

# International inclusion projects effectively generate more inclusiveness



European research<sup>1</sup> shows that participants in international mobility projects report a clear positive impact of their participation on their competences, their behaviour and their values. But we also found out that such projects that specifically address inclusion themes have a beneficial effect on participants' values, learning and commitment regarding inclusion – and even on their organisations. The data of the RAY research project indicates that the Youth in Action programme (now Erasmus+ Youth) is a good tool to reach its 'equity and inclusion' aims.

## Do inclusion projects lead to more inclusion?

Social inclusion was (and still is) a priority of the EU youth programmes. Mobility projects that specifically dealt with topics of exclusion-inclusion would get certain advantages. But do these projects then also have **real effects on inclusion**? Do they deliver what they promise (more so than non-inclusion projects)?

To answer this question, we contrasted the **effects of 'thematic inclusion projects'** on participants with the effects generated by 'non-inclusion projects'. In the RAY study, project leaders indicated the main themes of their project. A number of these themes were related to inclusion, as defined in the Youth in Action Inclusion Strategy<sup>2</sup> (e.g. social inclusion, Roma, health, urban/rural development, inter-religious dialogue, anti-discrimination, disability, minorities, sexual identity).

However, we suspect that a proportion of projects would indicate one or the other inclusion theme because of the possible advantages and the social desirability associated with it. Or some projects would only have a secondary focus on inclusion. Therefore we set a **threshold of minimum 2 'inclusion themes'** before we would consider the project to be a 'thematic inclusion project'. This gives us more

### European mobility projects and their impact

The European Commission has had mobility programmes for young people and youth workers since 1988. These programmes funded international **non-formal learning** projects that should inspire a sense of active European citizenship, solidarity, tolerance and encourage the inclusion of all young people.

But how can you measure this?

### RAY – Research-based Analysis of 'Youth in Action'

Research partners and National Agencies from 20 countries asked thousands of former participants and project leaders how international youth projects have affected them.

RAY clearly shows the **effects of international mobility** on young people and project leaders. These projects influence participants' personal and professional development, they stimulate interest in European issues, they help participants appreciate cultural diversity and include young people with fewer opportunities.

> Find the research reports at [www.youthresearch.net](http://www.youthresearch.net).

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on an inclusion analysis of the data provided by the RAY Network (Research-based Analysis of Youth in Action) with partners in 20 European countries (status 2014). The respective research instruments were developed by the University of Innsbruck, Austria, in cooperation with the RAY partners.

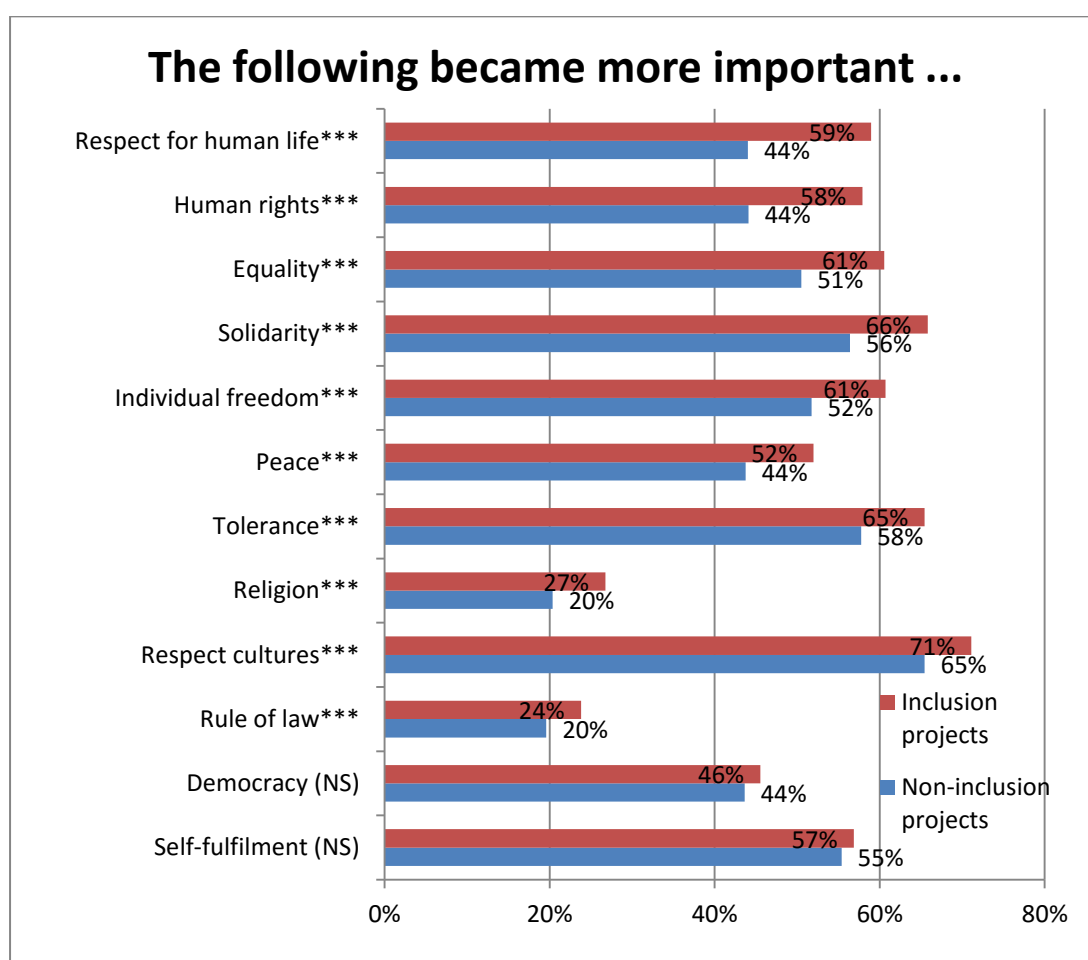
<sup>2</sup> European Inclusion Strategy for the Youth in Action programme, [www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/InclusionStrategy/](http://www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/InclusionStrategy/)

certainty that the projects in question truly addressed issues of exclusion and inclusion.

We contrast the effects on participants from these ‘inclusion projects’ with the effects of projects that did not indicate any of the inclusion themes listed above (let’s call them ‘non-inclusion projects’). From the total of 15600 respondents to the RAY questionnaire (2010, 11, 13), 1606 project participants (10,2%) participated in an ‘inclusion project’ and 3994 (25,4%) in a ‘non-inclusion project’.<sup>3</sup>

## A boost for positive values

In general, participating in an international youth project does have a **positive influence on young people’s values**. When they were asked, more than half of respondents indicated that respect of other cultures, tolerance, solidarity, equality, self-fulfilment, etc. have become more important for them as a result of participating in the project.



Graph 1: in order of difference between effects of inclusion projects versus non-inclusion projects

\*\*\* highly significant ( $p \leq .001$ ), NS=not significant

When we compare the effects of inclusion projects on participants, versus the effects of non-inclusion projects (see graph 1), we see that **inclusion projects generate significantly more positive**

<sup>3</sup> The research was conducted through an online questionnaire. We need to consider a possible self-selection bias in the analysis of the results. The 64.4% other respondents participated in a project that only listed one ‘inclusion’ topic and are not included in this comparative analysis.

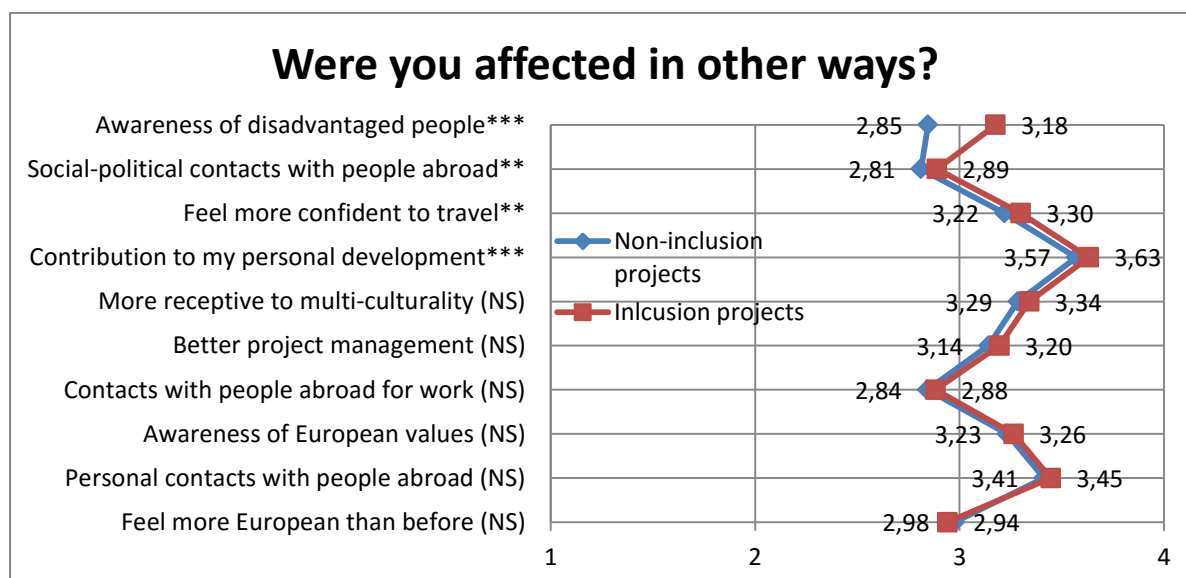
**effects** than non-inclusion projects. Inclusion projects boost young people’s respect for human life (+14,9%) more than non-inclusion projects do, but also raise the importance of human rights (+13,8%), equality (+10%), solidarity (+9,4%), individual freedom (+9%), peace (+8,2%), tolerance (+7,7%), religion (+6,4%), respect of other cultures (+6,4%) and rule of law (+4,2%) – each time compared to non-inclusion projects. This statistically supports our hypothesis that inclusion projects indeed generate more inclusion-related effects than non-inclusion projects.



## Generating awareness of what goes wrong in society

An international mobility experience has quite a **positive impact on young people** in general, as you can see on graph 2 below. International youth projects stimulate personal development, bring people from different cultures closer together and make them more receptive to multi-culturality.

But in the frame of this article, we are interested to see if projects dealing with inclusion affect young people differently compared to non-inclusion projects. The biggest difference is that inclusion projects trigger young people’s **awareness of disadvantage and injustice in society**, a lot more than is the case in non-inclusion projects (the mean score for inclusion projects lies an extraordinary 0,33 higher than for non-inclusion projects on a scale from 1 to 4). But it is interesting to note that inclusion projects do not generate systematically more receptiveness to multi-culturality compared to non-inclusion projects, even though it also an important feature of inclusion.

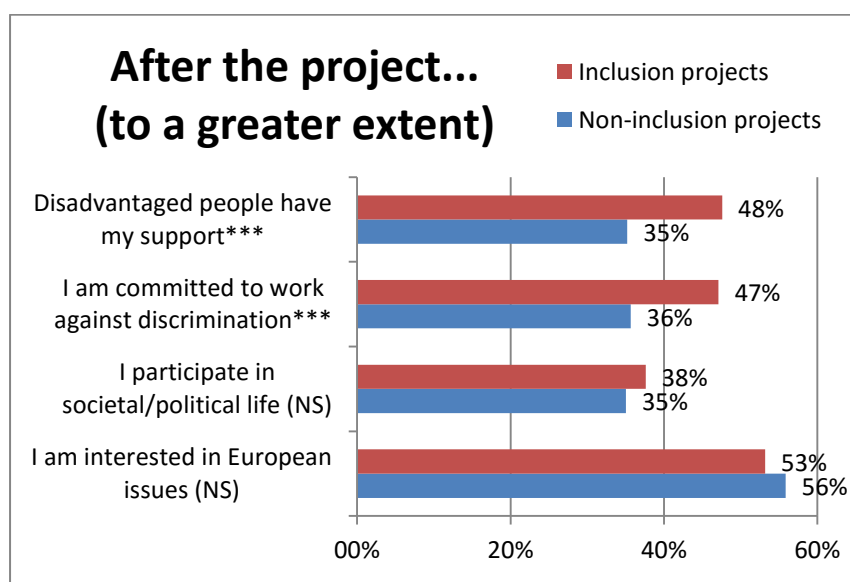


Graph 2: in order of difference between effects of inclusion projects versus non-inclusion projects  
 1=absolutely disagree, 4=absolutely agree, \*\*\* highly significant ( $p \leq .001$ ), \*\* significant ( $p \leq .00$ ), NS=not significant

## Increased commitment to combat exclusion

Awareness is one thing, but do international projects also **change people's intentions to take action**? RAY data give us a yes. More than a third of participants say that their participation in the youth project made them participate more in societal & political life, combat discrimination & intolerance and support disadvantaged people (approximately half do not change their intentions, and less than 10% reduce their commitment). The projects raised the interest in European issues of half of the respondents.

But what about inclusion projects? Do they generate different effects than non-inclusion projects? Participants in international inclusion projects indicate significantly more that **their commitment grew**, thanks to the project, to 'work against discrimination, intolerance, xenophobia, racism' (11,4% more) and 'support disadvantaged people' (12,4% more), compared to non-inclusion projects. Inclusion projects are thus an **effective tool to create actors for change**, more so than a non-inclusion project.



Graph 3: in order of difference between effects of inclusion projects versus non-inclusion projects  
\*\*\* highly significant ( $p \leq .001$ ), NS=not significant

## Effective learning about inclusion topics

If an international youth project addresses inclusion themes, we would expect that participants' learning will also be linked to those fields – and the other way around. When **comparing the top 5 issues** that participants said they learned about (*highlighted in table 1*), it is remarkable that more general topics such as Europe, art & culture and youth & youth policy are mentioned most frequently by participants of both types of projects. These learning subjects appear in the top 5 of inclusion as well as non-inclusion projects.

However, participants of inclusion projects indicate less often than participants of non-inclusion projects that they learned about these 3 general topics (Europe: -15,4%, youth & youth policy: -9% and art & culture: -8,6%). When contrasting the learning mentioned by participants of the different types of projects (*highlighted in pink*), we further see that inclusion projects – as expected – generate **more learning about inclusion related topics** such as inclusion (+18,9%), discrimination

(+12,9%), disability (+11,9%) or minorities (+8,9%), compared to non-inclusion projects. Environment is a lot less addressed in inclusion projects (-9%).<sup>4</sup>

In this project I learned about... (multiple response)	Non-inclusion projects	Inclusion projects	Difference IP-NIP
Inclusion of disadvantaged people	18,1%	<b>37,0%</b>	<b>18,9%</b>
Discrimination	7,6%	<b>20,5%</b>	<b>12,9%</b>
Disability	2,4%	14,3%	<b>11,9%</b>
Minorities	4,0%	12,9%	<b>8,9%</b>
Interfaith	6,5%	11,5%	5,0%
Roma people	2,2%	5,6%	3,4%
Sexual orientation	2,6%	4,1%	1,5%
Gender equality	7,7%	9,2%	1,5%
Health	5,8%	6,8%	1,0%
Nothing	1,7%	1,1%	-0,6%
Urban/rural development	<b>19,1%</b>	18,1%	-1,0%
Sport & outdoor	16,2%	13,5%	-2,7%
Other	13,3%	9,5%	-3,8%
Media	14,4%	8,7%	-5,7%
Art & culture	<b>38,9%</b>	<b>30,4%</b>	<b>-8,6%</b>
Youth & youth policy	<b>35,0%</b>	<b>25,9%</b>	<b>-9,0%</b>
Environment	<b>19,4%</b>	8,1%	<b>-11,3%</b>
Europe	<b>53,6%</b>	<b>38,3%</b>	<b>-15,4%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>268,3%</b>	<b>275,5%</b>	<b>7,2%</b>

Table 1: ranked according to difference between inclusion project respondents and non-inclusion respondents, Pearson Chi-Square.  $p \leq 0.001$ \*\* highly significant difference between groups

## Inclusion projects boost key competences

The RAY research essentially asks participants about the effects of participating in international youth projects. We compared these effects between participants in inclusion projects and non-inclusion projects. For most of the parameters, the generally positive results are not so different between the two subgroups. However, inclusion projects do give young people an **added benefit** in some domains.

### Inclusion projects stimulate learning to learn

The responses to a number of questions were combined into **aggregated indicators** of the 'key competences for lifelong learning'<sup>5</sup>, an EU reference framework of competences necessary for personal fulfilment, social inclusion, active citizenship and employment. Graph 4 below shows that international youth projects do boost foreign language competence, social & civic competences,

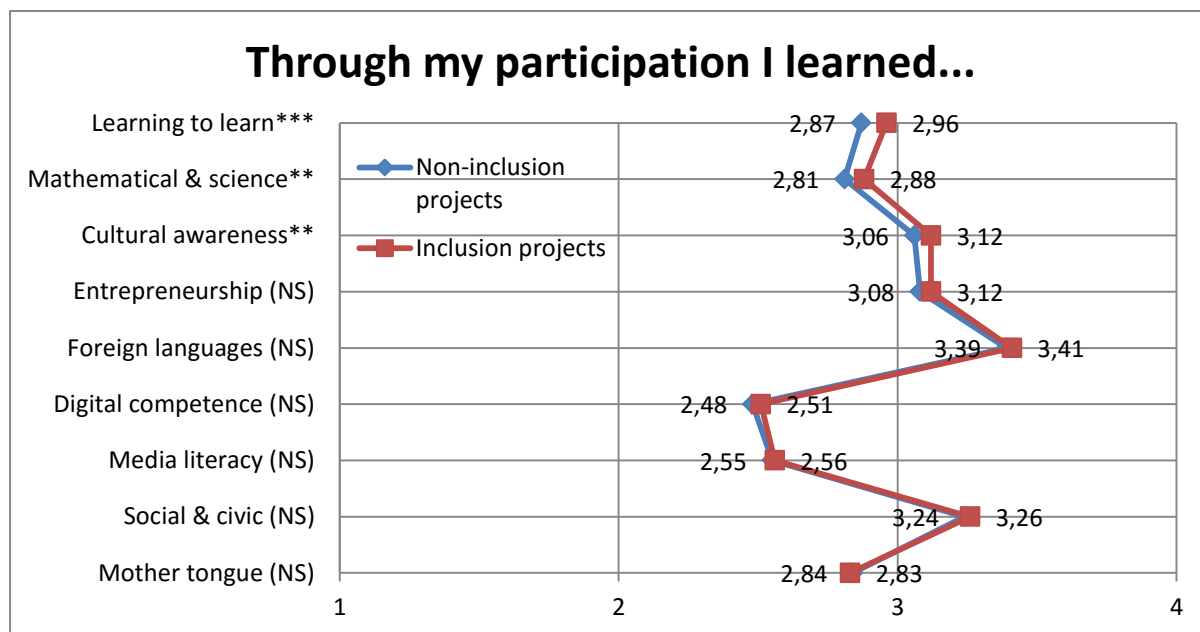


<sup>4</sup> These effects are worth being tested by more robust research approaches, such as longitudinal studies or methods that do not rely on self-evaluation.

<sup>5</sup> <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=URISERV:c11090>

but also sense of initiative and entrepreneurship and cultural awareness & expression – for all participants.

But when comparing the effect of inclusion projects versus non-inclusion projects, projects about inclusion issues generate significantly **more ‘learning to learn’ competence** (the mean score for inclusion projects lies 0,09 higher than for non-inclusion projects on a scale from 1 to 4). This is also the case for ‘mathematical competence and basic competence in science and technology’ (+0,07) and ‘cultural awareness’ (+0,06), but less outspoken.



Graph 4: in order of difference between effects on participants in inclusion projects versus non-inclusion projects, 1=absolutely disagree, 4=absolutely agree, \*\*\* highly significant ( $p \leq .001$ ), \*\* significant ( $p \leq .01$ ), NS=not significant

### A boost for personal development and confidence to travel

We already commented on graph 2 above, as inclusion projects more effectively raise awareness of disadvantage in society compared to non-inclusion projects. From the RAY data, it is also very clear that international youth projects are considered a **great stimulus for personal development** by the participants, and this is significantly more so the case in inclusion projects (a mean of 0,06 higher on a scale from 1 to 4) than for non-inclusion projects. Similarly, inclusion projects stimulate young people’s **confidence to travel** within their country and abroad, more so than non-inclusion projects. The differences are not very high, but still significant.

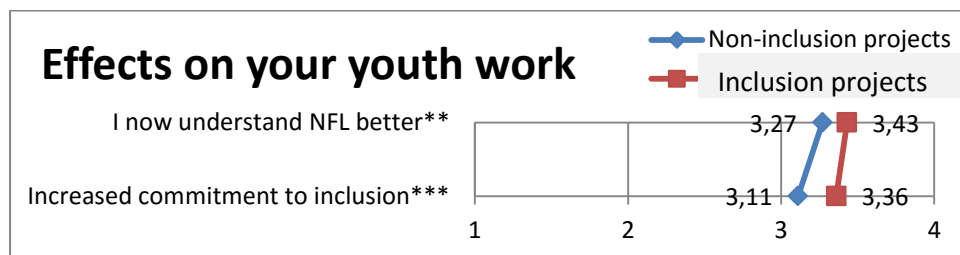
### Additional benefits of inclusion projects on youth work

Some of the respondents were actively involved in the youth field as a youth worker or youth leader, representing an organisation. When this was the case, they got a few more questions about how the project they participated in affected their youth work or the youth organisation they worked for. The international project indeed had a **beneficial effect on their youth work practice** and structure. You can read about it in the RAY research reports.

But what interests us, is to see if inclusion projects have a different impact compared to non-inclusion projects. In general this is not the case. Inclusion projects have similar beneficial effects to non-inclusion projects, but there are 2 exceptions. Youth leaders/workers who participated in an



inclusion project, said they **understand non-formal education and learning (NFL) better**, significantly more so than participants in non-inclusion projects (a mean of 0,16 higher on a scale from 1 to 4).



Graph 5: in order of difference between effects on participants in inclusion projects versus non-inclusion projects, 1=absolutely disagree, 4=absolutely agree, \*\*\* highly significant ( $p \leq .001$ )

But the most remarkable effect the youth leaders/workers share, is the **increased commitment of their organisation** to the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities thanks to the inclusion project (a mean of 0,25 higher than is the case for non-inclusion projects). This shows that the effects of inclusion projects go beyond the individual participant. Participating in an inclusion project also strengthens the organisation's commitment to inclusion.

### In a nutshell

Projects addressing inclusion topics do effectively generate **more sensitivity to social justice and equality**, compared to non-inclusion projects. Inclusion projects raise the awareness of social disadvantage in society. The participants in inclusion projects have more the **intention to act** to reduce these social problems, than their peers who participated in non-inclusion projects. But the inclusion effect goes beyond the participants: inclusion projects also generate **more commitment to inclusion within their organisations**.

## Pondering results and attempting conclusions

### 1. Inclusion projects trigger participants to question situations of disadvantage.

- International projects that address themes related to exclusion and inclusion do a particularly good job in **raising awareness of disadvantage** and social injustice (see graph 2). Can we assume that this personal confrontation of participants with situations of disadvantage appeals to their **sense of fairness, justice,...**? Especially when inclusion-related topics are discussed in a positive social frame, with trustful interactions with other participants from different backgrounds, who are maybe exposed to the risk of exclusion? This could be a trigger that incites a change of values (see graph 1), but also the commitment to do something about it (see graph 3).
- Other international projects about more neutral topics (less value-laden) as art, music, sport,... do maybe appeal less to people's personal sense of injustice, causing their values to be less affected by the project.

- It certainly would be an interesting research subject, to investigate **which elements of an inclusion project trigger this change** in values and commitment to act, compared to non-inclusion projects.

## 2. Or do inclusion projects only raise socially desirable answers?

- Inclusion projects discuss issues related to social exclusion. Often this generates an atmosphere of ‘we need to do something about it’. Inclusion projects tend to strive for change, to right the wrong situations. Does this induce more socially desirable answers to a questionnaire asking for effects of the project? Do participants in inclusion projects feel more compelled to indicate that they have become a better person who now wants to tackle the situations of disadvantage that were discussed during the project?

## 3. Are participants of inclusion projects different?

- Do inclusion projects attract different participants than other international projects? If themes related to social injustice and disadvantage appeal more to people who are inclined to tackle these issues, the positive change in values and commitment could be less a result of an inclusion project, than of a pre-existing inclination to becoming more ‘inclusive-oriented’.
- Inclusion projects generate more ‘learning to learn’ (see graph 4). A comparison between the effects of international youth projects on young people with fewer opportunities and those with most opportunities<sup>6</sup>, shows that the fewer opportunities group strengthens more than ‘well off’ participants their ‘learning to learn’ competence. This could indicate that there tend to be more ‘young people with fewer opportunities’ participating in ‘inclusion projects’ than young people with lots of opportunities. Does the fewer opportunity group identify more with ‘inclusion topics’? Are these projects then preaching to the converted?
- It would be interesting to see what effect an inclusion project has on participants who would not be interested in inclusion topics.
- If there would proportionally be more young people with fewer opportunities in inclusion projects, then this also could provide an explanation for their comparatively more increased ‘personal development’ and ‘confidence to travel’ (see graph 2). We could assume that young people with fewer opportunities have not had many chances to take part in international projects, so that this gives them more scope for personal development and to become more confident when it comes to travelling.

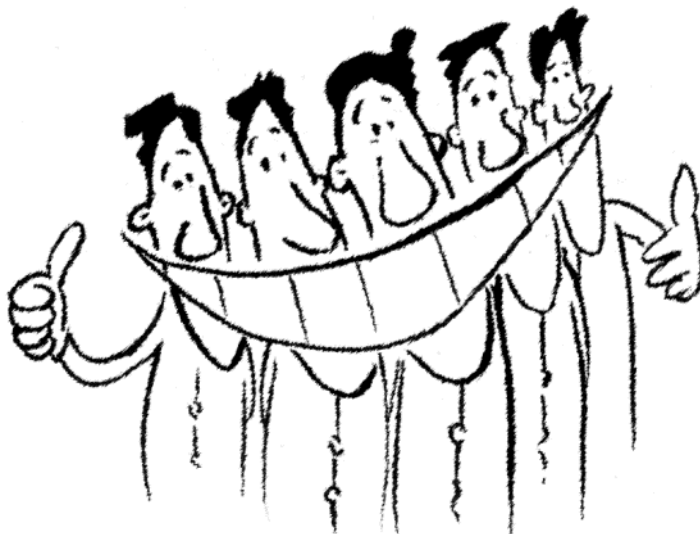


<sup>6</sup> Download this research article: ‘International youth projects benefit most those with fewer opportunities’ from [www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/InclusionResearch/](http://www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/InclusionResearch/)



#### 4. Does increased awareness and commitment translate into real action?

- Graph 4 shows that young people who participated in inclusion projects are more committed to 'work against discrimination, intolerance, xenophobia and racism'. And so do their organisations (graph 5). We could ask ourselves (or ask them) to which extent this also leads to concrete action.
- Based on the **cognitive dissonance theory**, we could assume that people would bring their behaviour in line with their values and commitment. That is well worth an additional research.



#### 5. Participants learn about inclusion related issues – but not so much....

- Table 1 shows the learning outcomes indicated by the participants of inclusion projects. Compared to the learning from non-inclusion projects (e.g. 53,6% indicates that they learned about Europe), these scores for inclusion projects are not that high ('only' 37% learn about inclusion). Does this mean young people learn less in inclusion projects?
- The lower scores are most likely due to the aggregated nature of 'an inclusion project'. These projects can be about topics as varied as Roma, disability, urban/rural development, sexual identity, inter-religious dialogue, minorities,... When doing a project on Roma minorities, participants maybe do not necessarily classify that as 'inclusion' and would not indicate that they learned about inclusion.
- Also, often we note a discrepancy between how a youth leader defines the themes of a project (more in professional terms) and how a participant sees it. A positive project about sexual identity might not be seen by participants to be addressing discrimination or inclusion as it tackles self-acceptance and resilience, even though this could be the project leaders' approach to combat discrimination of sexual minorities and promote their inclusion in society.
- 'Inclusion' being an aggregated concept also leads to a variety of learning outcomes. What is interesting to see is that participants of inclusion projects tend to indicate more learning outcomes than participants of non-inclusion projects, as you can see in the totals of Table 1.

## 6. Do inclusion projects have beneficial effects of on youth organisations

- Graph 5 shows a highly significant difference in increased commitment to inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities within the organisation, as a result of participating in an inclusion project versus a non-inclusion project. We suppose this depends on the level of decision making power of the ex-participants to an inclusion project with their organisation. If an important youth worker from an organisation returns highly motivated from an inclusion project, this commitment to inclusion is likely to rub off on the organisation.
- However, one could ask a critical question. Is the fact of sending (or allowing) one of its youth workers to an international inclusion project already an indication that the youth organisation is open to playing their part and taking action regarding inclusion-related topics? Maybe the returned participant from an international inclusion project is then merely an activator that boosts this development.
- It could be interesting to contrast the evolution of inclusive-mindedness of organisations who did send a youth worker to an international inclusion project and those who did want to send a youth worker, but who was not selected and did not participate in such an inclusion project.

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**SALTO Inclusion Resource Centre – [www.salto-youth.net/InclusionResearch/](http://www.salto-youth.net/InclusionResearch/)**

*PS Also read our articles about the impact of mobility projects on young people with fewer opportunities versus mainstream young people, about the effects on different excluded groups and about the collateral benefit of such mobility projects on youth work practice.*