



European
Commission

Youth in Action
mobilising
the potential
of young
Europeans

Youth Initiatives:

**encouraging
active participation**

Young people are naturally inventive, creative, and enterprising. Youth Initiatives build on this sense of adventure, and encourage young people to become involved in all aspects of their daily lives, at local level and also in the wider world. The aim is to provide them with a platform for developing their own suggestions, proposing their own improvements and finding their own solutions. This gives them the opportunity to develop their experience with responsibility, autonomy and involvement, in the context of a common interest. In a world of constant change, Youth Initiatives help young people to try out their own ideas, to devise their own projects and to carry them out in their own way and so to develop entrepreneurial skills. There are organisations that work directly with government departments to identify unemployed young people and to meet them to discuss the possibility for applying for grants for Youth Initiatives.



▶▶ There is a prominent European added value to these projects, although they are often carried out at national level, because the themes and issues they deal with are closely related to EU priorities — and particularly to inclusiveness. And through transnational Youth Initiatives,

young people have the opportunity to see more clearly what European citizenship is, and to become active in civic, social and political fields. This factsheet presents some examples of the thousands of projects completed so far. ■



Some of the many Youth Initiative projects completed so far

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1. Getting young people into decision-making processes

The essence of the project was the exploration of young people's right to be active citizens in their society

'Voices of Youth' aims to provide a stronger voice for youth in the media. It is a group of five young people from different parts of Ireland and different backgrounds who were concerned at the lack of opportunity for youth input in the media, particularly on youth issues. They believe that the negative depiction of young people in the media has undesirable consequences for how young people are treated. As a catalyst for their project, they chose electronic security systems with an anti-youth bias — notably the 'Mosquito' alarm, which emits an ultrasonic sound similar to the buzz of a mosquito, and is marketed as a safety and security tool for preventing anti-social behaviour such as loitering.

The group believes that the Mosquito device exists because young people are seen negatively, as a

problem to be solved. They wanted to change this and present a view of young people as a group in society capable of solving problems. The purpose was not to campaign against negative media reporting about young people, or the Mosquito device, but to stimulate debate and discussion. The essence of the project was the exploration of young people's right to be active citizens in their society.

The group was supported by an experienced coach during the seven-month project in 2010, which involved training in facilitation and media skills, a series of four public meetings with young people across Ireland, compilation and promotion of the findings of the meetings through video and other social media, and a national seminar to disseminate the key findings and learning.

Project funded by

the Youth in Action national agency in Ireland

National Youth Initiative carried out by:

• Work Ireland, Dublin.

2. 'Heart, keep beating'

The 'Heart, keep beating' project created a documentary film following two young Romanians infected with HIV, and gave a voice to a group of young at-risk people by letting them tell their stories and express their hopes and dreams for the future.

The film was made in Romania, the editing took place in Denmark and Portugal, and distribution was organised in all three countries. The 12-month project in 2009/10 had 13 participants from Denmark, Portugal and Romania. The participants not only learnt film and communication techniques, but also gained new insights into cultural diversity. Friendships were formed and connections made between northern, southern and eastern Europe.

The film has been shown at schools and cultural institutions across Europe. The concrete result was greater awareness of a piece of contemporary European history: it told the story of how Romania

in the 1980s became the European country with most HIV-infected children (a total of nearly 10 000, victims of transfusions of unsterilised blood or inoculation with reused syringes) but also how these young adults are now struggling with the realities of independent life, and facing discrimination and difficulties in finding jobs and homes.

The team set up an informal group, 'Kultureuropa'. They say that facing the problems of people of their own age infected with HIV has given them a new understanding of what is 'normal', and they now want to fight discrimination, stigmatisation and exclusion of young HIV victims. Strengthened by the project, 'Kultureuropa' is now a small independent film production unit engaged in social filmmaking.

Project funded by
the Youth in Action national agency in Denmark

Transnational Youth Initiative carried out by:

- Kultureuropa's Danish Working Group (DWG), Denmark;
- Kultureuropa's Portuguese Working Group (PWG), Portugal;
- Romanian Informal Group (RIG), Romania.

The result was greater awareness of a piece of contemporary European history

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'I became curious, and I tried to find more information not only about HIV, but also about what we can do to change people's minds.'

'This project has helped my heart to grow. Particularly meeting the young HIV-infected people that we have involved in the project — by being able to get just a glimpse of these people's reality, it is an eye-opener.'

'Working on documentaries dealing with real problems in Europe that need more public attention is a good way to help Europe become a better place.'

'My contact with this project opened my eyes to HIV and to the people that live with the disease day by day, and the exclusion that is created around the disease.'

'A painful topic and an important film.'

BERLINGSKE TIDENDE, COPENHAGEN, 2.10.2009

This initiative gave these young people experience and skills in managing European cooperation projects

3. Making music across borders

A Swedish–Italian music project brought together 18 musicians and other creative young individuals from both countries to produce a compilation CD, and organise four concerts. The musicians came from a wide variety of backgrounds, influenced by jazz, rock, reggae, blues, electronic and classical music, and they included self-taught artists and graduates from music academies. All the songs were written by the participants in the project. They also gave wide publicity to what they were doing, and to the opportunities under the Youth in Action programme, particularly to other young musicians. The seven-month project in 2008/09 boosted understanding between young people from different countries, gave the participants experience and skills in managing European cooperation projects, and created networks across national borders.

In Sweden, they planned, rehearsed and recorded the CD and organised two concerts. They then organised two concerts in Italy. The project was fully documented with photos, music files and texts created by the participants and published on a project homepage, as well as on social networks and YouTube. The group ran e-campaigns and produced posters and postcard flyers for the concerts, as well as press releases and folders with information about the project and Youth in Action, and ran a photo exhibition of one of the concerts.

Project funded by
the Youth in Action national agency in Sweden

Transnational Youth Initiative carried out by:

- Informal Group of Swedish Creative Individuals, Sweden;
- Informal Group of Italian Creative Individuals, Italy.

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‘I’m proud I had the chance to work with such a talented group of people. Not many times have I seen a group working on a music project with that sort of passion, respect and professionalism.’

‘This gave me a valuable opportunity to work with Swedish musicians I had never met before and to experiment myself as a composer. We got to know each other by making music together, and we built a bridge between our two countries.’

‘I took care of much of the practical organisation, the finances and administration. We knew there was a risk in getting musicians with different backgrounds and levels of experience together, but when they met everything fell into place, and the rehearsals and recording went well because they were so determined to create something good together.’



4. Bringing Europe into schools

An informal attempt to bring the idea of Europe into schools so that young people could understand it better has grown into a vigorous organisation operating at national level, ‘Europa macht Schule’, involving students from across other European countries.

The group now regularly brings to life the concept of inter-European exchange, while sharing ideas and knowledge. Erasmus students from all over Europe present their country in a creative way to

young people in schools, creating mini-projects with them for a few hours and developing dialogue. This breaks down stereotypes and preconceptions about other cultures and opens German schoolchildren’s eyes to the diversity of European life. In 2010, the young people from ‘Europa macht Schule’ organised an international training session for multipliers to extend their concept to other European countries.

Project funded by
the Youth in Action national agency in Germany

National Youth Initiative carried out by:

- Europa macht Schule e.V., Germany.

5. Schools helping development

Every year, in October, Belgian secondary school students spend one school day as volunteers in a company, shop or organisation in their neighbourhood, and donate their earnings for the day to an NGO of their choice that is working towards the millenium goals in the developing world. Local companies, shops and organisations help by advertising vacancies on the project's website. In the run-up to the 'work' day, every participating school can take part in an educational week, largely prepared by the students themselves, with visits from young people from the supported projects, and specially prepared teaching materials,

youth magazines and movies. The project has grown since its start in 2006, with 10 000 youngsters and 128 schools participating in 2011.

Zuiddag NGO is a low-budget organisation aiming to give youngsters the chance to make a difference in the world by bringing together schools, companies and youngsters from North and South. It is all about raising awareness and promoting action to build a sustainable and fair society.

Project funded by
the Youth in Action national agency
in the Flemish-speaking community of Belgium

National Youth Initiative carried out by:
 • VZW Zuiddag, Belgium.

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‘ We will never forget this week in Flanders. We felt really welcome. We know now that we have support to make changes in Brazil and to make our educational systems better.’

‘ This is a really cool experience. I did it mainly to help the Brazilian youngsters who were in our school, but I learned a lot from it for myself.’

‘ The Brazilian youngsters now believe more firmly in their future, and the Flemish youngsters learned a lot about Brazil, about working, about themselves.’

6. Winning understanding for displaced minorities

Thirteen young people in Austria put together an awareness campaign about the daily life of asylum seekers, with a short film, a photo exhibition and a brochure. For two weeks in 2008, information stands in Innsbruck's main station highlighted the obstacles faced by asylum seekers and Roma in Austria. Visitors to the exhibition had the chance for close contact with different cultures, through enjoying typical food cooked by asylum seekers and music played by Roma.

The exhibition later went on to train stations in the Tirol and Vorarlberg. The young people running the project obtained a deeper understanding of the situation of asylum seekers and Roma, who were involved throughout, as well as greater awareness of human rights, other cultures and problems of integration.

Project funded by
the Youth in Action national agency in Austria

National Youth Initiative carried out by:
 • Projektgruppe 'Asyl', Austria.

The young people running the project obtained a deeper understanding of the situation of asylum seekers and Roma



7. Ecology in Portugal

This national project in Portugal involved 20 young people for four months in 2009 in promoting participation in youth centre activities, so as to develop the autonomy, initiative and responsibility of young people. The themes of the project were the environment and the European dimension of environmental issues.

The participants first carried out their own research work and adopted positions on a number of ecological subjects. They also obtained data about ecological practices among the local population. They then organised workshops and activities with

people living in the area. The results were improved environmental awareness in the local community, increased interest and engagement among young people in environmental issues, and development of their abilities to take the initiative in these areas. The project also developed intergenerational contacts, and promoted conservation of the environment and the use of sustainable technologies.

Project funded by
the Youth in Action national agency in Portugal

National Youth Initiative carried out by:
• Associação Juvenil de Deão, Portugal.

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The result was improved environmental awareness in the local community



The project helped integrate these young people into their community and into wider society

8. From inside prison to inside society

Four young offenders in a rehabilitation unit in Malta helped build a professional kitchen that they themselves could use, to replace the food pre-prepared elsewhere by adult inmates and delivered in containers. The 18-month-project carried out in 2008/09 allowed the young residents to apply for funding, plan the kitchen set-up, choose the best offers, work with professionals from health authorities and food suppliers, and work on the kitchen's construction under the guidance of qualified tradesmen.

The result was that the participants managed to run the kitchen so successfully that food was provided for the entire facility — improving the lives of everyone there. At a personal level, the project empowered the participants and developed their integration into their community and wider society, as well as increasing their skill sets and boosting their chances of subsequent employment.

Project funded by
the Youth in Action national agency in Malta

National Youth Initiative carried out by:
• Young Offenders Unit of Rehabilitation Services, Malta.

Youth Initiatives 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. 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, to 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 Initiative projects, and how do they work?

Youth Initiatives can be national, designed at local, regional or national levels and developed by a single group in its country, or international, networking youth initiatives in different countries. They are open to people aged 18–30, although people as young as 15 can take part if accompanied by a coach. Applications can be made by non-profit and non-governmental organisations or by informal groups of young people.

Participation is open to the 27 Member States of the European Union, as well as to Croatia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland and Turkey (programme countries), and grants are made via Youth in Action national agencies in those countries.

Youth Initiatives in figures:

	2007	2008	2009	2010
Projects receiving grants	3 014	3 504	4 529	4 985
Granted projects	1 252	1 324	1 394	1 557
Successful grant applications (%)	41.5	37.8	30.8	31.2
Committed funds (million EUR)	8.087	9.839	10.456	10.040
Number of participants	14 133	13 476	12 787	14 244

Youth in Action: http://ec.europa.eu/youth/index_en.htm



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