

**IMPACT OF THE COOPERATION WITH SOUTH EAST EUROPE  
WITHIN THE YOUTH IN ACTION PROGRAMME**



**Evaluation Study**  
Summary Report



**SALTO-YOUTH**  
SOUTH EAST EUROPE  
RESOURCE CENTRE



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The complete evaluation study can be obtained upon request from SALTO SEE.

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## Foreword

As the Youth in Action programme is coming to an end, it seems important to ask, what has been the impact of the Programme on the people involved and on the wider communities in which they happened? Evaluation studies carried out by the European Commission have already taken up this question<sup>1</sup>. However, none of them has looked in more detail at the impact of the Programme on the cooperation with its neighbouring regions. This is the focus of this study<sup>2</sup>.

Before plunging into the study itself, a brief look at **background and context** might be helpful.

South East Europe is one of the three »neighbouring partner regions« of the European Union's Youth in Action programme<sup>3</sup>. The relationship of the SEE region to the Programme is special, however: Steps towards closer integration to the EU, and in this process also to the Youth in Action programme, have been taken by all the countries of the Western Balkans since the »Thessaloniki Summit« of heads of state and governments of the countries of the Western Balkans and the European Union in 2003 confirmed the perspective of accession to the European Union for all countries of this region.

Croatia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia took up preparatory measures for joining the Lifelong Learning and Youth in Action Programmes in 2009. Croatia became a full member of both programmes with the beginning of 2011; on 1st July 2013 the country entered the EU. In Serbia, the Ministry of Youth and Sport has for several years politically and financially supported the promotion of the Youth in Action programme as well as capacity building for project organisers to be able to better use the possibilities that this Programme offers.

Some figures can provide an impression of the dimension of **project implementation with the support of Youth in Action in South East Europe** over the past years:<sup>4</sup>

Currently, annually over 200 volunteers from all over Europe come to South East Europe, and as many volunteers from this region go to other European countries within over 300 European Voluntary Service projects (under Action 2). Since 2007, when around 100 EVS projects with SEE were implemented, numbers have tripled.

About 130 Youth Exchanges involving partners from SEE have been organised annually (under Programme Action 3.1.) since 2007. In addition (also under Action 3.1.), almost 200 Training and Networking Activities involving partners from SEE are currently implemented per year, almost twice as many in 2012 as in 2007. About one third of these activities are training courses, followed in number by seminars, feasibility visits and partnership building activities.

Project statistics further tell us that priority themes indicated by project organisers across all project types and years have been European awareness, anti-discrimination and art & culture.

As can be seen from this brief overview, the Youth in Action programme has been increasingly used in the SEE region. Nevertheless, given the different socio-political context and support provided in each country, also the

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<sup>1</sup> Evaluation studies about Youth in Action commissioned by the European Commission can be downloaded from: [http://ec.europa.eu/youth/focus/youth-in-action-monitoring-survey\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/youth/focus/youth-in-action-monitoring-survey_en.htm)

<sup>2</sup> Studies looking into the impact of the Youth in Action programme on the neighbouring regions were carried out by all three regional SALTO YOUTH Resource Centres in 2012. The studies focussing on Eastern Europe and Caucasus and the Euro-Mediterranean region are available from the respective Resource Centres for Eastern Europe and Caucasus and EuroMed.

<sup>3</sup> In 2013, the region of South East Europe in the context of the Youth in Action programme includes Albania, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo (according to UN Security Council Resolution 1244), Montenegro and Serbia.

<sup>4</sup> The figures presented here give a rough overview. They do not include Croatia, which changed status during this period, into South East Europe; neither do they include projects financed by the Macedonian National Agency in the framework of preparatory measures for YIA.





extent of project implementation has been different. The highest number of projects has been organised in and with partners from Serbia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, as well as Croatia following the establishment of the National Agency and the country's accession to the Programme, followed by Bosnia and Herzegovina. Having said this, it should be underlined that positive trends have been visible in each country of the SEE region.

### **What has been the role of the SALTO SEE Resource Centre?**

The SALTO South East Europe Resource Centre has been supporting the cooperation with partners from South East Europe in the Youth in Action programme (and its predecessor, the YOUTH programme, 2000 - 2006) since 2002, focusing on promotion and partnership-building, and during the past years of the Youth in Action programme increasingly on capacity building to enhance project quality, awareness raising about the specificities of non-formal learning, training on how to use it in youth work, and the social recognition of youth work and non-formal learning in the countries of the region.

Our support measures - European support activities (such as training courses, study visits, partnership-building activities or symposia) - have targeted in particular youth workers and youth leaders, but also a variety of other stakeholders in the Programme including governmental authorities in charge of youth. They have been organised jointly with a variety of partners. In addition, local support measures were tailored to fit the needs of the different countries and target groups of the region.

Specific support has been provided in the framework of EVS through the organisation of the EVS training cycle for EVS volunteers in South East Europe<sup>5</sup> and accreditation of organisations wishing to host or send volunteers. Accreditation serves to ensure that organisations fulfil certain minimum criteria before being able to apply for grants for EVS projects from the Programme; it is a process that includes assessment as well as support for the organisation.

To ensure these different tasks, SALTO SEE relies on a pool of experts, mostly coming from SEE countries and taking up different roles: Contact Points for the Programme have been nominated to provide information, advice and training at national level; a pool of accreditors from countries of SEE and many other European countries carries out the accreditations, and a pool of trainers runs the EVS training sessions for volunteers and various other training courses.<sup>6</sup>

After many years of project development and Programme support in and with South East Europe, we wanted to make an effort to look beyond statistics and individual stories to find out more about how all the projects and support measures have impacted on young people, youth workers and youth leaders and their organisations in South East Europe. Has the Programme had a wider impact going beyond the people directly involved? And has the cooperation with South East European partners been in any way special for their partners in other European countries? We decided to ask those that were actively involved – project organisers, accreditors, trainers, Contact Points, National Agencies, national authorities in charge of youth etc. - for their perceptions.

We hope you will enjoy reading the result. The full study is available upon request from SALTO SEE.

Sonja Mitter Škulj  
Coordinator SALTO SEE

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<sup>5</sup> The EVS training cycle includes in particular on-arrival training for all volunteers during their first weeks of service in the host country, mid-term meetings for EVS volunteers staying for more than six months, and annual EVS events for ex-EVS volunteers who have completed their service.

<sup>6</sup> More information is available on the SALTO YOUTH website at [www.salto-youth.net/rc/see](http://www.salto-youth.net/rc/see).

## Some benefits of Youth in Action projects with partners from South East Europe<sup>7</sup>

“Increased awareness that the Western Balkan countries are a part of Europe.”

“A very special European dimension – a region which is in many ways so uniquely European and then again not at all; the diversity within the region but then again some strong common traits. Good sense of humour and passion for the work.”

“Offering young people opportunities to visit and learn about places they are highly unlikely to ever visit.”

“Prejudices are bigger towards people from SEE. Having SEE volunteers here let us raise awareness in the local community about the lack of substance of such prejudices and about the common belonging to a European community which is not composed only of the old members.”

“Politically this (the Youth in Action programme) is the main tool for peace building in that area. It prepares the ground for integration with the EU. For young people it is a very important way of learning about European history and the idea behind the integration – most of the young people today have no possibility to remember the war in Yugoslavia, so they grow up used to living in peace – this makes them more vulnerable to extremism.”

“SEE countries are not more, nor less special than other European countries, as they simply belong to Europe like all others as well.”

“What we see as a real benefit is that by doing a Youth in Action project in SEE countries we really help them to develop. We can teach them a lot about the project method etc. But at the same time, we can learn a lot from them, see their point of view and appreciate it.”

“New ways of working and innovation. Dedication to work and willingness to lean and continue even in challenging environments.”



photo: Youth Association creACTIVE

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<sup>7</sup> Quotes below are taken from text answers given by survey respondents in the framework of this study.



## Purpose and objectives of this study

This evaluation of the cooperation with South East Europe (SEE) within the Youth in Action programme took place over a period of one year between August 2011 and August 2012. The **overall aim** of the evaluation was to **assess the impact of the Programme in the SEE region as well as the specific relevance of the cooperation with partners from SEE for project beneficiaries based in Programme countries**, and thereby supplement the existing Youth in Action evaluation studies which focused mainly on the Programme's relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability in the Programme countries.

The objectives of the evaluation were to provide an assessment of the impact of the Youth in Action programme with a specific focus on possible effects on the organizational, youth work and youth policy level, to highlight benefits and challenges of the cooperation with SEE within the Programme and to provide an assessment of the sustainability of possible positive effects of the Programme, especially as the Programme in its current form is slowly coming to an end.

### Evaluation Questions

The evaluation study was focused around the hypothesis that there has been a discernible impact of the Youth in Action programme in the SEE region but that this impact varies greatly by country. The hypothesis was examined utilizing the following research questions:

- **Impact of Youth in Action on the individual level (young people and youth workers):** How do different stakeholders view the impact of Youth in Action projects on individual participants (young people and youth workers)?
- **Impact of Youth in Action on organizations in the field of youth:** How do different stakeholders view the impact of the Programme on the work, development and recognition of organizations which were involved in Youth in Action projects either as the beneficiary or as a partner organization?
- **Impact of Youth in Action on youth work:** How do different stakeholders view the impact of the Programme on the youth work field in general, such as transfer of concepts and practices (beyond specific organizations involved in projects)?
- **Impact of Youth in Action on local communities:** How do different stakeholders view the impact of the Programme on local communities in terms of recognition of the Programme, youth work in general and specific organizations?
- **Impact of Youth in Action on youth policy:** How do different stakeholders view the impact of the Programme on local- or national-level youth policy? Were any models or concepts from Youth in Action adopted by or supported through local or national policies?
- **Sustainability of changes:** Are there support mechanisms similar or complementary to Youth in Action? How do different stakeholders view the consequences of the Youth in Action programme withdrawal, should this happen?



## Evaluation methodology and target group

The evaluation study was focused around the hypothesis that there has been a discernible impact of the Youth in Action programme in the SEE region but that this impact varies greatly by country.

The study focused mainly on opinions and observations of different stakeholders collected through online surveys with multiple choice, scales and open free-text questions. Surveys were designed to target representatives of organizations from SEE that took part in Youth in Action projects and representatives of their partner organizations from Programme countries, trainers from SEE and from Programme countries that facilitated trainings organized by SALTO SEE, accreditors from SEE and Programme countries that have accredited organizations based in SEE, representatives of Contact Points for the Youth in Action programme in SEE, staff members of Youth in Action National Agencies (Action 2 and Action 3.1 officers), and representatives of National Authorities in SEE countries responsible for cooperation with the Youth in Action programme.

1483 e-mail invitations were sent out to addresses acquired from the Programme's main database, Youthlink, and from databases of SALTO SEE. In 252 cases the invitation was not delivered due to no longer valid e-mail addresses etc. Just over 38.0 % (468) of respondents who received the invitation showed interest by clicking on the survey link and 226 (18.3 %) submitted a valid survey. To complete information and provide more background to some of the points highlighted in the surveys, 10 interviews were held with selected respondents.

### Validity

The external validity, as with most online surveys, is marked by the fact that those most likely to respond were motivated individuals interested in expressing their opinion about the Programme, which makes it more likely for them to give positive feedback in regard to the Programme's impact. This does not diminish the validity of expressed opinions and described examples; however readers should keep in mind not to overly generalize results as respondents' opinions might not be representative of the target group as a whole.



## Results

Stakeholders tend to give encouraging feedback about the impact of the Programme. They pick fairly high values on scales reflecting different aspects of positive changes and offer descriptions of many examples. Respondents also show a critical stance towards some aspects of the Programme's influence, namely a limited long-term impact on youth policies and local communities, but the overall impression is that for SEE countries the Youth in Action programme has been an important and well received intervention in the youth field, which has stimulated relevant developments in the directly involved organisations as well as in the youth work field as a whole.

### INDIVIDUAL LEVEL IMPACT

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Findings in our survey are similar to results of the interim evaluation of the Youth in Action programme carried out in Programme countries. The Programme seems to have a notable impact on the individual level and competences are strongly linked to the Programme's goals and priorities. While it is impossible to separate the impact of Youth in Action projects in general and projects with partners from SEE countries, reciprocity of benefits that survey respondents have reported should be recognized. Youth in Action projects with neighbouring partner countries are more than 'charity' for those not 'lucky enough' to be part of the European Union: they seem to be strong, meaningful learning experiences for all parties involved and can directly and indirectly benefit young people of the EU and beyond.

#### Competences and attitudes gained by young people who participated in Youth in Action projects

Most respondents (85%) believe that the Programme contributed to positive changes in young people who participated in projects. The main competences and attitudes gained that are mentioned by respondents from SEE and Programme countries (85% - 95%) are interest in other cultures, self esteem and personal confidence, and communication in foreign language, followed by planning and organising, and awareness of their own learning (60% - 70%).

Interestingly, ability for participation in their own organisation and in society, and entrepreneurial competences, such as initiative taking, project management or problem solving are more strongly mentioned learning outcomes among SEE respondents.

On the other hand, more young people from Programme countries mention increased awareness of current political issues. Possibly this can be related to specificities regarding the intercultural learning aspect in projects involving SEE countries. Many respondents show awareness of, and place the intercultural learning dimension into the political context of the cooperation, referring to the past conflicts in the Balkans, the specific situation of the SEE countries in today's Europe or the countries' perspective of accession to the EU.

*"It /Youth in Action/ makes a change in one's life by pushing the limits of prejudices and self-awareness."*

*"Young people break the existing stereotypes about young people from SEE. On the other side, as our projects are connected with young people with disabilities, participants from SEE countries could get to know this group better and see that young people with disabilities have the same dreams, desires, etc. as everybody else."*

## Competences and attitudes gained by youth workers/leaders through involvement in Youth in Action

Similarly, ca. 85% of respondents from Programme and SEE countries find the Programme useful for facilitating positive changes in youth workers. Largely the same competences and attitudes are emphasized by SEE and Programme country respondents, but the impact is considered to be higher in SEE countries.

Team work and group work competences, ability to work in intercultural environments and sensitivity to other cultures are listed by over 80% of all respondents, followed by facilitating non-formal learning, planning and organisation, and communication in a foreign language.

“We are far more aware of the problems discussed and could learn from methods other participants have tried to reach out to this target group, which we have often found very difficult.

This was mainly because the situations described by participants, e.g. working with young Roma girls in SEE countries, who are extremely difficult to reach, helped us to focus on this subject.”

“Our organization now has 15 local youth workers able to run educational activities with youth following non-formal learning principles. Youth in Action has been a great tool to train these youngsters, provide them with attitudes, knowledge and skills to be able to make our work visible.”

Competences and attitudes that are more strongly emphasised by respondents in SEE countries include innovative approaches to working with young people, awareness of their own learning process and, to a lesser extent, working with young people with fewer opportunities, and sense of initiative and entrepreneurship.

Motivation for political participation and ability to discuss political issues rank among the least mentioned competences and attitudes (25% - 35%) among SEE and PC respondents alike.

### ***How sustainable would this impact be in case the Youth in Action programme was terminated or support was substantially decreased?***

Respondents indicate that without financial support from Youth in Action, fewer young people would have the opportunity to travel, meet peers from other countries and have meaningful intercultural experiences. Our survey also indicates that continued exposure to such experiences shapes the attitudes and competences of a young person more effectively than one-time experience. On the other hand, respondents report that the best projects can be aha-moments for participants and in such cases even taking part in one project can have long-lasting effects.







## IMPACT ON ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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It is difficult to separate simultaneous influences such as availability of funds and support from the Youth in Action programme and other sources, changes in social climate, development of knowledge base on youth work etc. Nevertheless, representatives of organizations involved in the Programme share their view about whether (and if so, how) the Programme impacted on their organizations.

Findings point towards three specific contributions of Youth in Action to organisational development, all of them with a slightly higher impact in SEE compared to Programme countries:

1. Through the Programme many individual youth workers gained new knowledge and skills which were brought back to their organizations, shared and multiplied with colleagues.

In about 15% of cases this was done systematically: such organizations tend to report that they carefully chose trainings that were of interest to their organization, therefore they encouraged more than one person to attend and they had an idea about where and how to use the new knowledge. Common organizational changes that had this course of action were: organizations began to work with a new target group (in particular young people with fewer opportunities), using a pedagogical approach that they heard about before (e.g. adventure learning), or developed or expanded the international dimension of their work or changed the way they finance their activities.

“Last year we organized our first youth exchange in our small town. Now we are preparing new Youth in Action projects. We increased the number of our local projects and the quality of these projects. The local government recognized our efforts, and now we plan to open the first youth-centre in our region. All of this happened because we accidentally found Youth in Action 😊.”

“After involvement in Youth in Action our staff and members became more professional in their tasks, positions and activities, and our volunteers increased in numbers and became more creative in proposing ideas for activities.”

In most organizations (85% of responses), however, the transfer of knowledge and skills was more or less accidental. Youth workers mostly chose a training that was of personal interest to them. If the idea was inspiring enough and if the new knowledge was practical and immediately useful in practice, enthusiasm of a youth worker would sometimes “rub off” on their colleagues and they began to experiment with new approaches. If enough people got interested, changes made their way to organizational culture. Organizational changes that happened this way were mostly: new approach or methodology or changes in priorities of organizations’ work programmes.

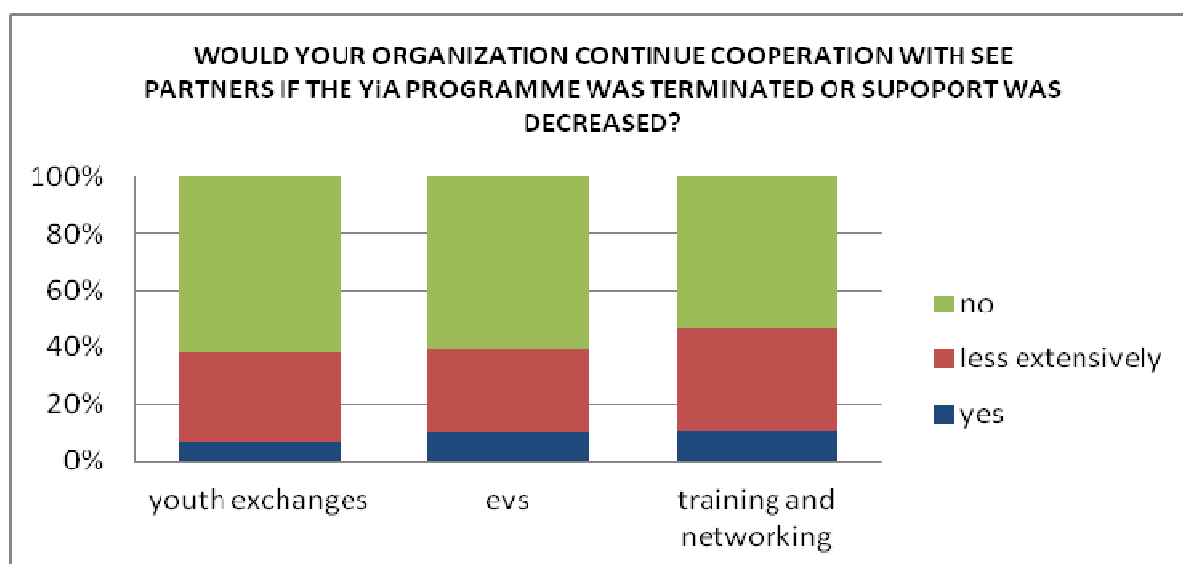
2. Organizations were influenced by the “philosophy” behind the Programme, especially through concepts such as non-formal learning, participation of young people, active citizenship and key competences for life-long learning.

3. Financial support enabled certain organizations to increase the participation of young people in their organisation, establish new partnerships and networks and to tackle larger-scale and more international projects than they would without Youth in Action funding. Organizations that did this on a continued basis often experienced organizational growth and subsequently underwent structural changes.

***In case the Youth in Action programme was terminated or support was decreased ...***

This would be “a big blow” to organizations working in the youth field in SEE and their partners from Programme countries. Less than 10% of respondents from Programme countries report that their organization would be able to continue their cooperation with SEE countries in the same capacity without the support of the Programme, and 40% report that cooperation would be likely to stop entirely.

Organizations in SEE would be at risk of being more dependent on local grants and this would impact the way they define priorities for their work. Respondents expect a decrease of activism and active participation of young people if the support from Youth in Action would be no longer available.



## IMPACT ON YOUTH WORK IN COUNTRIES OF SOUTH EAST EUROPE

In South East Europe, 76% of respondents believe that the Youth in Action programme has contributed to positive changes in the development of youth work in their countries.

There is a high agreement among respondents on how the Programme influenced the youth field. 91% of respondents believe that the Programme has provided more training opportunities for youth workers, which has led to a higher quality of youth work. Due to the Youth in Action programme more young people now participate in youth organizations and a number of new organizations were developed under the influence of the programme. 77% of respondents believe that the Programme has introduced methodologies that support non-formal learning. More organisations are involving young people with fewer opportunities in their work. Over 50% also report that the Programme has led to increased social recognition of youth work.

It would seem that the Youth in Action programme has influenced the youth field mainly indirectly through capacity building of young people, youth workers and organizations, and that these improvements had a trickling effect on other organizations and subsequently the youth field in general. Pathways such as direct cooperation with local authorities, research and literature development seem to have been less successful in shaping the youth field.

### Country specific influences

Respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina are more likely to mention the role of funding: they report that the Programme has contributed to positive changes by offering direct funding and support for youth projects, that youth workers have been able to transfer grant writing skills and financial management skills gained through Youth in Action and use them to secure other sources of funding, and that exposure to the Programme also influenced some local authorities to provide more funding for similar activities.

Respondents from Serbia tend to mention other types of development in the youth field: increase of meaningful participation, more dialogue between young people and youth workers with policy makers on decisions regarding the youth field, better understanding of concepts underlying youth work. They also mention that the Programme has contributed to the development of new methods and pedagogical approaches. Respondents from Serbia are also the only ones that mention more research and literature on youth work among the developments in the field.

Respondents from Croatia tend to report new methodologies of working with youth and development of project management capacities as the primary contribution of the Programme, while respondents from Montenegro, Albania and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia emphasize that due to Youth in Action organizations integrate more international work in their programmes.

Respondents (especially from Serbia and Croatia) express that the Youth in Action programme currently has a strong influence on existing or emerging youth work.

“The Youth in Action programme in my opinion gave visibility to youth needs in our country as well as some of the solutions. It attracted young people to become more involved in the work of local youth organizations, introduced more methods of non-formal learning and pointed out volunteering as an important learning tool.”

“Examples of good practice from other European countries, especially those which are the most developed, have been transferred to our country, through professional youth workers, thus bringing youth work to a very high level.”



***In case the Youth in Action programme was terminated or support was substantially decreased...***

Less international cooperation is to be expected, and this might lead to less sharing of best practices and less knowledge about the latest developments of youth work in other countries. Decrease of project-based youth work is to be expected. Respondents fear that there would be even less recognition and understanding of youth work by the public. They also see a severe risk of exclusion of disadvantaged young people since not many other available grants focus on non-formal learning opportunities for this target group. To sum up, while the termination or decrease of support from Youth in Action would impact individuals and organizations, potential disadvantages for the youth field in general would seem to have the most serious consequences.





## IMPACT ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES

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*“The young people we work with come from polarised parts of Belfast. The learning they gain from our international work ripples through their communities when they return.”*

*“In some cases, particularly in the smaller towns, the local communities were actively involved in the projects and it was appreciated by them. The Youth in Action projects led to strengthening the sense of European identity and inter-culturally enriching experiences for both the foreign participants and the local people.”  
(Respondent from SEE)*

Youth in Action projects have contributed to positive changes in local communities. Over 70% of respondents believe that their projects left a discernible impact. Local communities followed Youth in Action projects with interest and some even provided support for similar projects in the future. Some initiatives that started as one-time projects left a long lasting impression. In particular some topics seem to have been successful in reaching local communities: sustainability, environmental protection, conflict resolution and ethnic minorities. However, while participants report quite a good impact of their projects on the local community, they also express that the Programme has a rather low visibility among local policy makers.

The intercultural dimension was appreciated by local communities: this is indicated by 85% of respondents from SEE and 95% of those from Programme countries. Respondents in Programme countries often mention that their local communities do not know much about SEE countries but prejudices towards them might be present. They report Youth in Action projects have challenged these perceptions and sometimes facilitated small changes in attitudes and opinions.

In SEE countries, local communities (especially those in rural areas) rarely have the chance to *“talk and interact with foreigners who don’t visit the town so often.”* Respondents report that there is still some reservation and even fear present among the public, but direct experience with young people from other countries is helping local communities open up. Although the Youth in Action programme does not anticipate a strong European dimension of projects with neighbouring partner countries of the EU, 75% of respondents from SEE and 60% of respondents from Programme countries mention that projects in SEE sparked community-wide discussion of topics such as European citizenship, European identity and the European Union.

### ***Recognition of youth work on local level***

Free text responses provided by respondents from SEE also highlight that involving local communities in Youth in Action projects helps to raise visibility of youth organizations and brings the importance of youth work to the attention of the public and local policy makers. A number of respondents report that their organization was taken more seriously after showing that they can carry out successful international cooperation.



## IMPACT ON YOUTH POLICIES

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### **Priorities of national youth policies identified by youth workers, youth leaders and trainers from SEE countries**

Survey respondents' perceptions of priorities of their national youth policies reveal some commonalities as well as differences between SEE countries. In all countries, "employability of young people" is the most picked priority (60% of all respondents). In light of current global economy trends, this is not surprising. Not surprisingly either, one of the key topics of youth policy for this target group is recognition of and support for youth work, particularly in connection to volunteering, non-formal learning, inclusion and capacity building for youth organizations. Furthermore, respondents seem to be very much aware of the importance of dialogue between decision makers and young people when it comes to political decisions and guidelines concerning young people.


More respondents from Serbia and Croatia than from other SEE countries tend to pick policy priorities that resemble concepts present in the Youth in Action programme: non-formal education, inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities, youth information and international mobility of young people. It is interesting that non-formal education of young people is picked more often as a priority (49%) than formal education (33%). An interesting topic is also political participation of young people – an item picked almost exclusively by respondents from Serbia. Respondents from Albania and Kosovo are likely to state that their country has no existing youth policy that they are aware of or no clear priorities. Respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro typically pick a range of responses, but they are more likely than others to choose formal education and health of young people. Respondents from BIH are also more likely to choose budget for youth work and youth projects as one of the priorities of their national youth policy (which might reflect the specific political structure in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where responsibility for youth policy lies mainly at entity level). Correspondingly, when asked if they could list granting schemes for funding youth projects similar to Youth in Action at local, national level or international level, respondents from BIH are most likely to list international granting schemes.

### **Impact of Youth in Action on national youth policies**

Although Actions 2 and 3.1 are not expected to bring policy-level contributions, the Youth in Action programme seems to have had some influence in the youth policy field. In light of the youth policy priorities mentioned above, it is not surprising that respondents from Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia tend to report that they believe the Programme is in compliance to their national policy. In Serbia, the Programme seems to have had a strong influence not only on the content of youth policy documents that emerged in the last few years, but also on the process of how they were formulated. Key beneficiaries of the Programme have also been acknowledged as important partners from the youth field and invited into dialogue with decision-makers. This seems to have resulted in a youth policy heavily influenced by the concepts and procedures adopted from Youth in Action. Croatia, however, might be another story. Evidence suggests that the direction of emerging youth policies was fairly close to (although developed rather independently from) the Youth in Action programme, and this might have been why the Programme became more promoted and supported on the national level (until fully entry into the Programme in 2011), which was followed by an increased number of projects.

Overall, the Programme seems to have influenced national policies in a very specific way especially through Action 2 – EVS: several respondents mention the development of laws on volunteering and simplified Visa





procedures for foreign volunteers. These laws and Visa procedures apply to volunteers from different backgrounds and who are funded through various programmes and schemes, but respondents' opinion seems to be that the Youth in Action programme, and specifically experiences with EVS volunteers, provided an impetus for governments to speed up the adoption of these decisions.

### **Challenges of current youth policies**

Respondents show a critical stance towards the state of affairs regarding youth policies in their countries. Some participants point out that while there might be youth policies in place, young people are not sufficiently informed about them.

Lastly, there is a vast divide among SEE countries concerning the state of policy-making in the field of youth and awareness about its importance. While some countries such as Serbia and Croatia seem to be developing documents and practices in the youth field, other countries have not really begun to tackle the problem – at least from respondents' point of view. A number of respondents are critical of the lack of key decisions and documents outlining the direction of political decisions concerning youth in their country.

Organizations in particular report that they are interested in participating in the process of formulating clearer youth policies but feel that the awareness and motivation of other stakeholders, particularly the general public and decision-makers, are not strong enough yet.

Interestingly, respondents' examples suggest a specific understanding of what is youth policy. Many seem to envision youth policy as a separate document, strategy or set of laws connected to youth work; they do not necessarily see youth policy in the context of a myriad of political decisions connected to young people in different fields (education, health, traffic, housing etc.).

### ***What would happen in the youth policy field in case the Youth in Action programme was terminated or substantially decreased?***

Many respondents do not believe that the Youth in Action programme has a strong influence on current developments of youth policies and that therefore there would not be much change without the Programme. Others believe that the Programme has influenced the spirit and the form of youth policies adopted in their countries, and that Youth in Action projects are tools for informing about youth policies as well as direct support for their implementation, which would mean that without Youth in Action the youth policy development would experience a setback. A concern is also that participation, inclusion, intercultural dialogue and active citizenship will not be prioritized, which could lead to fewer young people being exposed to experiences that introduce these concepts.

## BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF YOUTH IN ACTION PROJECTS INVOLVING PARTNERS FROM SEE COUNTRIES

Respondents from Programme countries were asked to specify what kind of benefits and challenges they encountered in Youth in Action projects that they carried out in cooperation with partners from SEE. Their answers were grouped into the following overarching topics.

BENEFITS		CHALLENGES	
Intercultural learning	29	Visas and access	12
European heritage and future	7	Cultural differences	11
Cooperation	5	No challenges	9
Motivation	5	Cooperation	8
Mutual learning and sharing	4	History of conflict	6
History of conflict	3	Less support for YiA	4
Challenging prejudice	2	Administration	4
No specific benefits	1	Sustainability	3
Mindset	1	Money management	2
		Funding	1
		Concepts	1
		Motivation	1
		Language	1

### Main benefits and challenges

The number one benefit is a strong **intercultural learning dimension** (29 replies): respondents report that in projects involving partners from SEE countries there is a **“much greater intercultural learning impact than within EU”**. Interestingly, cultural differences are also the second most reported challenge of such projects (11 replies), surpassed only by issues surrounding Visa and accessibility (12 replies).

Another topic that appears both as a benefit and a challenge is **cooperation among partners**: whereas 7 respondents list good experiences with cooperation with partners from SEE as a specific benefit of such projects (**“Good cooperation, sticking to agreements, appreciating the opportunities”**), 8 respondents had challenging experiences (**»In some cases a cultural gap in the way to work (times, respect of deadlines, working rhythm).“**).

**History of conflict in the SEE region** is also reported as a benefit and projects are seen as an important tool of peace building (3 replies). However, the history of conflict is also seen as a challenge (6 replies), e.g.: **“In the Balkans, it is very difficult and we have to be very careful not to wound anybody, not to focus on the past and the conflict, avoid any political discussion, anything that can make bad memories come back and at the same time speak and make them have discussions and reflections about religion, communities, change some of their opinions and open their life to something else to be involved.”**

Another benefit of projects with SEE reported by respondents from Programme countries is strengthening awareness of **European heritage and future** for participants from Programme countries as well as SEE (7 replies). Replies emphasize that **“SEE is a region that cannot be taken out from any EU policy. The benefit to work with South East Europe is mostly related to the perspective of joining the EU as it is happening with Croatia. It is important to continue working with SEE in order not to create any kind of disadvantaged situation looking to the enlargement of the EU. “**







## VIEWPOINT OF NATIONAL AGENCIES

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The majority of the evaluation study focuses on views of the largest group of stakeholders of the Youth in Action programme: young people and youth workers directly or indirectly involved in the Programme. The view of National Agencies is only sometimes mentioned. NA staff from 18 countries completed the survey. Here is a short summary of their contribution to the study.

### Support for projects that include partners from the SEE region

The survey for the National Agencies focused on information that was not readily available from other sources such as Youthlink databases, project evaluation reports etc. For example, we asked National Agencies about specific types of support they offer to projects that involve partners from SEE. 27% of responding staff reported that their National Agency had included cooperation with the SEE region in their yearly priorities for cooperation with neighbouring partner countries and 42% reported that their National Agency had organized training activities or other support activities with the objective to specifically support projects with partners from SEE countries. Many training and other support activities that are mentioned were carried out in cooperation with SALTO SEE.

National Agency staff report that the intention behind these decisions was to raise the number and/or quality of projects with the SEE region. National Agencies from Austria, Germany and Slovenia also report that they wanted to foster existing bonds that their beneficiaries already had with organizations from SEE. One of the staff members also reported that before their organization had taken on the role of the National Agency, they had a history of NGO cooperation in the region, and this experience influenced their work as a National Agency. An interesting motivation that is also mentioned quite often is a conviction that projects with neighbouring partner countries strengthen European awareness for all participants: *“We consider it important to include SEE and EECA participants in our activities in order to allow sustainable partnerships beyond the actual EU borders and in order to support the EU integration process. Organisations and participants from SEE bring a strong added value to any activity since they have a very different view on all EU-related topics. Different in a way that they can motivate the people from the so-called old EU countries on the one hand to believe in the EU, and on the other hand to see the actual and the future evolutions with a critical eye. Their view from outside is very helpful and constructive.”*

### Outcomes of projects that include partners from the SEE region

National Agencies are perhaps best equipped to evaluate outcomes of decentralized YiA projects that are carried out in cooperation with the SEE region. Their sources of information include intended results described in project applications, actual outcomes outlined in final reports, information from monitoring meetings, desk-checks, on-the-spot visits and ongoing communication with beneficiaries. One of the challenges is the fact that these resources are often underused since systems of efficient and ongoing analysis are not in place.

Relying on the above mentioned sources of information and anecdotal evidence, staff members believe that the most important outcomes and results of YiA projects that involve organizations from Programme countries and SEE countries are improved intercultural awareness (*“reducing fear, ignorance and arrogance on both sides; increasing knowledge and understanding on both sides”*), empowerment of youth work and stronger cooperation of the EU with the region. A number of staff members mention that outcomes of projects *“involving Programme countries and SEE countries are not that different from the projects involving only*

**Programme countries”**. Some respondents also point out that they have never investigated this question before within their National Agency but can see the benefit of doing so in the future.

### **Specificities of projects that include partners from the SEE region**

Interestingly, about a third of surveyed staff members emphasize that they believe there are no important specificities of projects involving partners from SEE, that they are very similar to projects involving only Programme countries or another neighbouring region, while the other two thirds are vocal about different challenges and benefits they see as specific to such projects. Many respondents mention a strong thematic focus of projects as a specific advantage of projects with the SEE region. Another advantage is intercultural learning – it is argued that the cultural differences are bigger and therefore the intercultural learning component is stronger. Another advantage that is mentioned is raising awareness of organizations in Programme countries that quality projects can be done with a low budget and resourcefulness.

Some National Agencies mention historical influences and current social trends as reasons for a specific interest for cooperation of their beneficiaries with SEE countries. For example, the Slovenian National Agency reports that due to common history and cultural similarities their beneficiaries are highly motivated to cooperate with SEE countries (“we used to share a country and still share a similar language and culture”). On the other hand, staff members of the Austrian, German and Italian National Agencies report that projects with SEE can be used to address issues of migration from SEE to their country (“many many migrants from former Yugoslav republics live in Austria”). Furthermore, they think that projects can help raise intercultural awareness of young people and local communities towards young immigrants from SEE, overcome prejudice, facilitate young immigrants’ integration in the host countries’ culture, and on the other hand give second generation young immigrants the opportunity to learn about their cultural heritage.

Staff members also mention prejudice that young people from SEE face in Programme countries. Lack of reliable and skilled partner organizations is another commonly reported challenge, as is a different (often described as “laid back”) organizational culture.

Staff members do not report specific differences between projects in cooperation with SEE and other regions of neighbouring partner countries (Slovenian NA is an exception due to proximity of the region and historical ties with it).





## Conclusions

The impact evaluation of the cooperation with SEE within the Youth in Action programme used a mixed methods approach to assess the impact of cooperation on individual level, organization level as well as on the youth work and youth policy field.

The general conclusion is that the Youth in Action programme was successful in reaching the purpose for cooperation with neighbouring partner countries which was to “develop mutual understanding between peoples in a spirit of openness, while also contributing to the development of quality systems that support the activities of young people in the countries concerned”, to support “activities designed to network and enhance the capacity of NGOs in the youth field, recognizing the important role they can play in the development of civil society in the neighbouring partner countries” with the intention of facilitating “the establishment of long lasting, high quality projects and partnerships” (Youth in Action Programme Guide (2013), p. 75).

Participants in our surveys and interviews report to have observed benefits of participation in Youth in Action for individual young people such as intercultural competence, social competence, improved communication in foreign languages and other benefits. For youth workers, the main benefits are increased motivation for their work, intercultural competence and professional development of knowledge of their target group, different methodologies and approaches to non-formal learning, stronger capabilities to participate in political discussion about decisions concerning youth and often a shift in perspectives about youth work. Main benefits for organizations are establishment of international networks and capacity building through sharing of best practices. Influences in the youth policy field greatly vary from country to country, but can be seen in the level of recognition of youth work and in transfer of concepts from the Programme to national-level youth policy documents.

Benefits for individuals and organizations from Programme countries are similar: exposure to intercultural experiences and challenging prejudice is the most mentioned positive development for young people and youth workers, and organizations from programme countries reported that they gained both inspiration and ideas for activities and approaches for their work with young people from youth workers from SEE. Among the specific challenges of cooperation with partners from SEE there are logistical issues, challenges due to cultural differences and securing funding for projects.

With the end of the current financial perspective and therefore the end of the Youth in Action programme looming on the horizon, the main concern for the SEE region remains the sustainability issue. Respondents from SEE as well as their partners from Programme countries express concern that in case the Programme was terminated or support was substantially decreased, they would not be able to continue their cooperation, or it would continue in a much smaller capacity. However, the motivation exists due to predominantly positive experience and there is a willingness to invest effort in finding other potential sources of funding if needed.

Overall, cooperation with SEE in the context of the Youth in Action programme was effective in reaching its objectives. But the systems for networking, sharing information and cooperation among stakeholders from SEE and Programme countries would still need support and reinforcement if the impact is to be long-term. Without the financial support and direct training opportunities, existing practices might not survive and new ones are not likely to emerge. While support can be found for certain types of international cooperation, it does not have the same focus in regard to content, focus and priorities.



## Main sources

- Interim Evaluation of the Youth in Action programme  
[http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/evalreports/index\\_en.htm#youthHeader](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/evalreports/index_en.htm#youthHeader)
- Key Competences for Lifelong Learning: European Reference Framework  
[http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/key\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/key_en.htm)
- Youth in Action Programme Guide 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012  
[http://ec.europa.eu/youth/youth-in-action-programme/programme-guide\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/youth/youth-in-action-programme/programme-guide_en.htm)
- Research-based analysis of Youth in Action project teams
- SALTO SEE website [www.salto-youth.net/rc/see](http://www.salto-youth.net/rc/see)
- Information available in Youthlink (general project database of Youth in Action), lists of project grants of the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA)  
[http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/youth/results\\_compendia/results\\_en.php](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/youth/results_compendia/results_en.php) , and SALTO SEE statistical compilations

photo: Gisele Evrard



## ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

**What has been the impact of the projects carried out within the Youth in Action programme involving partners from Programme countries and the Programme's partner countries in South East Europe, on the people involved and their organisations as well as local communities? Has the Programme had a wider influence on youth work and youth policy development in the countries of the SEE region?**

To look into these questions the SALTO South East Europe Resource Centre carried out an evaluation study of the cooperation with South East Europe within Youth in Action in 2012. Based on a survey among project beneficiaries and multipliers as well as National Agencies for the Youth in Action programme, the study aimed to assess the impact that the Programme has had in the SEE region as well as the relevance of cooperation with partners from SEE for project beneficiaries based in Programme countries. This summary report presents the main findings.

### What is SALTO-YOUTH?

SALTO-YOUTH is a network of eight Resource Centres working on European priority areas within the youth field. As part of the European Commission's Training Strategy, SALTO-YOUTH provides non-formal learning resources for youth workers and youth leaders and organises training and contact-making activities to support organisations and National Agencies within the frame of the European Commission's Youth in Action programme and beyond.

[www.SALTO-YOUTH.net](http://www.SALTO-YOUTH.net)

### What is the SALTO South East Europe Resource Centre?

The SALTO SEE Resource Centre aims to facilitate and increase the participation of partners from South East Europe in the Youth in Action programme through training and partner-finding activities and various other tools and resources. We work with the help of pools of trainers and accreditors as well as Contact Points located in the countries of South East Europe.

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[www.salto-youth.net/rc/see](http://www.salto-youth.net/rc/see)

### More information on Youth in Action:

<http://ec.europa.eu.youth>