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**COMMISSION REPORT TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL,
THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE
COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

Interim evaluation of the ‘Youth in Action’ Programme

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Youth in Action (YiA) Programme, which aims at developing cooperation in the field of youth in the European Union, covers the years 2007 to 2013. Pursuant to Article 15 of the Decision N° 1719/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2006 establishing the Programme¹, “the Commission shall submit (...) an interim evaluation report on the results obtained and the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the implementation of the Programme”.

This is the subject of this report, based on an independent external evaluation and on the reports on the implementation of YiA submitted to the Commission by the countries participating in YiA.

The evaluation can be consulted at: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/evalreports

2. PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES

The implementation of YiA since 2007 has:

- offered non-formal learning opportunities to young people, with a view to enhancing their skills and competences (employability) as well as their active citizenship (participation),
- offered to youth organisations and youth workers opportunities for training and cooperation, with a view to enhancing the professionalism and the European dimension of youth work in Europe.

This stems from the general objectives of YiA which are:

- (1) “to promote young people's active citizenship in general and their European citizenship in particular;
- (2) to develop solidarity and promote tolerance among young people, in particular in order to reinforce social cohesion in the EU;
- (3) to foster mutual understanding between young people in different countries;

¹ OJ L 327, 24.11.2006, p.30.

- (4) to contribute to developing the quality of support systems for youth activities and the capabilities of civil society organisations in the youth field;
- (5) to promote European cooperation in the youth field”

and which “complement the objectives pursued in other areas of the Community's activities, in particular in the field of lifelong learning, including vocational training and non-formal and informal learning, as well as in other fields, such as culture, sport and employment”.

3. KEY FIGURES

The main quantitative outcomes of YiA over the three years 2007-2009 (see Annex) are the following:

- more than 380 000 persons (278 000 young people and 102 000 youth workers) have participated in YiA;
- 21 800 projects were granted out of 42 700 (an increase by 14% from 2007 to 2008 and by 18% from 2008 to 2009) projects submitted; the proportion of the projects granted has fallen from 52% in 2007 to 43% in 2009;
- YiA has involved annually around 20 000 promoters (youth organisations, informal groups of young people, public bodies...), presenting, according to an analysis conducted on 2009 data, a significant renewal rate from year to year (only 28% of the 2009 beneficiaries were already beneficiaries of YiA in 2008).

The operational appropriations allocated to YiA from 2007 to 2009 amounted to EUR 405.4 millions (EUR 360.9 millions from the annual EUR27 budget and EUR 44.5 millions corresponding to additional appropriations including contributions from the EFTA/EEA and candidate countries) and have been fully used.

Given the high number of projects and the need for close proximity to the beneficiaries, YiA is largely (81% of the budget) managed in a "decentralised" manner by national agencies (NAs) established in the participating countries. Eight NAs, in addition to their mission as NAs for their countries, constitute SALTOs (Support, Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities) - Resources Centres providing support for all the NAs by developing special areas of geographic or thematic competence. YiA also supports centres providing information on Europe-wide opportunities for young people (the Eurodesk network).

Some strands of YiA, which require a "centralised" approach at European level, are managed by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA).

4. EVALUATION

4.1. Procedures

The interim evaluation is based on:

- evaluation reports from the Member States and other participating countries (national reports);
- a report drawn up by an external independent evaluator which, in addition to the aforementioned national reports and the results of the permanent monitoring put in place by the Commission, used the results of its own research. This external evaluation was carried out by ECORYS, under a framework contract concluded with the Commission in 2006 following a call for tenders.

The approach retained for the external evaluation was based on the following activities:

- desk research;
- interviews (notably with beneficiaries, National Authorities and NAs);
- focus groups with young people;
- exploitation of the results of a survey launched by the Commission in January 2010² among a sample of 4 550 participants (young people, youth workers and youth organisations), aimed at measuring the impact of YiA regarding its learning outcomes and the active citizenship of young participants;
- online questionnaire launched by ECORYS in June 2010 among a sample of 3 920 young participants;
- online questionnaire amongst 2 000 non participating young people (control group);
- the national reports.

4.2. The evaluators' conclusions

The evaluators come to very positive conclusions on a number of aspects regarding the relevance, complementarity and added value of YiA, its effectiveness and its efficiency. Their assessment is largely supported by the conclusions drawn by the national authorities in their reports.

Moreover they highlight several improvements compared to the previous Programme, though the intervention logic still has some weaknesses and YiA remains complex.

They also come to the conclusion that YiA compares well with other schemes as regards the “client satisfaction” expressed by the participants. The very positive results in terms of satisfaction of YiA participants are confirmed when compared to the satisfaction level of the sample group of “non-participants” that took part in youth projects funded by other schemes.

² http://ec.europa.eu/youth/focus/focus1757_en.htm

4.2.1. *Relevance, complementarity and added value*

YiA addresses the problems identified at the time of its adoption (such as a low participation in community life and the employability issue). The various Actions are considered relevant by the young participants and other stakeholders. In line with the current problems identified, some stakeholders ask for a further strengthened focus on employability; based on the problem analysis, this factor could be reinforced, without diluting the participation objectives and taking into account the complementarity of activities to other programmes. The support to youth workers is considered relevant as it contributes to the quality of youth work and its recognition as well as to the quality of non-formal education. Youth organisations consider YiA relevant as it enables them to test innovative approaches and to build their capacities.

YiA is well-embedded in the wider EU policies for youth defined when it was established; it is also largely complementary to the strategies more recently adopted, such as the Renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018)³ and Youth on the Move⁴.

In terms of complementarity, YiA complements the Lifelong Learning Programme through its focus on non-formal education and by targeting youth workers supporting young people. In addition, its objectives are connected to the Europe for Citizens and Culture Programmes although the scope of YiA is different because of the distinctiveness of the non-formal learning focus and of youth as the target group. The fact that it focuses on the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities is another unique feature compared to other programmes.

There is also a significant degree of complementarity in relation to national programmes. National contexts differ considerably among the Programme countries in terms of policies and other programmes available. Some countries have national activities that are comparable to those of YiA, especially supporting youth initiatives and volunteering. For another group of countries, YiA is mainly a complementary instrument, as it has a specific focus on non-formal learning, covers exchange of knowledge and experience among the participating countries, offers transnational opportunities and places the emphasis on civil society and social inclusion. In a third group of countries, there are hardly any programmes directed at youth, and YiA compensates for the lack of funding for this target group in these countries.

In terms of added value, the main contribution of YiA is that it facilitates international cooperation in the field of youth. Furthermore, there is a positive evaluation of certain aspects such as the non-formal learning scope, active participation of youth and the possibilities to learn more about Europe, and the fact that young people with fewer opportunities are a specific target group. For youth organisations and youth workers, the international exchange of experiences, intercultural and international learning, and networking and training opportunities are highlighted as added value. Young people themselves stress the cooperation aspect, the international component and the wide choice of activities as important added value aspects of YiA.

³ OJ C 311, 19.12.2009, p.1.

⁴ COM/2010/0477 final of 15.09.2010.

The exchange of experience and cooperation are some of the most valued elements of YiA, which cannot be easily achieved by a national or regional programme; the same applies in relation to the mobility aims of YiA. Activities that can be implemented in one country only (like the sub-Action Youth initiatives) are often seen as the first step in YiA and as having a low threshold for participation, which is especially true for young people with fewer opportunities; the added value is therefore rather found in the international exchange.

4.2.2. *Effectiveness*

YiA is effective in meeting its objectives related to young people and has social impacts beyond non-formal learning. Although all Actions contribute significantly to the objectives, there are differences in the extent to which the various sub-Actions do so. Youth exchanges, in particular, contribute to the sense of belonging to the EU and participation in democratic life; the European Voluntary Service has the highest contribution to employability, personal development, mobility and language skills and youth initiatives specifically contribute to encouraging entrepreneurial spirit and creativity. The Youthpass certificate (aimed at assessing the learning outcomes of the participation in a YiA project) is a useful tool for improving chances on the labour market.

YiA effectively targets young people with fewer opportunities through the projects supported. Other activities are organised to reach the target group, such as the training and provision of information on inclusion, which have a wider effect. There might be, however, opportunities for increasing the inclusion of less advantaged youngsters by further encouraging youth organisations to target this group.

The majority of youth organisations indicate a positive contribution of YiA to the development of the quality support systems for youth activities and the capabilities of civil society organisations as well as to the promotion of European cooperation in the youth field. The majority of youth organisations and youth workers are involved in the exchanges of good practice, and networks are created. The international dimension is much appreciated and knowledge is gained on non-formal learning in youth work. It is therefore generally reported that the quality in youth work has been improved.

The influence of YiA on national legislation is limited. Its impact on the national youth policy and practices is more promising partly because the NAs are increasingly involved in policy making.

More than one out of three young people have heard about YiA or its Actions⁵. At the same time, the participants and non-participants of YiA consider that it is not visible or well-publicised enough, which suggests that there is still room for improvement.

YiA has a sustainable impact on participants and youth workers in terms of participating in events after YiA, follow up work for NGOs and increased subsequent mobility. Sustainability in terms of partnerships and networks of organisations varies while being more consistent with regard to networks of young people.

⁵ Survey amongst non-participants

YiA is important in terms of the long-term sustainability of the type of activities it supports. Such activities could probably not be financially supported from other sources in the absence of YiA. Stakeholders are generally not able to access to additional budget in the current economic climate. Consequently, there are limited possibilities for raising the co-financing level. However, where possible, co-financing should be required, as it stimulates the ownership and generates additional sources.

4.2.3. *Efficiency*

YiA is on track in expenditure with a high absorption rate stemming from a strong interest among stakeholders.

Although management costs of YiA as a whole have appeared relatively high, justification is found in the involvement of youth organisations that apply for the first time and are quite often inexperienced grass root organisations. NAs have developed a high level supportive approach, which also contributes significantly to the capacity building of these organisations. In addition, the small project focus leads to a relatively large number of projects which need to be selected, contracted and monitored. Lastly, there are five application rounds per year in order to provide more opportunities to apply and not to lose momentum. Consequently, management resources are needed to support the focus of YiA and building capacity in line with the objectives of the Programme.

The breakdown of the budget is appropriate and there is some flexibility for the NAs to shift budget between sub-Actions, so that the division is adapted to actual needs. In general, the NAs consider themselves to be sufficiently staffed for their tasks, which some of them see as a relatively high administrative burden, although most would like to accomplish more. Improvements in some tools, such as the monitoring tool YouthLink, can potentially help in reducing this burden.

The application process does not pose significant problems in terms of selection procedures and of information on where to apply (centralised or decentralised). The administrative burden connected to filling out the application form and the reporting is generally perceived as high in relation to the project budgets available. There is a call for further simplification, less jargon and the provision of electronic application and reporting tools.

The division of tasks between the NAs and the Executive Agency (EACEA) is generally clear, including in cases where an Action is implemented on both levels. Further decentralisation could nonetheless be helpful. Centralised implementation remains desirable for (a) sub- Actions with budgets too limited to be implemented efficiently at decentralised level, and (b) projects involving stakeholders/beneficiaries at EU level.

Management tools have been considerably improved in comparison to the former Programme. Monitoring is based on indicators and many standard formats have been developed. Moreover, there is a high level of satisfaction among beneficiaries vis-à-vis the structures implementing YiA.

4.2.4. Overall impact of YiA

A noteworthy convergence can be demonstrated both among the national evaluations, and in relation to the evaluation conducted at European level, particularly as regards the impact of YiA.

Participating in YiA is seen as a strong learning experience: "[YiA] makes an important contribution to promoting non-formal learning and to promoting and developing key competences. Furthermore, (...) YiA helps to distinguish non-formal learning as a separate area of skills acquisition." (DE) "[It] has a life-changing impact on its beneficiaries and leads to better education and employment opportunities." (UK)

This learning experience in a non formal setting can create bridges to formal education and training: "YiA provides the participants with possibilities that they would not find within the framework of the formal educational institutions. These added possibilities also have the effect that they increase the desire by participants who are not doing well in the formal educational system to continue or return to the formal educational sector. By participating in YiA activities it therefore seems as if some of the "hard-to-reach" groups might be eased into learning, thereby adding to the national priority of 95% of a cohort finishing upper secondary education." (DK) "Broader societal impacts and side-effects are that [YiA] stimulates innovation and increases the motivation of young people to study." (NL)

Regarding participation and active citizenship: "From the perspective of European youth policy, YiA is an important education tool in order to stimulate interest for European social and political realities and civic behaviour based on European values." (RO) "The activities (...) are seen to improve the young people's view of the EU. (...) YiA to a great extent improves the participants' social awareness as well as their sense of responsibility and their maturity." (DK)

National contributions report on the openness of YiA vis-à-vis young people with fewer opportunities: "Unemployed young people (...) have been made targeted offers. There is also cooperation with the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund." (EE) "For many of the participating young people, this is the first time they are outside not only Sweden, but their home region." (SE)

YiA is seen as having a strong impact on the professionalization of youth work: "YiA has a strong education dimension, continuously producing new competent contributors to national and European youth policies. Training produced within YiA is of high quality, specifically targeted and topical." (FI) "The added value of YiA, for the promoters, is on one hand in the (further) training of their staff in terms of topics and methods of work in the international youth field, on the other in the establishment and development of network structures and the extension or profile of their offers." (DE) "By extended accessibility, YiA managed to attract new organizations, as well as youth categories having a reduced access to ordinary educational programmes." (RO) "It is unlikely the project will continue if funding stops because there will be no funding from the Dutch government to replace it and most beneficiaries indicate that without funding they would not have started the project. The dissemination and exploitation of results from the projects occurs well." (NL)

National contributions report a wider systemic impact of YiA: "YiA has created a significant added value at national level. It has brought the concept of non-formal education in the education field. (...) Additionally (...) this Programme provides significant contributions to establishment of youth policies in Turkey." (TR) "A new law of youth work enforced on September 1, 2010 is to some extent based on the experience received in the course of YiA, for example it stresses the context of informal and non-formal learning in youth work." (EE) "Non-formal learning is key in YiA and represents an important asset to improve the transition between studies and the working life of young people. This Programme has a strong link with national priorities and plays an important role to support them. Among the national developments influenced by YiA, one can name the adoption of national schemes like the "Service volontaire d'orientation" (...) inspired by the European Voluntary Service." (LU)

The importance of YiA in the national context is further illustrated by various examples: "YiA plays a particular role as there is no coherent youth policy implemented by the state on the national level. It enables the implementation of the European [youth] policy on the national level, making the NA a very important player in this field in Poland. (...) [It] is the largest tool used for promoting and implementing non-formal education in Poland. (...) [It] is second to none in certain areas (multilateral exchanges, in particular with non-EU countries). (...) [It] offers extensive developments opportunities for youth organisations, both as regards the use of a wide range of opportunities to co-finance activities and personal development of employees." (PL) "The wide range of actions and types of activities provide the target groups with different opportunities that are not available in the national system." (DK) "YiA provides a number of opportunities which are not supported anywhere else, may this be the unique concept of the European Voluntary Service or the support for local initiatives of young people, who can acquaint here with the project management for the first time." (CZ) "YiA supports activities for which almost no other funding is available". (BE-NL) "YiA [supports] the youth sector in Malta allowing youth organisations to organise activities which, without the Programme's support, would not have been possible." (MT)

5. MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS AND COMMISSION COMMENTS

The evaluators have made a series of recommendations which constitute invaluable feedback and food for thought in relation both to the ongoing implementation of YiA and the conceptual exercise regarding a future programme. The main recommendations made have been highlighted hereunder (in italics), including an indication of how the Commission intends to respond to them.

5.1. Improve the rationale of a future Programme

Although improved compared to the previous Programme, there is still room for improving the intervention logic of YiA.

The Commission intends to reduce the number of Actions proposed in a future Programme, with a view to streamlining and simplifying it, to increasing its readability and visibility and to making its results more easily measurable.

5.2. Consider an increased focus on employability

New strategies that provide the base for future programmes suggest an increased focus on employability. However, this should be achieved without losing sight of the participation and civic society objectives.

In the context of Youth on the Move and the Europe 2020 Strategy, the Commission intends to reinforce the focus of the activities proposed for young people on their learning dimension, with a view to supporting in the most effective way the acquisition of skills and competences through such non formal activities.

5.3. Keep the mix of support to youth organisations and youth workers and direct grants for young people

Strengthening the capacities of the youth work contributes to an increase in quality, and, for the participation of young people in non-formal learning activities, funding is still needed. The current balance is appropriate and a shift towards support to youth organisations and youth workers at the cost of grants for young people is not desirable, as there are not many other resources for their participation in YiA-type activities.

The Commission shares the view that a future Programme should continue to target young people themselves, taking into account the effectiveness of the activities and the fact that they are in certain countries the only transnational opportunities offered. On the other hand one has to consider the extent to which a wider impact can be reached by enhancing the support to youth work. The future Programme will have to strike the right balance between these two objectives.

5.4. Further promote Youthpass

In order to increase the value of Youthpass, more promotion and awareness-raising activities should be used.

Youthpass was introduced for the first time in 2007 and applied in the beginning to a limited number of Actions of YiA. The Commission now intends to promote it more widely.

5.5. Further promote and define costs covered for "youth with fewer opportunities"

The additional financing opportunities proposed for youth with fewer opportunities could be better promoted and defined.

The Commission intends to take this recommendation into consideration when defining the future funding rules.

5.6. Improve the targeting of youth through additional communication strategies

Youth organisations and youth workers seem to be sufficiently reached. Hence, the visibility and promotion of YiA should be channelled through additional channels in order to reach out to a wider group. Suggestions include promotion through schools, better Internet use (with information that better relates to the interests of young people) and the use of social media.

The Commission intends to follow this recommendation on both aspects: better dissemination and exploitation of the results of the projects granted (notably through a platform aimed at showcasing the outcomes of various European programmes in the field of Education and Culture); enhanced visibility of YiA (possibly by recourse to new social media).

5.7. Consider measures to reduce the administrative burden

The financing of relatively small projects involving grass root organisations is an explicit choice made within YiA according to its legal basis and contributes to capacity building on the one hand but entails a relatively high administrative burden and management costs on the other. It is recommended that an investigation is undertaken as to whether these can be reduced by implementing some efficiency measures.

The implementation of the future Programme should be simplified by various means (streamlining the actions proposed, striking the optimal balance between costs and benefits of controls, enhancing the recourse to simplified forms of flat rate financing...) with a view to making it more user-friendly for its beneficiaries but also less consuming in terms of administrative resources for the implementing bodies. Some measures will already be introduced under the current Programme.

5.8. Improve the monitoring system

Transforming the monitoring system to a wider management tool would be useful.

The Commission has already launched the process aimed at defining a more suitable management and monitoring system for the future Programme. This process involves a user-group including representatives of NAs.

6. COMMISSION'S CONCLUSIONS

The positive assessment resulting from this interim evaluation backs up the results of the monitoring survey launched in 2010 among the various categories of beneficiaries of YiA, which demonstrated inter alia that:

- 77% of young participants learned better how to identify opportunities for their personal or professional future and 66% believe that their job chances have increased thanks to the project experience;

- 88% of youth workers consider that they gained skills and knowledge which they would not have been able to gain through projects organised at national level;
- 92% of youth organisations consider as "very true" or "somewhat true" that participating in a project supported by Youth in Action increased their project management skills.

The Commission intends to implement all the recommendations issued by the evaluators with a view to further improving the effectiveness and efficiency of a Programme which receives, year after year, an increased number of grant requests. Some of these recommendations will lead to an action plan aimed at already improving the management of the current Programme, while others will contribute to the definition of the actions to be proposed for young people at European level after the current Youth in Action Programme comes to an end.

Youth in Action - Outcomes 2007-2009

	Outturn (MioEUR)	Number of projects selected	Number of partici- pants
Youth for Europe			
1.1 Youth exchanges	82.293	3 947	123 286
1.2 Support for young people's initiatives	29.244	3 970	40 396
1.3 Participative democracy projects	21.315	301	22 647
European Voluntary Service			
European Voluntary Service	128.023	6 675	16 491
Youth in the World			
3.1 Cooperation with the neighbouring countries of the EU	23.140	1 511	40 807
3.2 Cooperation with other countries	7.360	85	-
Youth support systems			
4.1 Support for bodies active at European level in the field of youth	8.965	275	-
4.2 Support for the European Youth Forum	6.855	-	-
4.3 Training and networking of those active in youth work and youth organisations	37.634	4 630	88 313
4.4 Projects encouraging innovation and quality	2.314	28	-
4.5 Information activities for young people and those active in youth work and youth organisations	2.448	37	-
4.6 Partnerships projects	1.950	30	11 785
4.7 Support for the structures of the Programme	39.552	-	-
4.8 Adding to the value of the Programme	1.311	-	-
Support for European cooperation in the youth field			
5.1 Meetings of young people and those responsible for youth policy	10.363	283	37 432
5.2 Support for activities to bring about better understanding and knowledge of the field of youth	0.134	-	-
5.3 Cooperation with international organisations	2.476	-	-
Total	405.377	21 772	381 157