DDP-YD/ ETCD (2026)45 Strasbourg, 19 January 2026

Training course on quality essentials of international youth activities

for organisers and facilitators of study sessions in the European Youth Centre and of international activities and annual work plans supported by the European Youth Foundation

4 - 9 February 2026
European Youth Centre Strasbourg



Activity Report

Executive Summary

The training course on quality essentials of international youth activities was designed to increase the capacities of youth organisations and networks to carry out quality international youth activities with a multiplying effect for their members, and to enable young people to actively uphold, defend, promote and benefit from the Council of Europe's core values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The course took place from 4-9 February 2026 and was hosted in the European Youth Centre Strasbourg. It was co-organised by the European Youth Foundation (EYF) and the Education, Training and Cooperation Division (ETCD) and brought together 30 participants representing 30 youth organisations from 17 countries.

The programme of the training course was based on the principles and approaches of non-formal and intercultural learning, building on the experiences and practices of the participants. Its content and methodology were designed to equip participants with competences that would enable them to master the essentials of international youth activities either during the upcoming study sessions or the international activities and annual work plans supported by the EYF. Through sessions that proposed experiential learning activities, individual reflection, skills building workshops and exchange of practices, participants explored the basic non-formal education concepts and processes - defining principles and learning objectives, designing educational programmes, experiential and intercultural learning, evaluation - as well as Council of Europe tools and principles, including the Manual for Facilitators and the quality standards in education and training activities.

Aim and objectives

The aim of the training course was to increase the capacities of youth organisations and networks to carry out quality international youth activities with a multiplying effect for their members, and to enable young people to actively uphold, defend, promote and benefit from the Council of Europe's core values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.
Based on this aim, the following objectives were defined:

- to increase participants' organisational skills in relation to preparing, implementing and evaluating international youth activities;
- to increase participants' competences to apply the Council of Europe youth sector's quality standards in relation to non-formal education and intercultural learning approaches in their international youth activities;
- to develop participants' understanding and agency in connecting their organisation's work and activities to the Council of Europe priorities, tools and standards;

- to create a space for youth organisations and networks to make valuable contributions to the programme of the European Youth Centres and of the European Youth Foundation, through constructive dialogue.

Participants

The group of selected participants consisted of highly motivated individuals that were in a position to transfer the knowledge gained during the training to their organisations either through their direct involvement in the educational or organisational teams of international youth activities or by training their colleagues on the concepts and processes learned during the course. It included a mix of representatives from international organisations that were organising their study sessions in one of the European Youth Centres and from youth organisations that were planning or expecting to implement EYF-funded international activities. Furthermore, while some participants were experienced in organising international youth activities (IYA) either as coordinators or facilitators, others had limited experience with IYAs. The roles they hold in their nominating organisations varied from volunteers that were involved punctually in projects, to experienced trainers, facilitators, staff or board members.

Training storyline - the training's flow in action

Prior to the course, an online preparation on the Council of Europe's e-learning platform was proposed. It included a Council of Europe quiz, a short get to know each other activity in pairs and a section sharing key information about the course.

On the evening of their arrival, participants were greeted in the Belgium bar area of the youth centre, where a variety of name games and icebreakers were introduced to facilitate informal introductions and help them connect with one another.

The first icebreaking activity on **day one** offered participants an opportunity to meet and greet everyone present in the room as well as to learn how to greet each other in other languages. Participants were then instructed to meet and exchange letters from their names with each other in order to compose their names. After this name game a lateral thinking exercise was proposed, challenging participants to imagine new objects starting from a clothes hanger.

The team introduced the programme of the week as well as the course's educational approach, including its methodology, its focus on essentials, the invitation to being vulnerable, allowing oneself to experience new things and seeing this experience as a laboratory where everyone can test themselves and experience different tools and educational tools.

The first session concluded with the official opening in the presence of Sophie Kwasny, head of the Education, Training and Cooperation Division, and Gordana Berjan, head

of the European Youth Foundation. They shared a few points about the history of this course, some thoughts about how it fits in the current work of the Council of Europe's Youth Department and underlined some of the key developments in the European Youth Foundation, especially following the recent reform that was carried out.
Following the break, participants took part in the inauguration of the "Museum of…" a self-organised visit of a space hosting interactive 'art pieces'. The exhibition area contained pieces such as the "Missing Piece" that provided participants with more information on what a study session is, or "The tales of the brave and more from EYF" - an interactive space about everything one needs to know on training day 1 about the EYF. Other pieces included the "Magic Canvas" where participants shared their own arguments for the need for civil society making democracies stronger, or the "Zip-time-line" that showcased the moments participants got involved in international youth activities. The "Spiderweb" collected everyone's thoughts on the value of non-formal education in young people's lives and the "Willow of expectations" displayed participants' objectives and expectations for the course, and completed the museum's exhibition.

After lunch, the sessions were structured in two blocks. The first one focused on increasing participants' sense of working together as a team. The Swamp tested participants' abilities to cooperate in order to solve a common problem. This exercise concluded with a list of principles for living and working together to be used for the following days of the course. The second block consisted of a reflective exercise — my his(her/their)story — that enabled participants to reflect on external and internal events in their lives that ignited their motivation, shaped their values and connected them to the work of their own organisations and the youth sector of the Council of Europe.

At the end of the daily programme, participants were invited to reflect in small groups. With the support of one of the preparatory team members, they looked back at the day and identified their learning and the challenges they faced and provided feedback to the training team. The trainer encouraged the group members to take turns in the role of facilitators and shared a different method to be used every day.

The **second day** introduced participants to the concept of non-formal education. First, they reviewed a memorable activity they attended in the past in order to reflect on what makes a qualitative educational activity. This concluded with a short introduction of the Council of Europe's quality standards in education and training activities. The ninth standard referring to 'a consistent practice of non-formal education principles and approaches' was then explored in detail during the second session. Participants experienced three different educational settings that simulated three types of learning environments — formal, non-formal and informal. A reflection on the distinction between these, their definitions, as well as on the NFE principles, closed this experience.

The afternoon sessions concentrated on experiential learning and debriefing. In order to learn how Kolb's experiential learning cycle functions and how it is applied in practice, participants were asked to 'Take a step forward'. The next step was to talk about the debriefing process. A short input on the 6 generations of facilitation and the theoretical debriefing model built on Kolb's cycle (What? So What? Now What?) helped participants get an understanding of the concept and its educational role. A short reminder of the art crafting powerful questions that they experienced in the non-formal learning environment before lunch helped participants during the exercise of building a sequence of debriefing questions based on an activity description. After the daily small group reflection and in order to close the day, an informal NFE Cafe was proposed, pushing further the reflections on non-formal learning.

The morning of the **third day** was dedicated to intercultural learning. Firstly, participants explored intercultural learning through the 'Five Tricks' experiential activity. This created the premises for discussing the context of intercultural encounters and the dialogue that unfolds.

The second session encouraged participants to reflect the intercultural aspects that need to be taken into consideration when preparing a IYA. They were introduced to an adaptation of the Guidelines for intercultural dialogue in non-formal educational activities.

The afternoon sessions focused on the process of designing educational programmes. After taking participants on a journey of clarification that included items such as aim and objectives and international youth activity learning outcomes, the team invited them to define a set of learning outcomes based on a proposed project aim and objectives. They then used the learning outcomes to design a 5-day educational programme that would respond to the project aim and objectives.

The evening saw participants gathering for an intercultural evening around a virtual fireplace, sharing poems, songs and stories from their culture and lives.

The morning of the **fourth day** was dedicated to a process of reflection on how facilitators can create spaces where social issues that concern young people participating in international youth activities can be addressed. Before lunch, participants created ideal models of facilitators and consequently reflected on the application of various 'facilitator approaches'. As there were no sessions planned for the afternoon, participants could take some time for themselves to rest or discover Strasbourg.

The **fifth day** started with a counting exercise (1-2-3) that helped participants get into cooperation mode and prepared them to talk about their preferred co-working models. Before the morning break, they were also introduced to the concept of feedback and had the opportunity to practice in pairs by choosing some co-working models as a

basis for practicing giving and receiving feedback. The last session of the morning focused on transversal principles when organising international youth activities. Participants joined 4 different workshops on gender equality, accessibility, intersectionality and sustainability.

The afternoon was organised as a variation of the Open Space Technology method. Participants were invited to propose topics they are still interested in exploring and to choose to participate in those that interest them most (given that workshops were held in parallel). As such, topics such as HRE through sports, impact evaluation design, dialogue, post-covid strategies to reach and engage new participants, accessible volunteering, art and creativity in youth work, managing pools of trainers and accessibility were tackled.

The day concluded with the routine small group reflections. The last session of the day resumed with a networking space, allowing participants to network and interact with each other and develop potential connections between themselves and their organisations.

The **sixth** and last **day** of the training course enabled participants to interact with team members of the Education, Training and Cooperation Department and the team of the European Youth Foundation, and to learn more about ways of working with study sessions and EYF grants. The last session of the morning enabled participants to learn more about the work of other departments, units or divisions of the Council of Europe and to meet and network with colleagues that work in the Gender Equality Division, with the secretariat of the European Committee of Social Rights, the Education Department, the Parliamentary Assembly secretariat, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the Migration and Refugees Division, the Hate Speech, Hate Crime and Artificial Intelligence Unit, the work of the Council of Europe on Democratic Institutions and civil society, and the Anti-discrimination Co-operation Unit.

After lunch, participants looked at international activities through both educational and organisational spectacles and identified the different steps to be taken in a timeline for preparing, implementing, evaluating and reporting on an IYA. A short input on evaluation was also shared with participants and they had the opportunity to experiment with interpreting a set of data as one of the steps of the evaluation process.

The last session of the course was dedicated to reviewing the entire learning journey. It included the closing of the reflection groups and reflecting on the overall week-long experience. This was done both orally and in writing and was followed by an awards ceremony during which participants received their certificates of participation and a final round and words by trainers. The training course was closed by Tobias Flessenkemper, head of the Youth Department.

Results of the evaluation

General overview of the participants' evaluations
The participants' responses as to the extent of which the training course responded to their expectation was very high, with an average of 4.36 out of 5.
This corresponds to their perception towards the objectives' fulfilment, which they rated at an average 4.46 out of 5.

Eight participants provided additional comments. Overall, the feedback was positive. Participants appreciated the trainers' methods and professional background, the inclusive approach, and the variety of activities and tools used throughout the training. Several noted that the course met or exceeded their expectations, particularly due to the diversity of learning methods and the focus on non-formal education.

Some participants expressed strong enthusiasm and gratitude for the opportunity to attend. One participant indicated that their professional interests did not fully align with the training objectives. Another mentioned that although a few questions remained unanswered, guidance was provided on where to find further information.

Most useful programme sessions
14 out of the 18 sessions were mentioned at least once as having been useful by all participants. The most frequently mentioned sessions were: program design (10 out of 25), experiential learning and debriefing (9 out of 25 mentions), the educational dimension of IYAs and the role of the facilitators (9 mentions) working with the Council of Europe (CoE) youth sector (7 mentions), FE, NFE and IL (4 mentions), Basic team dynamics and leading international teams (4 mentions) and meeting with colleagues from the CoE, outside the youth sector (4 mentions).

Most important learning outcomes
Participants most commonly reported gaining a better understanding of facilitation and experiential learning, including exposure to different pedagogical approaches and how these can be applied in future facilitation roles. Many highlighted the value of the methods and practical tools used during the training, which they felt could be transferred directly to their work with youth activities and study sessions.

A key learning outcome was increased competence in planning and structuring IYAs. This included clearer understanding of how to set aims, objectives, learning outcomes, and how to design coherent programmes, facilitate debriefings, manage conflicts, and carry out evaluations. Several participants also mentioned improved clarity around the logistical and organisational aspects of quality IYAs.

Participants noted the development of skills such as confidence, reflection, intercultural sensitivity, and increased motivation to be more active in youth work. The supportive learning environment and use of non-formal methods were seen as enabling dialogue, exchange, and peer learning. Networking and building connections at European level were also mentioned as an added value.

A small number of responses reflected more individual or critical perspectives, including one participant who concluded that this field was not aligned with their professional direction, and others who felt the training primarily strengthened and contextualised existing practice rather than introducing entirely new content.

Missing elements

Many participants indicated that nothing essential was missing from the training and that their expectations were largely met. Several comments explicitly stated that the programme was well organised, comprehensive, and sufficiently covered the key topics. Some of the suggestions related to programme pacing and workload. Participants noted that the agenda was intensive and at times exhausting, and recommended shorter working days, earlier finishes, better distribution of sessions across the week, and more or longer breaks to allow time for rest, reflection, and networking.

Another recurring theme concerned session structure and content balance. Suggestions included allowing more time for parallel workshops and in-depth discussions, reducing the number of parallel sessions, avoiding repetition (particularly regarding EYF-related information), and scheduling more theoretical sessions earlier in the day while keeping interactive sessions for later hours.

Participants also recommended increasing networking opportunities, including earlier NGO networking sessions, more cross-sector exchange, and greater opportunities to connect informally. Some comments highlighted group composition, suggesting more balanced levels of experience or closer attention to age and generational differences within the group.

Additional suggestions included incorporating more outdoor activities, artistic methods, and use of the host city, dedicating clearer time to funding and reporting topics, and providing additional support or guidance for participants with dietary restrictions when arranging meals outside the centre.

Feedback on the preparatory team's knowledge, skills, approaches

Overall, feedback on the preparatory and facilitation team was very positive. Participants consistently described the team as well-prepared, knowledgeable, professional, and approachable. Many highlighted the trainers' strong knowledge of the topics, clarity of delivery, and ability to create a safe and supportive learning environment.

A recurring theme was the team's inclusive and participatory approach. Participants appreciated that their input and feedback were taken into account, particularly during reflection sessions, and that diverse opinions were respected. The facilitation style

was described as enabling peer learning, encouraging dialogue, and balancing structure with openness.

Several responses referred to the team's strong internal dynamics and teamwork, noting good synergy, balanced presence, and visible cooperation among trainers. The variety of methods used and the adaptability of the team to participants' needs were also positively mentioned. Some participants described the trainers as inspiring role models for their own future facilitation work.

While the vast majority of comments were positive, a small number of constructive observations were shared. Two participants mentioned that there were different levels of experience within the trainer team and another participant suggested that frequent requests for feedback occasionally felt excessive.

The European Youth Centre Strasbourg

Overall, participants evaluated the European Youth Centre positively. The accommodation, particularly the availability of single rooms, was frequently appreciated, as it allowed participants to rest and recharge after intensive programme days. Training and meeting spaces were described as spacious, well-equipped, and benefiting from natural light. Cleanliness and additional facilities, such as the sauna, were also positively mentioned.

The staff (reception, kitchen, and support staff) were widely described as friendly, helpful, and welcoming. Several participants expressed general satisfaction with the services and overall comfort of the venue.

Feedback on food was more mixed. While many participants described the food as good or above expectations for this type of activity, recurring suggestions concerned:

- clearer labelling of ingredients (particularly for allergies),
- improved vegetarian/vegan options, especially increased protein variety,
- occasional issues with food being too salty,
- limited savoury breakfast options,
- and minor practical issues (e.g. coffee availability/temperature).

A few participants mentioned room temperature concerns (feeling cold), cleaning inconsistencies, and limited opportunities to leave the centre during the week due to the intensive schedule.

Other thoughts, comments and suggestions

Participants used this space primarily to express gratitude and appreciation for the training, the facilitators, and the learning environment. Many highlighted the value of meeting inspiring peers, engaging with a supportive facilitation team, and gaining insights that they expect to apply in future work. Several comments emphasized the

impact and motivational aspect of the experience, with participants noting that it strengthened their confidence and commitment to youth work.

A few practical suggestions were mentioned, including:

- Providing a packing list to guide participants on essentials (e.g., towels).
- Considering shorter, more intensive formats (e.g., two full days rather than a week) to better fit participants' needs.
- Clarifying age or experience expectations to ensure participants feel well-matched to the group.
- Improving session introductions and clarity around roles during daily activities.

Concluding points

For the next edition of the training course, should there be one, the preparatory team should take into account the following:

- review the reports from the previous years and decide on the key elements that should be taken into account;
- design the course based on the team's shared understanding of the objectives and learning outcomes and building on the already existing best practices that have been improved every year for the past 5 editions;
- align the design and flow with the participants' expectations;
- replicate the main structure of the course and adjust it to ensure participants' needs are taken into account;
- keep a strong focus on the hands-on elements of the programme — aims, objectives, methods, programme design and flow, etc. — as mastering these practical elements provides participants with a sense of accomplishment and confidence
- allow space for feedback, especially after hands-on sessions, so participants can draw on both their own and the team of trainers' experiences.

Annex 1: Programme

Tuesday, 3 February 2026

Arrival of participants at the European Youth Centre

19.00 Dinner

20.30 Welcome activities

Wednesday, 4 February 2026

From 7.30 to 9.00 Breakfast

From 8.00 Registration of participants

9.30 Opening and introductions to the course programme and education approach, participants, the team and the Council of Europe with Sophie KWASNY, head of Education, Training and Cooperation Division, Youth Department and Gordana BERJAN, head of European Youth Foundation, Youth Department (tbc)

11.00 Break

11.30 Getting to know each other and the youth sector of the Council of Europe (study sessions, EYF grants)

13.00 Lunch break

14.30 Group building and agreement of working together

16.00 Break

16.30 From values of individuals and organisations to international youth activities

18.00 Reflection groups

19.00 Dinner

Thursday, 5 February 2026

From 7.30 to 9.00 Breakfast

9.30 Opening of the day

Care for quality in international youth activities for social change

11.00 Break

11.30 Education: formal, non-formal, informal, and aspects of learning in international youth activities

13.00 Lunch break

14.30 Experiential learning in international youth activities (I)

16.00 Break

16.30 Experiential learning in international youth activities (II)

18.00 Reflection groups

19.00 Dinner

20.30 Non-formal learning café

Friday, 6 February 2026

From 7.30 to 9.00 Breakfast

9.30 Intercultural learning in international youth activities (I)

11.00 Break

11.30 Intercultural learning in international youth activities (II)

13.00 Lunch break

14.30 Creating programmes of international youth activities (I)

16.00 Break

16.30 Creating programmes of international youth activities (II)

18.00 Reflection groups

19.00 Dinner

20.30 Intercultural evening

Saturday, 7 February 2026

From 7.30 to 9.00 Breakfast

9.30 The educational dimension in international youth activities, the role of facilitators (I)

11.00 Break

11.30 The educational dimension in international youth activities, the role of facilitators (II)

13.00 Lunch

Free afternoon and self-organised dinner

Sunday, 8 February 2026

From 7.30 to 9.00 Breakfast

9.30 Team dynamics and leading international teams

11.00 Break

11.30 Parallel workshops on transversal elements in international youth activities: sustainability, accessibility, gender equality, intersectionality

13.00 Lunch break

14.30 Learning spaces on participants' experiences and relevant topics (I)

16.00 Break

16.30 Learning spaces on participants' experiences and relevant topics (II)

18.00 Reflection groups

19.00 Dinner

Monday, 9 February 2026

From 7.30 to 9.00 Breakfast

9.30 Working with the European Youth Centres (study sessions) and the European Youth Foundation's grants

11.00 Break

11.30 Making links to the Council of Europe thematic work

13.00 Lunch break

14.30 Revisiting the cycle of an international youth activity and organisational evaluation

16.00 Break

16.30 Course evaluation and closing with Tobias FLESSENKEMPER, Head of the Youth Department (tbc)

19.00 Dinner

Tuesday, 10 February 2026

Departure of participants