential aspects of the programme monitoring that we would like to obtain a full response set for. All other aspects are covered by strategic or thematic survey modules, and data imputation or



respondent matching techniques may be applied. This approach has allowed us to shorten the average survey length for each respondent, without sacrificing too much of the range, width or depth of our datasets. Core modules will be included in each of the biennial survey cycles (2023, 2025, 2027) for all respondents, other modules may be swapped.

4.3. STRATEGIC SURVEY QUESTIONS

Strategic survey questions explore how and to which extent Erasmus+ Youth activities/projects contribute to (a) the aims, objectives and priorities of the programme itself, (b) programme-specific strategies, such as the inclusion strategy, and (c) youth-sector-specific strategies that the programme is intended to contribute to, such as the European Youth Work Agenda. Strategic survey modules will be included in each of the biennial survey cycles (2023, 2025, 2027) for subsets of respondents, covering all activity/project types.

4.4. THEMATIC SURVEY QUESTIONS

Thematic survey questions explore various subjects of interest to the RAY Network. Commonly, they will be developed as part of thematic research projects. In RAY-LEARN, thematic questions on organisational learning and development were developed for activity/project types involving youth workers and youth leaders; in RAY-COMP, thematic questions on competence development have been refined, and so on. Generally, thematic survey questions are developed towards the end of thematic research projects to start monitoring key aspects of the theme in question. Exceptionally, they may also be used to help a new thematic research project gather initial data to kickstart the project, in particular when evidence on the theme in question is scarce.

4.5. STRENGTHENING COMPARABILITY

We have used the modularisation of the RAY-MON surveys to improve and strengthen the comparability of our datasets with related and relevant research. This happens partly through using questions from surveys such as the European Social Survey or the European Values Study. We are additionally drawing on other surveys and studies and available datasets, including the European Youth Wiki and the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy, to better contextualise and differentiate our own research findings.

4.6. DEVELOPING OPEN DATASETS

As agreed in our RAY Research Programme 2021–2027, we have started to and will continue working on transforming our datasets into open datasets. We already make our data available to interested researchers in and beyond the RAY Network, under the condition that it may only be used for non-commercial purposes. This process is time-consuming for all parties involved, and limits access to the dataset to those researchers aware of its existence and able to work with statistical software. With an open dataset and an online data portal, we will not only widen access to our data considerably for the youth research community, but importantly also open the dataset up for youth policy and youth work actors.

4.7. STRENGTHENING SURVEY PRACTICES

As agreed in the RAY Network and with the Heads of National Agencies through their Co-Group and their Business Meeting, we will pay specific attention to strengthening the monitoring surveys, including outreach work to potential respondents, but also through developing codebooks and dataset manuals to ease the analysis by national research partners.

4.8. COUNTERFACTUAL PILOT RESEARCH

In preparation for changing criteria to evaluative research to be put forward by the European Commission, we will conceptualise and pilot evolving research approaches.

5. RESEARCH SCHEDULE AND OUTLOOK

As a reminder, the survey schedule has been moved to a biennial **and joint** autumn rhythm. In 2025, directly preceding this outlook, we have conducted the second survey wave of our monitoring surveys, leading to 2026 starting with dataset cleaning and analysis. The table below provides an overview of the main activities at transnational and national level for the next project phase (now two years, January 2026 – December 2027). Keep in mind that the activities for RAY-MON and RAY-SOC will now largely happen in parallel:

Time period	Activities at transnational level	Activities at national level
01.2026 – 03.2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data cleaning, national dataset preparation, codebook and survey manual development • Start of preparation of current dataset for open data portal • Start of development of concept for counterfactual pilot research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procurement of national research partner, if necessary
04.2026 – 06.2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2nd transnational analysis with focus on development of key findings • Network-internal launch of open data portal at Network Meeting • Continuation of development of concept for counterfactual pilot research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National analyses and national key findings
07.2026 – 12.2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2nd transnational analysis continued with focus on research report, policy report and fact sheets • Public launch of open data portal at our next Triangular Summit • Start of implementation of counterfactual pilot 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National analyses and national research and policy reports
01.2027 – 08.2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalisation of the 3rd monitoring survey with refined questions and/or new modules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Translation of new modules and questions in the 3rd survey into national languages
09.2027 – 12.2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data collection for the 3rd monitoring survey during autumn • Wrapping up implementation of counterfactual pilot 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting public relations and awareness raising for the surveys



6. 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"> Analysis of national datasets and national monitoring reports
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Translation of revised survey and module questions into national languages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation in the working group of the research project
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Translation of open data portal components into national languages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation in pilot research exploring counterfactual approaches
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support in distributing the findings of the research project at national level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Translation of research reports and/or fact-sheets into national languages

7. RESEARCH PARTNERS

All RAY Network Partners participating in the European Solidarity Corps are partners in this research project. Further partners are always welcome to join.