

RAY LEARN

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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RAY-LEARN explores how the European Youth Programmes can better support beneficiary organisations to learn and develop at organisational level as well as to use the programmes strategically in this context. Youth organisations already learn and adapt through projects, partnerships, crises, funding opportunities, etc. RAY-LEARN asks how the European Youth Programmes can support this learning to become more intentional, more useful for long-term organisational development and more connected to organisational aims and directions.

What we learned about...

... what matters when supporting strategic organisational learning through the programmes:

Support should add operational capacity, not consume it: Beneficiaries operate with limited staff capacity, uncertain project funding and informal management structures. This leaves little room for long-term planning and intentional organisational development. Therefore, support that brings substantial additional tasks risks competing with the very learning and development it is intended to enable.

Understandings of impact focus on concrete outcomes: Organisations describe impact through visible outcomes in projects and communities. Big-picture effects feel hard to prove. The links between immediate outcomes and their broader contribution to social change seem difficult to articulate and, possibly, difficult to believe in.

Organisational learning is best supported through simple, practice-near input: Organisations learn most easily through running projects, observing and adapting concrete practices, and collaborating. Formats like peer exchange, study visits and job shadowing are successful for organisational learning.

Alignment matters: Programme opportunities have stronger organisational effects when they connect to what the organisation already does, needs, values or is trying to become.

European youth field knowledge should not be taken for granted: To engage in the programmes strategically, some beneficiaries need support to understand European youth work culture, non-formal methods, strategies and priorities.

Shared uptake is very resource intensive: Important organisational processes often depend on one person. This is adaptive given capacity constraints, and support that is meant to be taken up organizationally by

more than one colleague should account for the constraints that make one-person reliance practical in the first place.

Organisational development happens through continuity and repetition: Organisations learn through repeated experience, gradually adapting and consolidating new ways of working. Continuity and repetition allow small adjustments to build on each other and become longer-term organisational change.

Strategy is manifested as identity or theme: For many beneficiaries organisational direction is held through values, target group or thematic focus and not so much through strategies including missions, needs, goals, action plans and progress monitoring.

... how the programmes contribute to organisational learning and development:

Programmes contribute most to operational learning: The programmes most reliably build organisational learning around project management, quality assurance, partnerships and non-formal education methods.

Programme priorities reinforce more readily than they transform: Programme priorities usually strengthen existing organisational orientations. Where no such orientation exists, it's harder to detect effects of the priorities beyond the project level. It is possible that whether very long term engagement with the programmes can turn these practices into broader organisational orientations.

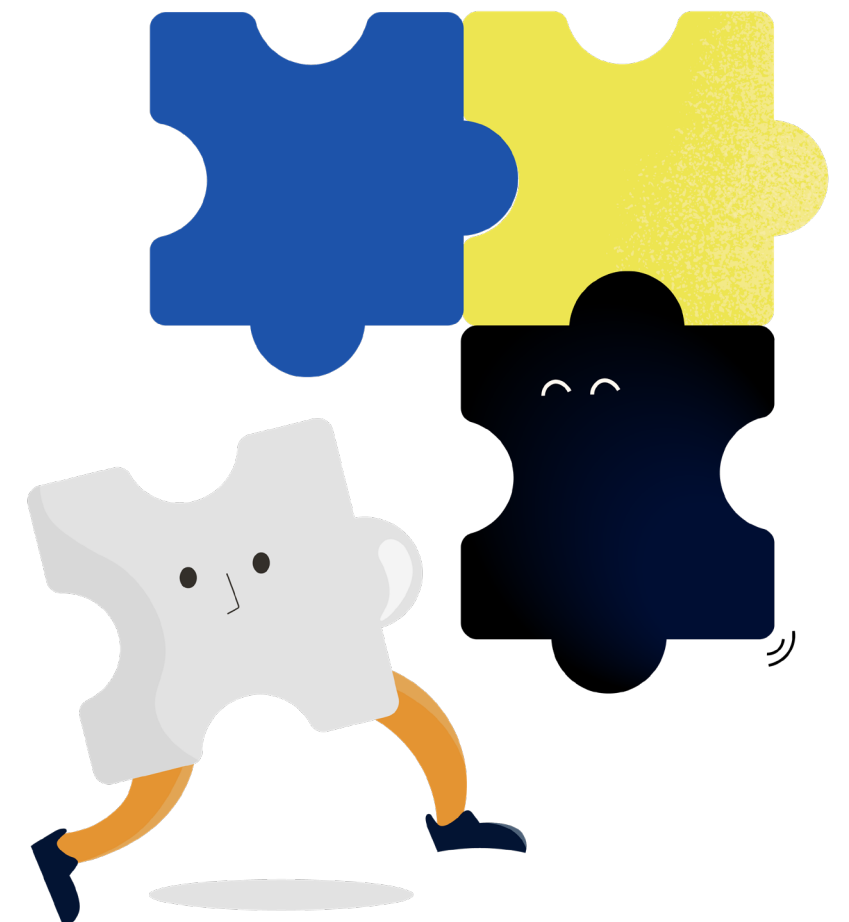
Programmes have different organisational functions for different beneficiaries: Different beneficiaries use the programmes for different goals: stabilising, diversifying, deepening local work or testing innovation in public institutions.

Volunteering projects are organisational learning sites: Organisations often build repeated programme engagement around volunteering projects. Beyond their effects on young people, these projects are places to develop organisational capacity, organisational awareness and organisational identity.

The E+ accreditation prompts organisational reflection: The Erasmus+ accreditation creates space to reflect about organisational direction and functioning, which participants often describe as clarifying.

The E+ accreditation supports stability, continuity and repetition: The Erasmus+ accreditation supports organisational learning through stability, continuity and repetition, but its strategic effect depends on whether organisations actually use it as a space for reflecting and strategizing.

What we learned about



RECOMMENDATIONS

*Recommendations addressed to the European Commission should be understood as relevant to all actors involved in shaping programme policy, including the European Parliament and the Council where applicable.

NATIONAL AGENCIES

• Design support from organisational needs

Move support from helping beneficiaries find out how they fit the programmes to helping them see how the programmes fit them – their own direction, needs and development concerns.

• Differentiate support

Offer programme implementation support that is tailored to the different organisational positions, capacities and needs of beneficiary organisations, as partly captured in the RAY-LEARN typology of beneficiary organisations.

• Make organisational learning and development visible to beneficiaries

Help beneficiaries recognise organisational learning and development as an expected benefit of programme participation by making concrete organisational effects more visible in action-specific information, guidance and support.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION*

• Support cumulative learning through repeated participation

Preserve and strengthen programme formats that allow organisations to easily repeat activities and build on previous projects so that experience can gradually consolidate new capacities over time.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION*

NATIONAL AGENCIES

• Frame long-term tools as learning infrastructure:

Design and frame long-term access opportunities such as the Erasmus+ accreditation, the Quality Label or their successors in a way that they can support reflection and cumulative organisational learning. Help beneficiaries use them in this way.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION*

SALTOS

NATIONAL AGENCIES

• Invest in dedicated support

Provide tailored expertise to strengthen thematic learning and organisational impact in project design, with programme policy enabling it and National Agencies and SALTOS facilitating access.

• Use cooperation for thematic learning

Create programme-level opportunities for expertise-based partnerships. Use partnership-building support and field knowledge from National Agencies and SALTOS to connect organisations that want to develop an area with peers that have mature practice in it.

ORGANISATIONS IN THE YOUTH FIELD

• Use programmes strategically

Make programme participation more meaningful by connecting project choices, topics and trainings to the organisation's identity, needs and direction.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Refer to the main RAY LEARN research report for more detailed explanations of the findings, recommendations and research methods.

Other key finding documents of RAY LEARN:

1. [Outcomes of the accreditation in Erasmus+](#)
2. [Organisational effects of hosting ESC volunteers](#)
3. [Organisational effects of youth worker mobilities](#)
4. [Types of beneficiary organisations in Erasmus+ and the ESC](#)