



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

Erasmus+ Youth in Action

EFFECTS AND OUTCOMES OF THE ERASMUS+: YOUTH IN ACTION PROGRAMMA

**THE PERSPECTIVE OF PARTICIPANTS AND PROJECT
LEADERS**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
NATIONAL REPORT BELGIUM (FLEMISH COMMUNITY) 2019/2020
MAIN FINDINGS OF RAY-MON**

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1. INTRODUCTION

In November 2019 and May 2020 the third wave of the RAY monitor of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action Programme 2014-2020 took place. For the sixth time the Flemish Community of Belgium participated in this monitor. This is a quantitative research of participants and project leaders of projects financed by European Youth programmes. The monitor was conducted for the first time in 2009. The Flemish Community of Belgium participates in this monitor since 2011. The previous participations took place in 2011, 2012 and 2013 under the previous name of the programme Youth in Action. Since 2014-2015 and 2016-2017 it resorts under the current programme name of Erasmus+: Youth in Action. This research is executed by the RAY research network (<http://www.researchyouth.eu/>), a network of 32 national agencies involved in the implementation of Erasmus+: Youth in Action at a national level, and their research partners. The Flemish partners in this research network are JINT vzw and HOWEST, the University of Applied Sciences, Study Department of Social Work and Social Care. The aim of this research network is to scientifically support Erasmus+: Youth in Action.

The respondents in this research are participants and project leaders in an Erasmus+: Youth in Action project that took place between February 2019 and the end of January of 2020. Let it be clear that all these projects were finished when COVID 19 struck Europe.

For the third time, all national agencies of Belgium (JINT vzw, BIJ and Jugendbüro) are taking part in the survey. The result is a Belgian sample. This dataset has been subdivided to construct a Flemish sample. Similar to the transnational approach, the Flemish sample consists of all participants who participated in a project financed through JINT vzw. This is supplemented by all the people who live in the Dutch-speaking region of Belgium and who have participated in a project subsidized by another national agency. Furthermore, people who live in the capital region of Brussels and who have filled in the Dutch language survey are also included in the Flemish sample. The result is a sample of 317 participants and 66 project leaders. Out of the 317 participants in the Flemish sample, only 72 live in the Flemish Community and the rest is a resident of a different country participating in a project financed by JINT vzw. Out of the 72 participants who belong to the Flemish community in the sample, 62 live in the Flemish region and 10 in the Brussels' capital region. The percentage of participants from the Brussels' capital region (13%) is therefore lower than in the two previous waves of the RAY monitor. Out of the 66 project leaders in the total Flemish sample, only 22 live in the Flemish Community and 44 outside the Flemish Community. Out of the 22 project leaders who live in Belgium, only 10 live in the Flemish region and 12 live in Brussels.

2. THE PROFILE OF THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE FLEMISH SAMPLE

In the Flemish sample 26% participates in a youth exchange, 37% in a youth workers mobility project, 6% in a the Structured Dialogue, 24% in a TCA and 6% in an EVS project. It is quite remarkable that this time the participation rate in youth exchanges is low and the participation rate in TCA is relatively high compared to the previous research wave in 2017-2018. Furthermore, the participation in youth worker mobility is higher than in 2017-2018, but similar to the participation in this part of the programme in 2015-2016.

The majority of the participants (60%) are women. This does not mean necessarily that more women are reached by the programme, but to a higher response rate among female respondents. This is the probable explanation why women are overrepresented in the sample. The average age of the participants is 28 years, which is older than during the two previous waves of the RAY monitor. In 2015-2016 the average age was 26 years and in 2017-2018 it amounted to 22.7 years. This higher average age in the current research can mainly be explained by the composition of the current sample and the higher participation in TCA and youth worker mobility. The average age of participants in these actions of the programme is traditionally higher than the age of the participant in the other three actions.

This can also be found in the current data. This time, the participants in the Structured Dialogue with an average age of 19.7 years are the youngest participants. They are followed by the participants in youth exchanges (average age 21 years) and participants in EVS projects (22 years). The average age of the participants in youth worker mobility on the other hand is way higher, with 28.6 years and participants in TCA are on average even 37.8 years old. The largest age category among participants is the 25 and over age category (49%), followed by the age group of young people aged 18 to 25 (44%). Only 7% of the participants are younger than 18 years.

51% of the participants live in an urban or a metropolitan area. One out of four lives in a rural area or a small town and the other participants in a suburban area. Therefore, people living in an urban and metropolitan area are overrepresented in the sample. The percentage of people living in a rural area or a small town is slightly lower than the one in the 2017-2018 sample, but comparable to the finding in the 2015-2016 wave.

The participants who filled in the online questionnaire are highly-educated. 60% of them already hold a tertiary degree and slightly less than half of them are still students. Almost one out of three (32%) is still in secondary education and has not yet started higher education. It is safe to conclude that the final educational attainment of the participants will be even higher than the current data suggest. Compared to the previous waves, the percentage of participants with a higher education degree is higher in the current data and the percentage of participants still in secondary education is lower. Also, this can be mainly explained by the higher participation in TCA and youth worker mobility and the subsequent higher average age of the participants. The highest educational attainment can be found among the participants in TCA (88%), participants in youth worker mobility (68%) and EVS where the percentage of higher education is above 60%. It is lower among participants in youth exchanges (40%). A large part of these participants are still in secondary education. Participants in the Structured Dialogue are, in contrast to the two previous waves, the least highly-educated. The highest attained education level of the majority of this group (60%) is higher general secondary education. Also in this group there are many pupils still in secondary education (but also students as well). It is also the youngest group of participants.

If we compare the young people aged 14 to 30 of our sample who live in the Flemish or Brussels region with a representative research of the Youth Research Platform (JOP), we find that this time the educational level of these participants in the Erasmus+: Youth in Action project have no higher educational attainment level as the Flemish youth aged 14 to 30. In previous waves the participants of Erasmus+: Youth in Action had a higher educational level than the 14 to 30-year-olds in the JOP research. The participants of Erasmus+: Youth in Action also live more often in a higher-educated family. More than half of them have a highly-educated father and/or mother.

Slightly less than half of the participants are still in education. This is lower than in the previous two waves. The participants who are already in employment, most of the time have a full-time job. Six percent of the participants (20 in all) are unemployed. A significant part of them (8 out of 18.44%) has been unemployed for at least twelve months.

Nineteen percent of the participants consider themselves to be part of a cultural, ethnic or religious minority, which is the highest percentage ever recorded in a Flemish sample. Over the six waves in which the Flemish Community participated in the RAY monitor, this percentage even doubles. The most important minority is an ethnic and cultural minority, followed by a language minority. Twelve percent of the participants speak a home language that is not recognized by the state where they reside. Among the participants living in the Flemish region, this group represents fifteen percent of the participants. In the Brussels region, the home language of half of the participants is a language that is not officially recognized in Belgium.

Participants in an Erasmus+: Youth in Action project have travelled abroad a lot. For only four percent of them, the project is their first international experience. Most participants have been abroad for a holiday, under the form of a school trip or as part of a youth exchange programme. In the current sample, 80% of the participants have already a history in the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme or a predecessor. This is significantly higher

than in the previous two samples where this percentages amounted to 60%. This pinpoints to a lesser degree of new blood in the programme. This finding has also been found in the transnational sample.

Young people with fewer opportunities are involved in an Erasmus+: Youth in Action project. Seventeen percent of the participants, who had to pay a fee to participate in the project, have difficulties to pay it. 60% did not have to pay a fee. 28% of the participants agree that they get less or even a lot less of their fair share in life compared to their peers. One out of six participants reports to experience impediments as regards access to mobility or social and political participation (23%) and education (13%). 31% of them even report to have difficulties to find a place on the job market. The main reasons why participants experience obstacles in life are the lack of money, health problems and family obligations. When using the definition of young people with fewer opportunities from the Erasmus+ programme guide, 52% of the participants would qualify as a young person with fewer opportunities. Since 2013 a more strict definition has been used in the Flemish studies. Participants who meet at least three obstacles in life or meet two obstacles and have a lower-educated mother and/or get less than a fair share out of life are considered to have fewer opportunities. This results in 32% of the participants to be a young person with fewer opportunities, the highest rate ever in a Flemish sample. According to 67% of the project leaders there were young people with fewer opportunities involved in the project. The main reasons why these young people are confronted with problems have to do with a lack of money and the fact that they live in a remote area.

3. THE PROFILE OF THE PROJECT LEADERS¹

Traditionally, the gender distribution of project leaders is more balanced than the one of the participants. In the current data set this distribution is identical to the distribution of the participants: 60% women against 40% men. According to the action type, there is also a 60/40-distribution among project leaders of youth exchanges and youth work mobility. In EVS projects almost all project leaders are female. On average project leaders are older than participants. Their average age amounts to 37.7 years and the largest age category is the category of people of and over (48%). According to the action type, EVS project leaders (on average 39 years old) are older than project leaders of youth work mobility and youth exchanges (37 years on average).

One out of five project leaders are still in education. 68% of the project leaders have ended their studies. Eight out of ten of the project leaders have a tertiary degree. 45% of the project leaders are full-time or half-time employed. Half of the project leaders are involved in the project on a voluntarily basis.

Thirteen percent of the project leaders consider themselves to be a member of an ethnic, cultural or religious minority group. This is comparable to research conducted earlier on. There are no differences in minority status of project leaders according to a sub-action of the programme. 55% of the project leaders have already been involved in a previous project as project leader, which is higher than during the previous waves. Half of the project leaders have been involved as a participant in a similar project. 24% of the project leaders are for the first time involved in a project subsidized by the EU. Almost half of the project leaders take up an organisational and educational role in the project. More than three out of four project leaders are involved in the project during the entire project timeframe.

4. REPORTED EFFECTS OF THE PROJECT

According to the largest group of participants and project leaders, there are three skills that they have developed in the course of the project. It concerns more particularly speaking a foreign language, dealing with people with a different cultural background and learn to work

¹ The number of project leaders is small. Percentages must be treated with caution. They are used to promote the legibility of this summary. Absolute numbers can be found in the main report.

in a team and negotiating a solution when there is a disagreement in the group. These skills refer to the key competences of multilingual, intercultural and social competences components. Participants and project leaders have learned least of all to make media content on their own. This is a media competence. Participants in TCA also agree to a lesser extent that they have developed this competence than participants in other sub-actions in the programme.

The agreement with the further development of youth work competences among participants and project leaders is very outspoken. Almost nine out of ten participants agree that they now better understand non-formal learning, that they can apply non-formal learning in youth work and that they learned to cooperate in an international team. Eight out of ten agree that they have learned to develop an international project and will in the future, when relevant, add an international dimension to their work with young people. The same amount of participants and project leaders agree that they have become better in involving young people in a project and better in adjusting a project to the needs of young people; they can also better guarantee the quality of a project and are more able to choose methods that fit the learning process of young people. The only skill that is less developed by participants and project leaders is the skill to find financial resources to set up projects for young people. The large interest in the international dimension of youth work can also be seen in their intention to keep in contact with the people of the project and seven out of ten claim that they are interested in developing a project with the people they have met in the project.

The topic most addressed in the current projects, according to the largest group of participants, is 'youth and youth work'. Almost two thirds of the participants claim that this topic featured in their projects. The current finding is different from the findings resulting from the two previous waves, where cultural diversity was the most frequently quoted topic. Cultural diversity still takes the second place: 60% claims this subject was treated in their projects. The third place is taken by 'non-formal and informal learning', which was a topic in the projects according to half of the participants. Also, this is higher in the current research wave than in the two previous waves. The more prominent place of 'young people and youth work' and 'non-formal and informal learning' in the knowledge development of the participants can be attributed to the higher participation in TCA and youth worker mobility. Especially these participants claim that these issues were addressed in their projects.

Remarkable in the development of values is the prominent place of tolerance, solidarity and equality: they have become more important for half of the participants. They are closely followed by human rights and individual freedom. As far as citizenship values are concerned, the value that has become more important by participating in the project is cultural diversity. For six out of ten participants and project leaders cultural diversity has become even more important after participating in the project. The same amount of participants is interested in developing youth policies. Four out of ten project leaders have become more interested in European current affairs, are more inclined to support people with fewer opportunities and are more prepared to engage in the struggle against racism and xenophobia. During the timeframe of this Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme (2014-2020), there is an increase in being more interested in youth policy among participants and project leaders. To a lesser degree the same can be found in interest to protect the environment and in being interested in European current affairs.

Participants and project leaders agree to a large extent that they have learned something about themselves and have developed themselves. Eight out of ten participants claim that they can better empathise with others and that they are better prepared to handle new situations when working with young people. Two thirds have a clearer view of their professional career options and which competences they can improve. Six out of ten participants have a clearer view of their future educational plans. For two thirds of them this includes improving their foreign language skills. Nine out of ten project leaders have got a better picture of their strengths and weaknesses. Two thirds of them know better which competences can be improved. The intention to study is lower among project leaders, but a larger part of them are already working full-time.

Almost half of the participants feel more European and four out of ten have become more interested in European affairs after their participation. For almost half of the participants, their image of the EU has not changed and for 47% of them the image of the EU has improved. The image of the EU has the least improved for participants in the Structured Dialogue and the most among participants in youth exchanges. Seven out of ten participants claim to have learned something new about European youth policy. Over time, there is a significant increase in participants who claim that the image of the EU has improved. In 2013, this was 34%. In the current sample, this percentage has increased to 47%. In previous research there was a decrease in participants who feel European, from 63% in 2011 to 43% in 2018. In the current data, there is no further decrease in feeling European among participants. On the contrary, this percentage slightly increased.

There are also positive consequences of the project for the organisation/group in which participants and project leaders are involved. More than nine out of ten of them agree that there are more international networks and that there is a better knowledge management in the organisation. Eight out of ten of them agree to a larger participation of young people in their organisation, more respect for cultural diversity, more capacity to use non-formal learning methods in the daily operation of the organisation, better project management, more and better contacts with local organisations and more involvement to include vulnerable young people. The project also influenced the larger, local community of the organisation. According to more than nine out of ten project leaders, the local community considers the project favourable and is interested in similar projects in the near future. Also, the European dimension of the project is highly appreciated. Yet 15 percent of the project leaders claim that the local community was not actively involved in the project and that there was not a higher commitment in the local community to do more efforts to involve young people with fewer opportunities.

5. INVOLVEMENT AND MOTIVATION

Participants are involved in an Erasmus+: Youth in Action project through a youth organisation, through another organisation or through friends and acquaintances. For project leaders too youth organisations are the most important gateway into the project. Information from the national agency and other types of organisations is also an important channel for them to get involved.

Participants take part in a project to quench their thirst for knowledge. Seven out of ten of them participate with the purpose of having new experiences, six out of ten are attracted by the topic of the project. More than half of them want to learn something new and want to further develop their professional career. Also the possibility of intercultural experiences is appealing to more than six out of ten participants. Instrumental reasons are mentioned to a lesser degree. Only fourteen percent participate in a project to improve their chances on the labour market and 40% hope to be able to prepare an activity after their participation. The reason that is the least mentioned is an external motivation: they were encouraged by others to do so. It is therefore safe to conclude that the participants are foremost intrinsically motivated to participate in a project.

Even more than in the two previous waves of the Ray monitor participants in the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme actually do know that it is subsidized by the EU. 85% of the current participants know this. This is 10% higher than in the two previous waves. More than half of the participants claim to have received a Youth Pass for this project. Nine out of ten project leaders claim to have used the Youth Pass in the project. 60% of the participants say that the Youth Pass was integrated in the project and was used as a tool for reflection and self-evaluation. For 90% of these participants this Youth Pass was an instrument to become more aware of their learning process. One out of four participants have already used their Youth Pass. The ones who have used the Youth Pass (70%) have the impression that mentioning the Youth Pass was appreciated by the other party and was helpful.

6. DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A PROJECT

According to the project leaders, three themes take a prominent place in the projects: cultural diversity, 'youth and youth work' and 'formal and informal learning'. Two years ago, there was a shift from youth work-related themes to more social themes. This time this shift reverses again: a smaller part of project leaders claim that social themes, such as solidarity, inclusions of people with fewer opportunities, ... have been on the agenda of the project, while a larger part of them stipulate that 'young people and youth work' and 'formal and informal learning' was a subject matter in the project. There is a significant decrease in the degree in which European affairs, structures and policies of the EU and European youth policy have been handled in the projects. There is a difference in content between sub-actions of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme. According to a larger part of project leaders of youth worker mobility European youth policy, education, non-formal and informal learning, entrepreneurship and professional career development featured more prominently in their project compared to project leaders of an EVS project or a youth exchange. A smaller part of project leaders of EVS projects claim that cultural diversity was a subject matter in their projects.

On average, a project has 15.4 project goals. Four out of ten project leaders even claim that all 18 project goals mentioned in the questionnaire are goals in their project. Nine out of ten claim that cultural diversity is a goal of their project. The same number of project leaders claim that the key competences of participants have improved and the intercultural dialogue has been stimulated during the project. Eight out of ten agree that the project contributes to formal and informal learning and that one of the goals of the projects is to demonstrate how different forms of learning are interconnected. Nine out of ten agree that solidarity among young people is a goal.

95% of the project leaders are satisfied of the preparation and cooperation with the project partners during the project. Almost all project leaders think that the partners cooperate respectfully with one another. This time, there is no difference in the appreciation of the cooperation in the project, the sustainability of the project and the general approach of the project according to national agency.

Eleven percent of the participants meet language obstacles in their participation in a project. Participants are overcoming language barriers by using digital tools, but foremost by using the help of other participants and project leaders in the project.

Satisfaction with a project is high among the participants. 96% of the participants would encourage others to participate in a similar project. The same number of participants agree that their participation is a personal enrichment. Participation stimulates participation, because nine out of ten want to take part in a new project.