

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

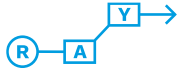
RESEARCH PROJECT ON COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT FOR YOUTH WORK THROUGH TRAININGS IN THE EUROPEAN YOUTH PROGRAMMES (RAY-COMP)

Interview Report (Module 4)

LITHUANIA

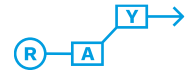
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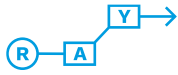
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1. INTERVIEW REPORT: INTERVIEW 1

1.1. MAIN FACTS

Interview date	2024 03 20
Duration of the interview	42 min
Employment status / Position of the person interviewed:	Volunteer youth leader

1.2. ABSTRACT

The youth work biography of this particular informant is brief yet intensive. They started their journey as a representative in the school parliament and subsequently went through various youth organizations focused on advocating for the interests of young people. The informant demonstrates a profound interest in political engagement and actively participates in diverse youth initiatives, assuming roles such as mentor, leader, and communication expert.

Since their introduction to the youth field, the research participant has been a member of several organizations in which they took chances to learn from other members, and most of the learning that they acknowledge is peer-to-peer learning. European programs played some part in their path, but not too significantly. The informant refers to them as intercultural learning experiences that are of little relevance to what they are actually doing in their work in the youth field.

1.3. CONTEXT

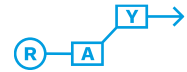
The research participant is a volunteer in 3 different youth organisations and initiatives, employee of a youth organisation, and a student.

On the European level they are participating in international training courses for young workers and youth leaders, although most learning is happening within the organisations that they are a member of.

1.4. MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCES AND MOTIVATIONS TO BECOME A YOUTH WORKER

The research participant repeatedly mentions that initially, they stumbled into youth field activities by accident. Their journey in youth work started with participation in the student council, which subsequently exposed them to a broader spectrum of youth-related activities within their city. They perceive themselves as active young person, which serves as a primary motivation for their involvement in various organizations and initiatives both in their hometown and presently in the city where they reside and study.

Another significant motivating factor for their engagement in the youth field and participation in organizational activities is their interest in a specific area – participation and representation. Additionally, the research participant mentions people who served as exemplars of what they aspired to become and achieve. They observed these individuals closely, learning from their actions and receiving encouragement, particularly from the youth affairs coordinator in their hometown and another member from a youth NGO.



Reflecting on their journey, the research participant expressed, *"the school thing was a mistake in how I got into the council. But anyway, I was so active, I just needed activity all the time. And it seems to me that you can represent not only your opinion and that others will hear it, but also to represent others, it seems to me that this is probably very encouraging. And then that you can meet new people, that you can acquire various skills that will be useful to you later on in life seems to be something that encouraged me to join."*

The motivation to be in the youth field seems more connected to personal development.

1.5. THE EDUCATIONAL YOUTH WORK BIOGRAPHY

The biography of this participant's youth work experience is predominantly experiential. Having become involved in youth work activities at a very young age, around 12 or 13 years old, they have big variety of experiences from diverse types of organizations and encountered different types of leaders along the way. When asked how they learned to be a mentor or to lead initiatives, they emphasized learning by doing, peer-to-peer education, in-organization training, and job shadowing. They remarked, *"It is usually the case that you have some kind of authoritative figures in those youth organizations, and you see what qualities they possess and then try to learn from them. If you have any questions, you still turn to people who have more experience and simply with this principle of transfer of experience, it seems to me that everything works. It seems to me that as you try yourself, you make mistakes and then you learn from those mistakes. And then it turns into such a big snowball that keeps filling."*

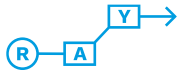
In-organization training holds exclusive importance for the professional development of this research participant. They stated, *"I participate in trainings that are connected to politics"* Additionally, while seminars and training courses outside of the organizations are also valuable, they are not labelled as exclusive learning activities because they are of broader type and not as directly connected to specific tasks within the organizations or the projects/initiatives they currently implement. The participant explained, *"Where I used to participate, mainly the training courses were connected to youth policy or youth work."* National training courses are preferred, because of easier transfer of knowledge and direct application of learning outcomes because of the national context.

The research participant does not have any formal training in the fields directly connected to youth work.

Since the participant was learning through example and through her own experience while having less formal mentors in organisations, this transfers to their activities as youth leader – working together, consulting, taking lead where it is needed, supporting other youngsters.

1.6. THE PERSONAL DIMENSION OF YOUTH WORK

The research participant did not mention experiences beyond youth work or the educational system. Networking, learning, and interactions with people are all directly tied to the youth work field in some capacity.



It can be observed that the research participant is deeply immersed in the youth work field, with most of their significant experiences originating from there. Their peer groups primarily consist of individuals from various youth organizations, their volunteering efforts are focused within the youth sector, and their connection to the local community is facilitated through participation in the local youth council.

Regarding inspiring figures, the participant mentioned a youth affairs coordinator from their hometown, who they described as supportive and encouraging, urging them to pursue their dreams and embrace the learning process through making mistakes. Another influential person highlighted by the participant was a vice-president of an NGO, who organized training courses and provided personal motivation through conversations, instilling a sense of purpose to continue in the youth work field.

Furthermore, the participant mentioned colleagues as a general source of inspiration, particularly those who held positions slightly higher within organizations but maintained an equal relationship regardless of the hierarchy. They emphasized the friendship within these relationships, allowing for open conversations and mutual support.

1.7. THE IMPACT OF THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

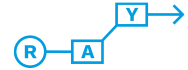
So far, the research participant perceives the European context as adding value to their personal and professional development primarily through its intercultural aspect, which broadens perspectives beyond the national context. As a former participant of one of the EU programmes, they assert that the cultural program they had planned for the journey now enables them to better navigate various issues at work or in volunteering actions, offering a broader perspective on diverse matters. Additionally, they mentioned the European Youth Dialogue program, which provided them insights into processes occurring in different countries.

Regarding international training courses, it was noted that the intercultural aspect is valuable, but equally important is the intergenerational dimension. However, while acknowledging the benefits, the research participant expresses doubts about the relevance of international activities compared to national programs in terms of topics and applicability. They remarked, *"You can gain good experiences in international programs, but I don't relate to them as much as the national level training."*

1.8. ANALYTICAL REMARKS

Self-assessed training needs:

- How to work with young people, how to ask questions, how to solve problems, and identify possible solutions and levels for solutions;
- Techniques for transferring knowledge;
- Strategies for involving young people in activities;
- Understanding youth policy structures;
- Embracing the values of youth work, particularly reliability and trustworthiness;
- Enhancing communication skills;
- Improving time management abilities.



Another set of self-assessed learning needs is directly linked to their current job, which could be described as narrow, focusing on practical "how-to" skills or niche topics such as "political communication".

As professional development progresses, self-assessed training needs become more specific and focused. People gain clarity about what they already know, what they still need to learn, and how to bridge the gap. They become better equipped to identify the most suitable activities for their growth as they already have experiences many forms.

For this research participant, the most crucial aspect of youth work is promoting equal participation and knowledge sharing. Even when considering training opportunities that are interesting to them, they sometimes hesitate to join because of doubts about their ability to contribute to others' learning. They expressed, *"The topic is relevant, and there are many training courses that sound interesting, but I couldn't add anything from my experience there."* This perspective underscores the participant's belief in the reciprocal nature of learning, which aligns with their accustomed peer-to-peer approach and exchange of experiences.

2. INTERVIEW REPORT: INTERVIEW 2

2.1. MAIN FACTS

Interview date	2024 03 25
Duration of the interview	1 hour and 8 min
Employment status / Position of the person interviewed:	Full time youth worker

2.2. ABSTRACT

The informant spent a decent amount of time trying to find a way to work with young people. They began in the student union, participated in international youth work activities, went through several inconsecutive years of volunteering, and worked various jobs and studied in different fields of studies. Eventually, after living, studying, and traveling, they returned to their hometown and became a youth worker. Many of their career decisions were based on their belief system and certain values—such as willingness to help and contribute to the greater good. Additionally, their ability to form connections with young people, along with encouragement from external sources, led them to where they are now.

2.3. CONTEXT

Current state of occupation - full time youth worker at an open youth space.

Their involvement in the European youth programmes is ongoing for some time already, they have experience participating in international youth exchange projects within Youth in Action programme, training courses under Erasmus+ / youth in action programme. Currently different cooperation projects with international partners.

2.4. MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCES AND MOTIVATIONS TO BECOME A YOUTH WORKER

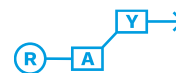
First contact. During their bachelor studies, they were members of the student union, which served as their introduction to youth activities. They also participated in several youth exchanges through the Youth in Action program. However, at that time, they didn't perceive these activities as youth work; instead, they were engagements in which they participated alongside other active young people, seeming natural to collaborate in such activities.

The research participant describes the initiation of their work at the youth department as a more direct and structured involvement in youth work. The informant recounted a story about discussing a job advertisement with an acquaintance, mentioning that she wouldn't apply because "*the ad states they require youth work experience and I have none,*" only to later realize that their involvement in the student union activities and international youth exchanges also constituted a form of youth work with which they had been engaged.

Motivation. "*I always wanted to do some type of educational work.*"

Several aspects are important as motivation to become a youth worker:

1. Willingness to contribute to the society;
2. Capability to create a relationship in which the young person shares openly;
3. Realisation that working with adults is boring;
4. Pedagogical internship during teacher training studies;



5. Several conversations, including one with youth affairs coordinator.

Meaningful experiences. Pedagogical studies and a pedagogical internship in a school provided them with the opportunity to explore working with young people. They observed that students entrusted them with personal issues and came to the realization that schools often maintain a restrictive work culture, heavily structured from external and hierarchical influences. This realization prompted them to consider alternative approaches to youth engagement, eventually leading to a youth centre.

Another significant experience occurred when they made the decision to return to their hometown. Their intention was to take a break from formal employment and explore opportunities for volunteering with young people. Upon reaching out to a youth affairs coordinator in their hometown to inquire about volunteering opportunities, they were informed that a youth worker at a local youth space had recently left their position. Subsequently, they were offered and accepted the position, becoming the new employee at the youth space.

2.5. THE EDUCATIONAL YOUTH WORK BIOGRAPHY

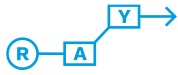
The research participant possesses formal training and a bachelor's degree in psychology from the university, which, according to the law, meets the requirements to become a youth worker. Following these studies, they pursued master's level studies in communication, which they now acknowledge as beneficial for their role as a youth worker. Additionally, the interviewee completed a teacher training program, enabling them to work as a psychology teacher in schools.

They also underwent significant training through seminars, learning mobility opportunities, and practical youth work experience. Several training courses stood out, the first one – introduction to youth policy: *“there were the basics that I still remember even though so much time has passed. For example, about the Harts ladder of participation I have learned in this training course”*. Another training course that was mentioned as a very important one for their professional development as a youth worker is “ASIST” course which is a *“the standardized suicide intervention skills training for anyone who wants to learn how to provide first aid to people who are considering suicide.”* This course was mentioned several times as a very practical one and the learning outcomes were said to be applied many times with young people.

Learning mobility was mentioned as a way to broaden ones views, learn about innovation and, also, deal with diversity and interculturalism.

Regarding the challenges that the research participant faces while taking part in educational offers is the workload and the struggles that come with it which affect participation and learning: *“When I go to a residential training course, it means that my work doesn't stop and I need to get up earlier to do some 2 hours of work in the morning and some 2 hours after the training programme”*

One of the important aspects that this research participant underlined as important in their learning and development as a youth worker is the high relevance of training courses that are offered on the national level and the continuous consultations from the Youth Affairs Agency where they claim to be able to direct all kinds of professional questions and get valuable advice. *“there was a year in which the numbers of young people at my open youth space became impossible to handle on my own. There were 60 people per day, 80 people per day. I couldn't work with them alone. I spoke to several people at the Agency and their opinion was coherent with mine – I went on a sort of strike. I said I will not work until there is a second person hired to work with me. And they did. They hired a second youth worker.”*



2.6. THE PERSONAL DIMENSION OF YOUTH WORK

The interviewee embodies a value-driven approach to youth work. Finding meaning in their actions, such as forming meaningful relationships with young people, addressing their needs, listening attentively, providing a safe space for expression, and offering guidance, is of paramount importance to them. Beyond formal educational experiences, their diverse work experiences in various companies provided valuable insights into their preferences and priorities in a job. They realized they did not want to work for for-profit organizations or engage in roles devoid of a larger societal contribution.

During the interview, they reflected on their primary source of learning, which primarily occurs through self-reflection and feedback from individuals they encounter. Notably, the idea of becoming a youth worker was planted during a conversation with the pedagogical internship coordinator at the university: *“we were talking after my classes what I like and what I dislike about working in school and I said that I have good experiences talking to students, encouraging them to open up, but the pre-set school programme might not be for me. And she said “have you thought about youth work? Maybe you should, because it would suit you”. And I thought to myself that maybe I should.”*

Another influential figure in their journey was the youth affairs coordinator from their hometown, who provided encouragement and support in their pursuit of becoming a youth worker. This individual continues to be a great source of support in their current role.

Furthermore, their positive outlook on openness, community assistance, and understanding diverse perspectives was shaped by their experiences traveling, living in different countries, and volunteering. These experiences fostered a broader perspective and instilled a sense of empathy and openness towards others.

2.7. THE IMPACT OF THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

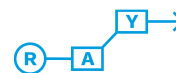
The European context, working and learning within it contributed to **tolerance and values** that the research participant wants to transmit:

“It seems to me that it contributed a lot to tolerance and understanding of other people. To see how different we all are, we are from different countries, but we are similar - similar problems, similar concerns, similar desires, wishes... And somehow I wanted to convey that and reduce that separation, maybe even division”.

“I once saw a sign for I think an Erasmus exchange, like an advertisement, and there was an article called “The more I volunteer, the less I want war”. It was about international volunteering specifically. I thought that this is the truth, the more I know those people from other places, the less I want... I want everything to be good everywhere.”

Also it is perceived as an exchange of **practices and methods** that can be used “at home”: *“from each training I took something to do and not to do”.*

The approach to participation in training at European context changes over time with more experience. The research participant noted that in the first trainings or exchanges they’ve learned about diversity, expression, interculturalism. But later on the approach changes and there is less interest in building relationships with people, because *“I realised that I will never meet these people again and there is no point to try to build relationships with 20 of them. Maybe with 2 or 3 it’s possible.”* Also the selection of particular courses becomes more topic-centered, there is willingness to explore particular topics and content becomes very important.



Research participant spoke about exchanges and initiatives that they are implementing with partners from other European countries. how they see it purposeful to learn from each other, hear and see examples of the activities that they are willing to implement in their town, how they are implemented in other countries, seek advice, etc. *“You take concrete contacts, concrete initiatives.”*

2.8. ANALYTICAL REMARKS

Training needs that youth workers within the European youth programmes assess themselves:

- General knowledge about the youth work policy and structures;
- Communication, creating an open and trust-based relationship with young people;
- Practical aspects how-to react in difficult situations (suicidal thoughts, self-harm, etc.).

Self-assessed training needs change over the course of professional careers of youth workers and leaders and they become narrower, more directed to particular interests of the youth worker (emotional health and well-being of young people in this case), concrete topics, concrete cases, initiatives, their analysis.

The competences that were acquired by the interviewee over the course of their biography:

- General knowledge about youth work policy and structures – acquired through training courses and youth work practice.
- Communication, creating an open and trust-based relationship with young people – acquired through formal academic education and youth work practice.
- Practical aspects of how to react in difficult situations (suicidal thoughts, self-harm, etc.) – acquired through formal academic education, specific training courses, and youth work practice.

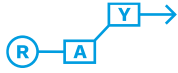
A central aspect of this interviewees understanding of youth work is the relationship-based interaction with young people—responding to their needs, assisting them in resolving their issues, etc. This forms the primary motivation for youth workers—to aid members of society. Additionally, these are the main competencies that, according to the research participant, a youth worker needs to have. It is also reflected in the topics they are interested in—learning about young people's emotional lives, recognizing signs of personal difficulties, and learning to support them during challenging situations.

What it takes to be an accomplished youth worker. Youth work is a value-driven profession. One needs to know themselves well to make a mature decision to be in the field and not make it about themselves, but be there for the young people and help them in their every day experiences.

In order to be an accomplished youth worker one needs to learn about others while learning about themselves and be able to lead by example *“you need to be ready to share stuff about yourself. If you're uncomfortable with that, young people will also be uncomfortable to share with you”*.

It takes a lot of specific training to be able to talk to young people about sensitive and uncomfortable topics (suicide, self-harm). Also – courage and dedication.

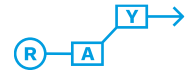
2.9. OTHER COMMENTS



Intercultural learning and tolerance are not indicated as learning needs, but they are mentioned as important and valuable learning outcomes.

2.10. ANNEXES

<https://livingworks.net/training/livingworks-asist/>



3. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

3.1. CONTEXT (AS STATED IN MODULE 3)

In Lithuania, there is currently no formal education study program specifically for youth work. Instead, organizations involved in open youth work often seek employees with degrees in psychology, social work, or social pedagogy. While these study programs typically include some courses on youth work, group dynamics, and non-formal education, there is no dedicated academic track for youth work. However, the Agency of Youth Affairs offers a certification program for youth workers based on the recognition of non-formal learning experiences. Additionally, the Agency organizes a 5-module long-term training course covering youth work, psychology, social work, youth non-formal education, and youth policy. This course, according to the participants of focus group, is highly sought after, with youth workers often on waiting lists for participation.

The (European) training sector holds significant relevance for youth work qualification in the Lithuanian context. With no formal training program available locally and the constantly evolving nature of youth work, European training opportunities play a vital role in providing essential skills and knowledge to youth workers. While the European training sector was previously more dominant, increased support from national and municipal governments has led to a rise in funding for youth worker training within the country.

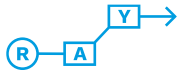
The typical profile of a youth worker in Lithuania varies, but many have backgrounds in social work or psychology. Historically, there was no formal recognition of youth work as a profession until the mid-90s, resulting in a diverse range of educational backgrounds among older youth workers, who often entered the field as volunteers. However, many active youth workers have since gained experience through a combination of work and non-formal learning, seeking certification through the Agency of Youth Affairs to formalize their status as youth workers.

In Lithuania, youth work in open youth centres or spaces is typically paid, as these activities are financed by municipalities. However, within the NGO sector, youth work may involve volunteer or project-based activities, though paid positions also exist within certain NGOs.

3.2. TRAINING NEEDS AND YOUTH WORK(ER) UNDERSTANDINGS

Assessing the information received through interviews, it is possible to make a division between task-driven (participatory) youth work where youth leaders can be met and relationship-driven (supportive) understanding of youth work, which is essentially closer to social work with young people. In both understandings, the general knowledge about youth work policy and structures is the first learning need that is mentioned. Also, communication, creating an open, equal, and trust-based relationship with young people, as well as embracing the values of youth work, particularly reliability and trustworthiness, are relevant.

The main differences that become apparent in the interviews stem from the target group that the youth workers are working with. One deals with active and highly motivated young people. Their understanding of youth work is participatory - implementing activities together with young people, supporting them with knowledge and other resources to help them complete what they feel motivated to do. A lot of equal relationship, peer-to-peer learning is relevant



in this understanding of youth work. Learning needs that are attributed to this understanding are more practical – how to involve young people into activities, how to manage and facilitate groups of young people, how to ask questions, how to solve problems, and identify possible solutions and levels for solutions, how to transfer knowledge, etc.

The second one deals with diverse groups that are often labelled as “less motivated”, who are coming from vulnerable situations. Personal relationship, being with young people, communication, dealing with emotional difficulties is more relevant to this understanding of youth work. Also, practical aspects of how to react in difficult situations (suicidal thoughts, self-harm, etc.). It is important to note that this understanding of youth work comes from a youth worker who has formal training in psychology; therefore, a lot of emphasis is put on personal relationships, reflection, self-awareness, etc.

Differences between the identified youth work understandings and motivations are difficult to grasp. Possibly, while one youth worker prioritizes building relationships and responding to the needs of young people, the other focuses more on developing specific skills while also advancing their personal and professional development. This might be associated not only with the understanding of youth work but also with the age of research participants since the youth leader is still a young person and has more drive for personal and professional advancements. But to sum up, relationship-driven youth work is more directed towards the growth of others, the task-driven can be more directed towards the growth of self. The understanding of youth work as a relationship-driven profession emphasizes the importance of empathy, compassion, and self-awareness, whereas a task-driven based focus may prioritize practical skills and techniques for working with young people.

Shared aspects between the identified youth work understandings and motivations include:

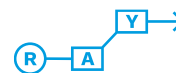
- Commitment to supporting and empowering young people.
- Lifelong learning and professional development are essential for effective practice.
- Aiming to make a positive difference in the lives of young people and contribute to the broader community.
- Personal growth, self-reflection, and the development of valuable life skills through youth work.

3.3. TRAINING NEEDS DEVELOPMENT OVER TIME

Training needs development over time do not differ depending on the profile or context of a youth worker. In both cases, in the beginning, there is a need to explore the field, learn about what is out there, and map the youth field actors, practices, etc. Then (or parallelly), international training comes into play – to see what is out there in Europe, what different practices exist, and to broaden personal and professional views. Intercultural learning is perceived as a valuable learning outcome, not as a self-assessed learning need. Afterwards, there is a turn towards specialization – in both cases, training needs become more narrow, more practical, and more directed to the topics of the projects or initiatives the youth worker is currently working on.

3.4. COMPETENCES AND BIOGRAPHIES

Based on the interviews, some differences come through:



- **Formal education.** One participant has completed several levels of formal education, acquiring theoretical knowledge in psychology, communication, and pedagogy. In contrast, the other participant has learned primarily through practical experience and values workplace learning from colleagues. While they prioritize practical learning, the latter is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree, indicating an understanding of the importance of academic education.
- **Involvement into youth work field** One participant became involved in the youth work field from a very early age (13-14 years old) with full awareness that what they are doing is youth representation. The other participant first encountered youth work during university (19-20 years old) and gained experience before even realizing it was youth work. Competence acquisitions related to these backgrounds include practical skills in engaging with young people, facilitating groups, peer-to-peer education, and leadership.
- **International and intercultural experience** slightly differ. While one has more intercultural experiences from independent travel and volunteering outside of European programs, along with participation in Erasmus+, the other participant's experience is primarily within European programs. Competence acquisitions related to these backgrounds include intercultural competence, adaptability, knowledge of European youth policies and practices, and a broad perspective on youth work.

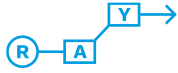
3.5. COMPARISON BETWEEN ACQUIRED COMPETENCES AND TRAINING NEEDS

When comparing the identified training needs with the acquired competences, only a few **gaps** become apparent. First of all, there is a need for advanced level, narrow competence development, need to learn from those who have similar experiences or more experience. Another gap is in the area of intercultural learning. While both participants have some exposure to international and intercultural experiences, there's a lack of explicit self-assessed training needs in this regard. This suggests potential gaps in intercultural competence and understanding, which could be addressed through targeted training.

When comparing the identified training needs with the acquired competences, it becomes apparent that there is a good alignment between the identified training needs and the competences acquired in areas such as general knowledge about youth work policy and structures, communication skills, and creating trust-based relationships with young people. Both participants have demonstrated proficiency in these areas through formal education, practical experience, and international exposure.

One blind spot is the underutilization of learning opportunities related to intercultural learning. Intercultural competence is considered as something nice to have, an important competence, but the research participants have gained it as a side competence. They were not aiming to become more interculturally aware; it was not their learning need. Intercultural competence is a by-product of life experiences and learning in European programmes. Therefore, while both participants have international experience, there may be a tendency to overlook the importance of ongoing training and development in intercultural competence, especially given the migration tendencies and increasing diversity in youth populations.

To me a highlight of this research was that the national supply of training opportunities responds to the learning needs of the youth workers and youth leaders. Also that nationally organised training courses are rated as better quality than the international ones. Another one could be the participants' emphasis on peer-to-peer learning and learning by doing. Both interviewees mentioned the significance of learning from colleagues, mentors, and experienced



individuals within the youth work field. This highlights a strong culture of knowledge sharing and collaboration among youth workers, which can be highly beneficial for professional development.

3.6. OTHER REFLECTIONS AND COMMENTS

I am quite surprised that in the non-formal learning field and training in the youth field there is a wish to have more standardized programmes and how standardization implies quality. Accreditation seems the right direction to take in the European youth programmes.