

Turbocharging Erasmus+ Youth in Action

On Tuesday 27 March 2018, the RAY Network had the chance to present main findings from its research at the European Parliament. A group of 50 representatives and experts from the European youth field followed the invitation to the Policy Event “Turbocharging Erasmus+: Youth in Action: what can be learned from research?”, which was hosted by [MEP Emilian Pavel](#) and moderated by Wout Van Calmere, Coordinator of the [European Parliament Youth Intergroup](#). Additionally, Christine Mai, Communication Advisor in the Cabinet of European Commissioner Tibor Navracsics; Irmeli Karhio, Chairperson of the RAY Network; Alessandro Senesi, Deputy Head of Unit at European Commission’s Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture; Ville Majamaa, Board Member of the European Youth Forum; and Helmut Fennes, Researcher and Lecturer at the Institute of Educational Science, University of Innsbruck, joined the panel.

After Emilian Pavels opening words, highlighting the importance of the EU youth programme with its positive effects on young people, Christine Mai from the Commissioner’s office highlighted the importance to open the programme to more people, especially to those with fewer chances. New forms of mobility are needed as well as easier access for small organisations. *Youth work* and *youth policy dialogue* are two very important points in the soon to be presented youth strategy. She thanked the RAY network for demonstrating that and showcasing the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme enables young people to get to know and shape Europe. RAY gives an impressive basis for evidence-based youth policy.

Irmeli Karhio, Co-Chair of the RAY Network representing the National Agencies, referred to the 10th anniversary of RAY, and remarked that the value of international youth work is recognized and no longer needs to be justified. Now there is room to concentrate on research. She highlighted that only a programme with a clear objective on inclusion is a programme for all young people.

Andreas Karsten, a member of the transnational research and coordination team of the RAY Network, presented key findings from RAY results from the past ten years under the title ‘Turbocharging *Erasmus+ Youth in Action* – what can be learned from research for the new programme generation?’. The core of this was a summary of recommendations: five aspects to maintain, five aspects to improve, and five aspects to introduce into the programme:

A // FIVE ASPECTS TO MAINTAIN

1. E+/YiA is intercultural learning at its best: a safe space to encounter differences with positive curiosity and explore them through constructive discourse and exchange.
2. E+/YiA is the most important European powerhouse for enhancing youth work at local, regional and national level with an international dimension.
3. E+/YiA is a crucial training ground for new youth leaders, youth trainers and youth workers on key aspects, such as the principles of youth work.
4. E+/YiA empowers young people and youth professionals by drawing on non-formal learning as the basis for its educational approach.

5. E+/YiA attracts and supports a healthy mix of novice and veteran youth professionals with a rich diversity of organisational backgrounds.

B // FIVE ASPECTS TO IMPROVE

1. E+/YiA needs to get better at building a recognition that goes beyond mobility.
2. E+/YiA needs to get better at training experienced youth professionals.
3. E+/YiA needs to get better at developing modern tools for Youthpass.
4. E+/YiA needs to get better at strengthening, and reproducing, diversity.
5. E+/YiA needs to get better at organising meaningful policy dialogue.

C // FIVE ASPECTS TO INTRODUCE

1. E+/YiA needs new formats to address current social and political developments.
2. E+/YiA needs new tools that help the transfer of learning into organisations.
3. E+/YiA needs new instruments that help organisations to grow and professionalise.
4. E+/YiA needs new ideas to address the gap between digitalisation and youth work.
5. E+/YiA needs new approaches to the recognition of youth sector professionals.

Reactions

After the presentation, Wout van Calmere raised the question: *Which one of the presented 15 aspects of the RAY results is resonating most with you and why?* The panel had to chance to react to the research findings, which Youth Pro Aktiv captured as follows ([source](#), used with kind permission):

Alessandro Senesi from the Commission was happy to remark that many of the researchers' recommendations fitted well with the outcomes of their internal assessment. He highlighted the excellent opportunity they have with the timings for the Commission to present its proposals for a new Erasmus+ and a new Youth strategy so close to each other, allowing the Commission to align these and make the most of both. He said that the planned evolution of the programme strategy will focus on some of the points stressed in the report. Dialogue between young people, youth workers, youth leaders and policy makers will be a central point in their new proposal – “there will be a much

bigger effort and precise focus on that” – looking at how young people can cooperate in the thinking for the future. They want to come up with a more holistic, integrated and based on evidence approach to youth work and improving competences, and digitalisation will play a more important part in this. They would like to, among others, “encourage more trans-sectorial partnerships”; “make exchanges and mobility even easier”, especially for small groups; and as an overarching concern, they will further increase access to under-represented groups and increase diversity, for example through new types of outreach and new virtual and offline communities they are developing. Mr. Senesi wants to be invited to the 20th anniversary of the RAY network 😊.

Ville Majamaa from the European Youth Forum figured, that to put quality in youth policy, the use of evidence, such as from RAY research or the shadow report of the European Youth Forum needs to be used. He emphasised again the need for quality policy dialogue in which policy-makers would actually engage – which is not really there if half of the dialogue is not in the room. “If you want to disengage and disempower young people, this is how you do it,” he concluded. He also talked about the need for the programme not to just be successful at individual change, but to have long-term institutional and policy impact, to do more for resilience of the organisations and the youth field.

The need for a greater diversity resonated the most for Helmut Fennes, who is worried about the Matthew effect of accumulated advantage currently present, with those who have getting more: there is a very high proportion of highly-educated people with rich experience taking part. How do we involve those who are less educated or have special needs or fewer opportunities? He was also concerned that a vast majority of the investment in the programme goes into mobility itself and it neglects the wider learning experience which starts well before the mobility and carries on. In his opinion, there should be more focus on the preparation for the mobility and on making the most of it afterwards and building on it.

Emilian Pavel added, his wish for paperwork in the programme to be cut. He also emphasised the value of travelling, working and learning together in person, which he hopes to preserve in the programme and add to it. Further, an improvement of the recognition for young people’s skills, developed through their participation in a youth project is needed.

Irmeli Karhio talked about professionalisation of the field which lays in the national responsibility, and the need of the more experienced youth workers esp. in the field and topics *Human rights education, digital youth work* in terms of smart youth work and *European values*. Also, the cooperation outside of the EU should be fostered, i.e. Eastern European and Mediterranean countries and again, the new programme needs to be an inclusive one.

Professionalisation versus volunteers who merely wish to do something meaningful temporarily while having their competences officially recognised was discussed further through open questions and comments.

The budget for the next edition of Erasmus+ Youth in Action programme was an important point throughout the conversations. Milan Zver, Member of the European Parliament, CULT, standing rapporteur for Erasmus+, could not be present at the event but shared with the participants at distance his strong support for an increased budget and his determination to persuade member states to approve this. Emilian Pavel concluded the event with his assurance that the Parliament has agreed on a specific increase in budget that will be negotiated with the other actors now, and he emphasised the determination not only to bring more money in but also to look for new ways to use it as efficiently and effectively as possible.