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ERASMUS VIRTUAL EXCHANGE FOR ACTIVE
CITIZENSHIP AND SOCIAL EXCHANGE

Project's website: www.eyesnetwork.org

SURVEY REPORT

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NEED ANALYSIS 2025

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose of the survey and focus group

The survey seeks to evaluate the concrete requirements of the participants, involving the needed infrastructure and training needs regarding the virtual exchange projects. It contributes to the customization of the programme to secure its inclusivity, coherence, and feasibility.

The Focus group delivers greater understanding of the interviewees' background and the project's impact, as well as engaging the target group in the design procedure to enhance involvement and accountability.

Combined, these shall ensure the project's inclusiveness, needs-centeredness, and participant-led nature.

Key findings

The main findings from both the survey and the focus group are presented below:

Audience profile:

- Mainly newcomers or highly experienced
- Not many have experience in Erasmus+ projects, therefore there is a necessity for guidance and mentoring

Competencies and deficiencies:

- Assets: digital facilities, commitment, cross-cultural work.
- Deficiencies: grant developing, crowdfunding, conflict resolution

Training priorities:

- Virtual exchange facilitation, grant developing/planning, digital management, youth mental health, inclusion

Educational Priorities:

- There is a preference for live online sessions, with hybrid sessions coming second in the list of preferences

Challenges:

- Low commitment, weak accessibility to technology, language obstacles, inadequate support

Necessities:

- Hands-on, participatory mentoring; Improved funding accessibility; better communication

Conclusions:

- Inclusive approaches strengthen both ownership and commitment
- Addressing digital/facilities deficits
- Engaging families and civil society
- Genuine, equipped educators make a greater impact

Main recommendations, in summary

The main recommendations from both the survey and the focus group are presented below:

Increase Engagement:

- Use energizers and role-based tasks. Empower youth to take the lead—experiential learning fosters confidence.

Prioritize Accessibility in Design:

- Platforms should be mobile-friendly, optimized for low-bandwidth environments, and support multiple languages and enable chat-based interaction.

Train Youth Workers Effectively:

- Focus on virtual facilitation, conflict/time management, intercultural skills, mental health awareness, and parent engagement.
-

Build Community, Not Just Content:

- Integrate peer learning features such as discussions, profiles, and feedback. Actively involve youth and parents in the co-design process to ensure relevance.

Enhance Skills Development:

- Offer training in digital facilitation, gamification, AI tools, emotional intelligence, and leadership, with a particular focus on supporting vulnerable groups.

Improve Access & Support:

- Ensure access to affordable devices, improved internet connectivity, and user-friendly tools. Collaborate with schools and local groups to secure financial support.

Ensure Inclusivity:

- Use clear, multilingual communication and provide cross-cultural training to ensure all participants are engaged.

- **Encourage Continuous Learning:**

- Support long-term growth by fostering collaboration, peer networks, and hybrid learning models.



INTRODUCTION

Short description of the project

The “**Empowering Youth: Erasmus Plus Virtual Exchange for Active Citizenship and Social Inclusion**” (EYES) project emerges in response to the urgent and growing need to **promote social inclusion, active citizenship, and sustainable development** among young people in both **Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa**. Rooted in the belief that youth are powerful agents of change, the project recognizes the untapped potential of young individuals to contribute meaningfully to their communities and to broader societal transformation.

EYES brings together youth and youth workers from eight countries—**Cameroon, Gabon, Ghana, Greece, Italy, Nigeria, Spain, and Turkey**—with the aim of fostering intercultural understanding, digital cooperation, and innovative learning opportunities. The **rationale for the project** is grounded in several pressing issues, including persistently **high youth unemployment rates, limited opportunities for cross-border collaboration**, and the critical need to address global challenges such as the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** and youth **mental health**. By focusing on these themes, EYES creates a space where young people can not only learn but also actively contribute to shaping sustainable and inclusive futures.

At its core, the project aligns with the values and priorities of the Erasmus+ programme, which promotes mobility, cooperation, and innovation in education and training. EYES harnesses the power of **virtual exchange to overcome physical and geographical barriers**, making learning and collaboration more **accessible**.

Over a 36-month period, the project will engage **2,168 participants** through three key pillars: (1) **online mentor training** to prepare facilitators for leading intercultural dialogues, (2) thematic **discussions** among young people focused on **civic engagement, solidarity economy, sustainable development, and mental health**, and (3) specialized **training for youth workers** to enable them to design and implement similar virtual exchange initiatives within their organizations.

The **project’s objectives** are closely aligned with the overarching goals of the Erasmus+ call, particularly in **fostering cross-border cooperation, promoting the professional development of youth workers, and enhancing youth engagement** in addressing today’s most pressing societal challenges. Through its activities, EYES is expected to lead to **increased awareness and understanding** of key global issues, **the development of critical soft skills** among participants, and **the strengthening of civil society** through empowered youth leadership.



INTRODUCTION

Beyond its educational and developmental impact, EYES serves as **a platform for strengthening EU-Africa relations, encouraging exchange of best practices, and promoting intercultural dialogue**. By building bridges between diverse communities and supporting the next generation of civic-minded leaders, the project represents a timely and strategic contribution to both regional and global efforts toward inclusive and sustainable development.

Background/ context

The survey and focus groups were carried out to gain a greater awareness of the concrete infrastructure and training requirements of virtual exchange programmes' attendees. This was done to ensure that the project being implemented is not only pragmatic but also inclusive and doable for everyone involved. Whereas the survey contributed to the gathering of crucial evidence on the actual needs, the focus groups offered a far more insightful and detailed look at the experiences of the target group. These conversations permitted attendees to discuss their struggles and achievements, adding precious insights into the pragmatic impact of virtual exchanges.

The focus groups also acted as a means of actively involving attendees in forming the vision of the project, providing them with a sense of ownership and fostering greater commitment. This was not just a feedback collecting procedure, but the nurturing of a feeling of joint accountability for the project's planning. The facilitators created a context where participative engagement was a priority, assuring that all felt at ease to share their perspectives, even those who were not fluent in English. Participants were supported to interact in their preferred language, while translation facilities secured that no voice was left out of the conversation. This approach not only served to collect hands-on insights but also helped to cultivate a greater sense of intercultural comprehension and community among the various attendees.

Data collection method

The data was gathered through a blended methodology by combining an online survey with focus groups on Zoom. The online survey permitted widespread participation with quantitative evidence, whereas the Zoom focus groups enabled more profound, qualitative comprehension via real-time conversations. This dual approach ensured a holistic picture of the youth workers' needs and perspectives.



INTRODUCTION

Data analysis method

For the quantitative data that were collected through the online survey, a descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to summarize responses, including frequencies and percentages. This helped us identify patterns and trends in participant responses.

For the qualitative data gathered from the focus group, we conducted a thematic analysis. The process included transcribing the discussion, reviewing the content, identifying and coding significant segments, and organizing these codes into overarching themes. These themes reflected the main ideas shared by participants, allowing us to gain deeper insight and contextual understanding.

Limitations

The survey presents several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. The small sample size limits the ability to generalize the findings to a broader population, as it may not capture the diversity of views or experiences within the target group. Additionally, there is a risk of bias, which may stem from how the questions were phrased or the voluntary nature of participation, which can influence the accuracy of the responses.



PROJECT PARTNERS



1. ABARKA ONGD (Spain)

ABARKA ONGD as coordinator and applicant in this project is a seasoned Spanish organization dedicated to enhancing community well-being through innovative educational methods. Focusing primarily on civic engagement and empowerment.



2. Web and Development Foundation (Cameroon)

Web and Development Foundation, established in 2006, is a cornerstone in Cameroon's efforts to enhance the quality of life in African communities through sustainable development initiatives. Focused on education, healthcare, and economic empowerment.



3. EKO (Greece)

Established in 2013, **EKO** stands as a pivotal organization in Athens, Greece, dedicated to fostering an inclusive society where diversity is celebrated, and sustainable growth is a collective pursuit. EKO targets a broad spectrum of societal issues ranging from unemployment and cultural intolerance to environmental challenges and political engagement.



4. NGO SIFOS (Gabon)

Founded in 2000 by Mrs. SASSE SAGBO Chantal, **NGO SIFOS** is dedicated to advocating for the rights and well-being of some of the most vulnerable populations in Gabon, including street children and victims of trafficking. SIFOS plays a crucial role in combating poverty and unemployment through targeted social interventions.

PROJECT PARTNERS



5. Associazione Stella Marina (Italy)

Associazione Stella Marina is an influential non-profit organization based in Southern Italy, renowned for its dynamic approach to project design and implementation in cultural, IT, social policy, and entrepreneurial development sectors.



6. AIESEC Alumni (Ghana)

AIESEC Alumni Ghana brings a wealth of experience and a broad network from its history of leadership development and engagement with young professionals across various sectors. This organization is known for its strong focus on ethical leadership and corporate governance, which is critical in the context of the EYES project.



7. Karaman Youth Club (Turkey)

Karaman Youth Club stands out as a vibrant and influential organization deeply embedded in Turkey's community development landscape. With a focus on non-formal education and youth empowerment, the organization has a long-standing history of facilitating transformative projects that foster active citizenship and societal contribution among the youth.



8. International Talent Outreach (ITO) (Nigeria)

ITO is an organization that has carved a niche in empowering Nigerian youth through extensive networks and community-based projects. Their expertise lies in project management, local outreach, and the creation of platforms that facilitate young Nigerians' access to educational and developmental opportunities.

1. Methods

1.1 Participants' Recruitment

Our research participants included youth workers, cooperating with young people between the ages of 18 and 30 living in Italy, Greece, Ghana, Gabon, Spain, Turkey, Cameroon and Nigeria. The study participants were recruited by the project partners who live and work in the focus countries. Recruitment spanned the entire previously mentioned countries. The questionnaire was developed in English and was conducted online via social media dissemination. Data collection was from March to April 2025.

1.2 Questionnaire Development and Research Questions

The questionnaire required informed consent from all participants before they could proceed with the survey. It consisted of 14 questions covering a wide range of topics, including participants' demographics, professional background, previous experience with Erasmus+ or virtual exchanges, digital competencies, training needs, and challenges in virtual environments. On average, participants took approximately 10 minutes and 32 seconds to complete the questionnaire

Through the study questionnaire, we sought to:

1. **Collect data** on age, country, role, and years working with young people to understand participants' backgrounds and experiences.
2. **Assess prior involvement** in Erasmus+ and virtual exchange projects.
3. **Evaluate digital skills and competencies** across virtual exchange design, conflict resolution, digital platforms, intercultural dialogue, youth mental health, SDGs, civic engagement, grant writing, and crowdfunding.
4. **Identify training needs** by asking where participants want further education and support.
5. **Explore preferred learning formats** (live online, hybrid, in-person, self-paced).
6. **Understand the challenges** faced in virtual exchanges (e.g., internet access, engagement, time, funding, technical issues).
7. **Gather suggestions** for overcoming challenges and improving support.
8. **Prioritize focus areas** for future training programs.
9. **Collect additional feedback** through open comments and suggestions.

1.3 Profile of our participants

Total responses: 174

Age group

18-25	61
25-34	53
35-44	25
45+	35



1.4 Discussion of results

Key insights

1. Youth Dominance

The **large majority belongs to the 18-25 age group**, representing **36.7%** of the total. Combined with the 25-34 group (31.9%), people aged under 35 account for almost 69% of respondents. This indicates a **strong representation of younger people, which is in line with the EYES project's emphasis on youth empowerment and inclusion.**

2. Moderate Participation of Older Adults

The **age group 45+** represents more than a fifth of the sample (21.1%), suggesting significant participation of older stakeholders - most likely **youth workers, trainers or youth development professionals.**

3. Lowest Representation: 35-44 Age Group

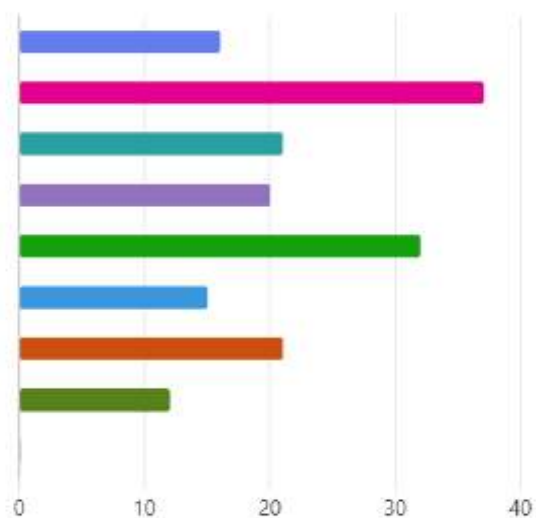
At just **15.1%**, this age group has the **lowest representation.** This might mirror a **gap in engagement strategies for mid-career professionals** or merely a demographic pattern in the target population.

Implications for Project

- The **significant presence of young people under 35** implies that the project **effectively reaches its main target group.**
- The **involvement of participants over the age of 45** holds **great promise for leadership and management roles**, providing opportunities to **benefit from their expertise.**
- The **underrepresentation of the 35-44** age group may imply the necessity for a **tailored approach or customized engagement initiatives** for **mid-level professionals or youth workers**, who could take on a **critical bridging role** between younger participants and older mentors.

3. Country of Residence:

o Spain	16
o Italy	37
o Greece	21
o Turkey	20
o Cameroon	32
o Nigeria	15
o Ghana	21
o Gabon	12
Otras	0



4. Your Role in your Organization:

o Youth Worker	41
o Educator/Trainer	65
o NGO Staff	19
o Volunteer/Facilitator	34
Otras	15



1.5 Experience Working with Young People

6. How many years have you worked with young people?



Key insights

1. Strong Presence of Experienced Participants

The biggest group - 34.3% - has experience of more than 6 years. This suggests a solid base of experienced practitioners committed to youth work, which is valuable for passing on knowledge, mentoring and coaching less experienced colleagues.

2. Fair Representation of Early-Career Youth Workers

52.5% of respondents have a total of 1-3 years or less (22.4% with less than 1 year and 30.1% with 1-3 years). This indicates that many respondents are relatively new to the sector, highlighting the need for training, mentoring and career development opportunities - which the EYES project can promptly respond to.

3. Mediocre experience of medium level

Of the respondents, just 15.9% are included in the 4-6 years category, a remarkably low percentage. This could imply a transition point where youth workers are either moving into more senior roles or changing career paths. It could also imply a potential gap in the middle tier that could potentially take advantage of capacity building to secure long-term dedication to the field.

Implications for Project

- The mixture of expertise level is well suited to the peer learning and mentoring structures within the project. **Well experienced professionals** can **guide junior youth workers**, setting up a **supportive learning environment**.
- The **large number of participants** in the early stages of their careers **underlines the necessity of incorporating core training modules**, particularly in fields such as civic participation, raising awareness on mental health issues and facilitating virtual exchanges.
- The **data supports the EYES project's concept** of empowering youth work competences and encouraging a sustainable pipeline of youth development practitioners.

1.6 Participation in Erasmus+ Virtual Exchanges

7. Have you participated in Erasmus+ or virtual exchange projects before?



Key insights

When asked "Have you participated in Erasmus+ or virtual exchange projects before?", **most participants - 123 people** - replied that **they had not participated** in this kind of initiative. On the contrary, **51 respondents** reported that **they had previously been involved** in such projects.

These findings indicate that although part of the group has been introduced to Erasmus+ or virtual exchange activities, **the general level of direct participation remains relatively low**. This may imply a range of possible **barriers**, such as **low awareness, access issues or lack of information** on how to participate. It is also likely that these opportunities were **not generally offered in particular regions or organisations**.

Simultaneously, the **51 people who attended** represent a rich pool of experienced individuals who **can offer knowledge, share best practices** and potentially **serve as ambassadors** or mentors to inspire their peers to explore this kind of experience.

Implications for Project

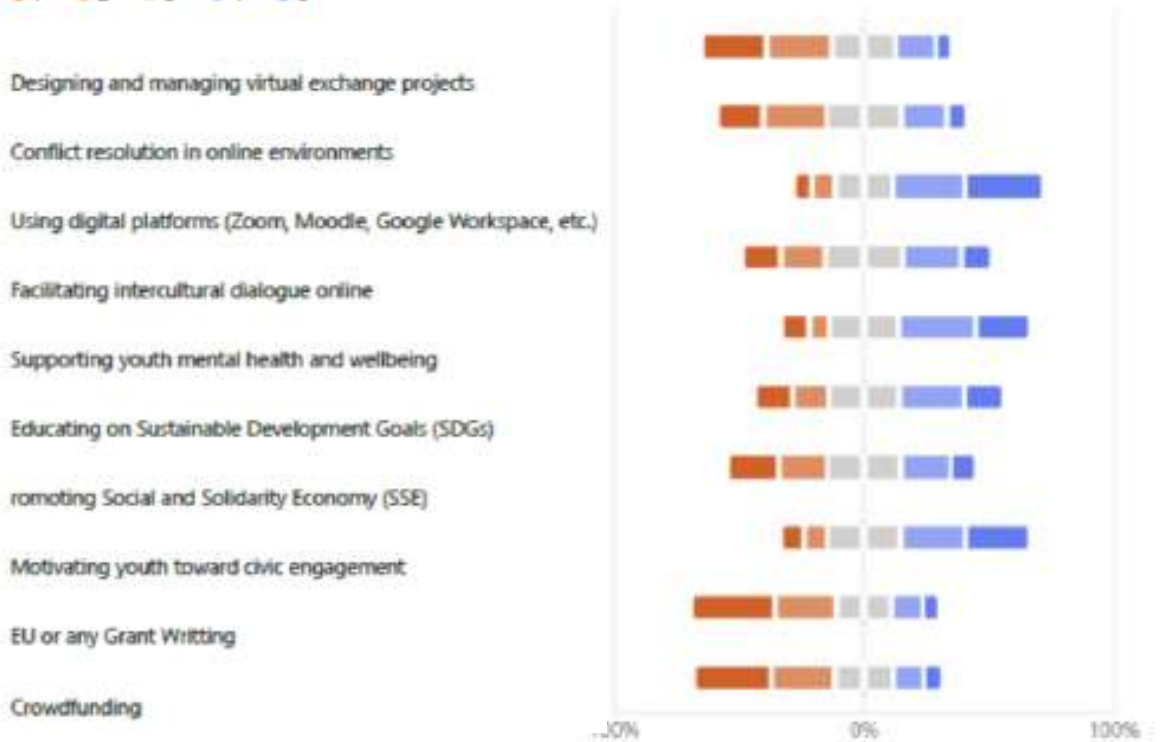
In summary, **the evidence demonstrates** a considerable **potential for boosting engagement with Erasmus+ and virtual exchange projects**. **Raising awareness, facing potential barriers** and **offering more transparent pathways** of participation could **contribute to widening access** and **encouraging greater involvement**, especially given the personal and professional rewards that these projects often have to offer.

2. Findings and Discussion

2.1 Self- evaluation of knowledge and skills

8. On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate your knowledge and skills in the following areas?

1 2 3 4 5



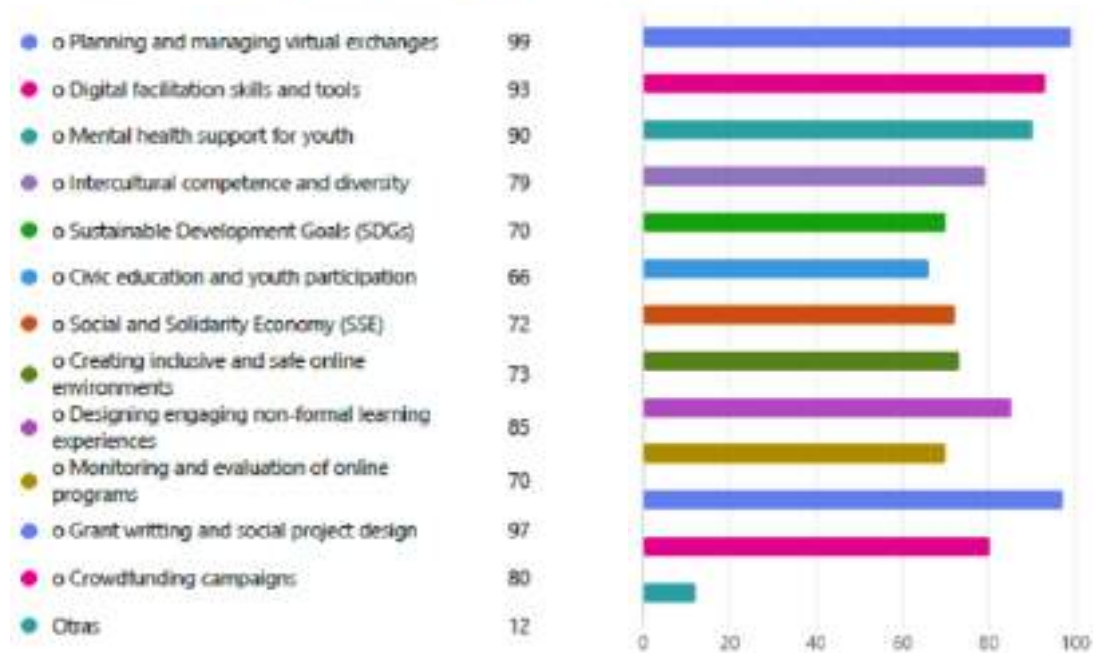
Analysis of Participant Self-Assessment on Knowledge and Skills

Participants assessed their skills across eleven key areas linked to **virtual project management**, **youth engagement**, and **sustainability**. Findings reveal **strong digital literacy**, **intercultural facilitation skills**, and an **ability to motivate youth**, indicating a solid foundation for digital and social engagement. **Moderate competence in youth mental health**, **SDG frameworks**, and the **Social and Solidarity Economy** points to emerging awareness, though further development is needed. **Low confidence in grant writing** and **crowdfunding** highlights **critical gaps** in resource mobilization skills. Variation in **conflict resolution** and **virtual exchange management** suggests uneven professional experience, underscoring the importance of **customized training pathways**.

In conclusion, the group demonstrates **strong technical and engagement capabilities**, but **strengthening fundraising and conflict management competencies is essential** to fully support sustainable youth-led initiatives.

2.2 Desired areas for knowledge enhancement

9. Which areas would you like to receive more training in? (Select all that apply)



Key insights

- **Virtual exchange management** was the **most requested training area** (99 votes), highlighting the critical **need for skills** in online project coordination and collaboration.
- **Grant writing** and **social project design** (97 votes) and **digital facilitation skills** (93 votes) were also **top priorities**, showing that participants seek **strong capacities** in funding acquisition and digital engagement.
- **High interest** in **mental health** support for youth (90 votes) points to an **increasing awareness** of the importance of mental wellbeing in youth work.
- Skills linked to **intercultural competence** and **diversity** (79 votes), **crowdfunding campaigns** (80 votes), and **creating inclusive and safe online environments** (73 votes) were moderately **prioritized**, reflecting a **commitment to inclusion** and alternative funding models.
- **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** (70 votes), **civic education** (66 votes), and **Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE)** (72 votes) received **less emphasis**, suggesting these global frameworks **may need stronger integration** into future trainings.
- A small group (12 votes) selected "Other", indicating a few participants have niche or specific training needs outside the listed options.

Implications for Project

- Training design should **prioritize virtual project management, fundraising skills** (grant writing and crowdfunding), and **digital facilitation** to meet the most **urgent demands**.
- **Mental health awareness modules** are crucial and should be embedded into training curricula to address the growing focus on youth wellbeing.
- **Building intercultural competence** and **promoting inclusive practices** in online environments will enhance the **social impact** of youth work initiatives.
- Although interest in **SDGs and civic education** was lower, these topics remain **strategically important** for long-term project goals and should be integrated in an engaging way to boost relevance.

2.3 Preferred Learning Format

10. What is your preferred learning format?

(Range from more important to less important)

- 1 Online live sessions (Zoom, Teams)
- 2 Hybrid (some live, some self-paced)
- 3 In-person (if possible)
- 4 Self-paced modules (LMS platform)



Key insights

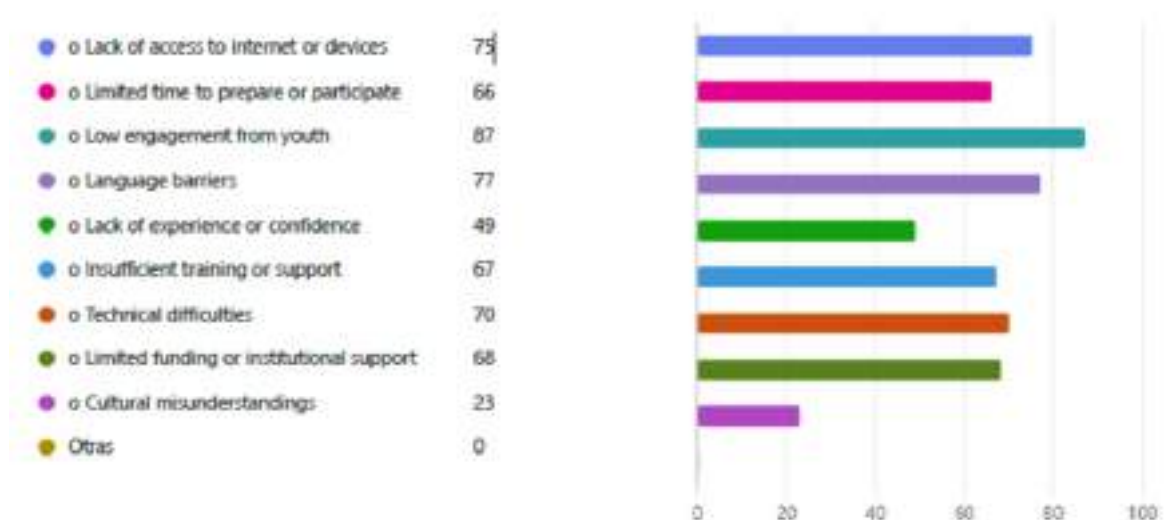
- **Online Live Sessions** (Zoom, Teams) were the **most preferred** format. Participants indicated a **strong preference for real-time online sessions**. This suggests **they value live interaction** with trainers and peers, the ability to **ask questions immediately** and the **dynamic environment** that live sessions provide. **Synchronous learning** seems crucial for maintaining participant **engagement and ensuring a sense of community**.
- **A hybrid format** (Some Live, Some Self-Paced) **combining live interaction** with the flexibility of **self-paced learning** was also **highly ranked**. This indicates that while participants appreciate live elements, they also value the **ability to manage their own time and pace** for certain parts of the course. Offering a blended approach would cater to different learning styles and schedules.
- **In-person learning was ranked third**. Although participants still appreciate face-to-face interaction, **logistical challenges**, such as travel or time constraints, make virtual formats more attractive at present. Nevertheless, organizing in-person components could **enhance networking** and experiential learning when feasible.
- **Self-paced learning modules** were the **least preferred** option. This suggests that participants may feel **less motivated or engaged** when learning independently without live support or scheduled activities. It highlights the **importance of structured guidance and interaction** in maintaining motivation and learning effectiveness.

Implications for Project

Participants **favour interactive, real-time learning formats**, whether **fully online or blended** with self-paced elements. They appreciate **flexibility** but still prioritize **opportunities for direct communication** and collaboration. Future training programs should focus on **providing live online sessions** as the primary delivery method while integrating some self-paced activities to allow for individual learning preferences. **Occasional in-person sessions** could further enrich the learning experience.

2.4 The biggest challenges faced when organising or participating in virtual exchanges

11. What are the biggest challenges you face in organizing or participating in virtual exchanges? (Select all that apply)



Key insights

The most **commonly reported challenge** was **low youth engagement**, mentioned by 87 interviewees. This highlights the **struggle to maintain the engagement** of young participants **in virtual environments** (most probably as a result of screen fatigue, reduced interaction or unfamiliar content). **Language obstacles** were also a major issue, which 77 respondents chose to address. This underlines the persistent need for **more inclusive communication tactics**, for example translation facilities or multilingual resources, especially in international environments.

Limited access to the internet or devices was indicated by 75 participants, showing that digital imbalance continues to be a persistent issue, particularly for those in rural or less favored areas. Further difficulties, frequently mentioned, involved **technical limitations (70)**, **inadequate financing or support from institutions (68)** and **limited training or assistance (67)**. These suggest a combination of practical and managerial hurdles, requiring improved facilities, increased institutional engagement and greater capacity building.

Time constraints were highlighted by 66 participants, indicating that **challenging timetables are still an obstacle** to both attendance and preparation. Despite being selected by 49 interviewees, **lack of experience or confidence** seemed to be less common - perhaps as a result of increasing **familiarization with virtual modes** during the recent years. **Cultural misunderstandings**, while less cited (23), continues to emerge as an **essential concern**, reminding us that although intercultural exchanges are crucial, they should be **cautiously facilitated** to prevent **unease or misunderstandings**.

Implications for Project

To conclude, the results reveal **a mix of technical, organizational and interpersonal factors**. Main challenges such as **commitment, connectivity and support structures** stay at the top of the agenda. These findings can feed into the development of more efficient and accessible virtual exchanges via better **facilitation, improved accessibility and youth-oriented initiatives**.

2.5 Desired help to overcome these challenges

Respondents provided a diverse group of ideas regarding the **ways to tackle the most frequent issues in planning and joining virtual exchanges**. Their feedback indicated various repeated topics that refer to concrete, applicable solutions.

Great attention was given to **training and capacity building**. Participants requested **accessible, practical coaching** adapted to **various expertise levels** - both for youth and for facilitators. This covers digital **competences, online engagement practices, intercultural interaction** and **mentoring on the proper use of virtual platforms**. Many also underlined the significance of **continuous assistance, guidance** and **easy-to-use resources** as user guides and instructional videos.

Financial and Institutional support was considered to be another major issue. Several pointed out that financing is crucial to **guarantee equal access**, be it for **internet connection, appliances, or scholarships** for participants. Institutional support - for instance from schools, youth organisations or local governments - was also considered essential for the **long-term sustainability and success** of virtual exchanges.

The **limited access to technology** is still a major obstacle. Recommendations consisted of offering **subsidised or donated devices, upgrading the internet infrastructure** and **selecting low-bandwidth** and **mobile-friendly platforms**. **Technical assistance** prior to and throughout meetings to minimize disruptions was also advised.

To address **low youth participation**, interviewees suggested that the exchanges should be more **participative, youth-led** and **linked to the concerns** and **daily activities** of the participants. **Explicit communication** on the aim and advantages of virtual exchanges, together with **flexible programming** and **appealing designs**, were seen as significant incentives.

Language and cultural differences were also mentioned. Solutions involved providing **translation facilities, speaking in a clear and easy manner** and fostering **cross-cultural courses** to develop mutual understanding and respect.

Lastly, respondents underlined the importance of **cooperation and more effective design**. Collaborating with **experienced co-workers, developing networks** to transfer **know-how** and securing **clear communication** and **reasonable schedules** were perceived as vital for a smoother implementation.

Overall, the replies suggest a definite direction to follow: **more investment in training, funding and digital access, combined with a more comprehensive, appealing and coherent project planning**. By tackling these aspects, virtual exchanges can be made more inclusive, efficient and significant for all participants.

2.6 TOP 3 priorities of the training courses during this project for youth workers

Considering the variety of replies and the repeated aspects, the top 3 priorities of the training courses for youth workers, throughout this project, would be:

1. **Enhancing Digital and Pedagogical Know-How:** Youth workers should be provided with **hands-on digital skills**, involving the use of **online resources, digital facilitation methods, gamification, AI incorporation** and **virtual engagement techniques**. These are vital for running up-to-date virtual exchanges and for **maintaining the engagement** and involvement of young participants.
2. **Mental Health Awareness and Youth Empowerment:** Mental wellness has been identified as a key aspect. Training should concentrate on **identifying mental health concerns, developing confidence, fostering self-esteem** as well as **encouraging individual growth**, in particular for vulnerable groups as young women. Development, motivation and leading competences are crucial here too.
3. **Comprehensive communication and Intercultural Proficiency:** Youth workers shall be educated in understanding and addressing **cultural plurality, language obstacles and social inclusion**. The up-grading of soft skills including **empathy, active listening and conflict resolution**, along with the **development of inclusive, participative and open spaces**, is of vital importance for the genuine and participatory involvement of youth.

To sum up, the findings indicate that training for youth workers has to be **inclusive, hands-on** and **in line with the actual needs** and challenges they encounter in the field. By **integrating digital innovation, emotional intelligence, intercultural awareness** and **structural assistance**, training curricula may prepare youth workers more effectively to enhance and motivate the youth they are working with.

3. Survey Recommendations

The key recommendations from the survey highlight the importance of enhancing digital and pedagogical skills among youth workers. Training should focus on practical competencies such as online facilitation, gamification strategies, and the integration of emerging technologies like AI. Strengthening these skills is essential for managing modern virtual exchanges and keeping young participants actively engaged.

Mental health awareness and **youth empowerment** should be central components of training. Programs must address the ability to **recognize mental health challenges**, **foster self-esteem**, and **develop leadership skills**, particularly for vulnerable groups such as young women. **Building emotional intelligence** will be key to creating supportive, motivating environments.

Strengthening communication and **intercultural competence** is also critical. Youth workers must **develop empathy**, **active listening**, **conflict resolution skills**, and **the capacity to create inclusive and participative spaces**. Understanding and addressing **cultural diversity** and **language barriers** will enhance the quality of youth engagement.

To ensure sustainability, training should include modules on **grant writing**, **crowdfunding**, and **social project design**. Building confidence in fundraising and resource mobilization is crucial to support youth-led initiatives over the long term.

Access to technology and technical support must be expanded. Solutions include **providing subsidized devices**, **improving internet infrastructure**, **using low-bandwidth platforms**, and **offering continuous assistance** through easy-to-use resources such as instructional videos and user guides.

Furthermore, greater **institutional and financial support is necessary**. **Collaboration with schools, youth organizations, and local governments** should be encouraged to secure funding and ensure broader, more equitable participation in virtual exchanges.

Virtual exchanges themselves should be **youth-led, engaging, and closely aligned with participants' real-life interests and needs**. Designing **flexible, interactive, and visually appealing programs** will boost motivation and participation.

Multilingual communication must be prioritized, offering **translation services** and using **clear, accessible language**. Cross-cultural training can foster greater mutual understanding, respect, and collaboration among diverse participants.

Finally, **sustainable collaboration frameworks** should be developed. Networks of youth workers, mentors, and organizations can facilitate **knowledge-sharing**, **peer support**, and **long-term cooperation**. Future training programs should adopt a **flexible hybrid approach**, **blending live online sessions with self-paced learning options**, and where possible, **occasional in-person meetings** to deepen community building and experiential learning.

4. Focus Group Analysis

4.1 Number of sessions, participants, setting

The focus group included more than 40 participants from Greece, Italy, Spain, Turkey, Ghana, Cameroon, Nigeria, Gabon, who attended through Zoom. The sessions addressed nine thematic topics:

Project's website: <http://www.eyesnetwork.org/>

- A. Experience with Virtual Exchanges
- B. Digital Challenges in Low-Infrastructure Contexts
- C. Tools and Platforms
- D. Platform Development
- E. Intercultural Communication
- F. Mental Health and Dropout Prevention
- G. Youth Empowerment and Inclusion
- H. Structural Issues and Parent Involvement
- I. Skills and Training for Youth Workers

These sessions were planned to address core areas relevant to the effectiveness of virtual exchanges and youth empowerment.

4.2 Thematic Analysis

Theme 1: Experience with Virtual Exchanges

Description: Participants discussed the challenges and learnings from facilitating virtual exchanges, particularly during the COVID-19 period.

Key Quote/Example: Facilitators found using interactive activities and energizers helped overcome initial discomfort. It was mentioned that in Italy, informal training methods are not commonly accepted, which makes promoting virtual exchanges difficult in formal educational settings.

Theme 2: Digital Challenges in Low-Infrastructure Contexts

Description: Participants discussed the digital barriers in countries with lower infrastructure, particularly in Cameroon.

Key Quote/Example: It was highlighted that the challenges of poor internet and lack of resources, despite high youth motivation. Participants agreed that overcoming these infrastructure gaps is essential for inclusive virtual exchanges.

Theme 3: Tools and Platforms

Description: Participants discussed the use of different digital tools and platforms, with a focus on interactivity and innovation.

Key Quote/Example: Traditional tools like Powerpoint and Microsoft Classroom were acknowledged but seen as limiting, while tools such as Canva, Miro, Slido, Kahoot, and Discord were preferred for their interactive features. GatherTown has been highlighted for its immersive, video-game-like environment that allowed participants to create spaces for more engaging exchanges.

Theme 4: Platform Development

Description: The development of new platforms that go beyond basic e-learning was discussed, focusing on features that enhance social interaction.

Key Quote/Example: It was mentioned that a platform with features like profile customization, forums, and internal messaging to replicate a social network feel. The team also focused on low-bandwidth options for wider access.

Theme 5: Intercultural Communication

Description: The challenges of communicating across cultures were explored.

Key Quote/Example: It was shared that by using slow speech and visuals helped overcome communication challenges.

Theme 6: Mental Health and Dropout Prevention

Description: Participants discussed the importance of mental health and strategies to prevent dropout, focusing on fostering engagement and responsibility.

Key Quote/Example: A participant shared a method of using private self-assessment questionnaires to help participants reflect without peer pressure.

Theme 7: Youth Empowerment and Inclusion

Description: Empowering youth and promoting inclusion through leadership opportunities and tailored content was a key discussion area.

Key Quote/Example: It was shared that when a young participant was empowered to lead a session, this, significantly, increased the self-esteem.

Theme 8: Structural Issues and Parent Involvement

Description: Participants discussed structural challenges and the different levels of parent involvement in youth education.

Key Quote/Example: It was explained that how lack of parental engagement and undertrained professionals contributed to student dropout in Cameroon. In contrast, it was highlighted how Erasmus+ projects allow both young people and parents to be co-beneficiaries, even in systems that don't fully support this approach. Turkey's family camps were also mentioned as a model for promoting intergenerational bonding.

Theme 9: Skills and Training for Youth Workers

Description: Participants identified key skills and training needed for youth workers to facilitate engaging and effective virtual learning environments.

Key Quote/Example: Priorities included mastering digital facilitation to keep participants engaged, effectively managing time and conflicts, and improving communication through tone, listening skills, and body language. There was also a focus on preparing youth workers for remote work environments to foster a culture where virtual sessions are valued as equally important as face-to-face ones.

4.3 Points of Agreement and Divergence

Points of convergence:

Virtual exchange experience: Attendees mentioned that initial hesitations seemed to be shared, although interactive facilities and energizers helped the virtual exchanges easy to handle.

Digital concerns: There was an agreement on the necessity to face infrastructure deficiencies, for example, with weak internet and digital illiteracy restricting attendance, particularly in low-infrastructure environments like Cameroon.

Tools and platforms: Tools including Canva, Miro, Slido and GatherTown were highly valued for boosting interaction over traditional platforms like PowerPoint.

Cross-cultural interaction: humour and personal storytelling were perceived as essential for personalising virtual exchanges.

Youth Empowering: engaging young people, for example, allowing them to run sessions, increased self-esteem and engagement

Points of Divergence:

Italy's Formal Education Barrier: In Italy, the use of informal training methods is not widely accepted, which created challenges in promoting virtual exchanges.

Digital Challenges: In Cameroon, issues like digital illiteracy and poor infrastructure hinder full participation, a challenge not as prominent in other countries.

Platform Development: While some participants preferred traditional e-learning tools, others supported platforms that incorporate features similar to social networks to foster a more interactive experience.

Parental Involvement: Different approaches were observed; EU projects engaged both youth and parents, while in Cameroon, a lack of parental engagement and undertrained educators were significant challenges.

5. Comparative Analysis

5.1 Comparison of survey results vs. focus group insights

Both the focus group and the survey underlined the significance of impactful, interactive techniques, such as energizers and task allocations, to engage youth participation. Whereas the focus group concentrated on the way these approaches enhance commitment, the survey emphasized the importance of hands-on training and greater communication to address lack of commitment among young people.

Both also underlined the concern of poor digital literacy and inadequate facilities, however, the focus group took it a step further by recommending that platforms should be customizable to various frameworks. A main distinction is that the focus group highlighted the need to include parents, teachers, and youth workers for continuous impact, which was not as highly addressed in the survey. The survey underlined the necessity for greater mentoring in digital facilitation. The survey also uncovered a gap regarding the expertise with Erasmus+ programs, indicating that more awareness and access are required, which was not significantly discussed in the focus group session.

6. Conclusions

The outcomes of the survey and focus groups are really in line with the project's purpose to enhance social inclusion, active citizenship, and youth empowerment through virtual exchanges.

Both underlined the significance of participatory techniques to strengthen youth commitment and ownership, which is essential for preservation. The necessity to tackle structural hurdles, including poor digital literacy and insufficient facilities, was also stressed, implying that platforms should be tailorable to various settings to secure inclusivity.

In summary, these results highlight the significance of inclusive planning, greater access to technology, involvement of key stakeholders to meet the project's aim of fostering youth empowerment and enhancing active citizenship.

7. Final Recommendations

Considering the input from both the focus group and the survey, the main recommendations proposed are listed below:

Short-term:

1. Incorporate interactive components to boost youth participation.
2. Develop low-bandwidth, mobile-optimised platforms equipped with multimedia, multilingual, and chat facilities.
3. Reinforce youth workers' digital competencies by prioritising virtual management, gamification, and AI incorporation.
4. Empower youth leadership by engaging them to guide personal growth initiatives.

Medium-term:

1. Develop a holistic mentoring schedule for youth workers that addresses virtual management, conflict management, cross-cultural interaction, as well as mental health.
2. Prioritise mental health and empowerment, in particular for vulnerable groups like young women.
3. Empower communication competencies for more participatory spaces.
4. Broaden technological connectivity and assistance by providing subsidised equipment and resources to overcome the digital divide.

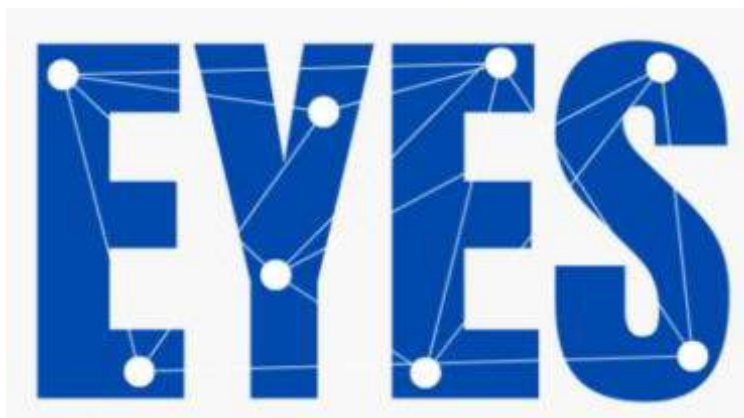
Long-term:

1. Design tools to involve parents to enhance intergenerational mentoring.
2. Establish collaborative networks among youth workers, mentors and institutions for peer assistance.
3. Secure sustainability via mentoring on grant development, crowdfunding and project planning.
4. Enhance commitment, youth-centered virtual exchange initiatives that align with the attendees' requirements.
5. Focus on plurilingual dialogue and offer translation support for inclusiveness.

These initiatives will reinforce commitment, tackle hurdles, and strengthen the project's long-term impact.



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