

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

**RESEARCH PROJECT**

**ON COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT FOR**

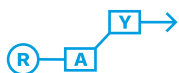
**YOUTH WORK THROUGH TRAININGS IN**

**THE EUROPEAN YOUTH PROGRAMMES**

**(RAY-COMP)**

**CONCEPT NOTE FOR 2024–2025**

1 JULY 2024



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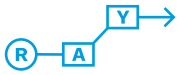
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## 1. CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

Competence development of key actors in the youth field is essential for contributing to the quality of youth work at all levels in Europe. Particularly crucial actors in this are youth workers and youth leaders involved in the European youth programmes and trainers in the youth field. An important piece of the puzzle regarding their competence development are training activities. The European Training Strategy (ETS), among others, reflects the importance of these trainings and recently developed competence frameworks for youth workers and trainers. Previous RAY research (in particular RAY-CAP, but also RAY-LEARN) has shown potential for improvement regarding the fit between training needs both on the individual and the systemic level and training offers. This holds especially true for certain profiles, namely more experienced youth workers and leaders or youth workers and leaders with a strong thematic specialization.

Against this background, RAY-COMP aims to gain further insights into competence development through trainings in the context of the European Youth Programmes, with a special focus on potentials for improvement. We aim to explore the different perspectives on competence development in the youth sector, namely training providers' rationales for developing training offers; youth workers and leaders' perceptions of their own training needs; trainers' interpretations of these training needs and aspects hampering and fostering their ability to respond to these needs while implementing training offers. As each perspective comes with assets and limitations (youth workers and leaders may not know what they don't know; providers may be focussed on responding to priorities and strategies, but link lesser to youth workers own needs assessments; trainers may know which aspects foster or hamper their ability to respond to training needs and comply with providers' training objectives, but may have little influence on some of these aspects), they complement each other and taken together can best show potentials for improvement. This is not only regarding the training offer but also reasons why certain trainings providers consider relevant are not taken up by some youth workers and leaders. In other words, the comparison of perspectives will allow us to formulate concrete recommendations on how to improve competence development through trainings in the context of the European youth programmes. Another relevant perspective on competence development, namely the organisational approach to organisational learning and development, is explored in another RAY project, RAY-LEARN, and will only be touched upon at the margins of this project, e.g. when youth workers and leaders are able to reflect on their teams' training needs from the perspective of their organisation or when they reflect upon organisational aspects hampering or fostering their participation in certain training activities.



RAY-COMP links the different perspectives to the relevant context, mainly the influence of the European Youth Programmes, SNACs, the European Training Strategy, the competence frameworks for youth workers and leaders and trainers, other European strategies, as well as the strategies National Agencies may develop for the design of their training offer. A qualitative research approach allows us to explore which of these or other context elements appear as relevant and in which sense. RAY-COMP is implemented in close consultation with SALTO Training & Cooperation, allowing us to reflect upon the ETS Competence Models for Youth Workers and Trainers as one quality system for training offers in the field of youth work.

## 2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

### 2.1. OVERALL AIM OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The overall aim of this research project is to gain further insights into competence development through trainings in the context of the European Youth Programmes, with a special focus on potentials for improvement. We aim to explore the different perspectives on competence development in the youth sector, namely training providers' rationales for developing training offers, youth workers and leaders' perception of their training needs; trainers' interpretations of these training needs and aspects hampering and fostering their ability to respond to these needs while implementing training offers. In other words, the aim is to explore the training providers' development of training offers; the trainers' perspectives on youth workers and leaders' training needs and training providers' objectives, as well as aspects fostering or hindering their ability to respond to these needs and objectives, and, finally, the youth workers and leaders' perceptions of their training needs and potentials, advantages as well as shortcomings of the current training offer.

### 2.2. KEY OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The key objectives of this research project are to explore

- the intentions and rationales of training providers that shape the construction of training strategies;
- the relation between training strategies and the self-assessed needs of youth workers and youth leaders, especially with regard to competence development;
- aspects at structural and individual level (e.g. funding, bureaucracy, organisational structures, trainer competencies) that foster or hamper the trainers' abilities to implement training strategies and respond to the needs of youth workers and leaders within the training context.



## 3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

### 3.1. CORE RESEARCH QUESTIONS OF THE PROJECT

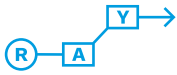
The core research questions of the project are:

- How do training providers construct training offers and what are their intentions, concepts and goals?
- How do trainers prepare and implement training activities for youth workers and leaders involved in the European youth programmes in particular in relation to the provider's instructions and their perception of youth workers and leaders' needs?
- What training needs do youth workers and leaders involved in the European youth programmes perceive and how do they relate to the training strategies in the field?

### 3.2. UNDERPINNING RESEARCH QUESTIONS OF THE PROJECT

The underpinning research questions of the project are:

- Which systemic needs of the European youth field are perceived by training providers and which role do they play when constructing training offers?
- Which role play the European Youth Programmes and their priorities when constructing training offers?
- Which aspects foster and hamper the trainers' abilities to prepare and implement training activities in respect to perceived and/or expressed training needs of youth workers and leaders and training providers' instructions? Which of these aspects are more decisive and how could they be tackled?
- Do the contract-status of trainers (contracted by the national agencies themselves or beneficiaries of the programmes) and the programme strand in which they are holding the trainings (Key action 1 or TCA / NET) influence the challenges, opportunities and support mechanisms they perceive?
- How does the ETS Competence Model for Trainers relate to obstacles and support mechanisms perceived by trainers?
- What training needs do youth workers and leaders within the European youth programmes assess themselves?
- How are possible changes in the training needs perceived at the different levels (youth workers and leaders, trainers, training providers) and how are these addressed?
- How do self-assessed training needs change over the course of professional careers of youth workers and leaders?
- What obstacles do youth workers and leaders face regarding their participation in trainings (at individual and organizational level)?



- Which training approaches do youth workers and leaders esteem appropriate for responding to their needs?
- How does the ETS Competence Model for Youth Workers relate to training needs expressed by youth workers and leaders?

## 4. RESEARCH DESIGN AND INSTRUMENTS

The following research methods and instruments are envisaged:

### 4.1. MODULE 1: INTERVIEWS WITH TRAINING PROVIDERS

**Note** *This module is intended to be finalised in the current cycle of the research project. We have kept it in the preview concept note for context and orientation.*

What? Interviews with training providers (TCA-/NET officers at national agencies, actors from SALTO resource centres) to construct in-depth data about relevant aspects affecting the construction of training strategies and activities.

Who? Transnational research team

The interviews aim at giving insights on the rationales and motivations that drive the construction of training strategies and activities for the European youth field. How are the needs for new training courses identified by National Agencies and SALTO resource centres and which aspects are relevant to training providers when developing training strategies that aim to accompany and qualify the European youth field? Which kind of knowledge, competencies and techniques are sensible to foster from the perspective of training providers and which pedagogical approaches do they esteem valuable? What are the reasonings and hopes addressed to the training instructions provided for the trainers? These questions lie at the heart of this research module. In-depth knowledge of the processes behind training strategies and activities within the European youth field is relevant background information, both for a better understanding of the training field in general and for contextualization of the trainers' and youth workers / leaders' experiences with training activities specifically.



## 4.2. MODULE 2: FOCUS GROUPS WITH TRAINERS AT NATIONAL LEVEL

**Note** *This module is intended to be finalised in the current cycle of the research project. We have kept it in the preview concept note for context and orientation.*

What? Focus Groups with trainers on a) aspects hampering and fostering the implementation of training instructions provided by National Agencies / SALTO resource centres, b) their perception of and experiences with training needs of youth workers and leaders and its relation to training activities.

Who? National researchers

The focus groups aim at covering the perspective of trainers. As they are the ones carrying out the training activities developed by training providers, they function like an intermediate hinge when it comes to transferring the providers' intentions of qualification to the learning experiences of youth workers and leaders on the ground. Which obstacles do they face when implementing training activities and what support mechanisms do they encounter and wish for? How do they use the training instructions provided by NAs and SALTO resource centres and how aware are they of the underlying goals?

Considering the diversity of trainers' contractual relations, focus groups should not mix trainers mainly working on TCA-/NET activities and KA1 trainings in the same groups. Similarly, the different levels of experience could difficult group dynamics, so that very experienced trainers and newcomers should not be assigned to the same groups.

In order to be able to distinguish the different trainer profiles and thus focus groups at transnational level, we ask you to pick which of the following focus groups you would like to conduct and not mix different trainer profiles in one focus group: 1) experienced trainers in KA1-contexts, 2) less experienced trainers in KA1-contexts, 3) experienced trainers in TCA-/NET-contexts and 4) less experienced trainers in TCA-/NET-contexts.

Reflections about the ETS competence models only make sense with trainers who are already familiar with these models. We recommend to select for one FG with experienced trainers in TCA-NET- contexts (FG type 3) trainers familiar with the ETS.

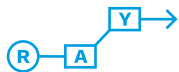
If you would like to cover all these different focus groups as well at national level, you would thus have to conduct at least 4 focus groups.

We recommend to conduct at national level:

1-3 focus groups with trainers (in particular if your youth sector or trainer pool is small)

2-4 focus groups with trainers (in particular if your youth sector or trainer pool is middle-sized)

3-5 focus groups with trainers (in particular if your youth sector or trainer pool is big)



### 4.3. MODULE 3: FOCUS GROUPS WITH YOUTH WORKERS AND LEADERS AT NATIONAL LEVEL

**Note** *This module is intended to be finalised in the current cycle of the research project. We have kept it in the preview concept note for context and orientation.*

**What?** Focus Groups with youth workers and leaders active at national and European level to construct in-depth data about training needs and their relation to training offers in the European youth field.

**Who?** National researchers

The focus groups aim at giving insights into the training needs of youth workers and leaders who are active at national and European level. Following up on findings from RAY-CAP, we aim to differentiate between different target groups, in particular youth workers and leaders with more and less experience in international youth work and whose work is thematically specialised (e.g. work with young offenders).

We recommend to not mix different profiles in the same focus group, and to conduct separate focus groups with 1) experienced youth workers and leaders, 2) youth workers and leaders who are relatively new to international youth work and 3) youth workers and leaders whose youth work is thematically specialised. Depending on the national context, different thematic specialisations may be important and it might be interesting to conduct alternative or additional focus groups, for example distinguishing youth workers and leaders who work on a voluntary basis from those who earn their living through this work.

If the participants of the focus group are familiar with the ETS competence model for youth workers, the focus groups may furthermore look into the competence model, inviting reflections against the background of their needs. Similar to module 2, it can make sense to construct one focus group with experienced youth workers and leaders who are familiar with the ETS competence models.

If you would like to cover all these different focus groups at national level, you would thus have to conduct at least 3 focus groups. Our aim is to cover the diversity at transnational level, so you can also conduct fewer focus groups, picking from the described types which profiles you would like to engage with and not mixing different profiles in the same group.

We recommend to conduct at national level:

1-3 focus groups with youth workers and leaders (in particular if your youth sector is small)

2-4 focus groups with youth workers and leaders (in particular if your youth sector is middle-sized)

3-5 focus groups with youth workers and leaders (in particular if your youth sector is big)





## 4.4. MODULE 4 (OPTIONAL): INTERVIEWS WITH YOUTH WORKERS AND LEADERS

**Note** *This module is intended to be finalised in the current cycle of the research project. We have kept it in the preview concept note for context and orientation.*

What? Narrative Interviews on professional / youth work-related biographies of youth workers and youth leaders.

Who? National researchers and transnational research team

In order to connect training needs back to the broader concept of competence development, this module aims at exploring the competence development of individual youth workers and leaders from a biographical approach. Beyond different educational and professional backgrounds, these interviews consider competence development in other spheres of life and its application to youth work contexts. Different places of learning, meaningful experiences and live-changing events are considered. While national researchers conduct these interviews in their national languages with youth workers and leaders who are active at national and European level, the transnational research team interviews youth workers and leaders who are mostly or exclusively active in European youth work.

Depending on the size of your youth sector we recommend to conduct:

2-3 interviews with youth workers and leaders (in particular if your youth sector is small)

3-4 interviews with youth workers and leaders (in particular if your youth sector is middle-sized)

4-5 interviews with youth workers and leaders (in particular if your youth sector is big)

## 4.5. MODULE 5 (OPTIONAL): THEMATIC MODULE FOR RAY MONITORING SURVEYS

What? Revision of the questions linked to competence development in the RAY-MON and SOC monitoring surveys.

Who? Transnational research team

Through this final module, key findings of the project will be used to revise the items covering key aspects of competence development and trainings in the context of the European youth programmes.

## 5. RESEARCH SCHEDULE

The following table provides an overview of main activities at transnational and national level for the subsequent project phase of the research project (2024–2025):

Date	Activities at transnational level	Activities at national level
<b>Finalised by then</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Interviews with training providers (module 1)</li> <li>▪ Transnational interviews with youth workers and leaders (module 4)</li> <li>▪ Transnational analysis of focus groups with trainers &amp; youth workers and leaders (module 2-3)</li> <li>▪ Transnational analysis of interviews with youth workers and trainers (module 4)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ National focus groups with trainers (module 2)</li> <li>▪ National focus groups with youth workers and leaders (module 3)</li> <li>▪ National interviews with youth workers and leaders (module 4)</li> <li>▪ National analysis of focus groups with trainers &amp; youth workers and leaders (module 2 and 3)</li> <li>▪ National analysis of interviews with youth workers and leaders (module 4)</li> </ul>
<b>7-12/2024</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Revision of the RAY-MON / SOC items on competence development (module 5)</li> <li>▪ Research report, policy brief, fact sheets etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Feedback to survey revisions</li> <li>▪ Feedback to research reports and other outputs of the research project</li> </ul>
<b>1-6/2025</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Research communication on key findings from research and policy reports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Research communication on key findings from research and policy reports</li> </ul>

## 6. RESEARCH OUTLOOK

The working group of the project and the strategy group of the network will discuss next year whether and how to continue the research project beyond 2025, resulting in a proposal for the 2024 network meeting.



## 7. PARTNER CONTRIBUTIONS

The following table provides an overview of basic and optional contributions to the research project by project partners:

Basic contribution of partners	Optional contributions of partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Financial contribution to the transnational costs of the research project</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participation in the working group of the research project</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feedback to research project outputs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Translation of research reports and/or fact-sheets into national languages</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support in distributing the findings of the research project</li> </ul>	

## 8. RESEARCH PARTNERS

Research partners of this project are the RAY Network partners in Belgium (Flemish Community), Bulgaria, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania and Portugal. Further partners are always welcome to join.