

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

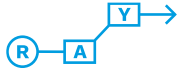
RESEARCH PROJECT ON COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT FOR YOUTH WORK THROUGH TRAININGS IN THE EUROPEAN YOUTH PROGRAMMES (RAY-COMP)

National Report (Module 2)

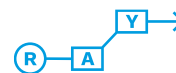
LITHUANIA

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- 1. FOCUS GROUP FORM: FOCUS GROUP 1..... 3
 - 1.1. MAIN FACTS..... 3
 - 1.2. ABSTRACT 3
 - 1.3. CONTEXT 3
 - 1.4. TRAINING GOALS AND ROLE OF THE TRAINER..... 4
 - 1.5. TRAINING NEEDS 4
 - 1.6. ASPECTS HAMPERING AND FOSTERING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF TRAININGS 6
 - 1.7. THE ETS..... 9
 - 1.8. ANALYTICAL REMARKS 9
 - 1.9. OTHER COMMENTS 9
- 2. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS 10
 - 2.1. RESEARCH QUESTION 1..... 10
 - 2.2. RESEARCH QUESTION 2 10
 - 2.3. RESEARCH QUESTION 3 11
 - 2.4. RESEARCH QUESTION 4 12
 - 2.5. RESEARCH QUESTION 5 12
 - 2.6. OTHER REFLECTIONS AND COMMENTS 12



1. FOCUS GROUP FORM: FOCUS GROUP 1

1.1. MAIN FACTS

Please, provide the main facts about the Focus Group in this table:

<i>Focus Group date</i>	<i>2024 02 08</i>
<i>Format (virtual, face-to-face, hybrid)</i>	<i>Virtual</i>
<i>Duration of the Focus Group</i>	<i>1 hour and 15 min</i>
<i>Position(s)/Role(s) of the participants:</i>	<i>Trainers, active in the youth field</i>

1.2. ABSTRACT

Consensus was reached on the following aspects:

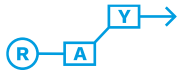
- A very high supply of training courses does not necessarily lead to better quality but rather to the participation of individuals whose main interest is international travel.
- Profiles of participants don't always match the intended target group. Sometimes it's difficult to ensure voluntary participation (someone is sent by their organization), and other times it's challenging to ensure that individuals are attending to develop competencies as indicated in the course description.
- Trainers find it difficult to deal with very diverse participants and balance their different expectations (beginners, advanced learners, travellers, those who were sent by their organization, because participation is obligatory) while also maintaining a productive atmosphere in the group.
- Cooperation with training providers is effective when there is open communication, clear channels for it, and a personal relationship also plays a significant role.

1.3. CONTEXT

The participants for this focus group were recruited through two methods. Firstly, individuals were identified via professional networks, specifically targeting those currently actively engaged as trainers within the Erasmus+ program. Secondly, participants were selected from the pool of trainers associated with the Lithuanian National Agency. Each member of the pool was contacted, and several agreed to dedicate their time to participate in this research.

Finding a suitable time and date for a meeting proved to be rather challenging, primarily because the trainers do not have a stable daily or weekly routine. Furthermore, those who had training scheduled on the three dates proposed were unable to join due to the demanding nature of their job, which necessitates full immersion in educational processes with groups. Despite these obstacles, the participants who agreed to attend the focus group were briefed on the context of the research and the activities of the RAY network. The main question addressed during the meeting was the anticipated outcomes of this research and how the results would be used.

4 out of 5 participants of the focus group were members of the Lithuanian pool of trainers with the Lithuanian National Agency. This pool of trainers is working mainly with on-arrival and mid-evaluation trainings with volunteers who come to Lithuania, also these trainers are supporting organisations that work with international volunteering programmes (hosting, coordinating, sending, quality label organisations).



1.4. TRAINING GOALS AND ROLE OF THE TRAINER

The initial reaction to the training goals is that they vary, depending on the topic of the training course, but *“overall, it’s important that people learn something. That there is a strong educational level. This is the main goal.”* (P5)

Another instance from work with the National Agency is that the goals were very clearly communicated – to improve the quality of future projects (example from a training course for potential applicants in KA2): *“the goal given to us was to increase, improve the quality of project applications, so that the projects that are financed by the Lithuanian NA would be better, follow the quality standards.”* (P1)

Participants also spoke about the annual priorities that are set by the National Agency (digital, inclusion, participation, democracy, green).

Participants agreed on the importance of following non-formal learning principles and values, to create a space for people to improve through their lived experience.

Participants mainly spoke about topic-related knowledge and competencies of the topics that they are training: human rights, migration, race, sustainability, active citizenship.

Trainers indicated 3 types of roles that they take on:

1. Solely conducting the training with the group – where the aims and objectives are provided by training providers, and trainers execute the program accordingly. One trainer expressed this by stating, *“As a trainer, I do what the client told me to do. <...> You make your own suggestions, of course. But somehow, sometimes you have to keep some of your positions for yourself too.”* (P5)

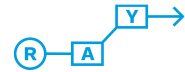
2. Acting as developers and educators – this occurs when trainers either apply for training programs themselves or when training is a component of a project or initiative organized by their employing organization. As one trainer explained, *“As far as I work as a trainer in the context of the Erasmus program as a whole, it’s mostly the projects we do ourselves. So, we formulate the objectives ourselves and, of course”* (P1)

3. Combining roles as developers, educators, and technical staff – particularly in scenarios involving small teams, trainers also undertake technical tasks such as participant selection, communication, venue coordination, and travel arrangements. A trainer described their experience: *“We had a very small team, and when we did the training courses there, it was really, really difficult. When you have to take care of the logistics and you have to take care of the participants, and everything. It was really difficult. Now I have a bigger team in Lithuania, it’s really cool. Even the simple logistical things that need to be solved, we have a system.”* (P5)

The role of participants can vary widely – from being highly active, which involves their inclusion in planning the learning program, to simply participating in a pre-established program that must be conducted according to agreements between training providers and trainers. As indicated by the trainers who participated in the focus group, participants often influence the flow and atmosphere of the program, with many of their learning needs and expectations being taken into account during the implementation of the training course.

According to the trainers, the role of training providers is to clearly articulate their ideas and needs, ensure open communication channels, engage with participants, and organize the logistical aspects of the training course, including travel and accommodation arrangements.

1.5. TRAINING NEEDS



The training needs identified by the trainers depend on the experience level of the participants. Newcomers require basics and are primarily interested in ready-to-use tools and methods. Those who have been working in the field for a longer period often feel the need to exchange experiences with others or delve deeper into certain topics.

Needs / expectations:

1. Ready-to-use tools and methods.

"There is a great need for methods and practical ways of working. After the training they want to leave with some sort of toolbox - a set of methods that they can apply directly in their work" (P3)

"There are always two groups. One consists of newcomers who are new to the field and need access to all the methods and tools available." (P2)

2. To (re)connect with colleagues.

"But very often, a large proportion of participants have been working in the field for years and already consider themselves professionals. For them, it's more about connecting with colleagues, sharing experiences, and discussing common challenges." (P2)

3. Theoretical aspects and deeper understanding:

"What we really see as a pressing need is to broaden our horizons. Sometimes, it involves delving into academic and theoretical aspects to gain a better understanding of broader concepts and issues. It's about contextualizing ourselves to truly comprehend our roles within various contexts, whether it's related to human rights, climate change, or other relevant topics." (P1)

At first the participants claimed that there are no particular needs for Lithuanian national context: *"I would say it's a similar situation with the Lithuanian context. At first, everyone tends to believe that they are the sole individual facing their own challenges. Yet, in reality, there are many others experiencing similar or even more significant challenges."* (P2)

Yet, over the course of the focus group several needs were identified that were connected to Lithuanian context:

- Frequent staff turnover which leads to the high need for **basic, introductory level courses** and basic competencies of youth workers.
- Need for **competence development of directors of youth centres** so that they have the necessary skills to effectively orientate new employees who frequently rotate.
- **Citizenship education** (critical thinking, understanding of the geopolitical context) is needed. *"For example, I live near the border of Belarus. And I have never in my life heard the conversation of the employees at work about what is happening at the border. We are 20 kilometres away from the wall."* (P5)
- **Human rights education.** *"At a big youth policy event I was involved in a discussion with youth workers about LGBT, their safety and so on. And when you hear from some municipality youth worker or the head of a youth centre with very anti-LGBT attitudes, then you also think, what kind of message are they sending to the young person as well. what can we talk about openness, about this kind of all-embracing personality development and so on."* (P1)

Participants of the focus group noted that there is a wide array of training courses available, catering to various interests. Special attention was given to basic courses that serve as

introductions to diverse topics. However, the challenge lies in meeting the needs of experienced participants seeking advanced-level content. These individuals are eager to delve deeper into topics, already possess some level of experience, and aim to further excel. One participant articulated this concern, stating, *"The question for me then is whether this responsiveness aligns with the needs of those youth workers who truly seek to enhance their learning and deepen their understanding of a specific topic. It's not about breadth, but depth; it's about comprehending topics such as human rights, sustainable development, or citizenship on a deeper level. Regardless of the subject matter, what concerns me is whether the quality of training meets this need, especially for those who are most motivated. Simply having a wide scope might not be enough."* (P1)

The extent the trainers are able to consider the training needs of participants in the trainings they facilitate is usually high. The trainers were talking a lot about the difficulties to respond to the diverse needs of participants, especially with different motivations and experiences.

"There's also the issue of tourism within Erasmus Plus, where you travel to provide training and find that out of 25 participants, around 15 are merely tourists. It becomes incredibly challenging as a trainer because you don't want to disappoint these tourists either, considering they've made the effort to attend and are sacrificing their time. They're seeking enjoyment from the experience. Meanwhile, you must also cater to those participants who are genuinely interested in delving deeper into the topic. I often find myself in such situations, with how to work it out. It's truly challenging because if you neglect the fun element, you risk disappointing a significant portion of the group, which could lead to a negative atmosphere during the training. However, you also can't neglect the needs of those who are there to gain valuable experience. This creates many difficulties during the training session, particularly when trying to balance the depth of discussion, managing the total number of participants, and deciding whether to start with basic vocabulary and definitions, even if the training was advertised as advanced level." (P5)

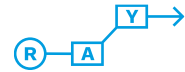
1.6. ASPECTS HAMPERING AND FOSTERING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF TRAININGS

Foster implementation of high-quality trainings:

1. Experience and flexibility of trainers: *"It seems to me that now it's about quality and the trainer's knowledge, experience, and skills. These are very important aspects for being able to orientate and reorientate during the course of the training."* (P4)
2. Focus on learning objectives and clear communication of them.
3. Ability to adjust to emerging learning needs of the participant group.
4. Ability to balance and find common ground among diverse participants (in experiences and expectations).
5. Utilization of proper and diverse methods.
6. Training courses implemented as part of a long-term project – engagement and responsibilities of partners and participants are significantly higher.

Participants spoke a lot about the supply of training courses and how it devalues learning experiences in Erasmus+ programme in general. Other aspects that **hamper** implementation of high-quality training courses were all connected to the attitudes and expectations of participants:

1. Topic and aims of the training course **do not match with real learning needs** of participants.



2. **Diverse groups of participants** (in experiences and in expectations) and the attempts to make the training course a little bit valuable for everyone, compromising on depth and advanced competence development.

“to me also very often it lacks that some kind of depth even though we seem to try to make a real effort to prepare a programme and then you know how to balance again, how to balance between those 2 different groups or categories of participants or not” (P1)

3. **Participants seeking entertainment rather than learning which leads to remaining on the surface of topics.**

“I’ve noticed that in recent years there’s been a greater need for the fun. For innovative methods. Whereas before we used to be able to sit down more, to talk, to discuss... now it’s like people are looking for that wow moment.” (P5)

“there is actually a lot of training courses. Funding is very strong whether it is Erasmus or not, the supply is huge. And then, as P5 said, I totally agree with this idea that we are then skimming the surface, at such a very primitive level.” (P1)

4. **Erasmus+ programme training courses are seen as tourism and/or solely cultural experience.**

*“There are many courses. In that sense, the supply of courses is insane. And people are already looking when they go... they’re looking at **places**, what **countries** you’re going to, whether you’re talking about international training or not, and they’re already looking for that kind of wow factor. it could be, for example, outdoor education, where we go for 3 days in the mountains in Georgia.” (P5)*

“people come, especially newcomers, who come with needs to learn a little bit about other cultures or cultural knowledge. Maybe something about the content, about the topic of your training, but they are so very very superficial.” (P1)

What **fosters** the collaboration with training providers is mainly pro-active and clear communication about goals, values, participants; established channels (windows) for communication and established systems of working (in the case of national trainers’ pool).

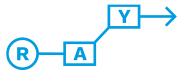
“being very clear about expectations and then sitting down and talking to the organisation, asking additional questions, getting the organisation to tell you about the participants and so on” (P4)

“probably the most helpful thing is proactive role of the customer. To be clear about what we expect, what we expect from you as a trainer, what the end result should be, maybe even in the long term. So that we as trainers have a clear understanding of where we are going and where the whole process should take us” (P1);

“Open communication, clearly stated objectives, priorities. So that as a trainer I know at the end that I have done what the customer asked me to do.” (P5)

What hampers collaboration is:

- **not knowing the training provider well enough and not being able to grasp (or guess) the real needs of the organisation:** *“when you go to work with an organisation you need to also hear about the underwater objectives of the Agency” (P4)*
- **unrealistic expectations** of the training providers (customer) in formulating objectives of the course – to be impressed or surprised rather than learn. *„Organisations want high quality and that it would not be boring. Some organisations maybe have seen many training already and they want you to surprise them, to wow them, to impress them and so on.“ (P4)*
- **Frequent change of staff within the national agency** (in the case of trainers pool): *„it’s very difficult to maintain communication with the organisation when there is a constant*



turnover of staff. You just manage to learn their name and the person changes. That was really frustrating.“ (P5)

- **Bureaucracy, documentation:** “I cannot buy a pen without public procurement. This is very difficult for me” (P5)

Aspects that foster collaboration with participants are the following:

- **Clear communication with participants on what they can expect:** “for me, it probably helps to have a clear communication of what we offer during the training, so that participants know what it's about... that maybe helps a little bit to avoid the tourists, to make it clear that there will be no trips here. whether or not to emphasise them if there are any.” (P3)
- **Preparation activities:** “online preparation call before the training. Either with the whole group or with each national group separately. works very well. but in terms of time it is obviously very time consuming and very resource intensive” (P3)

There was no consensus on which method of participant selection is preferable for promoting high-quality training courses or fostering cooperation with participants - whether through participant selection via open call or based on the needs of sending organizations.

- “We try to find ways to attract interested individuals with a clear purpose, and having a sending organization is important. Unfortunately, there are instances when you encounter organizations that seek participants externally through open calls and similar methods” (P1).
- “I understand your point, and there's certainly room for debate. However, I have concerns about our inclusivity because training should ideally be accessible to everyone. Yet, there's a dilemma for me because if it's a young person who has recently graduated from university, perhaps in social work, and is highly motivated to pursue a career in the field... but they do not yet belong to any organization” (P5).

Aspects that hinder collaboration with participants include:

1. **Participant forms not aligning with the actual needs and profiles of participants.** “We received 250 applications for this training course, and we selected 20-25 people. Yet, despite thorough screening, about 10 people turned out to be tourists. Their questionnaires were completed perfectly – everything that had to be said was said. We didn't understand what was happening. We discussed it with our partners and we realized that many people participate in the Erasmus program primarily for leisure purposes, partying, finding friends – fun! They excel at filling out application forms to an impressive level.” (P5)
2. **Last-minute additions of participants,** who may not be fully invested in the training. “There have been occasions where we faced a shortage of targeted participants or experienced dropouts. As a result, we had to recruit additional people from the youth sector or those loosely connected to the topic. However, their lack of genuine interest impacts the quality of the training. We sometimes had to do this to ensure that financial commitments are met.” (P4)

Regarding the national context, establishing a personal connection and fostering long-term cooperation with training providers undoubtedly enhances the implementation of training courses.

However, from the perspective of trainers, a significant hindrance to the implementation of training courses is the presence of participants who are obligated to attend, particularly in the national context.



Trainers would like to receive the following support:

- community of practice,
- supervision,
- peer support,
- “Space for reflection” (P5) about the values, principles of work.

1.7. THE ETS

The participants did not have a strong knowledge about ETS, they are currently not working on it or with it. All of them knew what it is about, they perceive it as a big competence model that they know it’s there and they know that they can consult it when there will be a need: *“when the need arises, I will look into it. I know there is this pending thing, but I haven’t looked into it yet because I haven’t had the need to go into it in that much detail.”* (P2)

One research participant noted that they occasionally refer to the framework and competencies as a guide but finds the model somewhat unrealistic, describing it as a utopia due to the comprehensive nature of the competencies outlined. They questioned the practicality of acquiring all the competencies outlined in the model, suggesting it would be unrealistic to expect individuals to master them all. *“If we would acquire all these competences, we would be superhuman... we would be Gods with those wheels of competence. The wheels would be hanging over our heads and these wheels would be shining”* (P5)

Participants noted that they occasionally refer to the model when they need to delve deeper into a particular topic or while planning a training programme but don’t use it extensively.

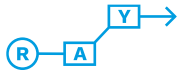
1.8. ANALYTICAL REMARKS

It seems to me that the main challenge facing trainers is mastering and catering to everyone’s needs during the training course. A lot of effort is put into selecting participants, preparing them, screening, etc. Trainers are frustrated with the mismatched profiles of participants. Also with partners, or training providers not following the selection criteria, and despite all efforts, ending up with a group that has completely different expectations, training needs, and motivations and having to spend training time for “finding common denominator for the whole group” (P2)

It is likely that some of the research participants miss being able to work at an advanced level. Although the current situation in the youth work field dictates frequent turnover of staff, leading to repetitive basic level courses.

Another recurring topic was the devaluation of non-formal learning and the Erasmus+ programme in general. The trainers seemed rather frustrated with the growing numbers of training courses of low quality, which shapes an understanding of what a training course within the framework of the Erasmus+ programme is. This, in their opinion, makes it more difficult to recruit participants who are truly keen on learning and not just having a good time, traveling, or having an intercultural experience.

1.9. OTHER COMMENTS



Consensus regarding growing budget of the programme and the necessity to pay more attention to quality, to have stronger screening of organisations who sometimes work as travel agencies. Possible solution identified – more resources to long-term project and less – to one-time training courses. Accreditations are perceived positively.

"there is a very large supply of training and you have to be very careful about the quality, because somehow I have noticed that there is a lot of low-quality training, where it's completely superficial, scratching the surface. <...> And then this kind of image is created about training courses. What is a training course? We'll have nice parties, travel, talk a little bit about peace-building or whatever. You know, I've somehow noticed that in the last year or so, the funding has been growing, a lot of trainings have been approved, and somehow the question of quality has come up for me. What kind of an image are these low-quality projects about non-formal education creating then?" (P5)

2. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

2.1. RESEARCH QUESTION 1

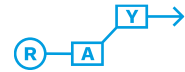
How do trainers prepare and implement training activities for youth workers and leaders involved in the European youth programmes in particular in relation to the provider's instructions and their perception of youth workers and leaders' needs?

Trainers prepare and implement training activities for youth workers and leaders involved in European youth programs by aligning their approach with the instructions provided by the representatives of National Agencies or NGOs and by considering the actual needs of the participants.

First, trainers review the instructions provided by the training providers, have meetings, discussions regarding the goals and objectives of the training, which may vary depending on the specific program and its focus areas. Trainers prioritize the goals set by the training providers and ensure that the training activities are designed to meet the "needs of the customer". Throughout the preparation and implementation process, trainers expect to maintain open communication channels with the training providers to ensure that their activities are in line with the overall objectives of the project or "the order".

Additionally, trainers take into account the perceived needs of the youth workers and leaders who will be participating in the training. This involves understanding their backgrounds, experiences, and areas of interest or expertise. Trainers (conduct needs assessments or surveys (this is often done in cooperation with training providers) to gather information about the participants' learning needs and overall expectations. Which not always align with the real expectations that are learned once participants are in the training room. Trainers often need to customize the training activities to make them more engaging and relevant to the actual participants.

2.2. RESEARCH QUESTION 2



Which aspects foster and hamper the trainers' abilities to prepare and implement training activities in respect to perceived and/or expressed training needs of youth workers and leaders and training providers' instructions? Which of these aspects are more decisive and how could they be tackled?

Aspects that foster trainers' abilities to prepare and implement training activities in alignment with perceived and expressed training needs of youth workers and leaders, as well as training providers' instructions, include:

1. Clear communication of learning objectives between training providers, participants, and trainers;
2. Experience and flexibility of trainers;
3. Ability to adjust to emerging learning needs;
4. Balancing diverse participant expectations and being transparent about it;
5. Diversity of methods;
6. Engagement in long-term projects.

On the other hand, aspects that hamper trainers' abilities include:

1. Mismatch between training topics and participant needs;
2. Compromising depth for broad appeal;
3. Desire for entertainment over learning;
4. Perception of training as tourism;
5. Unrealistic expectations of training providers.

Among these aspects, the most decisive ones appear to be the experience and flexibility of trainers, clear communication of learning objectives, and the ability to adjust to emerging learning needs.

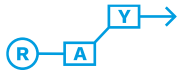
To address challenges, trainers could prioritize clear communication with training providers to ensure alignment of expectations, while also emphasizing the importance of focusing on genuine learning outcomes rather than superficial entertainment.

The general communication about the Erasmus+ program as a learning program rather than a traveling program would be beneficial. This could involve making some changes in calls for participants, placing more emphasis on learning process and outcomes.

2.3. RESEARCH QUESTION 3

Do the contract-status of trainers (contracted by the National Agencies themselves or beneficiaries of the programmes) and the programme strand in which they are holding the trainings (Key Action 1 or TCA / NET) influence the challenges, opportunities and support mechanisms they perceive?

In the work with National Agencies, trainers face few logistical challenges since they are not responsible for handling them. Additionally, they are less involved in participant selection,



which may result in a mismatch between the agreed participant profile and the actual participant profile. When National Agencies organize training courses, there is a smaller chance of attracting "tourist" type participants, but a higher likelihood of participants who are obliged to take part or sent by their organization regardless of their own motivation.

When working with beneficiaries of the programs, there is a greater chance of being asked to entertain and surprise with "wow" factors instead of focusing on learning objectives and deep learning. If the beneficiaries are organizations that the trainers either run or work for regularly, the logistical burden may increase, especially if the organization is understaffed. More time is dedicated to participant preparation, screening, etc., to ensure the right participants are selected. Essentially, trainers have more agency, take on additional work, and carry more responsibilities to achieve high-quality training.

Trainers find KA1 as the most challenging format due to limited time and resources for preparation and working with partners. They also struggle to see the continuation and long-term results of their work. On the other hand, trainings within KA2 projects are perceived more favorably by trainers. They appreciate the involvement of participants and find that the training is often more relevant and responsive to the actual needs of participants and organizations.

2.4. RESEARCH QUESTION 4

How does the ets competence model for trainers relate to obstacles and support mechanisms perceived by trainers?

It does very little. The ETC Competence model for Trainers is perceived as "nice to have," but too ambitious to be practically implemented as a whole. It is useful as a tool that helps to double-check particular competencies that the trainers are addressing in their training courses.

2.5. RESEARCH QUESTION 5

How are possible changes in the training needs perceived at the level of trainers? How are these addressed?

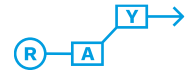
The participants in the focus groups demonstrate a high adaptability to the various situations they encounter in their work. While they may have their preferences, they frequently learn new topics and approaches to stay on top of the ever-evolving training landscape. However, they express frustration with certain aspects, such as the profiles of participants, the shift from training needs to mere "wants," a preference for entertainment over meaningful discussion, a tendency towards breadth rather than depth in training content, and an emphasis on basics over advancing in topics.

High focus on making the participants happy. Even the ones who are not there to learn.

2.6. OTHER REFLECTIONS AND COMMENTS

Very good experiences of research participants working with National Agency in Lithuania which comes from long-term commitment and established structures.

A lot of frustration from trainers regarding participants.



Most trainers want to do more education and honour non-formal learning principles and to not to entertainment activities instead of a real training.