



**Youth in Action**  
mobilising  
the potential  
of young  
Europeans

# Youth Exchanges:

## mutual understanding



**Y**outh Exchanges respond to young people's natural desire to explore the world. The mobility that the scheme offers exposes them to new experiences, allowing them to see diversity as an enrichment rather than a threat. It shows young Europeans more clearly what they have at home.

Exchanges focus on a theme relevant to the participants' daily lives, such as young people in society, racism and xenophobia, understanding between different cultures and religions, women in society, local heritage, or the environment. This fact sheet presents some examples of the thousands of projects completed so far.

The experience of multicultural Europe at a local level broadens the mind, and is a trigger for developing tolerance and mutual understanding. This practical engagement in European integration offers young people a sense of being a European citizen rooted in something that they have done themselves. They also acquire a broad range of skills and knowledge about the world of work, which can



▶▶ help them to improve their job prospects later on.

A strong international dimension, particularly in eastern Europe and the Caucasus, the Mediterranean region, and south-east Europe, helps young people to distinguish

and appreciate the specific values of the EU — democracy, respecting human rights, freedom, as well as deepening solidarity and intercultural awareness. At the same time, strengthened relations between the EU and its neighbours boost democracy and civil society.



## Some of the many Youth Exchange projects completed so far

*Participants shared the same concerns over gender and racial equality, even though they came from different cultures*

### 1. Overcoming gender stereotypes

The Youth Exchange 'Gender equality: is everything for anyone?', in Kaunas, invited 24 young people from Germany, Lithuania, Norway and the UK for an eight-day exploration of the principles of gender equality and of methods to combat discrimination in 2010. The focus extended from women's rights and feminism to women in employment, parental



leave, and the influence of social advertising. Workshops examined, for instance, typical professions for men and women and the validity of 'typical' characteristics. The project reviewed approaches to gender equality in different countries and cultures, and provided opportunities for discussion with local civic leaders.

Participants acquired a better understanding of the importance of being public-spirited, and a greater tolerance for different cultures, and they shared the same concerns over gender and racial equality, even though they came from different cultures.

**Project funded by**  
the Youth in Action national agency in Lithuania

**Hosting organisation:**  
• VėÅ Kauno ąvairiø tautø kultūrø centras, Lithuania.

**Sending organisations:**  
• Evangelische Jugend Erfurt, Germany;  
• Cardiff Youth Service, UK;  
• Kristoforo pygeviø klubas, Lithuania;  
• Ugdoms og Versfamilien, Norway.

### 1 TESTIMONIALS

*'Young people must be more active in social life and be more open to acting as citizens of their countries.'*

## 2. Think about your friends, not the conflict

Fifty-eight young people from eight countries and from different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds spent nine days together in the summer of 2007 to explore international cooperation, equality and diversity, and human rights and democracy. The participants came to Wokingham from France, Jordan, Lebanon, the Palestinian Territories, the Spanish Basque Country, Syria, Turkey and the United Kingdom. Through workshops, discussions and outdoor activities they discovered the differences and similarities in their countries, and looked at the myths of stereotyping people's ethnicity and beliefs. They conducted a 'photo safari' to find out how far local young people

felt they had a voice as citizens. An intercultural workshop helped the participants to challenge beliefs and attitudes.

Among the results of this project were enhanced capacities for intercultural cooperation, raised awareness of equality, diversity and human rights, and new skills and engagement in active democracy.

**Project funded by**  
the Youth in Action national agency in the UK

- Hosting organisation:**
- Wokingham District Council Youth Service, UK.
- Sending organisations:**
- The Jordanian–Danish Youth Centre, Jordan;
  - Anatolia Scout Association, Turkey;
  - Kilimiliklik Kiltur Elkartea, Spain;
  - Fun Hut, Palestine;
  - Follow the Women, Syria.

*They looked at the myths of stereotyping people's ethnicity and beliefs*

## 2 TESTIMONIALS

*Hanin admits she has no Jewish friends and does not know any Israelis. As far as she knows, she has never met an Israeli.*

*'Now I am learning to tolerate diversity more and accept people with different backgrounds and perception of the world.'*

*'We always think we have big problems in the Basque country, but we know the Palestinians have bigger problems.'*

*'We cannot go anywhere. You have to pass through the check points to get to different countries.'*

*'I try to explain how bad our situation is, how we suffer at the check points. We spent 12 hours at the borders when we came here and had a very bad time.'*

## 3. Branch of olive

This project created a multicultural and multi-religious atmosphere by bringing together 20 young people belonging to Christianity, Judaism and Islam from Hungary, Romania and Turkey for 10 days in Antalya, Turkey in 2011. The project focused on intercultural learning, and each group planned its own activities for a designated culture day, at which it introduced its culture and religion. All participants were also involved in workshops on diverse activities such as Ashura, painting Easter eggs, the Shabbat ritual, or henna night, effectively removing prejudices among the participants. A kite workshop involved group work, and the kites were flown together in a spirit of brotherhood and freedom. A visit to the 'Garden of tolerance', where a mosque,

a church and a synagogue stand alongside one another, helped reinforce the sense of co-existence, and each group had a chance to introduce its own rituals. An imam read extracts from the Quran and explained the meaning in English, answering questions from participants.

Participants learnt about each other's religions and cultures, improved mutual understanding, and broke down stereotypes and prejudices.

**Project funded by**  
the Youth in Action national agency in Turkey

- Hosting organisation:**
- Informal group of young people, Zeytynyadi, Turkey.
- Sending organisations:**
- JMPoint for Jewish Community Public Benefit Foundation, Hungary;
  - Eco East Romania Association, Romania.

*A visit to the 'Garden of tolerance', where a mosque, a church and a synagogue stand alongside one another, helped reinforce the sense of co-existence*

## 3 TESTIMONIALS

*'We stressed that being different is not something to divide us but to widen our horizons.'*

*'We shared our feelings, our own values, our religions and traditions. Finally, we realised that we are the same regardless of differences like race or religion.'*

*For many of the Balkan students it was the first trip abroad*

#### 4. Ambassadors for peace

Twenty-six Bosnian, Kosovan and Serbian students and 20 young people from Belgium and Italy took part in the European Rails of Peace (EU.R.O.PE) project during eight days in 2008. The students from the Balkans travelled to Rome, Sienna, Leuven and Brussels, where they met students from EU countries, and shared their experiences — particularly of the conflicts they had lived through between different cultural, ethnic and religious communities. There were also opportunities for discussions with officials from the EU, local government, and experts in democratisation, human rights and intercultural communication, on overcoming stereotypes and prejudices and developing regional and international cooperation.

Subsequently, all the participants travelled by train through Europe, in small groups. This gave them the chance to get to know each other, to make friends, to widen their perspectives and to

experience Europe for themselves. For many of the Balkan students it was the first trip abroad. And the students from Italy and Belgium were confronted for the first time with the views of people of their own age coming from post-conflict regions — and looking forward to the same type of European integration that the EU was built on after the Second World War.

The outcomes included raised awareness of democratisation, human rights and intercultural communication, and the overcoming of stereotypes and prejudices. The project also developed regional and international cooperation.

Project funded by  
the Youth in Action national agency in Italy

**Hosting organisation:**

- Viaggi e Liberta Associazione Culturale, Italy.

**Sending organisations:**

- Aegge leuven vzw, Belgium;
- Kontra organization, Serbia;
- Research and documentation centre, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

#### 4 TESTIMONIALS

*‘I came here with very clear opinions regarding the political situation in the Balkans. Thank you for having confused me. I have not necessarily changed my ideas but I have certainly questioned them and I think that is a good thing.’*

*They confronted resistance to tackling delicate issues such as religion and homosexuality*

#### 5. East meets West in combating prejudice

This project aimed at breaking stereotypes and combating xenophobia via art. A historic village in the Caucasus provided a meeting point between East and West and a perfect setting for theatre, dance and music. In the course of eight days together in 2007, 16 young people from France, Georgia, Spain’s Basque region and Ukraine created a show. They organised workshops, designed a set, composed a song, and created the choreography for a play that they presented to the local public. They decided themselves on the casting, and voted on the issues the play should touch on — confronting along the way resistance to tackling delicate issues such as religion and homosexuality. Through cooperation amongst themselves, they

overcame stereotypes, integrating elements of the complex geopolitics of the region, including the independence of Ukraine and Georgia (and the tensions between Tbilisi and Moscow), the diversity of alphabets, and the continuing use of Russian.

The results included personal enrichment, new friendships, and deeper understanding of very different backgrounds and cultures. The project strengthened the participants’ sense of citizenship and involvement in democracy.

Project funded by  
the Youth in Action national agency in France

**Hosting organisation:**

- Youth Group in Upper Svaneti Programme CTC, Georgia.

**Sending organisations:**

- Centre des bureaux, France;
- Kilimiliklik Kultur Elkartea, Spain;
- Charitable Fund ‘Pryyateli ditely’, Ukraine.

#### 3 TESTIMONIALS

*‘Our testimony hardly describes the intensity of what we experienced! We discovered another world. It is a treasure in which we can find similarities and where multiculturalism is a real issue.’*



## 6. Opening doors with art and culture

A project in Iceland that involved 56 young people from Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, the Netherlands, and Norway for nine days in 2007 was organised by LungA. The aim was to open doors to different countries through art and culture. It provided a space where the participants could discuss different cultures in an unprejudiced environment, through workshops examining their own and each other's fairytales and folklore, and their role in each country's history.

The project concluded with an event where each participating country gave a presentation of another country's culture. They learnt about how tales

from the past can help to understand why certain superstitions and beliefs exist in the present. And by introducing and explaining another culture, they not only got a deeper understanding of it, but also saw how their own culture can be perceived through the eyes of someone with a different background.

**Project funded by**  
the Youth in Action national agency in Iceland

**Hosting organisation:**

- LungA, Iceland.

**Sending organisations:**

- The Factory, the Netherlands;
- ProjectsAreUs.org, Estonia;
- Northland Academy of Art and Science, Norway;
- Linnanmäken sirkusskoulun kannatusyhdistys ry, Finland;
- The Bakkeddia School, Denmark.

*The project provided a space where the participants could discuss different cultures in an unprejudiced environment*

## 7. Can you get around town in a wheelchair?

The 'Helping hands' project aimed at integrating disabled young people in eastern Romania. Twenty-two young people from Italy and Romania spent six days in Bîrlad in 2010, identifying the problems faced, and exploring possibilities for bringing improvements to the quality of life of disabled young people. In particular they looked at how to increase the chances for social and professional integration. The project included visits to institutions specialised in working with disabled people, and outdoor activities, such as exploring the local town in a wheelchair, and trying to accomplish simple tasks like shopping in a supermarket or using local buses. The participants performed shows in local schools, and set up round table discussions with disabled young people and members of the local

community in a public café. They also took part in TV shows on the topic of integrating disabled young people.

In addition to suggesting ways that the local community can help disadvantaged young people and provide for socio-professional inclusion, the project promoted a positive attitude towards people with special needs. It also revealed differing approaches to helping disabled young people, exposing the participants to the diversity of European views. Parents of local disabled young people particularly appreciated the public discussion forums and the interest of other young people in improving the quality of disabled people's lives.

**Project funded by**  
the Youth in Action national agency in Romania

**Hosting organisation:**

- Asociația Myosotis Romania.

**Sending organisation:**

- Uniamoci Onlus Associazione, Italy.

*The project promoted a positive attitude towards people with special needs*



## 7 TESTIMONIALS

*‘ People in Bîrlad had no views about disabled people because they had no interaction with them.’*

*‘ I am so happy to see these young people working for a better life for disabled people. My disabled child will grow up amongst them. And if they are thinking like this ... well ... in this case I dare to hope for a better world!’*

*‘ The theatre performance they put on changed my personal attitude towards disabled people!’*



*They discovered parallels within their folktales, songs, and dances*

## 8. A Euro-Arab view of the future

This six-day workshop in Poland in 2007, entitled 'Let's talk about the future', focused on the connections — and divisions — between Europe and the Arab world. Thirty young people from Algeria, Egypt, Germany, Greece, Jordan, Palestine and Poland explored together their distinct cultural backgrounds and traditions, through dance, singing, storytelling, and craft. They discovered parallels within their folktales, songs, and dances, and they even found similarities between their native languages. They learnt about the politics and society of their respective countries, and discussed issues such as the challenges faced by women and the role of religion in society. They visited a school in Warsaw, and each national group presented a show to the children, talked with them and presented their national food, as well as playing games and making handicrafts with them. At the

end of the workshop all the participants took part in the International Euro-Med Singing Festival, to which the schoolchildren and the public were also invited.

Better understanding emerged about cultures from this project — not only of each of the other participant's, but also of their own culture. Stereotypes were broken, and respect was acquired for the similarities and differences of the other participating countries.

**Project funded by**  
the Youth in Action national agency in Poland

**Hosting organisation:**

- Arabia.pl, Poland.

**Sending organisations:**

- Association CIRTA, Algeria;
- Friends of Culture Jordanian Forum, Jordan;
- Zajel Youth Exchange programme, Palestine;
- Ecological recycling society, Greece;
- Sustainable Development Association SDA, Egypt;
- Forum für europäische Begegnungen e.V., Germany.

## 8 TESTIMONIALS

‘This project demonstrated how to show Polish people that in the Arab world, people are the same, with the same problems and friendships. This makes it much easier to speak about the future.’

‘The visit to the school where each group could demonstrate its country and culture was particularly successful. This made it possible to bring together different cultures and discover the fascination of diversity.’



## 9. Sustainable development, smart resources

*The participants shared their experiences and daily practices in saving, recycling and reusing resources*

The 4U2C project, on the importance of sustainable development and smart use of resources, brought together 26 young people from Egypt, Jordan, Latvia, Poland, Spain, and Tunisia for six days in 2010. Much of the project took place in Latvia, where the participants explored different views and shared their experiences and daily practices in saving, recycling and reusing resources. They got to know and understand one another and one another's cultures better through non-formal education activities including practical tasks, role games, and teamwork.

They learnt more about respect for the environment; at the same time, through workshops, they learnt how to promote sustainability back home.

Concrete outcomes included communication tools such as advertisements in social media, a street campaign in Riga, and a movie clip. The participants were asked to continue promoting sustainable development back home through doing similar street campaigns and through recording people's reactions in interviews. There was also a heightened understanding of, and engagement in, sustainability issues among the participants.

**Project funded by**  
the Youth in Action national agency in Latvia

**Hosting organisation:**

- Jaunatnes vizija, Latvia.

**Sending organisations:**

- Hussein Aghmed Hussein el Shafei, Egypt;
- Asociacion Juvenil Intercambia, Spain;
- El Hassan Youth Award (EYA), Jordan;
- Dom Spotkań im. Angelusa Silesiusa, Poland;
- Association des jeunes méditerranéennes pour les échanges culturels, Tunisia.

Youth Exchanges are part of the Youth in Action programme of the European Union

Youth Exchanges

Youth Initiatives

Youth Democracy

Youth Volunteering

Youth Support

# Youth in Action

## mobilising the potential of young Europeans

Youth in Action is the European Union programme that has helped young people since 2007, through non-formal learning and wider mobility, to boost their skills as well as giving them new opportunities to develop their personal capacities. It is open to all young people, regardless of their educational, social and cultural background. It encourages intercultural dialogue and the inclusion of all young people, particularly those with fewer opportunities. It strengthens European values everywhere it operates — in the EU and in 140 countries beyond. It funds a wide variety of youth activities, including exchanges, initiatives, democracy projects, and a voluntary service. It also supports youth workers and civil society organisations through training and networking, and promotes European cooperation in the youth field.

### Noticeable results

Youth in Action has a global budget of EUR 885 million for the 2007–13 period, and by the end of 2010 it had fully used the EUR 549 million allocated so far. Its basic premise is that investment in young people is the best business case for the European Union and it is also the way to make a success of the European integration project. Over the four years 2007–10, more than 527 000 persons took part (390 000 young people and 137 000 youth workers); 61 000 project applications were submitted and 30 100 projects were approved for grants; and Youth in Action involved around 20 000 youth organisations, informal groups of young people, or public bodies every year as promoters of projects. The intense involvement of non-governmental organisations and social enterprises is a stimulating example for young people of what it means to be an active player in society, and many participants in projects later become involved themselves in social work.

The projects supported range widely across youth activities — everything from raising the profile of young people in the media and giving them more of a say, to organising environmental protection projects at local level, creating documentaries on social issues such as young people with HIV or exclusion of minorities, or helping inmates in young offenders' institutions to boost their own self-esteem and to make efforts themselves to integrate into their community and into wider society.

### A significant impact

Youth in Action has had a demonstrable impact on the hundreds of thousands of young people it has involved. The programme has enabled many of them to experience other countries first hand, thus developing a greater sense of openness and understanding of other cultures. And it has provided the young people who have taken part with new skills and confidence.

This is all the more important since for many of the projects, the participants are deliberately selected from communities and social groups with fewer opportunities. The whole programme has a strong social dimension. It makes specific provision for involving young people from disadvantaged groups (with disabilities, health problems, or social, economic or geographic obstacles, unemployed, with educational difficulties, such as early school leavers, or from different cultural backgrounds). The engagement of many different social groups is important in ensuring that the European integration project is not restricted only to elites in European society.

### Attractive learning

Youth in Action makes extensive use of non-formal learning, through attractive methods (such as workshops, interviews or simulations), and based on personal experience outside schools. This promotes individual-based teaching, with the emphasis on talents and strengths. Professional facilitators ensure the learning process is conducted mainly by young people themselves, through participation and peer learning. The non-formal learning experience that Youth in Action provides is recognised through a specific certificate called a Youthpass.

In the different environment offered by projects, young people discover their own potential and abilities, and exercise new levels of independence and decision-making. The experience boosts their personal development and widens their horizons, helping them make choices about their further personal and professional life. And they acquire competencies that are increasingly valuable in an evolving labour market. ■

A survey in March 2011 among a representative sample of participants revealed that:

**91 %**

of young people considered participation increased their competences in foreign languages;

**75 %**

said they improved their abilities to identify opportunities for their personal or professional future;

**73 %**

declared they felt more European;

**92 %**

of youth workers considered they gained skills and knowledge they would not have otherwise acquired;

**73 %**

of youth organisations said they were doing more international projects.

### In addition

the 2010 survey showed that participants in the programme have a significantly higher voting record in European elections than their peers. For instance in 2009, **60 %** of participants voted, compared to an average of **29 %** for all young people across Europe.

**60 % / 29 %**



# Who can take part

## in Youth Exchange projects, and how do they work?

Youth Exchanges are open to young people who are 13 to 25 years old; up to 20 % of participants may be aged 25–30. Youth Exchanges can be bilateral, or multilateral, involving at least one EU country. In itinerant Youth Exchanges, all the participants move at the same time through the participating countries.

Applications may be made by non-profit/non-governmental organisations, local or regional public bodies, informal groups of young people, or European bodies active in the youth field.

Participation is open to the 27 Member States of the European Union; Croatia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland and Turkey (the programme

countries) as well as to the neighbouring partner countries of the EU, eastern Europe and the Caucasus, the Mediterranean countries, and south-east Europe. Projects may take place either in a programme country or in a neighbouring partner country, with the exception of the Mediterranean region. Projects receive grants via Youth in Action national agencies in programme countries, or via the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency in Brussels.

### Youth Exchanges in figures:

	2007	2008	2009	2010
Submitted projects	3 314	3 413	3 947	4 265
Funded projects	1 542	1 663	1 592	1 814
Successful grant applications (%)	46.5	48.7	41.3	42.5
Committed funds (million EUR)	30.321	32.934	32.699	34.702
Number of participants	48 721	52 605	48 886	54 146

Youth in Action: [http://ec.europa.eu/youth/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/youth/index_en.htm)



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