



Training and Co-operation Plans of the Youth in Action Programme

A vital contribution to European youth policy

Supporting young
people's employability

Increasing participation
in civil society
and politics

Strengthening
social cohesion

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A In a nutshell...

'Training and Co-operation Plans' are the training and capacity building instruments for youth work and youth policy in Europe, designed and implemented by the National Agencies and SALTO-YOUTH Resource Centres of the European Union's Youth in Action Programme.

Put together they make up what is:

the **3rd biggest action** of the Programme;
using **only 7% of the budget**;
implementing **15% of all projects**;
reaching **21,000 beneficiaries** (that's a big **17% of the total**).

Based on more than a decade of common action, the plans bring together many of the **major stakeholders** in the Programme and make a considerable contribution to bolstering the main roles of **the National Agencies**:

Managing the Youth in Action Programme in their countries

Helping **develop youth work** in Europe

Contributing to **European Youth Policy**.

All of this adds up to the Training and Co-operation Plans' strong contribution to the delivery of the three guiding priorities of the Programme:

Supporting **young people's employability**

Strengthening **social cohesion**

Increasing **participation** in civil society.



B Training and Co-operation Plans in the Youth in Action Programme

Youth in Action – what is it?

Youth in Action is the European Union's programme supporting the non-formal learning of young people and youth workers throughout Europe. It aims to inspire a sense of active democratic citizenship, solidarity, social cohesion and mutual understanding among young Europeans and to involve them in shaping the Union's future. It promotes the learning mobility, intercultural dialogue and co-operation of young people and youth workers as well as the capacity building of youth work institutions and

structures; it encourages the inclusion of all young people, regardless of their educational, social and cultural background. Last but not least, it supports the development and implementation of European youth policy.

With a total budget of 885 million euros for seven years (2007-2013) and 33 programme countries, the Programme supports a large variety of activities; hundreds of thousands of young people and youth workers so far have benefitted from youth

exchanges, the European Voluntary Service, youth initiatives and youth democracy projects, training and networking activities and other project types. Youth in Action is implemented by the European Commission together with an Executive Agency, a network of 35 National Agencies, 8 SALTO-YOUTH Resource Centres (known as SALTOs) – and thousands and thousands of youth organisations, youth services and active individuals.

European Training Strategy

As youth work today throughout Europe faces many challenges (among them a more and more culturally diverse globalized world, high youth unemployment and school drop-out rates, low voter turnouts among young people), the quality of youth work and the competences of youth workers are of core relevance to be able to meet those challenges. Recognising this, the European Training Strategy of the Youth in Action Programme

has been developed to optimise and further increase the impact of the Programme in the area of youth work development, capacity-building and the recognition of non-formal learning. It aims to contribute to developing the quality of support systems for youth activities, reinforcing links with the formal education sector and improving the capabilities of civil society organisations in the youth field.

Among the different instruments of the European Training Strategy, a special role is played by the **Training and Co-operation Plan (TCP)**: It implements the priorities of the Programme; it is the main instrument to support the quality of international projects within Youth in Action, and through this also has a wider positive effect on the youth work across Europe.

The Training and Co-operation Plans

The Training and Co-operation Plans are the National Agencies' instrument of quality support within the Youth in Action Programme as well as training and capacity building instruments for youth work and youth policy in Europe. They are the main tool to support the National Agencies' three roles defined as:

- management and implementation of Youth in Action at national level;
- support of the development of youth work; and
- support of the co-operation in the youth field in Europe.

To achieve this, the Training and Co-operation Plans offer national and international training courses, seminars, forums, network meetings and other activities to people involved in Youth in Action projects as well as other actors from the youth work and youth policy fields. To support the quality of youth work within and beyond the Programme, trainers have been systematically trained and trainer pools established. Thematically, the Training and Co-operation Plans uniquely reflect the political priorities and the specific situation and needs of the youth field on both European and national levels.

Among the most relevant topics of activities in the last years were some of the burning issues concerning young people in Europe nowadays, that is **young people's employability**, their **participation** in civil society and politics and **social cohesion** in Europe.





C Supporting young people's employability

With some regions experiencing dramatically high levels of youth unemployment (over 40 % in parts of Spain, Greece and Slovakia for example) or Germany experiencing school drop-out rates of over 13 %, some commentators are already talking about today's young people as belonging to the 'forgotten generation' (see, for example, the National Youth Council of Ireland's report: <http://www.youth.ie/forgotten>). Crucially important developments have been implemented within the Programme to help alleviate some of the effects of the current crisis, notably the introduction of Youthpass – an educational process and a tool for the recognition of non-formal learning.

Describing key competences developed through participation in the Programme, Youthpass supports the (self-)reflection about the personal non-formal learning process and outcomes, contributes to strengthening the social recognition of youth work and aims at supporting the employability of young people and youth workers. At the time of writing, over 150,000 Youthpass certificates have been issued, helping young people in the recognition of their competences and giving a real push towards increasing employability. The Training and Co-operation Plans have been used effectively to work with multipliers within the Programme to assist young people

to recognise their learning within projects and to be able to exploit their learning afterwards. Research co-ordinated by the University of Innsbruck has demonstrated that all of the Key Competences for Lifelong Learning are developed by participating in the international youth activities offered under the Programme, such as exchanges and volunteering projects. Young people's self-confidence improves; they have concrete competences to demonstrate in their CVs; and they are more able to identify what they need to learn in the future.

- Several thousand youth workers throughout Europe trained in how to use Youthpass to describe key competences of young people developed by participating in Youth in Action projects
- Hundreds of workshops, seminars, training courses and other activities strengthening the role of youth work in enhancing the employability of young people and developing the entrepreneurship of young people
- Linking over 150 stakeholders in the conference 'Bridges to Work', including employers, job agencies, coaches of the employment and entrepreneurship projects, policy makers, researchers, young job seekers and others, 86% of them leaving with new employment projects

Helping young people to go through such processes in which they can develop and recognise Key Competences requires a relatively highly-skilled support network of youth workers, mentors and counsellors. For this reason, JINT (the Belgian Flemish National Agency) joined forces with the UK National Agency and the SALTOs responsible for Inclusion and Training and Cooperation to create the '**Competences for all**' training course. In total, 26 participants attended the

course, drawn from youth and social work fields, especially those involved with school dropouts. They learned to work with instruments such as ProfilPass, C-Stick and Youthpass to support young people in their competence development and, according to the post-course evaluations, their motivation to attempt this complex task was raised enormously. And they went back to their organisations and started work on it!

So important is this priority that eleven National Agencies, in cooperation with the SALTO Inclusion Resource Centre, contributed substantially from their Training and Co-operation Plan budgets to the implementation of the conference '**Bridges to Work**' (see: www.salto-youth.net/BridgesToWork/) held in Antwerp in October 2011. Part of a three-year strategy including research and training elements, this pioneering conference brought together a unique set of participants who, in addition

to young job seekers themselves, were drawn from the worlds of entrepreneurship, employment, vocational training, academia and youth work. Concrete outcomes were high on the list of participants' evaluations: direct contacts with potential partners; new projects; new insights and learning; and motivation towards using own initiatives and becoming an entrepreneur. Some even created their own bridges to work – or got a new job.

The difficult situation that young people face in many corners of Europe today can be felt in the gap between Education and Employment – what is that "**E-Factor**" that encourages young people back into the system? The National Agencies of Sweden, Germany, Italy and Bulgaria supported a training course on how youth workers can influence a young person's employability track. The common difficulties that are shared across local realities in Europe were faced, together with emphasis on increasing a youth worker's competence

in guiding young people, and increasing their civic competence as part of a holistic approach of learning to learn.

As well as recognising EU funding as an instrument for developing young people's learning and working mobility through international experience dimension, there was the real opportunity to discuss about the political context from European level to the local work and reality of youth workers.



There is a need to organise more of this kind of activities (concerning entrepreneurship and employability) because the youth sector is not ready for it yet.

(Slovenia, TCP activity)

I'd never got up and given a presentation or pitch before, but now I know I can do it!

A good day which expanded my awareness of employability skills.

(UK, TCP activity; some of the 968 young people taking part in the Big Idea, a series of 20 workshops across Northern Ireland on youth entrepreneurship)



D Increasing participation in civil society and politics

A decreasing percentage of young people as part of the overall population in Europe, their wish to participate more in society and political life; a shift from long-term memberships in political parties and organisations to ad hoc movements and social networking; a very low participation in the elections to the European Parliament (and partially a low one on national and / or regional level too) – these are only some of the facts collected by the EU Youth Report which show the need to rethink how young people can be encoura-

ged to participation and active citizenship. The topic is therefore high on the agenda of European youth policy: to encourage young people to be active citizens and participate in society and politics is one of the main objectives of the EU youth strategy. This is encouraged through the Structured Dialogue process and the Youth in Action Programme, with its permanent priorities on participation and European Citizenship, as well as different funding opportunities for participation projects where the political will becomes

everyday practice on the European level. The Training and Co-operation Plan is used to support, train and connect the different actors from the local to the European level. It enables young people and youth workers to run youth democracy or youth initiative projects, to prepare young people and policy makers to engage in the Structured Dialogue and to support the exchange of young people, youth workers, policy makers and researchers about ways to increased participation in civil society and politics.

- Hundreds of youth workers and active young people have been trained on how to be actively involved in democratic and decision making processes in their local community and how to create a Youth Democracy project through Action 1.3
- More than 500 coaches have been trained who support young people in implementing participation projects

As the European-level support for international youth work has grown, so the roles of National Agencies have increased in complexity and importance. In addition to administering funds, they are also expected to play more of a catalyst role in youth policy development within their countries. For a relatively new agency such as the Croatian one this could be a daunting task, but the staff committed themselves to the task and set up a strategy to inform and encourage many different stakeholders (both young people and policy makers) to explore and inspire structured dialogue initiatives, using the **Long-term training course on**

the Structured Dialogue and Active Youth Participation as a central pillar. After introductions and capacity-building elements in the first seminar, the participants from each of the regions in Croatia carried out local youth policy projects, the experiences of which they were able to share in the second seminar. Follow-up surveys show that participants have intensified their efforts to implement structured dialogue within different levels of the local community and are bringing the European dimensions alive with financial assistance from the Programme.

As the local level is crucial for the implementation and transfer into practice of youth policy, the Slovakian National Agency implemented the **Partnership - Long-term Training for Municipalities**. Mayors, members of local parliaments and employees of the municipalities came together for a series of meetings to learn how to develop and implement local youth policies. On the basis of comprehensive information about participation and youth policy on national and European level, and a thorough analysis of the situation and needs of their municipalities, each of them developed their own policy

proposal, including public consultations with young people on the way. A study visit to Sweden allowed for some peer learning, which further inspired the Slovak participants for action and contributed to establish co-operation among some of the participating municipalities. Clearer youth policies and concrete action-plans on local level, a considerably increased participation of young people in decisions concerning them and a series of promising national and international partnerships and projects are the most relevant outcomes this activity led to.

Involving over 300 people from all over the country, Leargas the Irish National Agency, brought innovation to youth participation in the Structured Dialogue about European Youth Policy in the **Criss-Cross Youth Consultations** project. As the project strived to reach out to all young people and very diverse groups including young people from urban and rural areas, with fewer opportunities, from minority groups

etc., a thorough preparation was vital to guarantee success. Having decided on and then explored one topic, and developed the necessary skills to run a consultation project, the participants went back to their local community and ran projects constructing concrete policy recommendations to the national authorities and the European Commission.



This training programme inspired me to get active, also on national level when it comes to developing strategies for youth and improving active youth participation on both local/ regional and state level.

(Croatia, TCP activity)



E Strengthening social cohesion

In its Europe 2020 strategy, the European Commission recognises that a strategy for growth will not succeed without focussed attention on social cohesion and social inclusion and has therefore made the European Platform against Poverty one of the strategy's seven flagship initiatives. As the EU Youth Report and other research shows, young people are an especially vulnerable group in society: 20 % of young people aged 18-24 (but only 16 % of the overall population) are at risk of poverty; the youth unemployment rate is nearly twice the percentage of the total population and reaches beyond 40 %

in some member states; more than one fifth of children do not have basic standards of literacy and numeracy and over 13 % of young people are neither in employment, education or training (NEET). Social exclusion affects some groups of young people more than others, for instance, those coming from migrant or Roma backgrounds, those with disabilities or mental health problems and an increasing proportion of school drop outs. Bringing young people together across physical and cultural, social and educational frontiers in a positive manner, offering opportunities and equal access to all young

people, but at the same time giving special support to those with fewer opportunities and from less-privileged backgrounds, is how the Youth in Action Programme strives to contribute to social inclusion and social cohesion throughout Europe. Its Training and Co-operation Plan gives much emphasis to training of youth workers and youth leaders in the inclusion of underprivileged groups as well as to intercultural competences, creating opportunities for intercultural dialogue, reaching out to "new" target groups.

- Thousands of youth workers and youth leaders trained on how to include young people with fewer opportunities into national and international youth work activities
- Innovative projects reaching out to ethnic minority groups and leading to increased numbers of projects with young people from ethnic minorities in the Youth in Action Programme
- Hundreds of on- and offline tools for inclusion were tested successfully in the training courses implemented by the network of National Agencies

Minority groups in terms of language, nationality, religion, and / or culture often face difficulties to access public services in general and to be part of the Youth in Action Programme in particular. To answer this challenge, the **Cultural Coach** project was developed by several National Agencies and SALTO Cultural Diversity. It concentrated on training representatives from a cultural minority who would then become a bridge between their community and the Youth in Action Programme. As the – so far - last event in a series of seminars and training courses,

Making it Reality gathered young people and youth workers from cultural minority groups from all over Europe, who wished to develop the visibility of their local projects and promote a positive image of young people from cultural minorities. As the programme highlight the participants organised a public event in the centre of Helsinki to get in direct contact with passers-by. They talked, they sang, they played and came away from the whole Cultural Coach training empowered to go back into their local communities and produce inter-cultural actions.

As the Commission's interim impact study shows, (with already 75 specific projects funded by 2010), the policy of working to include Roma young people in the Programme has borne fruit. Supported by activities organised under the Training and Cooperation Plans much learning and interaction has taken place which would not otherwise have existed. One of the Plans' activities, the training course **Wandering for Wondering – Short Study Visit for Persons Working with**

Roma Youth brought together participants from Hungary, Slovakia and Finland on a three-step programme of study visits and seminars in which youth and social workers could really compare experience, show different practices, learn new methods and approaches and create projects with young Roma people. This is tough work for all concerned and consequently requires high levels of commitment and support.

Approaching contentious and challenging issues was also the focus of the **Interfaith** project, a training organised by the National Agencies of France and UK with the support of SALTO Cultural Diversity. Bringing together youth leaders from different religious backgrounds and communities, the training course examined issues such as 'What is the place of interfaith dia-

logue in the re-shaping of Europe's identity?', 'What is social reality?' and 'How to understand intersectionality?' These are the current burning issues of our times, underlined by traumatic events in our recent shared history, and which the Training & Cooperation Plan has the flexibility and power to counter.



It was inspiring for me. My target group are children from child care institutions and there are many prejudices and stereotypes about these people. Image building is a basic activity which goes hand in hand with integration and with inclusive activities in general.

(Hungary, TCP activity)

I feel much more confident to engage young people in interfaith dialogue activities. This is going to make a big difference in my community, and hopefully internationally too, if we get the Youth in Action funding that we want to apply for.

(UK, TCP activity)

F Training and co-operation in the new programme generation 2014-2020

Much has been achieved through the Training and Co-operation Plans since their establishment at the turn of the century. As we can see from the example of the introduction of Youthpass, the Plan is a tool that supports changing policies and priorities, providing the flexibility to implement new approaches within set systems.

It transfers youth policy developments on European level to the local, regional and national level and supports the quality of Youth in Action projects as well as European youth work in general, thus allowing to make a real impact on the situation of young people in Europe. It looks as if the role of National Agencies in the field of youth will not change much

in the future Programme. What remains are the three tasks to fulfil, the programme implementation, support of the development of youth work and support of European youth policy. What is changing and developing, are the challenges to be met in each of the fields in the coming years.

Among the main challenges awaiting the Programme structures in the future EU Programme generation 2014-2020 in the fields of programme management and implementation at national level, support of the development of youth work and support of the co-operation in the youth field in Europe are:

- to give special attention to the newer target groups of the Programme from youth services and youth policy that have few or no experience with learning mobility projects, in order to guarantee the quality of the Programme implementation;
- to keep a good balance in the Programme implementation looking e.g. at the geographical representation or the inclusion of all young people and especially underprivileged groups in the projects;
- to support the further development and better use of the EU recognition tools in and for the whole youth field, within and beyond the Programme;
- to foster the learning mobility and peer learning processes among youth services and youth policy makers in order to strengthen the international dimension of their work;
- to develop the competences of actors in the field and to contribute to the capacity-building of their organisations and institutions;
- to support the transfer into practice of the EU Youth Strategy and the Council Resolution on Youth Work on European, national and regional level and to provide opportunities for international peer learning in this field;
- to link to working mobility and the experience of the international dimension across the fields of education (both formal and non-formal) and employment;
- to further enhance and qualify the implementation of the Structured Dialogue.

To be able to meet those and other upcoming challenges in the youth field, the tried and tested instrument Training and Co-operation Plan is further needed to bridge policy and youth work practice and to guarantee quality implementation of and within the next EU Programme generation (2014-2020).



G Further information and Contacts

- Youth in Action Programme
http://ec.europa.eu/youth/youth-in-action-programme/overview_en.htm
- European Training Strategy
<http://www.salto-youth.net/rc/training-and-cooperation/trainingstrategy/>
- Youthpass
<http://www.youthpass.eu/>
- SALTO Network
<http://www.salto-youth.net/>
- Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth
<http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youth-partnership>

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