Research-based
analysis of European
youth programmes

RESEARCH PROJECT ON THE ROLE OF DIGITALISATION IN YOUTH WORK AND NON-FORMAL LEARNING IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EUROPEAN YOUTH PROGRAMMES (RAY-DIGI)

DRAFT CONCEPT NOTE FOR 2025

30 SEPTEMBER 2024

Please note that, to ease contract and project administration, we are using 2025 to switch from an annual mid-year cycle to a two-year calendar cycle. This concept note and its accompanying budget therefore only covers half a year, from July 2025 until December 2025 – this is the first part of the switch. For 2026 and 2027, we will then switch to a two-year concept note and budget – the second & final part of the switch.

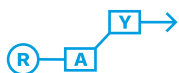**This concept note is a preview and is subject to change.**

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1. CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

While digital youth work has seen an increase in policy attention and youth work practice, there is still a mismatch between the increased relevance of digitalisation in young people's life and its translation to youth work practice. This gap has been the renewed focus of discussions between policy, research and practice – a gap that has come into stark focus during the pandemic years. Many youth work and youth sector organisations have struggled, not only to transfer—at least provisionally—their work into online environments, but more deeply to add meaningful digital dimensions to their work with young people. The initial findings of RAY MON, the research project for the monitoring of the Erasmus+ Youth programme, confirm a wide gap between project participants, project teams, and project beneficiaries, on many aspects of digital youth work and digital transformation.

Against that backdrop, this project will continue to explore digitalisation systematically, in co-operation with the SALTO Digitalisation Resource Centre and thematically relevant long-term strategic actitivities (LTSA), and develop recommendations on where and how the gap between digitalisation and youth work can be reduced.

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

2.1. OVERALL AIM OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

This research project aims to explore dimensions of digitalisation in the European youth programmes, to identify good practices and develop recommendations to strengthen and support the digital dimension in youth work (RAY-DIGI).

2.2. KEY OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Within the second research cycle of RAY DIGI, we will ...

- ... identify, explore, and analyse strategic approaches to the digital transformation of youth work organisations.
- ... develop recommendations for the development and implementation of digital strategies for youth work organisations.
- ... build a foundation to understanding and assessing the state of the digital transformation of the European youth field.
- ... analyse the contribution and role of the European youth programmes with regard to the digital transformation of youth work organisations.
- ... explore the effects of European and national strategies on the digital transformation of youth work organisations.
- ... develop recommendations on how to better align European and national strategies with the needs and realities of youth work organisations.
- ... develop recommendations for youth work organisations to better align with European and national strategies.
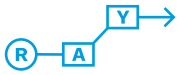
3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

3.1. CORE RESEARCH QUESTIONS OF THE PROJECT

The core research questions of the project are:

- What is the state of digital transformation in European youth work?
- How can youth work organisations be supported to develop strategic approaches to digital transformation?
- What is the contribution and role of the European Youth Programmes in the digital transformation of youth organisations?
- How can European and national strategies be better aligned with the needs and realities of youth work organisations?
- How can youth work organisations better align with European and national strategies?

4. RESEARCH DESIGN AND INSTRUMENTS[1]

4.1. MODULE 2: BEST PRACTICE NATIONAL AND TRANSNATIONAL CASE STUDIES ON DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

The case studies on successful approaches to digital transformation in youth work organisations will consist of a) desk research on explicit and implicit digital strategies and successful practices within youth work organisations and b) focus groups with staff and volunteers in strategic positions. The focus groups will explore 1) the design and implementation of digital strategies for youth work organisations, 2) goals, visions, and attitudes towards digital transformation in youth work, 3) the alignment of European, national, and organisational strategies, 4) youth work's role within and contribution to national and European digital education ecosystems, 5) the role and contribution of the European youth programmes to the digital transformation of youth work organisations, 6) needs of European youth work organisations with regards to digital transformation.

4.2. MODULE 3: SURVEY ON DIGITAL READINESS OF YOUTH WORK ORGANISATIONS

The survey on digital readiness of European youth work organisations will aim at assessing the state of the digital transformation of youth work organisations. It will address organisational strategies, goals, resources, infrastructures and needs. A special focus will be on non-formal digital youth work offers.

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[1] Note that RAY DIGI has more research modules that span across multiple years – these are the ones of relevance for the implementation period covered by this concept note (July 2025–December 2025).

5. RESEARCH SCHEDULE

The following table provides an overview of main activities at transnational and national level for the next project phase (July 2025–December 2025):

| Time period	Activities at transnational level	Activities at national level
07.2025 – 12.2025	• Module 2: Implementation of transnational case studies and support of partners in implementing national case studies	• Module 2: Selection of national case studies + implementation of national case studies (1-2 case studies per partner)

6. RESEARCH OUTLOOK

The following table provides an overview of main activities at transnational and national level envisaged for 2026:

Time period	Activities at transnational level	Activities at national level
In 2026 (outlook)	• Module 2: Implementation of transnational case studies and support of partners in implementing national case studies • Module 3: Development of survey on digital readiness of youth work networks and organisations	• Module 2: Selection of national case studies + implementation of national case studies (1-2 case studies per partner)

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
• Financial contribution to the transnational costs of the research project	• National case studies on strategic digital transformation approaches in youth work organisations
• Support in distributing the findings of the research project at national level	• Participation in the working group of the research project
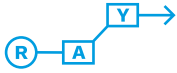
8. RESEARCH PARTNERS

Research partners of this project are the RAY Network partners in Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Portugal, Romania, and Türkiye. Further partners are always welcome to join.