



Evaluation of the European Commission-European Youth Forum Operating Grant Agreements 2007-2011/12

Final report

Client: DG EAC

Rotterdam, 6 November 2013



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Sacha Koppert
Susan Warmerdam
Reinout van Brakel

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ECORYS Nederland BV
Watermanweg 44
3067 GG Rotterdam

P.O. Box 4175
3006 AD Rotterdam
The Netherlands

T +31 (0)10 453 88 00
F +31 (0)10 453 07 68
E netherlands@ecorys.com
Registration no. 24316726

W www.ecorys.nl

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This report presents the findings of the evaluation on the operating grant agreement(s) between the European Commission (EC) and the European Youth Forum (YFJ, Youth Forum Jeunesse) (2007-2011/12). The aim of the evaluation is to assess activities, outputs and results against the objectives of the Youth in Action (YiA) Programme 2007-2013 and the operating grant agreements. It focusses on the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of these agreements and provides recommendations for the future.

Methodological approach

This evaluation is based on a range of data-gathering methods:

- Desk research;
- Interviews with representatives of the EC and the YFJ;
- A reconstruction of the intervention logic;
- An online survey among a broad group of stakeholders;
- Some 60 interviews with other stakeholders (members and non-member organisations);
- A focus group meeting.

Background to the YFJ

The YFJ is one of the bodies supported by the YiA Programme under Action 4: 'Youth support systems'. The objectives of the YFJ as set out in the legal base establishing the YiA programme for the period 2007 to 2013 are:¹

- To represent youth organisations vis-à-vis the EU;
- To coordinate the positions of its members vis-à-vis the EU;
- To relay information on youth vis-à-vis the European Institutions;
- To relay information from the EU to the national youth councils and non-governmental organisations;
- To promote and prepare the participation of young people in democratic life;
- To contribute to the new cooperation framework in the youth field established at the level of the EU;
- To contribute to the development of youth policies, youth work and educational opportunities, and to relay information concerning young people, and develop representative structures for young people throughout Europe;
- To engage in discussion and reflection on youth in Europe and in other parts of the world and on the Community's action for young people.

It is mandated in the legal base of the YiA programme 2007-2013 that the resources provided by the EC for the YFJ amount to at least EUR 2 million annually. In addition, at least 20% of the YFJ's income should be from non-Community sources. The grant from the EC is awarded annually, based on the work plan and budget of the YFJ.² This EU support has a number of conditions attached:³

- The YFJ's independence in the selection of its members, ensuring the broadest possible representation of different kinds of youth organisations;
- Its autonomy in the detailed specification of its activities,

¹ Decision No 1719/2006/EC.

² Decision No 1719/2006/EC.

³ Decision No 1719/2006/EC.

- The broadest possible involvement in the YFJ's activities of non-member youth organisations and young people who do not belong to organisations;
- The active contribution by the YFJ to the political processes relevant to youth at European level, in particular by responding to the European institutions when they consult civil society and explaining the positions adopted by these institutions to its members.

Results: Relevance and complementarity

Intervention logic

The raison d'être of the YFJ is to influence policies and make a difference for young people and youth organisations. In order to pursue this goal, the EC funds the majority of the costs of the YFJ. One of the conditions of this grant agreement is that the YFJ is an independent organisation, with autonomy in the detailed specification of its activities. Therefore, the YFJ has not only a relationship with the EC but also with the youth organisations in the field, who are members of the YFJ, pay membership fees and decide upon the activities to be undertaken. With regard to the autonomy of the YFJ, there could be a potential tension between expectations from the EC, based on the objectives set in the legal base for the Youth in Action (YiA) programme and the actual activities that the YFJ executes. However, this is seldom a problem in practice, as the independence of the YFJ is well respected by the European Commission. Nonetheless, the intervention logic could be better constructed to reduce the likelihood of tension.

The YFJ objectives as laid down in the legal basis of the YiA programme are broad. The objectives do overlap and the hierarchy of objectives is not clear. Moreover, the YFJ has formulated its own objectives in the statutes which are not identical to the objectives in the legal base establishing the YiA programme (Decision No 1719/2006/EC). In the work plans of the YFJ no connection is made between the specific objectives, priorities and activities as laid down in the YFJ's work plans and the objectives for the YFJ as laid down in the legal base establishing the YiA programme. The monitoring reports of the YFJ make no clear connection between YFJ activities and the objectives of the legal base establishing the YiA programme. The evaluators find this an omission.

Relevance to the Youth in Action programme and the Youth Policy

The policy input and feedback provided by the YFJ is considered to be very important by the EC. Having one platform that generates inputs from the wider youth field is a useful instrument to structure and channel opinions and inputs.

The activities undertaken by the YFJ appear to have a strong relevance to the objectives of the YFJ set out in the legal base establishing the YiA programme, except for the membership services which have a weaker link to the objectives set in the legal base.

The YFJ is relevant to the YiA programme, but also to several of the specific objectives of the future Erasmus for All⁴ programme as well as to the EU youth strategy.

Relevance to the needs of target groups

The activities of the YFJ are in general relevant to the needs of youth organisations. Due to the strong link between the activities carried out by the YFJ and objectives of the YFJ as set in the legal base establishing the YiA programme, also the objectives of the YFJ are relevant to the needs of youth organisations. Some specific activities stand out in terms of relevance to organisations in the

⁴ The analysis for the Erasmus for all programme was made in the beginning of 2013. The programme, however, is still evolving and at the time of writing (August 2013) the new programme is called Erasmus+.

youth field, namely: capacity building, representation, lobbying and advocacy work, dissemination of information, networking meetings and exchange of good practices.

Complementarity

The YFJ is a unique structure, especially because the YFJ brings youth organisations together, the YFJ lobbies and advocates for the interests of young people, the YFJ provides information to the EC, the YFJ members and other stakeholders. Moreover, the YFJ provides capacity building and trainings to NGOs and national youth councils. There are no other organisations at EU level that offer similar activities with such a wide scope.

Results: Effectiveness

There are certain limitations to the assessment of effectiveness of the YFJ activities, due to the descriptive nature of the monitoring reports. These reports do not clearly indicate what goals and outputs are expected to be reached and achieved in relation to the objectives set out in the legal base. Hence, the assessment of the effectiveness has to be made on a more qualitative basis.

Effectiveness to the objectives set for the YFJ in the legal base (Decision No 1719/ 2006/ EC)

The activities of the YFJ contribute to all eight objectives set out in the legal base of the establishment of the YiA programme, but the objectives are met to varying degrees. Objective 1 related to the representation of youth organisations to the EU stands out as being particularly effective. The YFJ executes many lobby and advocacy activities, the structured dialogue is one of the main vehicles used to reach this objective. The effectiveness of Objective 2, coordinating the positions of its members to the EU, is conditional for an effective representation of the members (Objective 1). Indeed, the YFJ proves to be effectively achieving this. Objectives 3 and 4 relating to information exchange are met to a large extent, though a clear communication planning for each target group would further enhance effectiveness. Objective 5 relating to promoting and preparing the participation of young people in democratic life is to some extent reached by the structured dialogue process. Most YFJ activities indirectly contribute to the objective through the YFJ's representation of youth organisations, who in turn represent young people directly. Objectives 6 and 7 are related to the contribution of the YFJ to policies, these objectives are also met, mostly via the structured dialogue, lobbying and advocacy activities, the production of policy papers and other information provided to the EC. Under Objective 8 (related to other parts of the world) important activities have been undertaken, though activities are rather scattered; a clearer focus could enhance effectiveness.

Effectiveness to the principles set out for the YFJ in the legal base (Decision No 1719/ 2006/ EC)

The YFJ meets all four principles set out in the legal base:

1. The YFJ is independent in the selection of its members to ensure a broad representation of youth organisations;
2. The YFJ is completely autonomous in defining its work programme;
3. The YFJ can do more to ensure the broadest possible involvement of non-member youth organisations and young people;
4. The YFJ contributes to the political processes relevant to youth at the EU level.

Effectiveness to the objectives of the YiA programme (Decision No 1719/ 2006/ EC)

The activities of the YFJ contribute (to some extent) to achieving the Youth in Action programme's objectives (Decision No 1719/2006/EC). A number of factors make a clear contribution to this, such as the implementation of the structured dialogue process, the enhancement of cooperation in the

youth field, the capacity building of youth organisations and the representation of youth organisations towards the EU institutions.

Results that would not have been obtained by other alternative options

There is general consensus amongst stakeholders that maintaining direct contact with a large selection of young people, and taking into account a diversity of opinions, is a challenging task for the European institutions. The YFJ is a means to represent youth, on a broad range of topics, and facilitate communication with a broad range of young people in Europe. Although other structures may be worth exploring, the evaluators find that the current option, whereby opinions are channelled through the YFJ, is the most suitable mechanism at EU level.

Results: Efficiency and sustainability

Organisational structure

The European Youth Forum's organisational structure is perceived as very professional and efficient. In general the selection process of members is assessed as transparent and the selection criteria are appropriate. Member organisations feel that the YFJ is organised in a highly democratic manner.

Cost-effectiveness

The monitoring data are not sufficient to judge on cost-efficiency. The qualitative information available on the rules around the reimbursement of costs, the salaries (which are in line with Belgium rules for NGOs) and the fact that many people work on a voluntary basis for different YFJ bodies, suggests that the YFJ looks closely at its spending.

Proportionality of the grant

The appropriateness of the size of the grant is very much subject to the desired results. Since no ambition levels were set in relation to the objectives, there is no benchmark to which the appropriateness of the size of the grant can be related. Still, the main stakeholders (EC, members and other stakeholders in the youth field) are satisfied with the activities undertaken by the YFJ.

Were the resources of the YFJ to diminish, the YFJ would employ fewer people and fewer activities would be organised. As a consequence, the YFJ would need to make choices in what activities they would employ, which will affect their effectiveness. The reduction in effectiveness will be dependent on the fields the YFJ would reduce the activities, or in the fields or activities that the EC might not wish to support further.

Alternative sources and sustainability

Most stakeholders are unable to identify alternative sources for funding for the YFJ, mainly because of the current economic climate. This also means that increasing the membership fees is also likely to be unrealistic.

A key issue is to what degree the grant of the EC is necessary to guarantee the sustainability of the YFJ. As long as the EC covers most of the costs, the YFJ is sustainable; if the EC terminates its contribution, sustainability is threatened. This supports the need for spreading risks. In terms of sustainability of the knowledge gained by the YFJ, the YFJ actually ensures the use of the knowledge of alumni in their activities.

Monitoring

Monitoring reports are rather descriptive and do not provide sufficient complete and structured information on activities, number of participants, achievements, expected achievements and related costs. Furthermore, there are no clear input-output and result indicators formulated. Recently, YFJ started working on improvements on this, but further monitoring arrangements need to be set up.

Communication

The YFJ has many communication tools e.g. newsletters, publications and websites, as well as via social media. Member organisations are generally satisfied with the information they receive, although further structuring of the information might help receivers to select what is relevant to them. Also, information provided through the website could be improved.

Recommendations

Taken together, these results lead to the following main recommendations towards the EC:

- The EC could include a more general objective for financing the YFJ in a future programme that overlaps the goals of both the EC and the members of the YFJ;
- The objectives set by the EC for the YFJ (in the legal base establishing the Youth in Action programme, Decision No 1719/2006/EC) could be simplified. Also, a reduction in the number of objectives is desired;
- The EC could improve the intervention logic and implement "framework independence", a situation in which the EC does not influence the opinions of the YFJ but does influence the delineation on the type of activities executed;
- The EC could encourage the YFJ to improve its monitoring arrangements, by defining indicators and establishing a format for monitoring reports;
- The EC should encourage the YFJ to monitor the inputs, outputs and results in a more structured way and to further develop their monitoring system allowing for a link of inputs to activities, outputs and results;
- The EC could consider adapting the legal basis of the YiA programme (Decision No 1719/2006/EC) to reduce the ambiguity of the role of the YFJ: make clear if the YFJ is an organization directly involving young people and non-members or can the YFJ only indirectly involve these target groups;
- The EC should consider what specific types of activities it finances and to what extent, in order to ensure that the activities financed contribute to the EC's own objectives;
- Were the EC to consider a reduction in the grant, it is recommended to the EC to gradually reduce it to give the YFJ enough time to search alternative sources.

1 Introduction

In the period December 2012-August 2013 Ecorys conducted an evaluation of the Operating Grant Agreement with the European Youth Forum on behalf of the European Commission. This report presents the findings of this evaluation.

1.1 Purpose of the evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation of the European Commission (EC) operating grant agreements with the European Youth Forum (YFJ, Youth Forum Jeunesse) is to assess activities, outputs and results against the objectives of the Youth in Action (YiA) Programme 2007-2013 and the operating grant agreements. It focuses on efficiency, relevance, effectiveness and sustainability. The results are compared with the results of the previous evaluation⁵. The evaluation covers the time period 2007-2011 and, as far as possible, the first six months of 2012.

The Terms of Reference for the study can be found in Annex 1.

1.2 Methodology

The evaluation is based on the following methodology:

- Desk research (policy documents, operating grants, monitoring reports, annual plans, statutes, former evaluation);
- Interviews with representatives of the Commission and the YFJ;
- Reconstruction of the intervention logic;
- Online survey among a broad group of stakeholders (addressed to national governments; national youth councils; national agencies of the Youth in Action programme; research institutions/ organisations linked to youth work; SALTO-YOUTH Resource Centres⁶; informal youth groups; national, European and international non-governmental youth organisations. Among the invited non-governmental youth organisations and national youth councils are the members of the YFJ, as well as non-members);
- Some 60 interviews with other stakeholders (members and non-member organisations);
- Focus group meeting to test the findings, collect additional data and to discuss the implications of the findings for the future.

In the analysis the results from the different sources are triangulated. In the report we clearly indicate which sources of information inform our findings and when statements are the opinion of the evaluator. The evaluators have encountered several problems in the course of carrying out this evaluation:

⁵ Final external evaluation of the Community action programme to promote bodies active at European level in the field of youth (2004-2006).

⁶ SALTO-YOUTH stands for Support, Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities within the European YOUTH programme. SALTO-YOUTH.net is a network of 8 Resource Centres working on European priority areas within the youth field. It provides youth work and training resources and organises training and contact-making activities to support organisations and National Agencies within the frame of the European Commission's Youth in Action programme and beyond.

- Low quality of monitoring data. The objectives for the financing of the YFJ as laid down in section 4.2 of the legal base⁷) are rather broad and there are no indicators defined to measure effectiveness. The monitoring reports provided to the Commission are very descriptive and do not often provide information on achievements. Furthermore, the report structure is related to the priorities of the YFJ as established by the members of the YFJ and not to the objectives of the legal base. This makes it difficult to obtain a clear picture of what has been done and what has been achieved in relation to objectives. This has implications for making firm statements on effectiveness in relation to the objectives set out in the legal base and makes it impossible to do a robust cost-effectiveness analysis of the activities performed;
- Relatively low response rate to the questionnaire, which addressed both the YFJ as well as the European Commission-Council of Europe Youth Partnership Agreements. The questionnaire has been sent out to a broad group of stakeholders (3500 people), but the invitation message was opened by only 40%. In total 342 people answered the questionnaire (approximately 10% of the total population and more than 20% of the people that opened the message). Of those 342 respondents, 243 respondents answered the questionnaire on the YFJ. A number of actions have been undertaken to increase the response rate: reminders were sent out twice, the European Commission approached organisations directly asking them to fill out the questionnaire and the running time of the questionnaire was prolonged.

The relatively low response rate was caused by:

- The fact that a large group did not even open the e-mail sent to them (over 60%, indicating that some of the addresses were not in use anymore or that they were blocked by a filter);
- The interest might have been relatively limited as a large group of the addressees to which the questionnaire was sent is not directly involved in the YFJ, which leads to a low interest in and/or a low level of knowledge on those institutions.

However, the total number of respondents is relatively large (243), with responses from different types of organisations, such as Ministries/ youth organisations (members and non-members of the YFJ), research institutes, covering most EU-27⁸ countries. Based on this comprehensive and diverse group of respondents, we can draw conclusions on the outcomes, helped by the fact that the variation in the answers provided by each sub-group is rather limited. Furthermore, the outcomes of the questionnaire have been further tested by the interviews with a broader group of stakeholders, which provided a consistent picture;

- Difficulty of mobilising people for the interviews among a wider group of stakeholders. The interest to participate in the interviews was not very high among people that were not directly involved in the YFJ. These organisations may feel that participating in the interviews is not worth the effort, or they may feel that they lack enough knowledge to make a useful contribution. This also relates to the relatively low response rate to the questionnaire. However, the people that participated in the interviews were knowledgeable and contributed to answering the evaluation questions;
- The former evaluation provided only limited possibilities for comparison with the current evaluation as the former evaluation covered not only the YFJ but also other organisations. Conclusions and recommendations on efficiency covered the programme level (Community action programme) only so the comparison is limited to those conclusions and recommendations which were specifically made for the YFJ.

The strength of this evaluation is that it combines the different sources available and that the main issues have been tested during the focus group meeting. The findings from the different sources do strengthen each other and within the focus groups the main issues were confirmed, which is a further indication of the reliability of the analysis.

⁷ Decision No 1719/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15th November 2006 establishing the 'Youth in Action' programme for the period 2007 to 2013.

⁸ The evaluation activities took place before the accession of Croatia to the EU.

1.3 Structure of the report

In Chapter 2 we present the objectives, activities and organisation structure of the European Youth Forum, followed by a Chapter (3) on relevance and complementarity. In chapter 4 the findings on effectiveness are presented and Chapter 5 deals with efficiency. Conclusions and recommendations are presented in Chapter 6.

2 The European Youth Forum

2.1 Objectives European Youth Forum

The purpose of the European Youth Forum (Youth Forum Jeunesse, YFJ) is, according to the Statutes of the YFJ, 'to organise studies, research, debates, seminars, meetings, publications, information or actions having the defence of the youth's interest in Europe as goal' (European Youth Forum, 2010, Statutes). The promotional activities of the YFJ are aimed at the Council of Europe, the European Union and other policy makers (European Youth Forum, 2010, Statutes). Today, the YFJ has 98 member organisations.

The YFJ aims to⁹:

- be a consultative body for international institutions on youth issues;
- promote youth policy by government and institutions;
- deliver input to inform the policies developed by international institutions on youth issues;
- increase the participation of young people and youth organisations in society and in the decision-making process;
- promote the exchange of thoughts and experiences, mutual understanding, and equal rights and opportunities among youth in Europe.

The EC has concluded an Operating Grant Agreement with the YFJ with the following objectives (laid down in the legal base for the Youth in Action Programme):¹⁰

- To represent youth organisations vis-à-vis the EU;
- To coordinate the positions of its members vis-à-vis the EU;
- To relay information on youth vis-à-vis the European Institutions;
- To relay information from the EU to the national youth councils and non-governmental organisations;
- To promote and prepare the participation of young people in democratic life;
- To contribute to the new cooperation framework in the youth field established at the level of the EU;
- To contribute to the development of youth policies, youth work and educational opportunities, and to relay information concerning young people and develop representative structures for young people throughout Europe;
- To engage in discussion and reflection on youth in Europe and in other parts of the world and on the Community's action for young people.

The evaluation is limited to those activities of the YFJ which are covered by the European Commission's operating grant agreement with the YFJ.

The support is financed through the Youth in Action Programme under the Action 4: 'Youth support systems'. The aim of this Action is: *"To develop the quality of youth support structures, to support the role of those active in youth work and youth organisations, to develop the quality of the Programme and promote the civil participation of young people at European level by supporting bodies active at European level in the field of youth."* (Decision **No 1719/2006/EC**).

⁹ European Youth Forum (2010), Statutes.

¹⁰ Decision No 1719/2006/EC.

More specifically the Action has the objective *“To support bodies active at European level in the field of youth, in particular the operation of youth NGOs, their networking, advice for people developing projects, ensuring quality by means of the exchange, training and networking of those active in youth work and youth organisations, encouraging innovation and quality, providing young people with information, developing the structures and activities needed for the Programme to meet these goals and encouraging partnerships with local and regional authorities.”* (Decision No 1719/2006/EC).

This EU support has a number of principles attached, which are identified in the Youth in Action programme and which the activities of the YFJ should therefore respect:¹¹

- The European Youth Forum’s independence in the selection of its members, ensuring the broadest possible representation of different kinds of youth organisations;
- Its autonomy in the detailed specification of its activities;
- The broadest possible involvement in the European Youth Forum’s activities of non-member youth organisations and young people who do not belong to organisations;
- The active contribution by the YFJ to the political processes relevant to youth at European level, in particular by responding to the European institutions when they consult civil society and explaining the positions adopted by these institutions to its members.

2.2 Budget

The European Commission has financially supported the YFJ and its predecessors for about 20 years. From 2007 to 2011/12 the YFJ has been financed through the Youth in Action Programme under the Action 4: ‘Youth support systems’. It is mandated in the Youth in Action programme 2007-2013 that the resources provided by the European Commission for the YFJ amount to at least EUR 2 million per year (Decision No 1719/2006/EC).

It is also stated in Decision No 1719/2006/EC that at least 20% of the YFJ’s budget should be from non-Community sources. These sources currently comprise:¹²

- The members’ annual subscription fees (around 5% of the total budget of the YFJ);
- Grants by the Council of Europe (around 3%);
- Volunteers, partnerships and other incomes;

Grants are awarded annually, based on the work plan and budget.¹³ These principles guide the activities of the YFJ.

The EC funding was approximately €2.0-2.4 million a year in the years 2007 to 2011 and covered operating costs and expenses of the activities of the YFJ. In practise the EC contribution corresponded to 75-84% of the eligible costs.

2.3 Description of YFJ priorities and activities

2.3.1 Strategic priorities

To fulfil its goals the YFJ adopts a set of Strategic Priorities every six years, subject to acceptance by the Council of members. The priorities for 2007-2012 and 2013-2018 are presented in the table below.

Table 2.1 YFJ Strategic Priorities¹⁴

¹¹ Decision No 1719/2006/EC.

¹² European Youth Forum, Final report 2011.

¹³ Decision No 1719/2006/EC.

2007-2012	2013-2018
Education;	Youth Participation;
Participation and Youth Policy Mainstreaming;	Strong Youth Organisations;
Youth Work Development;	Youth Autonomy and Inclusion.
Human rights and Social Cohesion;	
Employment and Social Affairs.	

The implementation of the Strategic Priorities is operationalized through Work Plans, which are adopted every two years. The Strategic Priorities provide a framework and give direction to relevant advocacy and lobby work, whereas the Work Plans focus on the implementation process and set out the political priorities of the YFJ. The Work Plans are intended to provide insights into key areas and projects, objectives, actions and activities. Each objective is individually linked to one or more of the Strategic Priorities.

2.3.2 Overview of key activities

The YFJ is engaged in a significant number of activities ranging from working with youth experts in the form of working groups, to representing youth organisations in international organisations and advocacy actions.

Lobbying and advocacy work towards the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of Europe and the United Nations, which is the core activity of the YFJ.

Institutional relations of the YFJ focus on policy implementation and monitoring, representation of interests, lobbying and advocacy towards institutions such as the European Union, the Council of Europe and the United Nations.

The YFJ assumed the role of chair of the European Steering Committee, which coordinates the **structured dialogue**. It has continued to fulfil this role during the second cycle of structured dialogue devoted to "youth participation". The YFJ also provides the secretariat of the European Steering Committee, which has the important task of collating in a single document the outcomes of the consultations of young people conducted in all the EU Member States prior to European Youth Conferences organised by each of the EU Presidency countries.

The YFJ is working actively for **evidence-based youth policy**. It has based its work on existing data and policy evidence gathered through engagement with and the diversity of its members.

Pool of Trainers is an open resource for the members of the YFJ¹⁵. These trainers provide strategic advice and develop methodologies for the activities carried out by the YFJ. The trainers are also involved in events (co-)organised by the YFJ. The pool of trainers consists of approximately 40 experienced trainers covering different fields of youth work, these trainers work for the member organisations of the YFJ.¹⁶

Organisational Development: besides the pool of trainers, the YFJ works actively on the organisational development of their members and supports the set up of national councils.

¹⁴ Youth Forum Jeunesse (2006), Strategic priorities of the European Youth Forum 2007-2012 And European Youth Forum (2012) Draft Strategic priorities 2013-2018 And <http://www.youthforum.org/#>.

¹⁵ http://www.youthforum.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1189&Itemid=105&lang=en.

¹⁶ http://www.youthforum.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1189&Itemid=105&lang=en.

Communication: The YFJ has several means for the distribution of information, such as publications, press releases, website and social media.

The key working structures of the YFJ to establish policy are a number of working groups. For example in 2011 the “Working group on Volunteering” and the “Working group non-formal education” were established. In addition, some three YFJ Expert groups are part of the working structures on issues such as youth in action, youth rights and vote at 16.

2.4 Member Organisations

There are two types of organisation that can become a member of the YFJ:

- National Youth Councils;
- International Non Governmental Youth Organisations having either at least 5000 young members in ten European States, and under no circumstances less than 300 youth members in any one of these ten States, or having a recommendation from the Secretary-General and Board or the Consultative body on Membership applications.

In principle there is only one National Youth Council member of the YFJ per European Member State (European Youth Forum, 2010, Statutes). Youth organisations cannot become members if an organisation with largely the same aims and structures and membership is already a member (European Youth Forum, 2010, Statutes).

Members have to fulfil several general criteria such as:

1. To accept and work for the purpose of the YFJ;
2. To be a non-governmental and not for profit organisation;
3. To have democratic aims and structures and accept the principles of the European Convention of Human Rights;
4. To fully acknowledge the Statutes of the YFJ;
5. To work with young people and have a decision making body controlled by young people;
6. Not to be subject to direction in their decisions by any external authority.

There are several types of membership:

- full member: right to vote, right to be present and to speak at the General Assembly and Council of Members, right to present candidates for all working structures of the YFJ (today 34 national youth councils and 42 NGOs are full member);
- candidate member: no right to vote though other rights are the same (3 national youth councils and 2 NGOs); or
- observer: no right to vote, right to be present and speak at the General Assembly and Council of Members, right to present candidates for all non-permanent working structures of the YFJ (1 national youth council and 13 NGOs).

3 Relevance and complementarity

This chapter presents the findings regarding the relevance of the activities of the YFJ, based on desk research, interviews with stakeholders in the youth field, a survey among stakeholders in the youth field and a focus group discussion as well as the expert view of the evaluators. The first part of the chapter presents the intervention logic i.e. the rationale behind the intervention, the connection of the activities of the YFJ to the goals set by the EC and the internal logic of the YFJ. In section 3.2 the relevance of the intervention to the EC is described, as well as the relevance towards the YiA programme, the Erasmus for All programme and the EU youth strategy. In section 3.3 we present the relevance of the YFJ for broader target groups. The last section presents the conclusions of the relevance of the YFJ's activities.

3.1 Intervention logic and relevance for objectives as set for the YFJ in the legal base establishing the Youth in Action Programme

3.1.1 *Rationale behind the intervention*

The *raison d'être* of the YFJ is to influence policies and make a difference for young people and youth organisations. The YFJ and its predecessors have a history going back more than half a century. Before the 60's there was no youth policy at European level, but the subject gained attention in the early 60's. In 1963, a platform of youth organisations was founded, the Council of European National Youth Committees (CENYC). This CENYC called upon the Council of Europe to establish a European Youth Centre and a Fund for youth activities. Since then European youth policy started to develop. In 1978 the EC was looking for a consultative organisation in the field of youth that was to be led by the EC. However, the youth organisations in Europe were not supportive of this idea, though they did support the idea of providing input on topics of their interest to the EC. Hence, the YFEU was set up by the CENYC and ECB in the late 1970s to work *vis-à-vis* the EC. In 1996 the CENYC amalgamated with the 'Youth Forum of the European Communities' (YFEU) and the 'European Co-ordination Bureau of International Youth Organisations' (ECB) forming the 'European Youth Forum'.

The history described above shows the rationale for the EU funding the YFJ through the YiA: to provide a forum for the EC to generate feedback and policy input from youth (organisations) throughout Europe. The idea is to have one platform that generates inputs from the wider youth field to structure and channel opinions and input. In order to pursue this goal, the YFJ is funded for approximately 80% by the European Union through the Youth in Action Programme. One of the principles conditional to this grant agreement is that the YFJ is an independent organisation, with autonomy in the detailed specification of its activities and independence in the selection of its members. This rationale is reflected in the fact that the YFJ has a relationship with (1) the European Commission, as laid down in the operating grant agreement, as well as with (2) the youth organisations in the field, who are members of the YFJ, pay a membership fee and decide upon the activities to be undertaken.

It is assumed that without substantial funding provided by the EC through the operating grant this platform would not exist, or would not be able to generate a substantial input. This assumption is confirmed by the findings of the evaluators, based on interviews with the YFJ, National Youth Councils and various member organisations. It is acknowledged that the funding of the YFJ is quite an exceptional situation, as other NGOs lobbying for their interests are normally not funded to such an extent. Moreover, it is exceptional that their independence is guaranteed.

Stakeholders acknowledge that the substantial funding rate potentially causes tension. The YFJ is an independent organisation, that has its own agenda and activities. However, the funder (the Commission) has certain needs and expectations (policy input relating to issues relevant for young people) while at the same time the members of the YFJ have needs that might differ from the objectives of the EC.

It is mentioned by interviewees that the EC has limited space to act because member organisations decide upon the activities undertaken. They indicate:

1. It is a risk for the YFJ to be 80% funded by the EC, as it might give the impression that the YFJ is being influenced by the EC and thus not completely independent;
2. That the YFJ priorities are not always in line with EC priorities as the YFJ is, according to the YFJ and its members, not accountable to the EC, but rather to its members.

Practice shows that these two issues do not frequently occur and the independence of the YFJ is respected. However, it is clear from the interviews that Commission staff members have certain expectations on what the YFJ should and should not do, while it is at the same time clear that the independence of the YFJ has to be respected. The EC does not intend to interfere with the YFJ but views the independence of the YFJ within the boundaries of the YiA programme (and its legal basis). Interviewees indicate some options for this issue. Either the Commission accepts the full autonomy of the YFJ by financing all its activities, including the activities that might be less relevant in the view of the Commission or the Commission decides on “framed independence”: a situation in which the EC does not influence the opinions of the YFJ but does influence the delineation on the type of activities it finances.

Both stakeholders (the EC and member organisations) have a distinct goal for their relationship with the YFJ as well as distinct expectations of the YFJ. Therefore, in this chapter we will make a distinction between the relevance of the YFJ for these two stakeholders (see section 3.2 on relevance towards the EC and section 3.3 on relevance toward broader stakeholders).

3.1.2 Objectives of the YFJ

Although the YFJ is independent in the detailed specification of its activities, there are general objectives set in the legal base establishing the YiA Programme, Decision No 1719/2006/EC, the establishment of the Youth in Action programme (see section 2.1).

These objectives are broad and not very specific. There is an overlap between objectives e.g. for the implementation of objective 1 (representation) the YFJ will need to implement objective 2 (coordinating the positions of its members). Additionally, objectives 1 (representation), 7 (contribution to youth policies) and 8 (discussion on youth) are interrelated. Moreover, the hierarchy of the objectives is not clear.

During the focus group discussion (involving the EC, the YFJ and member organisations) it became clear that objectives 1 (representing youth organisations vis-à-vis the EU)- and 7 (contribution to the development of youth policies) are by far the most relevant objectives for the European Commission, the YFJ and its members. Also during the interviews with members, objective 1 was mentioned most often as a reason to be involved with the YFJ. For the EC objective 1 is important because ‘Representing youth organisations vis-à-vis the EU is something they cannot easily organise themselves. On the other hand, objective 4 (relaying information from the EU to organisations) is something the EC could act on themselves and organisations often have other channels through which they receive the relevant information (although the survey among a broader group of stakeholders shows that receiving information is another important reason to be

involved in the YFJ). A number of interviewees from youth organisations indicate that the problems in the EU are such that the focus of the YFJ should be on the EU. This indicates that the world-wide scope of objective 8, to engage in discussion and reflection on youth in Europe and in other parts of the world and on the Community's action for young people, is at this point in time less relevant to youth organisations. The evaluator's opinion on objective 5 'promoting and preparing the participation of young people in democratic life' is that fundamentally it is questionable whether this objective is really related to the task of the YFJ. Many interviewees from member organisations stressed that it is not the task of the YFJ to support youth directly. YFJ is an umbrella organisation with a "pyramid-structure" in which the YFJ represents youth organisations, and youth organisations in turn represent youth. Therefore, one could argue that this objective raises expectations that can not be met by the YFJ.

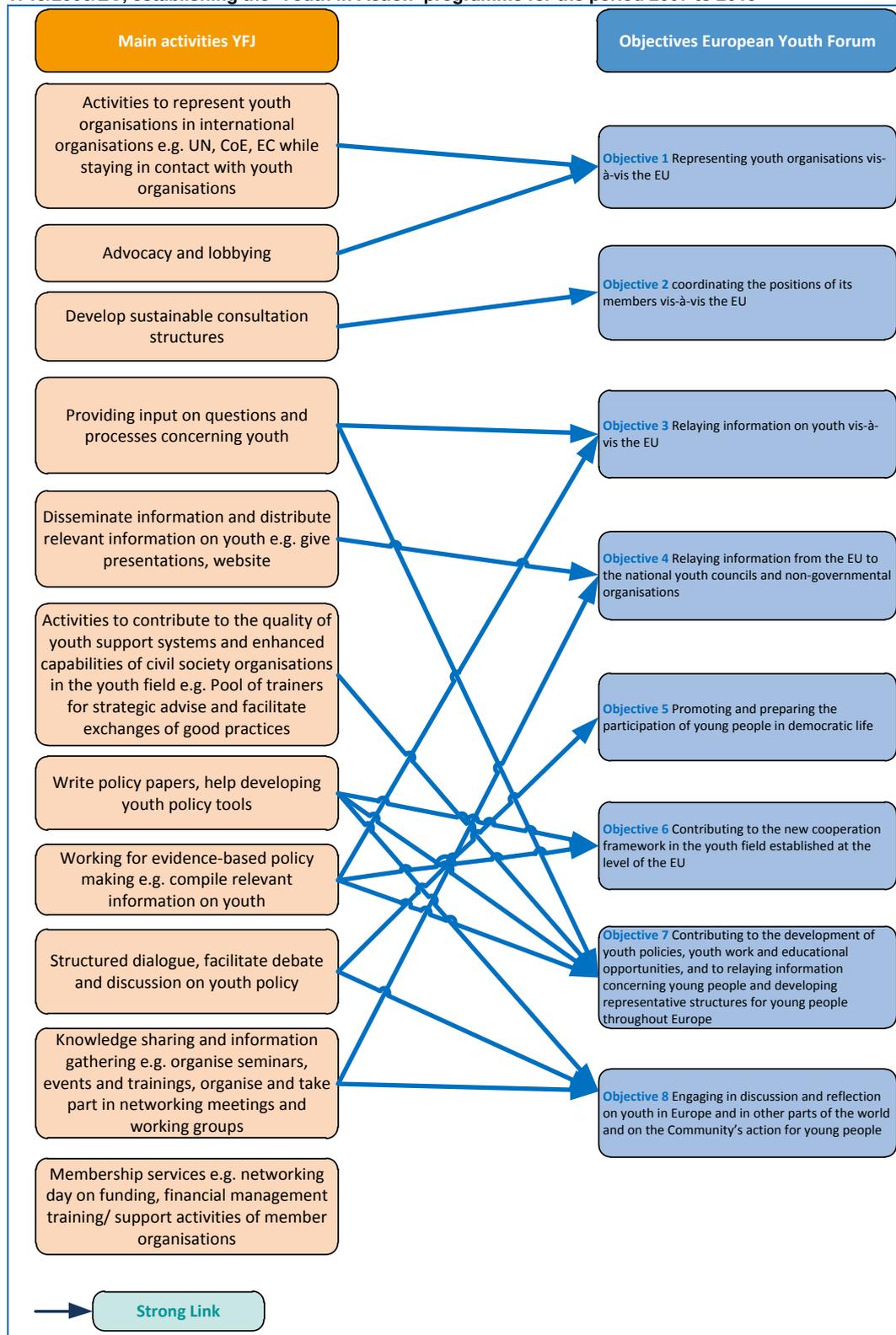
3.1.3 *Connecting the objectives specified in the legal base and the YFJ work plans*

The evaluators have undertaken an exercise to connect the activities of the YFJ to the objectives of the legal base in order to assess the relevance of the activities for the objectives of the legal base. The YFJ encompasses a significant range of activities, so we have grouped the main activities as shown in the figure overleaf and analysed the contribution to the main specific objectives of the YFJ as laid down in the legal base. Only the strongest links are presented in this picture since there are many links between the objectives and the main activities. All the groups of activities of the YFJ, except for the membership services, appear to link strongly to one or more objectives of the YFJ, as set out in the Youth in Action programme (Decision No 1719/2006 EC¹⁷).

Since the objectives in the statutes of the YFJ are not identical to the objectives in the legal base of the Youth in Action-programme, reconstructing the linkages between these two documents is not easy, and it becomes problematic when evaluating the performance against the legal base of the YiA-programme. In the work plans of the YFJ no connection is made between the specific objectives, priorities and activities as laid down in the YFJ's work plans and the objectives for the YiA-programme as laid down in the legal base (Decision No 1719/2006/EC, establishing the 'Youth in Action' programme for the period 2007 to 2013). The objectives as set out in the legal base are not specifically mentioned or reflected upon in the work plans or in the progress reports of the YFJ. The evaluators do find this a significant omission, as it is not clear how the legal base and work plans are connected. As a result, monitoring reports do not give sufficient information on the effects of activities and their contribution to the objectives set in the legal base. Although links between the legal base, the work plans and activities are not explicitly elaborated on in the YFJ documents, links can be found between these three.

¹⁷ In the grant agreement the objectives are indicated as being the main activities of the YFJ. However, in the Terms of Reference for his assignment these were referred to as objectives, and we have treated them as such for this evaluation, as the decision does not contain specific objectives for the YFJ (only principles and activities).

Figure 3.1 Relevance: Contribution of main activities to the objectives as set out in Decision No 1719/2006/EC, establishing the 'Youth in Action' programme for the period 2007 to 2013



We conclude that the activities undertaken by the YFJ appear to have strong relevance to the objectives as defined in the legal base. The exception is membership services, which are only indirectly relevant for the objectives set in the legal base.

3.1.4 *The internal framework of strategic priorities, aims, objectives and activities of the YFJ*

In this sub-section we describe the internal logic framework of the YFJ itself as an independent organisation. We do this to be able to better understand the working of the YFJ. However, it should be kept in mind that the subject of evaluation is not the YFJ as such (which is an independent organisation), but the work of the YFJ in relation to the objectives for the YFJ as laid down in the legal base. Of course, both are interrelated. In addition, it should be taken into account that not all priorities and activities necessarily have to be in line with the EC policy, since the YFJ has an independent agenda as well.

Next to the objectives of the YFJ as laid down in Decision No 1719/2006 EC establishing the YiA programme, there are strategic priorities set by the YFJ. These are cross-cutting themes, namely: education, participation and youth policy mainstreaming, youth work development, human rights and social cohesion. Aims and objectives have been formulated which are connected to the strategic priorities. These operational aims and objectives are in most cases not directly linked to the objectives of the YFJ, as described in Decision No 1719/2006 EC. In the Work Plans almost all operational aims and objectives set in the strategic priority 2007-2012 are elaborated into actions and activities. This means that all activities and actions are directly linked to the operational objectives, aims and/or priorities as set out in the strategic priority paper of the YFJ.

We conclude that the European Youth Forum has an overwhelming number of activities and these are directly linked to so called 'strategic priority areas', but do not map explicitly and one-to-one to the objectives of the YFJ as set in Decision No 1719/2006 EC.

Based on the outcomes of the desk research the evaluators conclude that the internal framework can be streamlined better by:

1. Linking activities more directly to the objectives of the YFJ as laid down in the Decision;
2. Bringing more focus in terms of operational objectives and activities: this focus could be demand driven by asking member organisations and other youth organisations about their needs. Moreover, this focus could be on activities directly connected to the Youth in Action programme, since it is part of the programme and receives the majority of its finance from it.

3.2 *Relevance of the intervention to EU programmes*

As indicated in the former section, the EU provides funding to the YFJ to have a forum for the EC to generate feedback and policy input from youth (organisations) throughout the EU. This policy input is considered to be very important by the EC. Having one platform that generates inputs from the wider youth field is a useful instrument to structure and channel opinions and input. In this section the relevance of the intervention to the EC in a broader policy context is assessed.

In order to assess the relevance of the YFJ activities and objectives to the broader policy context, we analyse the degree of relevance of the YFJ activities to the objectives of several EU policy interventions. Due to the strong relation between the YFJ activities and objectives, the assessment of the relevance of YFJ activities gives us an indication of the relevance of YFJ objectives.

3.2.1 *Relevance for the general and specific objectives of the Youth in Action Programme*

In order to assess the relevance of the YFJ to the general and specific objectives of the the Youth in Action Programme, an analysis of the degree of relevance of the YFJ activities to the YiA programme objectives was carried out, on the basis of an expert judgement.

General Youth in Action objectives

The YFJ is relevant to the YiA objective *“to promote young people’s active citizenship in general and their European citizenship in particular”* as it is the organisation on EU level to represent young people and as such is directly relevant to this objective, as well as via the involvement of the YFJ in the structured dialogue¹⁸ (see also section 3.2.3 and section 4.2, Objective 6). Furthermore, as the YFJ is involving their member organisations in those topics that are of importance on EU level, it also contributes to activating its members in being actively involved in EU policy making and lobbying. However, the YFJ is less relevant in terms of stimulating individual young people, as the activities of the YFJ are not directed to individual young people but solely to youth organisations, representing youth. Indirectly the YFJ might be relevant, in case of influencing policies and practices to enforce young people’s active citizenship.

The YFJ is also very relevant for the objective *“to promote European cooperation in the youth field”*. As an EU level umbrella organisation of umbrella organisations and national youth councils it brings organisations together to cooperate.

The activities of the YFJ as such are indirectly relevant for the objective *“to develop solidarity and promote tolerance among young people, in particular in order to reinforce social cohesion in the EU”*, since it facilitates the discussions and contacts between the member organisations. The same counts for the objective *“to foster mutual understanding between young people in different countries”*. It is directly relevant, if this topic were to be chosen as one of the themes of the provided activities. In practice many of the activities are related to supporting youth mobility, volunteering, capacity building or campaigning, which develop solidarity and promote tolerance amongst young people.

The activities of the YFJ are relevant to the objective *“to contribute to developing the quality of support systems for youth activities and the capabilities of civil society organisations in the youth field”* as training is provided to the members. However, those activities are mainly limited to the members.

Specific Youth in Action objectives

Regarding the specific objectives of YiA, the YFJ activities are in particular relevant for the following YIA objectives:

- Encouraging structured dialogue between policymakers and young people (as the YFJ is the organiser it contributes directly);
- Giving young people and the organisations that represent them the opportunity to take part in the development of society and of the EU;
- Encouraging the participation of young people in the democratic life of Europe;
- Promoting the fundamental values of the EU;
- Developing exchanges and intercultural dialogue between young people in the EU and in neighbouring countries;
- Promoting the quality of national support structures for young people and the role of persons and organisations active in youth work;
- Contributing to the networking of organisations;
- Developing the training of, and collaboration between, those active in youth work develop the training of, and collaboration between, those active in youth work;
- Improving information for young people, including the access of young people with disabilities to this information;

¹⁸ In the structured dialogue governments and administrations, including EU institutions, discuss themes with young people, to obtain results which are useful for policy-making. The YFJ is a main partner for the EU institutions in this process.

- Improving knowledge and understanding of youth;
- Developing a sense of belonging to the EU.

There are also links with the other specific objectives of the programme, but these are less strong.

To conclude, the YFJ activities are relevant for quite a number of the general and specific objectives of the YiA programme. Due to the strong link between the activities and objectives of the YFJ (Decision No 1719/2006/EC), we can conclude that the YFJ objectives are also relevant to quite a number of general and specific objectives of the YiA programme.

3.2.2 *Relevance: contribution to the objectives of the future Erasmus for all programme*¹⁹

The proposed new Erasmus for All programme, which would run from 2014 to 2020, brings together a wide range of EU objectives and activities in higher education, school, vocational and adult education, youth policy and grassroots sports. Hence, the programme has a wide scope and relatively wide objectives. The activities of the YFJ are relevant for several (parts) of the specific objectives of the Erasmus for All programme.

The YFJ is relevant for the objective *“to improve the level of key competences and skills regarding in particular their relevance for the labour market and society, as well as the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe, notably through increased learning mobility opportunities for young people, learners, staff and youth workers, and through strengthened cooperation between education youth and the world of labour market”*, although the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe is not enhanced by the YFJ through increased mobility opportunities or cooperation between education youth and the world of labour but through the active promotion of democratic youth initiatives and structures.

The YFJ activities also link to the objective *“to foster quality improvements, innovation excellence and internationalisation at the level of educational institutions, as well as in youth work, notably through enhanced transnational cooperation between education and training providers/ youth organisations and other stakeholders”*, since the YFJ objective is to contribute to the development of youth policies, youth work and educational opportunities and the YFJ involvement in developing representative structures for young people in Europe.

The YFJ is cooperating in the youth field and the development of youth policies, youth work and educational opportunities, and is thus relevant for the objective *“to promote the emergence of a European lifelong learning area, trigger policy reforms at national level, support the modernisation of education and training systems, including non-formal learning, and support European cooperation in the youth field, notably through enhanced policy cooperation, better use of recognition and transparency tools and the dissemination of good practices”*.

The relevance of the YFJ for the other objectives (international dimension of education and training, excellence in teaching and the learning of languages) is limited.

The evaluators conclude that the YFJ activities are relevant to some of the objectives of the Erasmus for All programme. Due to the strong link between the activities and objectives of the YFJ (Decision No 1719/2006/EC), we can conclude that the YFJ objectives are also relevant to some of the objectives of the Erasmus for All programme.

¹⁹ The analysis for the Erasmus for all programme was made in the beginning of 2013. The programme, however, is still evolving and at the time of writing (August 2013) the new programme is called Erasmus+.

3.2.3 Relevance for the EU Youth Strategy

The EU Youth Strategy (2010-18) has two overall objectives:

- to encourage young people to be active citizens and participate in society;
- to provide more and equal opportunities for young people in education and in the labour market.

The activities and aims of the YFJ are particularly relevant, as also mentioned under the objectives of the YiA Programme for the objective “*to encourage young people to be active citizens and participate in society*”. The YFJ is also relevant for the objectives to provide more and equal opportunities in education and in the labour market as one of the priority themes that are chosen in the work plans relate to those topics (education, employment and social affairs in 2007-2012). However, the priority themes chosen for 2013-2018 are less relevant to this objective and relate stronger to the first objective of the Youth strategy.

One of the means for implementing the strategy is the structured dialogue. In the Council Resolution on a renewed Framework for European Cooperation in the Youth Field adopted in November 2009, the Ministers for Youth of the 27 EU Member States agreed that “*the structured dialogue with young people and youth organisations, which serves as a forum for continuous joint reflection on the priorities, implementation and follow-up of European cooperation in the youth field, should be pursued and developed*”. Structured dialogue involves consultations with young people and youth organisations at all levels in the EU Member States, and at EU level during the EU Youth Conferences organised by each EU Presidency country, and during the European Youth Weeks hosted by the European Commission. The process is implemented in work cycles of 18 months that have a common overall thematic priority and are divided into three rounds of consultations.²⁰

The activities of the YFJ are in particular relevant to the structured dialogue, where the YFJ plays a leading role. Although its role in the process was not outlined in the EU Youth Strategy, it responded positively to the invitation of the European Commission and the Trio Presidency countries (Spain-Belgium-Hungary) to assume the chair of the European Steering Committee, which coordinates the structured dialogue. It has continued to fulfil this role during the second cycle of structured dialogue devoted to “youth participation”.

Moreover, the YFJ also provides the secretariat of the European Steering Committee, which has the important task of collating in a single document the outcomes of the consultations of young people conducted in all the EU Member States prior to European Youth Conferences organised by each of the EU Presidency countries. This document serves as the sole “background document” for the debates with policy-makers at the EU Youth Conferences. As the author of the background document, the YFJ thus provides a key input to the conduct of structured dialogue at EU level, and thereby contributes directly to the implementation of the Youth Strategy.

We conclude that the activities of the YFJ are very relevant towards the above mentioned objectives and activities indicated in the EU Youth Strategy. Due to the strong link between the activities and objectives of the YFJ (Decision No 1719/2006/EC), we can conclude that the YFJ objectives are also relevant to the above mentioned objectives and activities of the EU Youth Strategy.

²⁰ http://www.youthforum.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2354&Itemid=28&lang=en.

3.3 Relevance to the needs of the target groups

Although not directly relevant to the Grant Agreement objectives, the evaluation also assessed the relevance of the activities of the YFJ to their members and a wider group of stakeholders. The results are presented in this section.

3.3.1 *Reasons to be involved with the YFJ*

In the survey the respondents are asked to indicate the most important reasons for being involved with the YFJ. The most important *broad reasons* for organisations to be involved with the YFJ are because it is beneficial to the organisation (33%) and because it is beneficial to the young people the organisations represent (31%) (multiple answers were possible here). Another 16% of respondents were of the opinion that they are involved because it is beneficial to the staff of their organisation.

The evidence suggests that the most important *specific reasons* to be involved in activities of the YFJ are:

- To stay informed on youth policy (35%);
- To stay informed about opportunities in EU youth policy field (29%);
- To be represented in European youth policy discussions (27%).

The least important reasons for the respondents to be involved with the YFJ are: to stay informed about education opportunities (15%) or opportunities in the national youth field (11%).

Some respondents provided other reasons for their involvement in the activities of the YFJ: examples are personal interest, to maintain networks and contacts in the youth field, to gain international inspiration for local youth work and to spread ideas.

Different organisations indicate different reasons for being involved with the activities of the YFJ. Youth organisations and national agencies are especially involved as it is beneficial to their organisation (46%) and to the young people they represent (45%). Ministries and SALTOS and national agencies of the YiA programme have more policy-related reasons to be involved with the YFJ²¹, which is logical given their respective responsibilities. Members of the YFJ are more positive on all reasons for involvement compared to non-members.

Also during the interviews with organisations in the youth field, we asked the member organisations of the YFJ for their main reasons for being involved with the YFJ. The most common reasons mentioned are:

1. The YFJ voices their opinion stronger: it is beneficial to be part of a bigger structure that is strong in lobbying to influence policy, as well as to have their interests represented towards EU institutions through one single voice/ a recognised body with many contacts;
2. To have interaction with other member organisations;
3. The YFJ is the main reference for questions and information they need.

In addition, the evaluators of the former evaluation²² concluded that the YFJ is more than a lobbying organisation: it is also a powerful network and a reservoir of expert knowledge. This endorses the importance of the three main reasons for organisations to be involved with the YFJ

²¹ Ministries have as main reasons to stay informed on opportunities in the EU youth policy field (37%), and to stay informed on youth policy (34%) and SALTOS and national agencies of the YiA programme have the same two main reasons to be involved (to stay informed on youth policy (39%), to stay informed on opportunities in EU youth policy field (32%)).

²² Results from the Final external evaluation of the Community action programme to promote bodies active at European level in the field of youth (2004-2006).

mentioned above: to voice their opinion more strongly, to interact with other members and to receive information.

In conclusion, member organisations are mostly involved with the YFJ because of their work related to lobbying and advocacy, the role of the YFJ in increasing cooperation with other organisations in the youth field and because they can ask questions and receive information from the YFJ mostly on youth policy and opportunities in the EU youth policy field. Ministries, SALTOs and national agencies of the YiA programme have more policy related reasons to be involved: receiving information on the EU policy field and opportunities in the EU policy field.

3.3.2 Relevance of the activities

A majority of respondents of the survey (59%) stated that the activities of the YFJ fit the needs of the organisation/ institution to which they are affiliated to some extent. Some 17% of respondents indicated that this was the case to a great extent. Another 9% of respondents did not think that the YFJ's activities fitted the needs of their organisation at all. This is a relatively modest outcome, but this is also a result of the fact that the survey targeted a broad group of stakeholders, while the YFJ mainly targets their member organisations in their activities. Non-governmental youth organisations, national youth councils, SALTOs and national agencies of the YiA programme are significantly more positive on the extent to which the activities of the YFJ fit with the needs of their organisation than Ministries, research institutes and other types of organisations. This is not surprising, as the activities of the YFJ are mainly directed towards their members (youth organisations and national councils) and policy makers, and not so much to Ministries and research institutes.

The extent to which the stakeholders indicate that activities of the YFJ fit the needs of the young people in the countries is more convincing. According to more than half of the respondents, the activities of the YFJ fit the needs of young people in their country to some extent, while another quarter are very positive on this point. As the YFJ is an EU umbrella organisation operating at a relatively high (policy) level with a relative large distance to the individual young people, we consider this outcome as realistic and actually rather positive. At the same time, it shows that there might be room for improvement.

Again, there are significant differences in opinion according to the type of organisation: non-governmental youth organisations, national youth councils, SALTOs and national agencies of the YiA programme are more positive than Ministries, research institutes and other types of organisations. Organisations from non EU-27 countries were significantly more often of the opinion that the activities fit to a great extent, while organisations from EU-27 countries more often indicated that the activities fit to some extent.

Of the activities of the YFJ the most important ones to the organisations are: exchange of good practices, training, dissemination of information, network meetings, debate and discussions on youth policy (see table below). From the perspective of a wider group of stakeholders, this is not surprising, as the wider group of stakeholders directly benefit from these activities.

Table 3.1 The five most relevant activities of the YFJ for your organisation/institution (N=236)

	Count	%
Exchange of good practices	112	47,5%
Training	111	47,0%
Dissemination of information	108	45,8%
Network meetings	105	44,5%
Debate/ discussion on youth policy	100	42,4%

	Count	%
Lobbying	91	38,6%
Advocating	86	36,4%
Development of youth policy tools	80	33,9%
Seminars	77	32,6%
Production of policy papers	67	28,4%
Working groups	57	24,2%
Development of sustainable consultation structures	47	19,9%
Presentations	22	9,3%
Other	10	4,2%

Source: Web survey of youth organisations (2013). Base size 236 organisations.

**The total does not add up to 100% as this is a multiple response question: respondents could pick up to 5 answers.

There is, however, quite some variation in the relevance of the activities for the different types of organisations. For youth organisations in general training, network meetings and exchange of good practices are the most relevant activities, while for Ministries the debate on youth policy, exchanges of good practices and the production of policy papers is important. Research institutes benefit the most from dissemination of information, development of youth policy tools and policy papers. The most relevant activities for National Agencies and SALTO's are the discussions on youth policy, lobbying and dissemination of information. This shows that the different types of organisations have different needs and interests which are served by the different activities of the YFJ.

Activities which seem to be less relevant for all groups targeted by the questionnaire are the seminars, working groups, development of sustainable consultation structures and presentations. However, working groups do directly contribute to policy papers and sustainable consultation structures are highly relevant to the European Commission, since policy inputs through representative consultations are expected by the EC.

For the member organisations, the most important activities differ as compared with non-members. Members of the YFJ were more positive on the relevance of network meetings and lobbying than non-members while non-members were more positive in terms of debate/discussion on youth policy and production of policy papers. The most relevant activities for organisations based in the EU-27 are dissemination of information, exchange of good practices, lobbying, debate/discussion on youth policy and network meetings.

Based on interviews with organisations in the youth field we can conclude that the majority find the activities of the YFJ relevant to their organisation. The YFJ carries out a broad range of activities and many respondents to the interviews remark that not *all* activities are relevant to their organisation. Many add to this remark that it is impossible that all activities are relevant to all organisations because there are large differences in interests and needs between organisations in the youth field. Also, for some of the organisations interviewed the activities of the YFJ in general are less relevant than for others e.g. because the organisation is well staffed and strong by itself or because the organisation is focussing more on other themes than the YFJ. With this background it is not surprising that there is a wide range of activities indicated as relevant by the various organisations. The same applies to non relevant activities. Still, there are some activities that stand out in terms of relevance to organisations in the youth field:

1. capacity building is valued as highly important in order to make sure that volunteers qualify for the work in the organisation;
2. representation, lobbying and advocacy work is also a main relevant activity of the YFJ for the organisations, also political issues in general are highly relevant;
3. providing information and specifically the YFJ newsletter are also highly valued;

4. working groups are also mentioned several times as relevant, this is striking since work groups are not highly valued by organisations in the youth field in the survey;
5. the work of the YFJ in the structured dialogue is relevant to some of the organisations.

In general, respondents of the questionnaire were satisfied with the activities that were undertaken by the YFJ, with 26% agreeing to a great extent and 50% to some extent. However, given the relatively large number of respondents who stated that they are 'to some extent' satisfied with the activities of the YFJ, this also implies that there are possibilities for improvement. Members of the YFJ are significantly more favourable than non-members. This can easily be explained as most activities of the YFJ involve and are specifically directed at the member organisations.

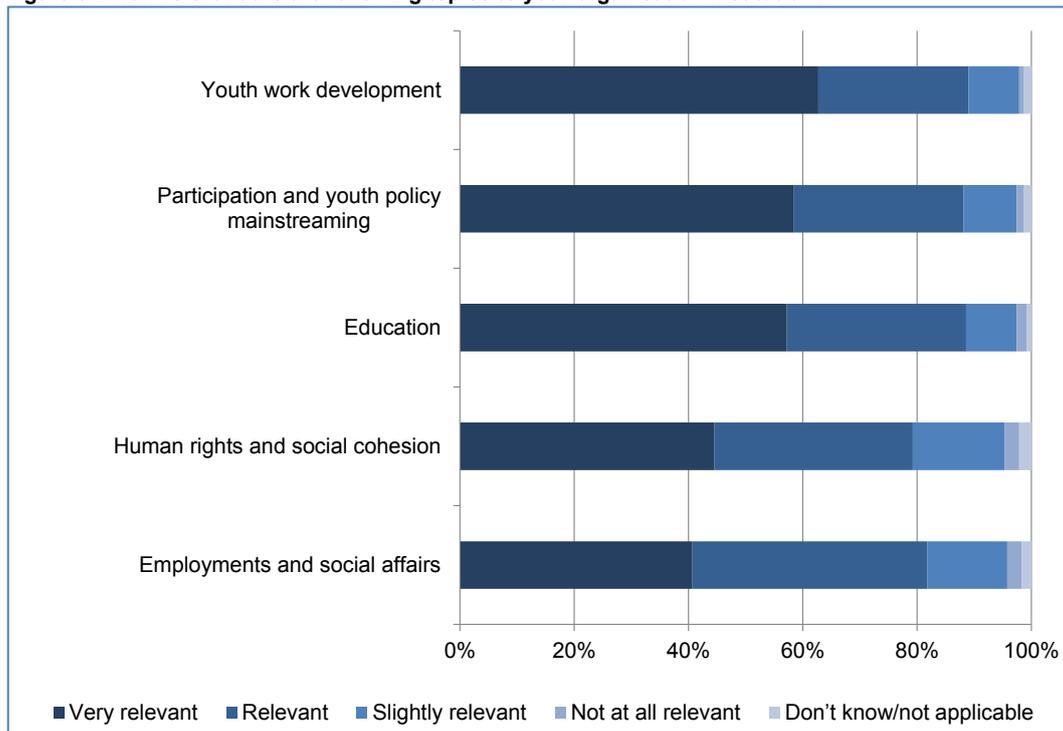
In conclusion, a majority of the specific target groups (such as young people, National Youth Councils, non-governmental youth organisations, youth policy makers) find the activities of the YFJ (to some extent) relevant to their organisations. The YFJ carries out a broad range of activities and many interviewed organisations remark that not all activities are relevant to their organisation but this is impossible due to differences in interest and needs between organisations in the youth field. Still, there are some activities that stand out in terms of relevance to these organisations:

- capacity building is valued as highly important to youth organisations in order to make sure that volunteers qualify for the work in the organisation;
- representation, lobbying and advocacy work is also a main relevant activity of the YFJ for the youth organisations, especially to member organisations of the YFJ. Also political issues in general are highly relevant e.g. debate and discussion on youth policies, especially for Ministries, SALTO's and National Agencies of the YiA programme;
- dissemination of information and specifically the YFJ newsletter are also highly valued. Many themes are mentioned as relevant such as youth employment, sustainability, youth work, non formal learning etc.

3.3.3 *Relevance of topics*

In general, respondents viewed the topics covered by the YFJ as relevant to their organisations/institution. According to the survey results, the most relevant topics for the youth related organisations are youth work development (63% of the respondents find it very relevant), participation and youth policy mainstreaming (59% indicate it to be very relevant) and education (57% of the respondents find it very relevant).

Figure 3.2 How relevant are the following topics to your organisation/institution?



Views on the relevance of topics differ by type of organisation. Education is most relevant for youth organisations, research institutes and other types of organisations; while youth work development and participation and youth policy mainstreaming are seen as most relevant to both Ministries and SALTOs and YiA national agencies.²³ EU-27 organisations are more positive on the relevance of the topics of education, human rights and social cohesion, and employment and social affairs than organisations outside the EU.

Members of the YFJ were less of the opinion that youth work development is relevant to their organisation than non-members. They rate participation and youth policy mainstreaming as most relevant.²⁴

In the interviews with stakeholders in the youth field many themes are mentioned as relevant such as youth employment, sustainability, youth work, non formal learning etc.

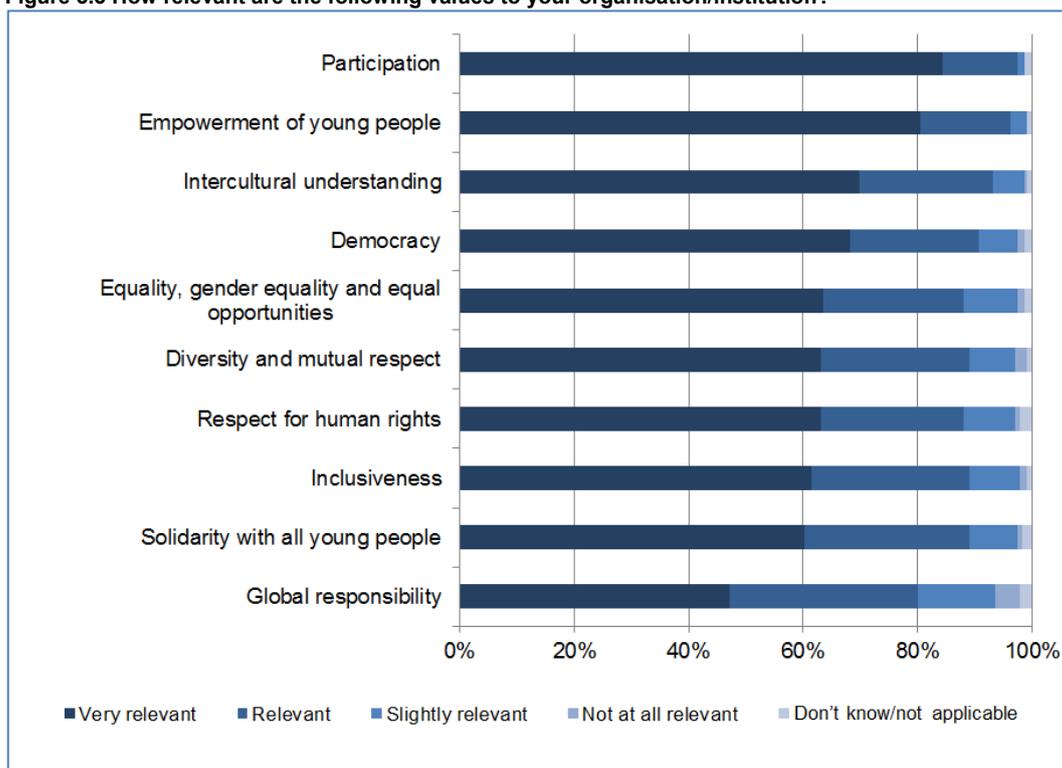
3.3.4 Relevance of values

Respondents were in general very positive about the relevance of all the values on which the YFJ bases its work. The most important values are participation (84%, very relevant) and empowerment of young people (81% very relevant). These are followed by intercultural understanding, democracy, equality, diversity, respect for human rights and inclusiveness and solidarity (60% to 70% found this very relevant and an additional 10% to 20% relevant). Global responsibility is assessed as the least relevant value (47%, very relevant, 80% very relevant to relevant).

²³ These differences are not statistically significant but differences are still rather large.

²⁴ These differences are however not statistically significant but the differences are rather large.

Figure 3.3 How relevant are the following values to your organisation/institution?



Source: Web survey of youth organisations (2013). Base size 236 organisations.

Organisations based in the EU-27 value intercultural understanding higher (75% very relevant) than organisations from non EU-27 countries (58%, very relevant).²⁵ NGOs, SALTOs and national agencies, and other organisations are more likely to value both intercultural understanding, and diversity and mutual respect as relevant compared with Ministries and research institutes.

3.3.5 Additional relevant activities

In terms of areas where the YFJ might potentially provide more support, 58% of the respondents to the survey seemed satisfied with the current situation. Youth organisations and national youth councils indicated significantly more often that they need more support from the YFJ than the other types of organisations, which is logical as this is the group the YFJ directly represents. Activities that could be strengthened are providing training, adding new subjects in the lobbying work, adding new subjects to the information dissemination, increased capacity building for different groups and youth structures, strengthening the structured dialogue by involving youth researchers and young people, strengthening the cooperation outside the EU and consultancy activities in youth policy development.

These above mentioned needs do not always match the objectives that the YFJ has (as laid down in Decision No 1719/2006/EC) and if these are to be taken up, the EC could decide whether they find it important to (co)-finance these activities or not.

The interviews with organisations in the youth field show a similar response as the survey. Most interviewed (member) organisations could not think of any additional activities which they need from the YFJ. Additional activities mentioned by organisations that do need additional activities from the YFJ are not mentioned more than once. This again reflects the differences in interest of organisations in the youth field. Those who did mention additional needs, state that there are some

²⁵ This difference is however not statistically significant, but the difference is rather large.

themes that could be interesting for the YFJ to focus more attention on e.g. youth unemployment, non-formal education, youth empowerment, poverty. Some examples of activities that are mentioned by some stakeholders as being in their interest include: understanding of youth policies in other countries/ study visits to other countries to learn, networking, more feedback on the structured dialogue process, knowledge sharing (e.g. in relation to finance/ personal matters as youth organisations become more professional) and membership support such as resources and tools.

We also interviewed some non member organisations to ask their opinion on relevant issues the YFJ could offer to them. More than one non member mentions that they would like the YFJ to be more open to non-members and to offer services to more organisations.

In conclusion, most respondents to the survey and interviewed (member) organisations seem satisfied with the current undertaken activities of the YFJ. Those who did mention additional needs state that there are some themes that could be interesting for the YFJ to focus more attention on e.g. youth unemployment, non-formal education, youth empowerment and poverty. Moreover, adding new subjects in the lobbying work, increased capacity building, networking, strengthening the structured dialogue, strengthening the cooperation with others within and outside the EU (e.g. networking, sharing knowledge, building partnerships with other youth organisations) and consultancy activities in youth development are activities that could be strengthened according to organisations in the youth field.

3.4 Complementarity

The YFJ is a unique structure, bringing youth organisations together and lobbying and advocating for the interest of young people. From the interviews with stakeholders from the youth field it becomes clear that there are no other organisations at EU level that offer similar activities to the YFJ. Although there are some other networks, these do not have a wide scope like the YFJ: these networks are mostly dedicated to one issue or theme, while the YFJ brings together organisations with different interests.

On a national level there are also some organisations (such as the National youth councils) that do more or less the same job as the YFJ on a national level. Still, these organisations are not as broad and as powerful as the YFJ. Also, they cannot offer the same level of services or activities as the YFJ. The YFJ is therefore seen as a unique structure by the interviewees.

In their activities the YFJ is mostly complementary to the activities of other organisations:

- Lobbying and advocating: there are other organisations that do lobby and advocate on an EU level, but these organisations mostly relate to one topic. The YFJ is lobbying on different issues and representing different types of organisations. Due to the strong position the YFJ has, it has access to main players from the EC and the Parliament on many different subjects that are in the interest of young people;
- The YFJ has an important information function towards the EC, their members and other stakeholders. Due to its broad scope, the YFJ is complementary to other organisations. Some interviewees comment that the YFJ might streamline or cooperate more with the YiA information streams;
- Capacity building and training: the YFJ works on capacity building of their member organisations, but also supports the set up of National Youth Councils in countries that do not have these structures in the youth field. In this latter activity the YFJ is rather unique and thus complementary to activities of other organisations. In the field of training there are also other

organisations that provide training to youth organisations, such as the SALTOS. However, from desk research (reviewing the European Training Calendar) it seems that the trainings provided by the YFJ are complementary towards other trainings provided in Europe, as these are mainly directed to strengthening the member organisations in their lobbying and consultation tasks. The YFJ contributes to the capacity building of NGO's by providing trainings. The YFJ has a pool of trainers composed of people from different member organisations with training experience who provide training and information on a voluntary basis.

Correspondingly, the former evaluation²⁶ concluded that the YFJ is complementary since it provided its members with the opportunity to participate and make their voices heard in a forum which has more resources, greater professionalism and more impact than the range of NGOs and National Youth Councils (NYCs) from which its participants are drawn.

3.5 Conclusions

Intervention logic

The rationale for the EU funding of the YFJ through the YiA programme is clear: to provide a forum for the EC to generate feedback and policy input from youth (organisations) throughout Europe. Although the EU provides 80% of the budget of the YFJ, the YFJ is an independent organisation with member organisations which pay a membership fee and who decide upon the activities to be undertaken. With regard to the autonomy of the YFJ, there could be a certain tension between the expectations of the Commission based on the objectives of the legal base of the Youth in Action Programme and the actual activities the YFJ carries out. Practice shows that this is not a significant problem. However, it is clear from the interviews that Commission staff members have certain expectations on what the YFJ should and should not do, and these expectations stem from ensuring the YFJ works within the boundaries of the Youth in Action legal base. While it is at the same time clear that the independence of the YFJ has to be respected, interviewees indicate some options for this issue. Either the Commission accepts the full autonomy of the YFJ and finances all activities, including the activities that might be less relevant in the view of the Commission, or the Commission decides on "framed independence": a situation in which the EC does not influence the opinions of the YFJ but does influence the delineation on the type of activities it finances.

The YFJ objectives as presented in the legal base for the YiA programme (Decision No 1719/2006 EC) are broad and not very specific, while there is also an overlap between objectives. Moreover, the hierarchy of the objectives is not clear. The YFJ has formulated its own objectives and these are not aligned with the objectives as set in the legal base.

Despite the lack of an explicit alignment of the objectives, the activities undertaken by the YFJ have strong relevance to the objectives of the YFJ as presented in Decision No 1719/2006 EC: All the groups of activities of the YFJ, except for the membership services, appear to link strongly to one or more objectives of the YFJ.

These membership services are highly valued by the member organisations of the YFJ, who also contribute to part of the budget of the YFJ. The most relevant objective of the YFJ for both the EC and the members is 'Representing youth organisations vis-à-vis the EU'.

Based on the outcomes of the desk research the evaluators conclude that the internal framework of the YFJ could be streamlined more by (1) linking activities more directly to the objectives of the YFJ

²⁶ Final external evaluation of the Community action programme to promote bodies active at European level in the field of youth (2004-2006).

as laid down in the legal base of the YiA programme (the objectives as set out in the legal base are not specifically mentioned or reflected upon in the work plans or in the progress reports of the YFJ) and (2) bringing more focus in terms of operational objectives and activities. Also, an improvement can be made in the structure of the work plans. The work plans are attached to the grant application of the YFJ. By not linking the activities set in the work plan towards the goals set in the legal base, it is not clear how these are connected.

Relevance of the YFJ for the Youth in Action Programme

The YFJ generates feedback and policy input from youth (organisations) throughout Europe. This policy input is considered to be very important by the EC. Having one platform that generates inputs from the wider youth field is a useful instrument to structure and channel opinions and input.

Moreover, the activities of the YFJ, and therefore the objectives of the YFJ, are relevant for quite a number of the general and specific objectives of the YiA programme, as well as to some objectives of the Erasmus for All programme. Also, the activities of the YFJ, and therefore the objectives of the YFJ, are very relevant for the EU Youth Strategy. Although there is a relevance of the activities of the YFJ towards all these EU policy measures, we note that the activities of the YFJ do not have to be relevant to all these measures. As the YFJ is financed under action 4.2 of the YiA programme, the activities should be relevant to the objectives of this action. As long as (1) the YFJ activities are relevant to its objectives as set in the YiA programme action 4.2 and (2) the intervention logic of the YiA programme is correct, the YFJ should automatically be relevant to the whole programme and, moreover, should be relevant to the broader youth policy.

Relevance of the YFJ for the needs of the target groups

A majority of the organisations find the activities, and therefore the objectives of the YFJ, of the YFJ relevant to their organisation. The YFJ carries out a broad range of activities, not all activities are relevant to all organisations in the youth field. It is impossible that all activities are relevant to all organisations since there are large differences in interests and needs between organisations in the youth field. Some activities that stand out in terms of relevance to organisations in the youth field are capacity building, representation, lobbying and advocacy work, and dissemination of information.

The YFJ is complementary to the activities of other organisations and to the activities of the YiA programme, since it is a unique organisation at EU level, especially due to its advocacy and lobbying work.

4 Effectiveness

4.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the assessment of the effectiveness of the YFJ. In order to assess the effectiveness of the YFJ, we analysed the contribution of the YFJ activities to the objectives²⁷ set in the legal base establishing the YiA Programme, Decision No 1719/2006/EC,. Most of the activities of the YFJ relate to more than one of the objectives and therefore, activities often contribute to more than one objective (see also section 3.1 on Relevance).

Assessing the extent to which objectives are met can only be done when goals and outputs are clearly defined upfront. The work plans and monitoring reports that we reviewed do not clearly indicate what goals and outputs are expected to be reached and what was actually achieved, which makes any assessment of the achievements difficult. Furthermore, an ambition level in terms of targets is not set for any of the objectives, nor are output and result indicators formulated. With these limitations, we assessed effectiveness using desk research, survey results and the interviews.

4.2 Reaching the objectives as defined in the legal base of Youth in Action

In order to understand the specific strengths and weaknesses of the YFJ in relation to the objectives as set in the legal base establishing the YiA Programme (Decision No 1719/2006/EC), the effectiveness of the activities in relation to each objective is described.

Objective 1 Representing youth organisations vis-à-vis the EU

During the focus group discussion it became clear that 'Representing youth organisations vis-à-vis the EU institutions' is the main objective of the YFJ, according to the European Commission, the YFJ and some of its members.

The YFJ's lobbying activities strongly contribute to this objective. The YFJ represents primarily its members, youth councils and international umbrella organisations, and the members of these umbrella organisations vis-à-vis the EU. Quite often lobbying efforts are successful, for example the youth guarantee and quality internships, though such actions often take many years to succeed, as a number of interviewees that have been involved in these lobbying efforts explained.

One of the main vehicles for the representation of youth organisations is the participation and active co-management of the structured dialogue process, which directly contributes to presenting the views of youth organisations and young people towards EU policy makers (see also description of structured dialogue under objective 6).

Institutions targeted for advocacy

The YFJ represents youth organisations towards the European Commission, as well as participating in the activities of statutory bodies within the youth department of the Council of Europe and providing input on questions and processes concerning youth to the Council of Europe. This provides important links between the YFJ and EU-Council of Europe (CoE). The YFJ also

²⁷ The word "objectives" is not used in the agreement. Instead the word used is "activity".

represents youth organisations towards other international institutions, such as the United Nations. For this purpose, high-level meetings are held with the United Nations to ensure the importance of investing in youth development is recognised.

Some of the key events related to the advocacy work towards those institutions are presented in the table below.

Table 4.1 Key Advocacy Events

Year	Event
2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bilateral meeting with the President of the European Commission on the future Youth in Action programme of the EU, stakeholder breakfast and the campaign “Where are you going?”, which aimed at gaining public support for the investment in youth; • Mainstreamed the debate on youth rights within the Council of Europe through participation on the statutory bodies of the youth department²⁸.
2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively contributed to the process of adoption of the Europe 2020 strategy; • Co-ordinated advocacy actions towards the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) on the topic of vote at 16. The work resulted in the adoption by the PACE of the resolution “Expansion of democracy by lowering the voting age to 16”.²⁹
2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointed as expert on Learning Mobility by the European Economic and Social Committee; • Health Conference that the YFJ organised together with the EU’s Directorate General for Health and Consumers; • Coordination of youth participation at the COP 15; • Creation of an Intergroup on Youth at the European Parliament³⁰.
2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leading force in launching two Written Declarations in the Parliament, both adopted with a clear majority of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs): a Written Declaration on the empowerment of young people in EU policies, and a Written Declaration on designating 2011 the European year of volunteering; • Contributed to the Council Resolution on the participation of young people with fewer opportunities³¹.
2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner in the organisation of the Rome Youth Summit, the celebrations of the 50th Anniversary of the Treaty of Rome; • Contributed to the design of the elements of the Youth in Action Programme, mainly in cooperation with the Directorate General Education and Culture of the European Commission.³²

Achievements of lobby and advocacy activities

Towards the EC, the YFJ regularly contributes to setting the agenda. The following examples of concrete achievements and influence can be noted:

- In 2007 the YFJ started the discussion on the quality of internships with DG Employment. In the discussion a broad group of stakeholders was involved, (partly) initiated by the YFJ. These discussions led to the European Quality Charter on Internships and Apprenticeships;
- The YFJ had an important role in the HELP campaign (DG Sanco) which was directed against smoking, targeting young people mainly;
- The YFJ has been lobbying for the new programming period for the EU Youth programme, probably resulting in a separate chapter on Youth under the Erasmus+ programme with a separate budget line for youth.

²⁸ <http://issuu.com/yomag/docs/annual-report-2011-en>.

²⁹ http://www.youthforum.org/images/stories/Documents/DESIGN_EN_1_BLACKOK1.pdf.

³⁰ http://www.youthforum.org/images/stories/AR_2010_EN_low.pdf.

³¹ http://www.youthforum.org/en/system/files/yfj_public/annual_reports/en/AR2008.pdf.

³² http://www.youthforum.org/fr/system/files/yfj_public/annual_reports/en/AR2007.pdf.

The European Parliament (EP) is actively targeted with lobby activities by the YFJ. The YFJ has been lobbying for a Parliamentary intergroup³³ on youth, which was established in 2010. Other lobbying activities of the YFJ towards the EP cover, among others, EU 2020, the youth strategy, Youth on the Move and employment issues. Events are organised bringing young people and representatives of the Parliament together, e.g. through the organisation of Yofest. The YFJ speaks regularly with Members of Parliament. On an ad-hoc basis the YFJ was in contact with several Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) on different issues, e.g. on the Community Code on Visas, the report on Juvenile Delinquency and the study on the impact of EU Development Policies on Young People.

The main concrete outcome of the lobbying activities towards the Parliament is article 165 of the Lisbon Treaty on education and sport. Furthermore, the campaign within the European Parliament in 2008 led to a written declaration on devoting more attention to youth empowerment in EU policies (which is an indirect contribution to the development of youth policies).

Regarding the Council, the YFJ closely cooperates within the scope of the Open Method of Coordination in the youth field and on sectoral policies which can affect youth. The YFJ provided support to the CoE Campaign for Human Rights, Diversity and Participation “All Different – All Equal” (organising an online survey and a closing round table). Furthermore, it cooperates in lobbying work towards the EP.

Opinion of respondents to the survey and interviewees on the effectiveness to objective 1

The survey among the wider group of stakeholders shows that the activities of the YFJ are felt to contribute to this objective by the vast majority of respondents (86% agree that the activities contribute to this objective). Compared to the other objectives, this is the highest score.

Over 40% of the respondents considered that the YFJ advocates for the interest of youth organisations vis-à-vis European institutions to a great extent, compared with 4% who believed that the YFJ does not advocate at all for the interest of youth organisations. Almost half of the respondents (47%) were of the opinion that the YFJ to some extent advocates for the interest of youth organisation vis-à-vis European institutions. Members (51%, to a great extent) of the YFJ have a more positive view on this than non-members (36%, to a great extent).³⁴ The majority of respondents (59%) agrees that the YFJ advocates for young people’s interests successfully to some extent. More than a quarter of the respondents stated that the YFJ advocates the ideas and interest of young people to a great extent. By comparing the extent to which respondents believe that YFJ advocates for the interest of youth organisations with the extent to which respondents believe that YFJ advocates for the interests of young people, it seems that the YFJ is more successful in advocating the interests of the youth organisations than individual young people. This is not surprising given the nature of the YFJ (an umbrella organisations of umbrella organisations, rather than an organisation directly representing young people).

The vast majority of the interviewees indicate that the YFJ represents the youth organisations quite well. It is the largest umbrella organisation available and still expanding its scope and reach; some comments from interviewees are presented below:

³³ Intergroups can be formed of members from any political group and any committee, with a view to holding informal exchanges of views on particular subjects and promoting contact between Members and civil society. Intergroups are not a body of parliament.

³⁴ This difference is not statistically significant, still, it is a rather large difference.

"We are very happy with the lobbying work of the YFJ on Erasmus for All. They did a very good job of mobilisation at different national levels."

"I think the YFJ is pretty effective, they really have influence and I'm really happy that they represent youth- it brings together a wide range of views from organisations".

"They are instrumental in negotiations with the Commission, the Council of Europe, the European Parliament in an institutional way. Individual institutions would not have the capacity or know-how to do it."

"The YF is an important actor within YiA and within youth policy".

Interviewees mention specific actions and activities that underline the effectiveness of the YFJ in representing youth. Participation in high level events and conferences, the structured dialogue, campaigns such as "Love your future" and the work on informal learning are mentioned without prompting. Furthermore, access to European Institutions that the YFJ facilitates for member organisations is mentioned as effective. Overall, all organisations interviewed agree that visibility of the YFJ is very high, especially in Brussels.

Although the vast majority of interviewees indicate that the YFJ represents the youth organisations quite well, it is still a struggle, however, to represent all youth and all organisations to the same degree. As one interviewee who attended many meetings of the YFJ in the past year noted, there is the risk that a few of the most active members have a large impact on the opinions put forward by the YFJ. This is caused by the various degrees of involvement and professionalism of the member organisations and the fact that there is a high turnover of young people being involved in these organisations. Also, there are variations according to the themes: some themes are covered well, for other themes organisations need to use other channels to be represented.

A few interviewees mention that it is difficult for them to see the real outputs and outcomes of the representation and that more clarity in the results achieved would be welcomed. The evaluator endorses the view that achieved results should be closely monitored and communicated by the YFJ towards its members, but also notes that it is always difficult to see the results of lobbying and advocacy, especially in the short term. Most interviewees from member organisations mention that advocacy and lobbying are long term processes, whereby effectiveness also depends on the willingness of the institutions to listen to young people and include their recommendations. Capacity building, lobbying and advocacy can only be effective when the "other side" accepts the advice. To the perception of some members "There is no openness outside the Youth Unit in the EC, to invite youth and youth structures to the table". The extent to which this statement is true has not been tested further by the evaluators; however this feedback was given by a couple of interviewees from member organisations that are closely involved in the work of the YFJ.

Some members comment that the YFJ should limit itself to lobbying activities that have a higher chance of success. A few interviewees say that the YFJ focusses too much on changing treaties that are difficult to amend or change. On certain issues the YFJ has been lobbying for 10 years (i.e. rights of children, apprentices, volunteers, lowering the voting age to 16), trying to change a treaty, which has not been very effective in the short term. Two other critical points are mentioned by both members and non-members. The differences in Europe, clearly visible now when looking at the high levels of youth unemployment, require different actions for different regions in Europe. The response by both the YFJ and the EU has been slow. "Our voice is heard, but we don't get a clear answer" as one member from Southern Europe puts it.

A number of interviewees stress that the voice of unorganised youth should be heard, if not at the YFJ level, then national members should have structures in place to ensure proper involvement of

these groups. National and regional youth organisations often work closely with youth that is not part of existing structures and most members indicate it is their responsibility to include unorganised youth and not that of the YFJ. Some member organisations and most non-members find that the YFJ is not doing enough to represent these groups. This issue is more broadly discussed for all YFJ activities under principle 1 and 3.

Some interviewees from member organisations criticise the choice of actions by the YFJ. Other member organisations scrutinise the attitude of the YFJ and would like to see a more political organisation that coordinates political actions. However, they find it important to be member of the YFJ and try to change the course of the YFJ for the better through constructive cooperation.

Several sources of evidence suggest that the objective of representing youth vis-à-vis the European institutions is reached to a large extent. The desk research shows a number of activities and concrete achievements: participation in high-level conferences, the role in structured dialogue, relationships with other bodies and the examples of agenda-setting indicate that the objective is achieved. Additionally the survey results and the interviews show that the large majority of stakeholders are of the opinion that the YFJ advocates the ideas and interest of young people to a great extent.

Although there are critical remarks as well, almost all stakeholders consulted agree that the YFJ has been the leading organisation representing youth vis-à-vis the EU for a long time. The YFJ develops continuously in terms of adopting more effective channels and methods for representation and communication. It is clear that these efforts need to continue, to adapt to the changing needs and environments of the member organisations. Our main conclusion is that the first objective is reached to a large extent and that being able to achieve this objective is recognized as one of the main assets of the YFJ.

Objective 2 Coordinating the positions of its members vis-à-vis the EU

As noted in the prior chapter, during the focus group discussion it was concluded that the YFJ will need to implement objective 2 (coordinating the positions of its members) in order to implement objective 1 (representation). In other words, effectively contributing to objective 2 is conditional to effectively contributing to objective 1. As the YFJ is assessed as effective in relation to the first objective it has automatically to be effective in relation to the second objective. This said, we will provide evidence in support of the effectiveness of objective 2 in this section.

The messages the YFJ spreads, the lobbying activities and policy papers, are based on the outcomes of the consultations with its members. The positions are discussed and agreed upon through a democratic process before lobbying takes place. Since this is done on a majority basis, there is always a possibility that some members do not agree.

Within the context of the structured dialogue, consultations are organised at national level by the National Working Groups, which are in most cases led by National Youth Councils. Support and follow up to this process is provided by the YFJ. These activities strongly contribute to the objective of coordinating the positions of its members and other relevant stakeholders vis-à-vis the EU.

The wider group of stakeholders completing the questionnaire is of the opinion that the YFJ reaches this objective (almost 80%).

Most interviewees agree that the coordination done by the YFJ is organised quite well, although it needs continuous attention. On each subject members are consulted. The external presentation of the views of the YFJ is coordinated well.

When asked whether the objective of coordination of positions has been achieved, interviewees give various responses:

"Overall they do a brilliant job. The YFJ is in a difficult position and do very well in getting us involved and feeling like we are part of something".

"This has been achieved really well, we are happy. If we want to take some points to the European level then the YFJ gives us the opportunity".

"The coordination is done very well: the debate between the organisations is very well organised".

Suggestions for improvement are mostly related to (internal) communication. There could be more personal contact instead of web based surveys when collecting opinions. One interviewee suggests that the YFJ could gather more information on what the national youth councils themselves are doing towards the EU institutions, and coordinate this a bit more. Some organisations criticise the choice of topics as a lot of topics are not addressed by the YFJ, mainly those that are not directly linked to youth but do affect young people, such as housing and health. Also some organisations mention that the YFJ either does not represent the issues that they find important, or that this has a limited chance of success, this issue is already elaborated on in the section on objective 1. The absence of a cooperation framework with the EC in political areas such as employment is likely to hinder the achievement of Objective 2.

Furthermore, some members indicate that in the process of creating one policy paper, which reflects the opinions of all members, the YFJ has to make choices. How the different opinions and viewpoints are synthesised into one document is not always clear to the member organisations. Some interviewees mention that more clarity on the consultation processes leading to certain lobbying activities would be welcomed. However, interviewees also indicate that these suggestions are meant to improve consultation further. They agree that the YFJ in general does a good job, also compared to other organisations of which they are aware.

Our conclusion is that the YFJ meets this objective to a large extent; the YFJ could consider further improving the transparency in the process of coordinating the position of its members. As indicated, there is a relationship with objective 1: if representation is done well, coordination of the positions of members automatically follows. However, the means of coordination may vary. There is no single method that works in all cases and variation is necessary. Therefore a periodic critical assessment of the effectiveness of coordination remains crucial.

Objective 3 Relaying information on youth vis-à-vis the EU

Relaying information on youth vis-à-vis the EU is achieved in different ways. The YFJ contributes to this objective by maintaining relationships with the Commission and other institutions. Through the participation in conferences, seminars and round tables the YFJ is contributing to this objective, as it provides opportunity to gain further knowledge on youth issues that can be used in providing information to the EU. Also, the information the YFJ spreads via newsletters, publications etc. (see the section on objective 4) contributes to reaching this objective.

Conditional to fulfilling this role is an effective consultation process and interaction with its members. In the prior section we assessed the consultation processes of the lobbying activities of the YFJ. The consultation processes in the context of structured dialogue provide important information on the needs of youth. Furthermore, the YFJ is collecting information by research. Examples are surveys and compiling reports on issues such as racism and its impact on young people, the state of youth rights and the development needs of youth. The YFJ gathers and

synthesises information from its members and strengthens existing tools for the monitoring of youth policy. One activity has been the development of the first European system on quality assurance on non-formal education, both through the non-formal education working group and the launch of a website on Quality Assurance of non-formal education.³⁵

Over 80% of the wider group of stakeholders that answered the questionnaire is of the opinion that the activities of the YFJ contribute to this objective.

Staff of the YFJ indicates that the ambition is to further improve the information provided to the EU, by expanding the research capacity. Member organisations state that the YFJ is providing information to the EU on a regular basis. This is perceived as being a strong element in the lobbying qualities of the YFJ. Also organisations that lobby themselves indicate that the YFJ does a good job in this respect. Selecting the method by which information is provided to the EU is part of the responsibility of the YFJ. As mentioned before, a few interviewees mention that more clarity in the results achieved and the consultation processes leading to certain lobby activities would be welcomed. Moreover, the European Commission is satisfied with the activities of the YFJ in relation to the provision of information.

Our conclusion is that this objective is met in many areas; the EC is satisfied with the activities of the YFJ in relation to the provision of information. Moreover, the YFJ also provides information to other institutions for instance by participating in conferences, seminars and round tables. The member organisations of the YFJ would like to receive more information on the results achieved and clarity in the consultation processes of the members may increase the effectiveness of this objective.

Objective 4 Relaying information from the EU to the national youth councils and non-governmental organisations

The YFJ actively distributes information from the EU to the national youth councils and the non-governmental organisations. Most member-organisations indicate that the information is useful, although some indicate that they use other sources of information as well. Given the broad representation of the YFJ, the themes that are covered are broad. Depending on the type of member organisation, effectiveness of this objective varies. The YFJ has means for communication, such as newsletters, publications, website and social media to distribute information from the EU and other relevant information on youth issues.

Newsletters

The magazine YO! – Youth Opinion, with three issues each year, provides member organisations with the opportunity to voice their opinion. The European Youth Forum Policy Watch is a bi-weekly bulletin which aims to provide the latest news in relation to youth within the Strategic Priorities. In 2011 it reached the inboxes of 3,000 people, including a wide range of stakeholders in the youth policy sector in Europe and beyond.³⁶ Courier is the weekly newsletter for member organisations.

Publications

The YFJ publishes a wide range of publications connected to campaigns (available to the wider public), outcomes of summits, as well as a guidance book to build e.g. a pool of trainers for member organisations. Key publications here include:

- Youth Employment in Europe – A Call for Change (2011);
- Interns revealed (2011);
- The young and the right less – The protection of youth rights in Europe (2011);

³⁵ http://www.youthforum.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=55&Itemid=88&lang=en.

³⁶ http://www.youthforum.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=55&Itemid=88&lang=en.

- Development needs youth! – Third Edition (2010);
- Study on the Youth dimension of the EU Lisbon Treaty (2010);
- Build Your Pool of Trainers (t-kit) (2010);
- The state of youth rights in Europe (2010);
- Shadow Report on the Evaluation of the current Framework of European Cooperation in the Youth Field (2009);
- Advocacy Tool-kit for Anti-Discrimination (2009);
- Racism and its impact on young people (2008);
- All Different, All Equal report (2008);
- Sunshine report on Non-Formal Education (2008);
- Guide for youth NGOs at the United Nations meetings (2008).

Website and social media

The YFJ is active in communication to a wider public and, in line with general growth in the use of social media, increased the use of these channels (facebook, flickr, twitter, vimeo). Both Facebook and Twitter are used on a daily basis. At the end of 2010³⁷ the YFJ had 10,800 fans on Facebook, the number on the same day of the following year was 20,640. Today³⁸ the number of Facebook fans is 26,233. The number of followers on Twitter has increased from 3,098 in 2011 to 4,081.³⁹

The Youth Forum website is a 'web 2.0' site, offering visitors the option to keep in touch via social media channels or email, and interact using their 'database' and 'intranet' portal.

Web visitor data has been collected using Google Analytics since 1st September 2010 and the data analysed concerns the two following years (Year 1 - 02/09/10 to 01/09/11, Year 2 – 02/09/11 to 01/09/12). Visits to the website remained at a stable level in Year 1 and Year 2 with spikes at various points throughout both years. The two highest visitor spikes during both years were 2,037 visits on 8 June 2011 and 2,422 visits on 19 November 2011. During both years, Google is the most popular referring search engine and Facebook the most popular website driving traffic to the YFJ.

It is clear from the visitor data and the figures provided regarding social networking activities that the YFJ has taken advantage of social media. An impressive fan base, particularly on Facebook, has played a significant part in driving traffic to the website. In our experience, focus on social networks sometimes results in a reduction of website hits as the visitor may be getting their information without having to visit the website and this may account for the website visits remaining fairly similar during the two year period and not gradually increasing as one might expect.

If visitors are signposted directly to the 'database' or 'intranet' portals their visit will not be counted as these two sections of the site are not counted by Google Analytics. Therefore, overall visits may increase if Google Analytics is used to measure traffic to these sections too – though if two systems are used to monitor visits, the visitors may be counted twice.

Content wise, the information provided through the website could be improved by providing more extensive and better structured information.

Stakeholder satisfaction

A majority of the stakeholders find "Relaying information from the EU to the national youth councils and non-governmental organisations" (very) effective for their organisation (67%) as well as for young people (62%). When looking at the satisfaction of stakeholders on the information received

³⁷ 31/12/2010.

³⁸ 06/09/2012.

³⁹ http://twitter.com/Youth_Forum.

from the YFJ, almost half of the respondents of the survey indicate that they receive the information they need from the YFJ. A very small number of respondents indicate that the information differs from their needs. As the survey was set out under a broad group of stakeholders, around 25% indicated that they did not receive information from the YFJ. This is not surprising as the YFJ mainly targets members directly.⁴⁰ Non-members are targeted by several more general communication means, such as the website, facebook and the Youth Policy Watch for which they can subscribe.

Respondents to the survey were also given the opportunity to provide general suggestions and recommendations. Some significant issues were raised, including the comment from more than one respondent that the communication of the YFJ could be improved for instance by the YFJ having direct contact with stakeholders, by providing more information about the YFJ to a broader public and by also providing information to smaller organisations.

The organisation of events, the information provided to the members through newsletters and policy reviews are mentioned by most of the interviewees as being professional, of high quality and effective. The amount of information that the interviewees receive is impressive, according to a number of them. The weekly newsletter and the Youth Policy Brief are regarded as useful and detailed by most organisations. A number of interviewees indicate that there is almost too much information and some interviewees indicate that the information is not relevant to them, as they collect the information themselves or because not all topics covered are relevant to the organisation. Again, this seems to be the logical consequence of representing a broad group of different NGOs which have different interests.

For most member organisations, not all the information they receive is relevant so they filter the information that is of interest to them. Furthermore, according to the opinion of some of the users, the website could be improved and provide more information than it does at the moment.

A number of member organisations stress the importance of taking into account the regional differences in Europe. In the current circumstances relevant information needs to be shared quickly amongst members that face the same challenges. This thematic interest is tied to some extent to common developments in specific countries. Segmenting the information based on these common developments would enhance the effectiveness. Particularly the situation of youth unemployment in the southern part of Europe is mentioned as an example: there is a need to rapidly exchange information to combat youth unemployment.

In general, the member organisations do further disseminate the relevant information they receive from the YFJ to their members and other interested parties. Dissemination is done through, among other methods, posting messages on the websites, forwarding newsletters and giving presentations at meetings.

To illustrate the stakeholder satisfaction, we present some quotes from interviewees:

“A broader range of channels should be used to inform members about events for example. Board members have been assigned individuals but they could contact them more individually such as through personalised emails or by telephone. They should also make more use of Facebook to publish events (they do some of this already)”.

⁴⁰ Some 52% of the YFJ members that responded to the survey, indicate that they receive information from the YFJ that they need (compared to 47% of the non-members); 22% receives information but it is not what they need (compared to 12% of the non-members); 15% receives no information (compared to 31% of the non-members).

“We receive the official newsletter, but more importantly, also the weekly newsletter which is sent every week and gives us the opportunity to be updated. We filter the relevant info and distribute it to our members”.

“The website is really bad. I was never able to find any information on that website, not even a list of members of the YF on the website. For the NGOs it is problematic. The YFJ need to speed up improving the website”.

“It is difficult to disseminate on European level. I can read about the activities in their newsletter but you never see anything about it in the national media etc. However for us it is important to stay updated on their activities”.

Our conclusion is that this objective is reached to a large extent. The vast majority of the wider group of stakeholders is positive about the contribution of the activities of the YFJ to this objective. The breadth of information in terms of topics is overwhelming for some members, thus they need to filter the information themselves.

The effectiveness may be increased further by categorizing the information according to the needs and profiles of the member organisations.

Objective 5 Promoting and preparing the participation of young people in democratic life

The role of the YFJ in the process of structured dialogue (which directly involves young people in policy making) and its support for structures allowing for participation of young people in democratic life both contribute to this objective. Most YFJ activities are indirectly affecting and representing young people as the YFJ represents youth organisations who in turn represent young people.

An important element that contributes to this objective is the structured dialogue process (see objective 6), as it involves consultations with young people and youth organisations. The structured dialogue has created a direct communication channel between young people and decision-makers at European level as well as in all EU Member States. It has directly involved young people in policy making and, thus, in democratic life. It brings together decision makers and young people to discuss youth-related issues and provide input for policy making.⁴¹ Structured dialogue is currently in its third cycle (Jan. 2013 – June 2014) and the current 18 month cycle of the structured dialogue is built around the theme of social inclusion. In the first (Jan. 2010 – June 2011) and second cycle (July 2011 – Dec 2012) the themes of the structured dialogue were youth employment and youth participation respectively. Youth participation was the main theme of the former cycle.

Support to structures (capacity building) allowing for participation of young people in democratic life also specifically contributes to this objective, although it is an indirect contribution. Examples are the support and assistance to the effort to re-establish the national youth platform in Poland, by offering experience, knowledge and political support. Specifically for the South Eastern Europe region (SEE) an event entitled: 'Ensuring co-management and cooperation between youth NGOs and the Governments in SEE' was organised in Lovran (Croatia).

An active lobbying campaign was started to bring the voting age down to 16 years. One of the activities organised in relation to this lobby is the event directed to helping member organisations to become active players in national level discussions on this issue, by gathering ideas for campaigning tools and information on the different needs across Europe in this respect.

⁴¹ http://www.youthforum.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=836&Itemid=111&lang=en.

The YFJ is part of the work group on youth participation which actively develops tools and methods. For example, a toolkit on the issue of youth participation, aimed at supporting youth work of member organisations, was drafted and then published in an electronic format (2007). Another example is a database of young experts in the health field, which was set up by the YFJ in order to empower member organisations to work on these issues.

Based on the results of the survey, we conclude that the effectiveness of the activities of the YFJ for this objective is perceived to be somewhat less than for the other objectives. Still, a relatively high number of representatives finds the YFJ effective for this objective (80% indicate that the YFJ is effective to a great or some extent).

Based on the interviews, the opinions on the success of the YFJ in achieving this objective are more mixed and less explicit. A number of interviewees indicate that this objective is achieved indirectly through the processes and events organised by the YFJ. The mere existence of the YFJ, with a democratic structure, is supporting this objective. The limitation is that it is an umbrella organisation of youth organisations, not speaking directly with individual youngsters (which are a task of the member organisations or even their members) and achieving mass appeal is a real challenge. It is becoming more difficult to get youngsters involved in organisations such as the YFJ and its member organisations meaning that there is a risk that a small elite group is “representing” youth.

The work that the YFJ does in the field of capacity building, directly contributes to promoting and preparing the participation of young people in democratic life. The member organisations, who receive support from the YFJ, are able to organise young people with the knowledge acquired through capacity building activities by the YFJ. The capacity building activities of the YFJ, for example on improving the lobbying and advocacy skills of its members, contribute to the objective. Most members consider the capacity building activities, through a large pool of trainers, a great asset of the YFJ.

Capacity building is not a “one-way street” in the sense that the YFJ organises activities (training, visits) and that the member organisations are “consumers”. Some of the more mature member organisations, with a long history in working with youth, indicate that they have to teach the YFJ in certain areas, suggesting they invest more in the YFJ than they receive back. However, they also underline the importance of this work at EU level, to help less ‘mature’ members to develop themselves.

To illustrate the reactions of interviewees when asked whether the objective of preparing youth participation is achieved, we present some quotes:

“They are reaching a lot of young people also from non- members. The NYCs and NGOs support big events for young people and through their membership the YFJ is reaching many young people. There is no other way the EC can get in touch directly with young people than through this structure”.

“This is the work of the member organisations, not of the YFJ. The YFJ cannot talk to individuals, as they talk with members. They do however work on creating capacity among member organisations to organise young people”.

“Yes, within certain limits. Though I would not underestimate the difficulty in getting young people involved. We know that it is harder and harder to get young people involved in political parties.”

Based on the somewhat mixed responses on the survey, and the various interviews, we conclude that this objective is met partly. Most activities of the YFJ contribute to this objective, but it is mostly in an indirect way as the YFJ represents youth organisations who in turn represent young people.

The structured dialogue is one of the main (direct) vehicles for the participation of young people in democratic life. Indirectly, capacity building of youth organisations and national youth councils contributes to this objective, as the work supports youth structures allowing for participation of young people in democratic life. Still, for the members that have a long history and track record, the extent to which the YFJ meets this objective is less obvious compared to members that are less well developed and where capacity building is an important value added of the YFJ. The pool of trainers is seen a real asset of the YFJ, that increases the capacity of the member organisations to achieve this objective.

Objective 6 Contribution to the new cooperation framework in the youth field established at the level of the EU

The renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field has been designed to provide better opportunities for Europe's young people.⁴² In order for Europe to meet the objectives regarding growth and jobs set by the Lisbon strategy, it is necessary that EU young men and women are socially as well as professionally well integrated.⁴³

The objectives of European cooperation in the youth field during 2010-18 are:

- the creation of more and equal opportunities in education and the labour market;
- the promotion of active citizenship, social inclusion and solidarity.

To reach these objectives, specific initiatives targeting young people and mainstreaming initiatives to incorporate youth issues into other policy areas are developed and promoted.⁴⁴ There are eight fields of action in which cross-sectoral initiatives to support young people should be taken: education and training; employment and entrepreneurship; health and well-being; participation; voluntary activities; social inclusion; youth and the world; creativity and culture.

The areas covered by the new cooperation framework in the youth field partly overlap with the objectives set in the Decision No 1719/2006 EC for the YFJ. The YFJ contributes to the following elements of the cooperation framework:

- Information: the YFJ contributes to this activity by providing information to its members and the wider public (see objective 3 and 4). The YFJ is composed of young people that distribute information and, in their turn, the member organisations disseminate the information further;
- Participation in civic life: This is the core activity of the YFJ, supported like many other things through the structured dialogue. In addition to structured dialogue, the YFJ involves their member organisations in agenda setting and position taking and the YFJ represents those organisations in their lobbying activities (see objective 1 and 2);
- Concerning the participation in democratic life (see objective 5). In the field of educating young people in participatory actions and activities, less is done by the YFJ although they do train their organisations in lobbying and advocacy skills.

As the structured dialogue is one of the main activities that specifically relates to the cooperation framework, we describe the achievements here in more detail.

⁴² http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/education_training_youth/youth/ef0022_en.htm.

⁴³ As above.

⁴⁴ http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/education_training_youth/youth/ef0022_en.htm.

Structured dialogue

The cooperation framework defines the main areas of the youth policy in the European Union and requests for setting up a dialogue between young people, youth organisations and policy makers about the issues of European youth policy, for which the structured dialogue is an instrument to ensure that the opinion of young people is taken into account in defining youth-related policies of the European Union. Hence, the YFJ contributes directly to this objective as the YFJ is heavily involved in the organisation and coordination of the structured dialogue, being chair and secretariat of the European steering committee for the dialogue.

The structured dialogue has created a direct communication channel between young people and decision-makers. It brings together decision makers and young people to discuss youth-related issues and provide input for policy making⁴⁵ and is an important tool for the EC. It contributes to all objectives of the YFJ as set in the legal base. Within the structured dialogue, governments and administrations, including EU institutions, discuss chosen themes with young people, in order to obtain results which are useful for policy-making.

After preparations in 2009 the European Steering Committee for the structured dialogue (ESC) was officially established in 2010 and has the following members:

- Representatives of the Trio Presidency countries', Ministries for Youth Affairs, National Youth Councils and National Agencies for the Youth in Action Programme;
- Representatives of the European Commission;
- Representatives of the European Youth Forum.

The Chair and secretariat of the ESC is held by the European Youth Forum and the Vice Chair of the ESC is held by the EU Presidency country. The main tasks of the ESC are coordination, support, monitoring and communication. The ESC has the overall coordination of the process and gives guidance for the National Working Groups providing the questions for the national consultations that serve as a base for the EU Youth Conferences. The National Working Groups are responsible for setting up a participatory process with young people in their own national contexts (through dialogue, research and surveys).

The structured dialogue is implemented in work-cycles which have common themes. The Council of the European Union Trio Presidency of Spain, Belgium and Hungary centred the structured dialogue on the theme of youth employment (2010/2011). Three rounds of consultations were organised, composed of consultations in the Member States and followed-up by the EU Youth Conferences where young delegates and decision makers met and prepared joint conclusions on the theme of the consultation round⁴⁶.

The YFJ is involved in the preparation and organisation of European youth events. It leads and chairs the European Steering Committee for the structured dialogue and it represents young people in the so-called "Informal Fora" between Presidencies, the European Commission, European Parliament and young people. Although the Informal Forum is not formally an integral part of the structured dialogue established under the EU Youth Strategy, the participation in the Informal Forum is considered to be a key part of the structured dialogue⁴⁷ by the YFJ.

The YFJ participated in the EU Youth Conferences which are organised by the rotating Presidencies of the Council of the EU. Participants are youth ministries and youth delegates from

⁴⁵ http://www.youthforum.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=836&Itemid=111&lang=en.

⁴⁶ Compendium of the first cycle of the structured dialogue, with young people and youth organisations on youth employment during the Spanish, Belgian and Hungarian EU-presidencies, p 16.

⁴⁷ YFJ, position paper on structured dialogue, adopted by the council of members Brussels, 19-22 April 2012.

Member States, as well as representatives from the European Commission and representatives from International Non Governmental Youth Organisations. During these conferences, the YFJ contributes to the exchange of views between young people and policy makers, which potentially leads to a contribution to youth policies.

National youth councils, which are member of the YFJ, are in most cases leading the National Working Groups that provide input for the structured dialogue and this creates concrete relations with their Ministries responsible for youth affairs.

Outcomes of the structured dialogue

As an outcome of the structured dialogue under the Spanish presidency, joint conclusions were presented on priorities to tackle youth unemployment. The main conclusions are taken up in the Resolution on the active inclusion of young people: combating unemployment and poverty which was finally approved by the Council on the 11th of May 2010.⁴⁸ The Belgian presidency continued the structured dialogue process on youth employment, raising political awareness about the structured dialogue. The activities under the Hungarian presidency directed to structured dialogue resulted in the 'Council Resolution on the structured dialogue with Young People on Youth Employment' (adopted in May 2011) and in the 'Council Conclusions on promoting youth employment to achieve the Europe 2020 objectives'. The documents received commitment from the ministers in charge of those subjects⁴⁹.

One of the important issues identified under the activities of the structured dialogue was the need for a quality framework for internships. In a speech, the EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion announced in May 2011 his commitment to presenting a quality framework for traineeships in 2012 and the European Commission proceeded with consulting stakeholders as to how this framework should take shape.

Conclusions, as presented in the resolutions, can be found in labour market policies for young people; tackling labour market segmentation; exploiting the full potential of EU funds; and considering young people in the drafting of National Reform Programmes; strengthening cross-sectoral cooperation. The idea of a 'Youth Guarantee' is also clearly referred to in the Council Conclusions as a way of promoting the return of young people to education, training and the labour market.⁵⁰

Interviewees mention that there are important political outcomes and joint agreements that are taken up in council conclusions and adopted in the council of youth ministers, as a result of the structured dialogue. They mention that the outcome of the first cycle is that three resolutions and one overall resolution was adopted leading to 4 council agreements. For the topic on youth employment the Council of Social and Employment ministers made reference to the outcomes. The Employment and Social affairs resolution has been adopted.

Self-evaluation

National Youth Councils from 11 of the EU's Member States performed a self-evaluation of the structured dialogue. This self-evaluation shows that despite many successes, there is also room for improvement in terms of relevance of topics, coherence between topics and the visibility of follow up actions⁵¹. There is a lack of effective monitoring of the follow-up done at national level on the recommendations resulting from the process and a lack of sufficient time to implement the

⁴⁸ Compendium, p 26.

⁴⁹ Compendium, p 36.

⁵⁰ Compendium, p 37-38.

⁵¹ Recommendations for improving and further developing the Structured dialogue process. p. 1-2.

structured dialogue at national level. Furthermore the self-evaluation indicated that the relevance of chosen Presidency priorities for youth across Europe is low. Despite these setbacks, the structured dialogue helps to involve more youth delegates and National Youth Councils at both Member State and EU level. The timing and quality of consultation has improved, which should lead to better policy inputs.

The wider group of stakeholders surveyed is of the opinion that the activities of the YFJ contribute rather strongly to this objective. Youth organisations, national youth councils, ministries and research institutes agreed that the YFJ contributes especially to the new cooperation framework in the youth field established at the level of the EU.

The structured dialogue is mentioned by many interviewees without prompting as one of the recent successes of the YFJ. According to many, the YFJ has done good work and is extremely committed to the process. The YFJ actively lobbies in the Member States to ensure the success of the conferences. When the structured dialogue started, it was really new and the direct involvement of stakeholders in policy development leading to joint conclusions is still quite unique.

The activities of the YFJ contribute to several elements of the cooperation framework, of which the structured dialogue is the most important. Our conclusion is that this objective is clearly met.

Objective 7 Contributing to the development of youth policies, youth work and educational opportunities

As mentioned above, the YFJ has an important role in the structured dialogue and actively contributes to the exchange of views between young people and policy makers, which has led to policy actions and potentially provided policy inputs that are taken up further in the future. In addition to the activities in the context of the structured dialogue, the YFJ provides numerous activities that contribute to the development of youth policies, youth work and educational opportunities which are described below.

Publication of proposals and policy papers

The YFJ publishes proposals and policy papers that contribute to the development of youth policies. Subjects covered include migration, fight against discrimination, youth and migration, youth employment, youth and the European Social Model, health and wellbeing, vocational education and training, young people and poverty and mobility. Recommendations were made on the mobility of young volunteers (2008). It also made recommendations on how to improve the outcomes of the Youth Pact in the last cycle of the Lisbon strategy. The YFJ also contributes to publications of others, such as the Report 'Investing in youth: An empowerment strategy' of the Bureau of European Policy Advisers (BEPA), providing advice and formulating recommendations on issues regarding the policy of the EU.

The YFJ advocated for the European Qualification Framework to facilitate transnational mobility in Europe. This contributed to the crucial change in the recognition of learning: it focuses on what people have learnt regardless of where they acquired those particular competences. It also made a proposal for a Quality Assurance Framework based on a solid understanding of quality and coming from the specific reality of Non-Formal Education (NFE) as provided by youth organisations. It reflected on the question of what education should be like for young people to be able to be full citizens in a globalised world with all its challenges and opportunities (2008).

Tools that support youth policy implementation

The YFJ contributed to the development of tools that support youth policy implementation. As an example, as stated in the YFJ report in 2007: "*one of the most tangible results of the work of the*

European Youth Forum and other stakeholders on the recognition of Non-Formal Education is the development of three recognition tools by the European Commission and the Council of Europe: the Youthpass, the European Portfolio certificate and Europass Youth. The European Youth Forum is in the advisory expert groups of all three processes and has been instrumental in bringing the voice from the field to the development process”⁵².

Furthermore, the YFJ collected best practices in the field of non formal education (NFE) highlighting the contribution of NFE for personal development and health, social inclusion, citizenship etc. (Sun Shine report, 2008), as well as best practices relating to how to facilitate entrance to the labour market and create decent working conditions for young people.

Advocacy

The advocating and lobbying activities of the YFJ also contribute to policy development as it tries to influence the policy decisions as well as the agenda setting. One of the agenda setting issues is the lobby for lowering the voting age to 16 years. Recently, the lobby of the YFJ in the context of the new programme period was successful in achieving a separate chapter on youth with a separate budget line in the Youth on the Move framework.

Working groups

Participation in working groups contributes to the formulation of youth policies. An example of a working group in which the YFJ participates is the Gender Equality Working Group, which provided input to the Policy Paper "Achieving Equality between women and men". Other examples of participation in working groups are: the Commission on the status of women (UN), Youth Work Development Working Group (YWDWG), Commission on Sustainable Development (UN), Working group on framework policy documents on education for democratic citizenship and human rights education (Council of Europe).

Research projects

Research projects contribute to policy information, as they provide important information on which policies can be built (see also objective 3).

Steering committee

As part of the steering committee the YFJ contributed to the design of different programme elements of the Youth in Action Programme, resulting in allowing for multi-annual grants under action 4.1 of the programme.

Capacity building

The YFJ actively contributes to capacity building of youth organisations. In countries that do not have a National Youth Council, the YFJ actively supports the capacity building for the establishment of a Council. As a result e.g. Bulgaria and Hungary do now have a National Youth Council. The YFJ is also promoting the participation of those countries in the Open Method of Coordination.

Other

The YFJ is the developer of the European Quality Charter on Internships, laying down principles to assure that internships taking place across Europe become a quality learning experience. It was the leading force on EP declarations on empowerment of young people in EU policies and on the designation of 2011 as the European year of volunteering.

The wider group of stakeholders indicate that the activities of the YFJ in general contribute to the objective "Contributing to the development of youth policies, youth work and educational opportunities" (40% to a great extent, and over 40% to some extent). Many interviewees see this as

⁵² European Youth Forum Final report 2007.

a priority area for the YFJ. One of the vehicles for contributing to the development of youth policies are position papers. Some interviewees find the position papers too vague and abstract, but, according to most of the interviewees, these position papers are well prepared and often well received. The structured dialogue also facilitates the contribution to the development of youth policies.

In section 4.5 we will elaborate on the effectiveness of the YFJ activities for youth organisations, supporting the further development of youth work.

Our conclusion is that this objective is met, although the impact of the various tools used is hard to measure since it requires many different stakeholders and decision makers to arrive at policy decisions, which often take years to materialise.

Objective 8 Engaging in discussion and reflection on youth in Europe and in other parts of the world and on Community's action for young people

This objective has several objectives in itself as it is directed towards discussion in Europe as well as towards other parts of the world in addition to the Community's action for young people.

Concerning the reflection on youth in Europe, again the activities of the structured dialogue do contribute to this objective. In addition to this, the YFJ organises several events, e.g. a workshop on the concerns and lobbying for the youth interests in Eastern Europe. In 2008 it was involved in the preparations of the European Year on intercultural dialogue and it succeeded in raising institutional awareness of the importance of involving youth organisations in the implementation of the year at the national level.

The YFJ is also involved in discussions, seminars and workshops organised in the context of the EU-European Council Partnership, bringing its perspectives on relevant topics as well as directing lobbying and being involved in discussions with the European Parliament.

The engagement in discussions on youth in other parts of the world has been realised through different activities over the years. The YFJ is in some cases the organiser of international events, or participates and contributes to international events organised by the EC and other institutions or organisations.

Examples of events (co-)organised by the YFJ are:

- Being co-organiser of coordination meetings and Forums (2 Arab Youth Forums, 2 Euro-Latin-America youth forums. Europe-Arab meetings of youth organisations);
- Several youth summits (Africa-Europe Summit, EU-Latin America and Caribbean summit and the EU-China EU Youth Leader Summit, Rome youth summit);
- Leading the EU-Africa Youth Summit, a side-event of the EU-Africa Summit of Heads of States and Governments. At this occasion the President of the European Commission attended. The process involved key-players in Africa and was followed up with cooperation in the field of mobilisation and capacity building, through the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES). In 2010 a follow-up Summit was organised in Libya and next year there will be one in Brussels;
- A training course was organised for the youth organisations in Africa and Europe, 'Africa-Europe Training Course for Youth Organisations', an activity which does not contribute directly to the objective;
- In 2008, the China-EU summit was cancelled by China. The YFJ had organised a parallel programme with the All China Youth Federation. Due to the fact that the YFJ is a NGO, this activity was not cancelled and provided opportunities for further cooperation between China and the EU;

- Concerning countries that are preparing to join the EU, several study visits were conducted by the YFJ to obtain a picture on the situation in the youth field and several networking events took place. In addition to this, there was a study visit to the neighbourhood country Georgia;
- The YFJ also had engagements in the South Mediterranean, like the organisations of the Euro-Arab Coordination Meeting of Youth Organisation to strengthen the relations with the Arab region. The Third Euro-Arab Coordination meeting was followed by the Euro-Arab Youth Conference “ Mare Nostrum: Youth, Migration and Development”, co-organised by the YFJ. Due to the Arab spring, the YFJ worked on the development of a renewed strategy for the dialogue and cooperation with the region. One of the steps in this process is the mapping of youth organisations and platforms in the region.

The YFJ contributed to/ participated in:

- Two EU-Canada round tables, where policy-makers, youth researchers, youth practitioners and youth organisations exchanged views on youth participation. This is an activity that according to the evaluators directly relates to the objective and builds relevant knowledge;
- Making a common action plan on the development of the Africa-Europe youth dialogue and on the cooperation in implementing the recommendations from the Africa-Europe Summit;
- In the context of the goal to further strengthen the regional and global youth dialogue and cooperation the YFJ actively supported the three “universities” on Participation and Citizenship in Uruguay and on Youth and Development in Cape Verde and Spain. There is a link between these contributions and the objective but it is rather weak;
- The conference ' young people in Eastern Europe and Central Asia: From Policy to Action';
- Relations have been built with Chinese organisations and youth dialogue has been promoted in the context of the EU-China year on youth. Also a project is supported from the Asian Student organisation, an activity for which the evaluators do not see a clear link to the objective;
- Relating to the engagement of the YFJ with the UN, there are several examples of activities the YFJ undertakes such as participation in the 4th Forum of the UN Alliance of Civilisations, as well as in an expert group meeting convened by the UN to work towards a framework for monitoring and evaluation of the World Programme of Action for Youth. It participated in the 62nd session of the UN General Assembly to advocate for the youth agenda and contributed to the UN year on youth in 2010. It participated in the UN framework convention on climate change and organised a preparatory meeting. As well as attending the UN Commission for Sustainable Development, giving input to the discussions in which youth and children were one of the major groups. Furthermore, the YFJ gave input for the Resolution Rio+20 (and co-organised a one week International Preparatory Meeting for the youth);
- Furthermore, a series of activities in Eastern European and Caucasus countries were initiated, such as the participation of the YFJ in roundtables on youth policies, as well as supporting youth work and youth NGOs in Belarus.

The wider group of stakeholders agrees that the activities of the YFJ are effective for this objective as well. Many interviewees recognise the efforts of the YFJ in dealing with other parts of the world. They have strong relationships with the UN, and this gives the members access to a broader network. As noted in the analysis of relevance, a number of interviewees indicate that the problems in the EU are such that the focus of the YFJ should be on the EU.

Our conclusion is that most of the above activities have a direct contribution to the objective of engaging in discussion in other parts of the world. However, it seems that the activities are rather scattered and lacking focus.

4.3 Meeting the principles

In the DECISION No 1719/2006/EC four principles are included to which the YFJ should comply:

1. The YFJ's independence in the selection of its members, to have the broadest representation of youth organisations

One of the principles is to have the broadest representation of youth organisations. The field of youth organisations is, however, very broad. As stated by Demokratie & Dialog e.V. (a Berlin-based NGO working at the junction of youth policy, youth research, youth media and youth work) on the website of youthpolicy.org:

“The international non-governmental youth sector has a long history. In principle, most of today's international non-governmental youth organisations developed out of different kinds of religious and ideological/political movements over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (e.g. the trade union and worker's movement, the missionary movement, the anti-war and peace movements, the ecological movement). The fact that these organisations developed out of movements, constituencies of like-minded young people, and a large social membership base has provided them with legitimacy as “representing young people.” In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries the explosion of new information and communication technologies (ICTs), new awareness and acceptance of the importance of the role of civil society in governance and the emergence of social issues such as migration, intercultural relations, among others, has led to the creation of new non-governmental youth organisations with an international reach. Many of these new organisations cater to constituencies of young people who are not interested in joining a political party or who are particularly concerned with a single value-related issue. Others cater for young people who do not feel welcome or represented in “traditional” or “mainstream” youth organisations and prefer to form their own communities internationally (such as young people from specific minority communities)”. (<http://www.youthpolicy.org>).

Almost 50% of the members of the YFJ represent youth councils. The other members are international umbrella organisations:

- 9 representing a political movement;
- 7 organisations representing a religion;
- 7 on specific topics (human rights, environment, objection to military service, empowerment of children, youth hostelling, nature and Esperanto);
- 6 on non formal learning/volunteering (of which one specifically is for peace and one for preventing conflict and sustainable development);
- 5 student organisations (of which one for school children, 1 specifically for medical students);
- 2 minority and human rights (one for gay/lesbian/ bisexuals/ transgender and one for national minorities);
- 2 on rural youth and agriculture;
- 2 scouts' organisations;
- 1 workers' organisation.

When looking at the description of the types of organisations, it can be concluded that the more traditional youth movements developed out of religious and ideological movements are well represented. In addition to this, there are several “single-issue organisations” represented in the YFJ. Of course, there is a dilemma here, as one could question to what extent “one issue organisations” can be seen as representative for a broader policy field. Of the 29 international youth organisations as presented on the website of youth.org, which includes the most important youth organisations at international level, and present in Europe, 12 are a member of the YFJ and two are observers.

Considering the issues that are of importance to the EU, one might expect a somewhat broader representation of minority groups and possibly organisations relating to employment issues. This, of course, also depends on the existence of such international organisations and the extent to which these meet the selection criteria of the YFJ. In this respect it must be mentioned that the YFJ has made an attempt to stimulate the setup of a minority umbrella organisations, which was not successful.

A comparison with youth organisations at EU-level that receive support from the European Commission via the YiA programme (Action 4.1) shows that only a minority of these organisations are members of the YFJ. Many of the organisations that are not members of the YFJ actually have similar objectives as those that are. The YFJ policy is to only allow one organisation for each topic to become members. Furthermore, the organisations that receive support from the Commission do not necessarily comply with the membership criteria of the YFJ.

There are other youth NGOs addressing specific themes such as (digital) media/ culture/ young entrepreneurs/ immigrants/ visually impaired and other minorities that are represented in a NGO youth organisation but do not seem to be represented by the YFJ. In many cases these organisations do not meet the selection criteria or do not have the ambition to become a member. Furthermore, there are also organisations that do not want to become a member as they do not want to be represented by an organisation lobbying on political issues.

With regard to the part of the principle that deals with independence in the selection of members, it is acknowledged that the YFJ members are responsible for selecting new members, based on an open call. A delegation of the member organisations draws up a report, after which the General assembly votes. The YFJ itself is not so active in approaching organisations to become a member, even when they played a key role in setting up national youth councils in new member states.

Membership criteria and the application process

The YFJ has several membership criteria and a written document presenting the membership application procedure. Members should have a certain size and be present in several European countries. If they are smaller and only working at a national level they can become a member of a National Youth Council, also represented in the YFJ. If the NGO does not meet the criteria, it could become a member if the Secretary General Bureau or the consultative body which advises the Bureau on membership applications (a body consisting of 4 member organisations) gives a positive recommendation. International Non Governmental Youth Organisations cannot become a member if they are largely identical in terms of aims, membership and structures of existing members.⁵³

The application process takes around one year to finalise. The potential member must deliver a range of documents such as statutes, rules of procedure, proof of legal existence, a copy of the accounts, positions, age and background organisations of board members etc. The YFJ receives the application and forwards it to the Consultative body on membership applications (CBMA: 4 members, 2 NYC and 2 NGO's, are represented in this body). The body examines the documents. The secretariat of the YFJ cross-checks the applicant organisation by asking the member organisations of the YFJ for their contacts with the organisation. The CBMA writes a report and submits it to the Bureau of the YFJ. The Board gives a recommendation on the membership application which is put on the agenda of the General Assembly. The General assembly votes on the membership application (two-thirds majority of votes). The applicant organisation can attend

⁵³ If the member does not fulfil the criteria for its level of membership it can be terminated of its membership or a review of its status could be decided upon (Membership application procedure, YFJ).

this meeting and is given the opportunity to speak. After a negative vote, a new membership application is only taken into consideration after two years.⁵⁴

A member acquires its status for an unlimited period of time. It might be interesting for the YFJ to have a review of its members every few years in order to give relatively new or increasing important organisations a chance. Also, it could be valuable to review important themes that are not covered among member organisations and actively target those NGOs able to cover these themes.

Of the respondents that had a view on the transparency of the application process, over 27% of respondents were of the opinion that the process of becoming a member is very transparent. Another 23% stated that it is to some extent transparent. Over 8% stated that the process is not transparent at all. In terms of independence of the process, 25% of the respondents chose yes, very; 26% chose to some extent and 5% chose not at all. The results of the survey do not give an unambiguous answer to the question whether the process to become a member of the YFJ is transparent and independent.

Members of the YFJ stated significantly more often that the process to become a member is transparent and independent, while more non-members stated that they do not know if the process is transparent and independent⁵⁵.

Some interviewees commented on the membership criteria: some argued that smaller organisations should also be able to become a member, while others argued that the fact that organisations should have a minimum number of members guarantees the desired level of representation of young people.

Our conclusion with regards to the principle of having the broadest representation of youth organisations is that the YFJ is rather successful in finding a balance between quantity and quality. On the one hand, one would like to have as many organisations involved in youth as possible. On the other hand, ultimately positions need to be taken forward, and a large number of organisations may complicate this further.

Maintaining fairness and transparency in terms of the selection process is therefore important. The application process has been developed over a period of many years and decisions are made following a strict procedure with rules and regulations adopted by the members. The voice of existing members who have the ultimate say in who is allowed to become member may hinder inclusiveness to some extent.

Our conclusion is that the EYF is independent in selecting its members, and that a careful process has been implemented to ensure fairness and transparency.

2. Autonomous in the detailed specification of their activities

The YFJ is autonomous in setting the specification of their activities, to a great extent. The work plans are decided upon by the members of the organisation, although influenced by the EU to some extent. There is autonomy within a framework. With respect to the structured dialogue, the Commission and the YFJ negotiated on the role of the YFJ in the process. The structured dialogue is an initiative from the Commission and the YFJ decided to cooperate in this process to have an active role in it.

⁵⁴ YFJ, Membership application procedure 2012.

⁵⁵ Transparency: Members: 54% yes, very non-members 16% yes, very and 54% do not know
Independent: Members 52% yes very, non-members: 13% yes very and 57% do not know.

The YFJ operates and plans its activities autonomously to a large extent. The member organisations are leading and they decide on the work plan. Sometimes issues important to the EC are part of the work plan, but this is a result of the decisions of the members, not of the EC.

Our conclusion is that the YFJ is to a large extent autonomous in deciding on the activities it performs. With regard to the autonomy of the YFJ, there could be a certain tension between the expectations of the Commission based on the objectives of the legal base of the Youth in Action Programme and the actual activities the YFJ carries out. The autonomy is a highly regarded virtue by the YFJ. The structured dialogue, which was originally a strong wish from the EU-level institutions, shows that agreement on working processes can benefit both sides, as long as the contents of the activities is decided autonomously.

3. The extent to which the YFJ ensures the broadest possible involvement of non-member youth organisations and young people that do not belong to organisations in the activities

The YFJ works according to different legal bases: both the statutes of the YFJ and the objectives of the YiA programme give direction to its activities. In the perception of many of the interviewees and survey respondents this is not always clear. Members of the YFJ say that the primary role of the YFJ is to represent its members. However, the role of the YFJ is also to reach out towards non-members and non-organised youth. Different legal bases and different expectations can sometimes lead to confusion.

The broadest possible involvement of non-members

The questionnaire among the broader group of stakeholders shows that not everyone has a clear view on the openness of the YFJ to non member organisations (over one third did not answer this question). Of the other respondents somewhat less than half of them consider that the activities of the YFJ are open to other organisations than members while the others are of the opinion that this is not the case. Youth organisations and national youth councils in particular are of the opinion that the YFJ is not open to non-members. Members of the YFJ more often consider that activities are not open to non-member organisations than non-members themselves (Yes: 23% members; 32% non-members No: 42% members; 30% non-members).⁵⁶ This might be explained by the fact that members of the YFJ significantly more often participated in activities of the YFJ (79%, members; 39% non-members).

The YFJ tries to involve relevant non-member organisations in topics that are relevant to them. With the Yofest, a broad group of organisations and young people is mobilised. Through the social media the YFJ tries to engage individual young people. The social media provide a platform for un-moderated discussion. Furthermore, the YFJ organises campaigns that target young people in general.

With regard to the “broadest possible involvement of non-members”, most interviewees agree that this should improve, although it is something of a dilemma as the YFJ is an umbrella organisation of youth organisations, representing the members. Representing non-members is not what the YFJ is aiming for. The YFJ indirectly involves non-members, namely through their members. Some argue that the YFJ is open enough to non-members, by providing information and involving them in certain activities and in trying to involve new countries by assisting in setting up youth councils. All activities are organised for members, and non-members do not have access. In countries that are still developing their youth organisations (i.e. Bulgaria), the activities are open to non-members. Several events are organised that are open to non-members, i.e. the Convention on Volunteering and YO!Fest. The topic of representation ignites some fierce reactions by both members, non-members and board members. Most members agree that more attention should be paid towards

⁵⁶ These above mentioned differences are not statistically significant, but are still rather large.

involving non-members: at least it should be discussed how this can be stimulated for example through campaigns. A number of representatives of non-member organisations are very clear: the YFJ does not represent the youth that their youth organisation work with at “ground level”. Some of the interviewees closely involved in the YFJ at management level are very explicit as well: The YFJ is primarily aimed at their members, and this should be taken into account.

Not many suggestions have been made to improve the participation of non-members, some mention more e-participation and more advertising on becoming a member.

The broadest involvement of young people that do not belong to organisations in the activities

Furthermore, it is argued that the involvement of young people that are not organised is the task of the member organisations; they consult and inform their members and in several cases these organisations also try to reach young people that are not participating in any organisations. This is not a task the YFJ could fulfil. Others argue that the YFJ could do more here by actively advertising the possibility of becoming a member to organisations.

Conclusion

Our conclusion here is that the YFJ has to do more to manage expectations. Many of the stakeholders interviewed assume that the YFJ is indirectly involving unorganised young people and non-members whereas its primary role is to provide activities for its member organisations vis-à-vis the European institutions. There is a “pyramid-structure”, in which the YFJ has contacts with youth organisations, and youth organisations have contacts with young people. The YFJ is there primarily for its members, representing them vis-à-vis the European institutions and providing activities for them. The legal basis creates ambiguity: it speaks of member organisations as well as youth organisations. The difference between “to represent” and “to reach out” should be clear to all actors involved.

4. The active contribution by the YFJ to the political processes relevant to youth at European level, in particular by responding to the European institutions when they consult civil society and explaining the positions adopted by these institutions to its members

The work of the YFJ is very much in line with this principle. The YFJ is very active in responding to the European institutions and provides information on the positions adopted by the EU institutions to its members. The YFJ is even going beyond this as the YFJ provides the EU institutions with information on its own initiative and is very proactive in advocating on issues the Commission and EU institutions did not directly ask for. This is highly valued by the institutions. Content wise the YFJ can contribute to many policies and thus to many different DGs.

Our conclusion is that the YFJ is meeting this principle entirely and goes even beyond. This principle is rather the core business of the YFJ. However, DG EAC would like to be better informed on the issues the YFJ is working on and would like to re-establish the frequent meetings between the YFJ and DG EAC for this purpose.

4.4 The objectives of the YiA programme

In the TOR for this evaluation the question is raised in relation to what the contribution of the YFJ is to the achievement of the objectives of the Youth in Action programme 2007-2013. In the chapter on Relevance (section 4.4) we already assessed whether the YFJ's objectives as well as activities contribute to the objectives of the YiA programme. In general, we conclude that the activities contribute to most of the objectives of the YiA programme (see section 4.4). Moreover, in the previous sections of this chapter we assessed the effectiveness of the YFJ towards its objectives as

set in Decision No 1719/2006/EC. As the YiA objectives and the objectives of the YFJ are strongly related, we will not discuss the effectiveness towards the YiA objectives in depth in this chapter, for an elaboration we refer back to previous sections in this chapter.

4.4.1 Programme Objectives

From desk research and interviews it can be concluded that the activities of the YFJ contribute to achieving the Youth in Action programme objectives (Decision No 1719/2006/EC). Contact between the various actors in the field of youth is particularly well-supported by the Youth Forum. We briefly discuss the objectives one by one in the remainder of this section.

The YFJ effective in “**organising structured dialogue between the various actors in the field of youth, in particular young people themselves, those active in youth work and youth organisations and policy makers**”. It is one of the main organisers of structured dialogue events in the context of the new cooperation framework in the youth field established at the EU level. The activities of the YFJ with regard to structured dialogue are also strongly effective in supporting the YiA objective “**to contribute to the development of policy cooperation in the youth field**”. Moreover, the YFJ is actively involved in activities that stimulate this cooperation e.g. in new member states. The consultations at national level, organised by the national youth councils and coordinated by the YFJ, are also directly influencing policy cooperation. The structured dialogue process directly contributes to objective 6 of the YFJ: ‘Contribution to the new cooperation framework in the youth field established at the level of the EU’. Therefore the contribution of the YFJ to this process as well as the outcomes of the structured dialogue process are described under objective 6 of this chapter (section 4.2).

The YFJ is effective in “**supporting youth seminars on social, cultural and political issues in which young people are interested**”. According to the survey respondents, the seminars organized by the YFJ are (very) effective for the young people in their country (60%). It is seen as one of the three most effective activities of the YFJ for young people. Also over 33% of the youth organisations find the seminars of the YFJ (very) effective for their organisation.

The YFJ is an umbrella organisation bringing together international youth organisations and national youth councils and as such it is directly effective in “**developing networks necessary to a better understanding of youth**”. This objective is directly linked to the second objective of the YFJ ‘Coordinating the position of its members vis-à-vis the EU’. Therefore the contribution of the YFJ to this objective is described under objective 2 in this chapter (section 4.2). In terms of building broader networks, it can be stated that the activities carried out under e.g. the structured dialogue do further contribute to this objective as it brings important stakeholders together to discuss policy issues relevant for youth. As an umbrella lobby organisation as such, it actively builds on its network with the EC, the European Parliament, the Council of Europe, the European Council and the UN.

4.4.2 General objectives

Concerning the general objectives of the Youth in Action programme (Article 2, Decision No 1719/2006/EC, establishing the YiA programme), it can be concluded that the YFJ is contributing to all objectives, either directly or indirectly, except for mutual understanding between young people which is not specifically addressed.

First of all, the existence of the YFJ as such supports **active citizenship** as it directly represents the interests of young people and organisations towards the EU (see section 4.2, objective 1 on the

effectiveness of this role), e.g. the consultations under the structured dialogue deliver a direct effect on the involvement of young people in policy making. Events that are being organised actively involve young people. For instance, in 2011 a civil society event on the context of the European Year of Volunteering, (II youth convention on volunteering) is organised by the YFJ and hosted by the European Parliament. This event attracted 10,000 people. The convention gave visibility to volunteering in youth work, showing the impact of youth organisations and added value of volunteering (see YFJ monitoring report). Furthermore, the prior 18 month cycle of the structured dialogue was built around the theme of youth participation in democratic life and it is expected that resolutions that will be adopted influence youth policies at EU level. The support to (the set up) of national youth councils also facilitates active citizenship in the member states. The YFJ is also actively lobbying for lowering the voting age to 16 in order to increase the participation in democratic life, but this process is still continuing.

The objective ***of developing solidarity and promote tolerance among young people, in particular in order to reinforce social cohesion in the EU***, is addressed by providing relevant policy inputs and events. In the context of the current cycle of the structured dialogue, specific attention is given to this topic. The recent EU Youth Conference was organised by the Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union on the theme of social inclusion of young people (March 2013). Prior to this conference, consultations in all the EU member states, in which more than 11,000 young people took part, were organised.

The objective ***to foster mutual understanding*** between young people is not specifically addressed by the YFJ, although it is clear that all the activities carried out by the YFL that bring together people, are helping to increase mutual understanding. The various stakeholders interviewed indicate that the impact of being involved in the activities of the YFJ often has had a major impact on their world views and understanding of other people.

There is a direct effect of the YFJ activities on ***the development of the quality of support systems for youth activities and the capabilities of civil society organisations in the youth field***. The YFJ has a pool of highly qualified trainers available that provide training to member organisations. In this way, the organisations strengthen their management capacities and the activities they implement. However, these training programmes do specifically target members of the YFJ, organisations that are already relatively strong. This YiA objective is directly linked to objective 7 of the YFJ: 'Contributing to the development of youth policies, youth work and educational opportunities'. Therefore, the contribution of the YFJ to this objective is described under objective 7 of this chapter (section 4.2).

The YFJ is ***directly contributing to the promotion of European cooperation in the youth field***. As an umbrella organisation it brings relevant organisations together and it actively works on relations with important EU institutions. In the context of the structured dialogue, consultations are organised on national level, among which discussion groups bringing different stakeholders together. This YiA objective is directly linked to objective 6 of the YFJ: 'Contribution to the new cooperation framework in the youth field established at the level of the EU'. Therefore the contribution of the YFJ is described under objective 6 of this chapter (section 4.2).

4.5 Effects of YFJ activities on the target groups

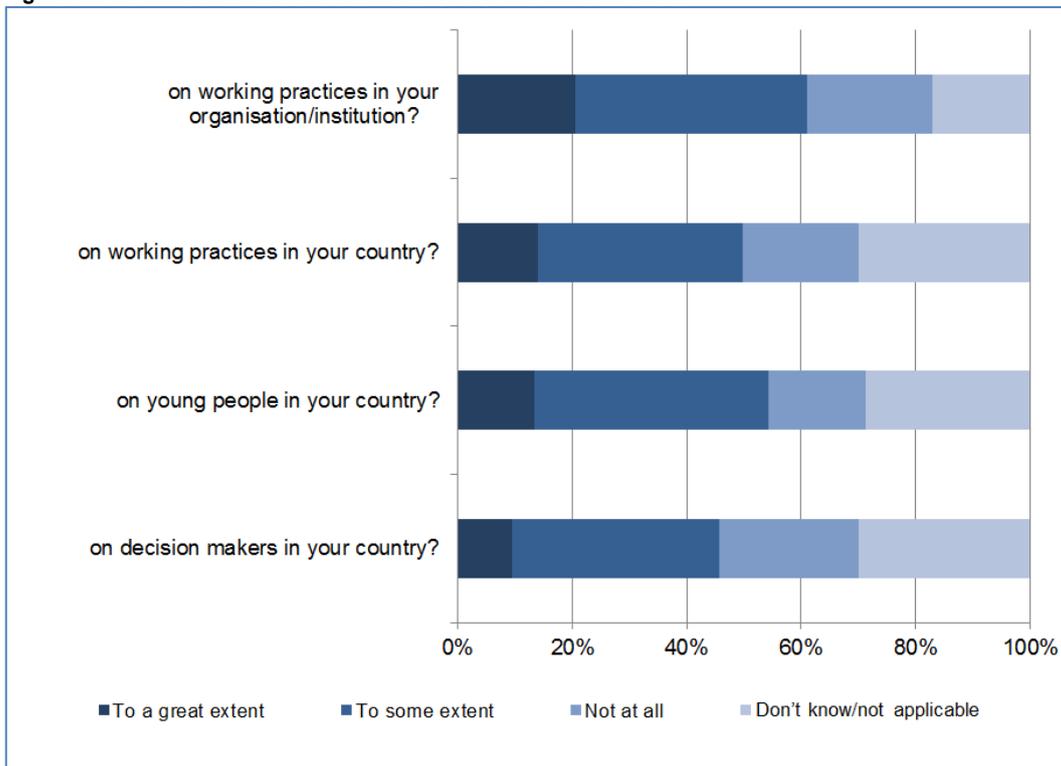
In the prior sections we assessed the extent to which the YFJ produced the desired results, as laid down in Decision No 1719/2006 EC by the European Commission. The European Commission is not the only stakeholder with expectations from the YFJ; also the member organisations and

broader stakeholders in the youth field expect certain results from the work of the YFJ. In this section we present the effects of the work of the YFJ on target groups such as young people, National Youth Councils, non-governmental youth organisations and youth policy makers. We focus on the effects of the work of the YFJ on these target groups and the working practices of target organisations and on the cooperation in the youth field more generally, in addition we assess which activities of the YFJ had most effect on youth organisations and young people.

Effect of the YFJ on target groups and on working practices of target organisations

The activities of the YFJ have most effect on *working practices* in the organisation/ institution of the respondents (see below) and on young people in the respondents' countries of residence. According to the respondents, the activities of the YFJ have a lesser effect on working practices or on decision makers in their country of residence.

Figure 4.1 To what extent do the activities of the YFJ have an effect



Source: Web survey of youth organisations (2013). Base size 223 organisations.

Youth organisations/ national youth councils, Ministries and other types of institutions were often of the opinion that the activities of the YFJ have a greater effect on their *working practices* than research institutes and SALTOs/ national agencies of the YiA programme.⁵⁷ Ministries, research institutes and other types of organisations stated that decision makers in their county are affected by the activities of the YFJ.⁵⁸

Members of the YFJ stated significantly more often that the YFJ had an effect on working practices in their organisation (32% members; 16% non-members), while non-members more often chose the answer category 'do not know/ not applicable' (4% members; 23% non-members).

⁵⁷ Youth organisations/ national youth councils: 28% to a great extent, 40% to some extent. Ministries: 11 % to some extent, 54%, to a great extent Other types of organisations: 13% to some extent, 40%, to a great extent.

⁵⁸ Ministries: 9% to a great extent, 54% to some extent. Other types of organisations: 7% to some extent, 60%, to a great extent, Research institutes: 57% to some extent, 53%, to a great extent. This difference is not statistically different, but still, relatively large.

From the interviews it became clear that at EU level, the YFJ strengthens the impact of individual organisations. The structured dialogue has proven to be a powerful tool for EU and national leaders. In recent years, seven new youth councils have been established with the help and support of the YFJ.

The level of impact at national level depends on the types of organisations already established. A number of organisations indicate that the information they get in combination with advice from experts provided by the YFJ, helped them to become more professional. Many organisations mention the willingness of the YFJ to support and provide information whenever they ask for it.

The impact on working practices in the youth organisations and the countries in which they operate, varies. In some countries, the work by the YFJ is used directly at national level. However, this seems to be the exception.

Effect of the YFJ activities on cooperation in the youth field

Some 49% of the youth organisations and national youth councils are of the opinion that youth organisations in the same field increased their cooperation to a great extent due to the YFJ activities. Another 47% agreed that activities of the YFJ contributed greatly to the cooperation among international youth organisations.⁵⁹ The youth organisations and national youth councils are less convinced about the contribution of YFJ activities towards the cooperation among national youth councils (35%, to a great extent), national youth organisations (25%, to a great extent) and youth organisations in different fields (30%, to a great extent).

Members of the YFJ have a more positive view on the contribution of the YFJ to *cooperation among all described organisations*, especially among youth organisations in the same field.

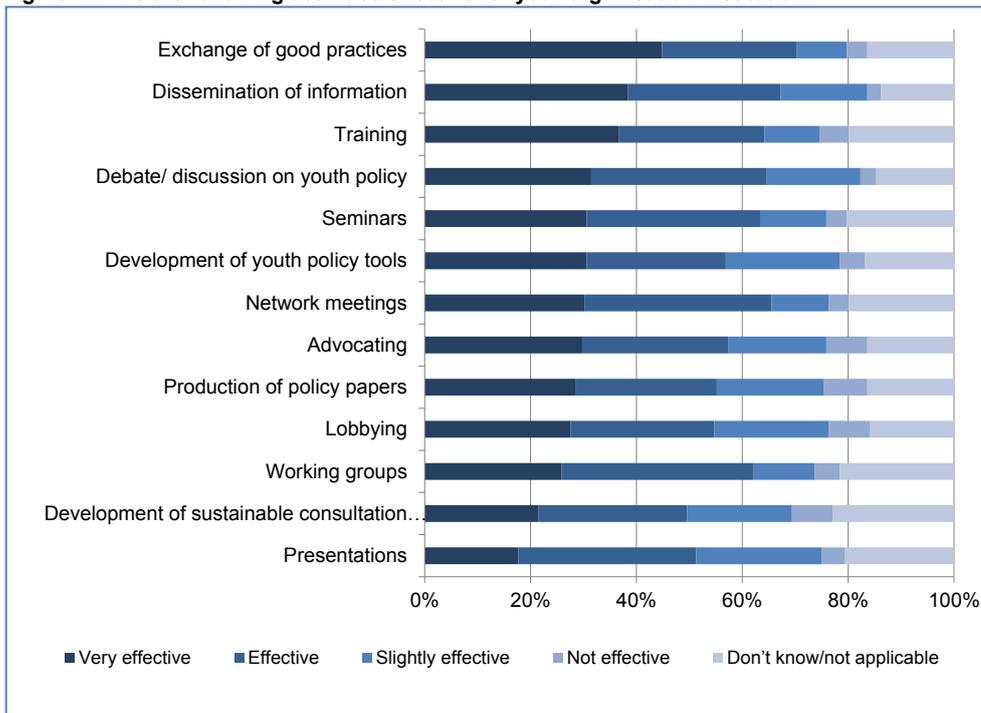
From the interviews it appears that the YFJ offers many opportunities to work and collaborate internationally, also outside the EU. Finding partners and other NGOs dealing with youth, is facilitated through events, projects and databases. The democratic structures initiate cooperation, as well as consultation on a regular basis. Room for improvement is to be found in collecting statistics and data from the national level, so that it is easier to find partners with common interests.

Effectiveness of the activities of the YFJ for organisations in the field and young people

The results of the questionnaire indicate that the activities of the YFJ have an effect on, among other things, youth organisations and young people. Respondents were asked to rate which of the activities of the YFJ have an effect on either their organisation or young people. All types of activities undertaken by the YFJ were rated as (very) effective for their organisation/ institution by at least 50% of respondents (see below figure).

⁵⁹ These above mentioned differences are not statistically significant, still, these differences are rather large.

Figure 4.2 Are the following activities effective for your organisation/institution?



Source:

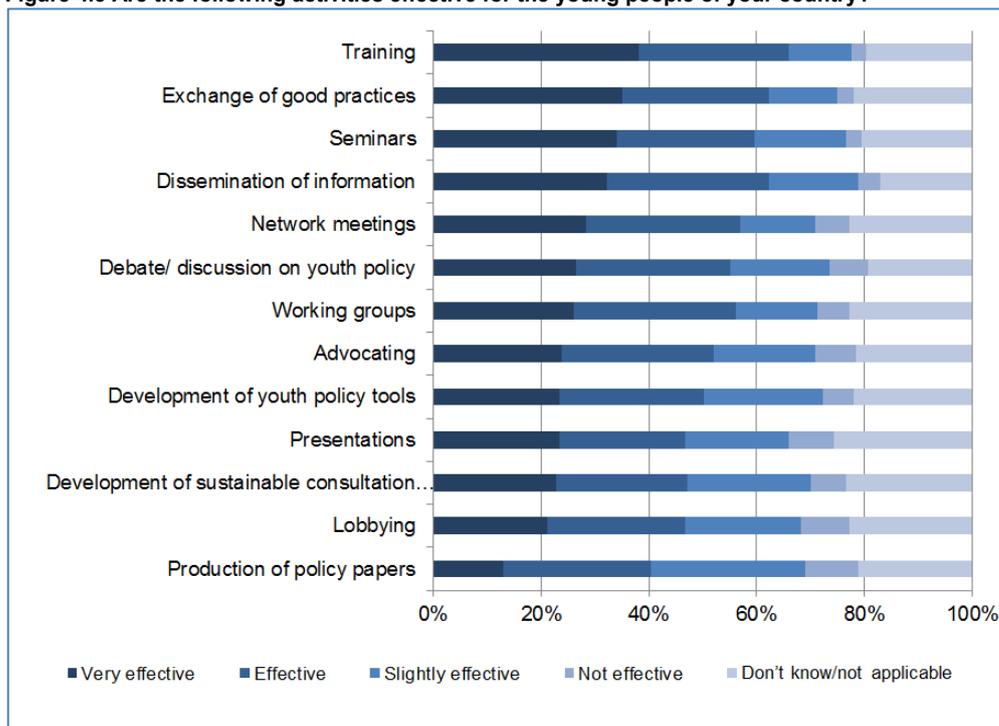
Web survey of youth organisations (2013). Base size 232 organisations.

Exchange of good practices (45%, very effective), dissemination of information (38%, very effective) and training (37%, very effective) were viewed as being the most effective activities of the YFJ for the organisations/ institutions that responded to the survey. Activities viewed as comparatively less effective for the organisations/ institutions that responded are presentations, development of sustainable consultation structures and working groups.

Information sharing and knowledge building activities seem to be more effective in the opinion of the respondents than activities related to the consultation and representation of the sector. Exchange of good practices, dissemination of information and training are also valued as most *relevant* activities of the YFJ for the organisations (see section on relevance). While lobbying was rated as one of the least *effective* activities of the YFJ for the responding organisations it is seen as a *relevant* activity for responding organisations compared to other activities of the YFJ (see section on relevance).

Overall, most of the activities of the YFJ were assessed as less effective for young people than they were for organisations. This is not surprising, as the activities of the YFJ are not directly targeting young people. The YFJ rather targets more general policy issues, which have in the end an effect for young people in general. The evaluation of the effectiveness of specific activities of the YFJ for young people are quite similar to the evaluation of the effectiveness for responding organisations.

Figure 4.3 Are the following activities effective for the young people of your country?



Source: Web survey of youth organisations (2013). Base size 223 organisations.

Similar to the results of the effectiveness of activities to organisations, it seems that information sharing and knowledge building activities are more effective for young people than activities related to the consultation or representation of the sector. Development of youth policy tools and production of policy papers seem to be more effective for youth related organisations than for young people themselves. For young people, training (38%, very effective), exchange of good practices (35%, very effective), and seminars (34%, very effective), are the most effective activities.

Our conclusion is that the work of the YFJ has a moderate positive direct effect on the target group, which is a consequence of the primary focus on member organisations. It seems that information sharing and knowledge building activities are more effective for young people and youth organisations than activities related to the consultation and representation of the sector. Exchange of good practices, dissemination of information and training are valued as most *effective* activities as well as most *relevant* activities (see prior chapter) of the YFJ for the organisations. While lobbying was rated as one of the least *effective* activities of the YFJ for the responding organisations it is seen as a more *relevant* activity for responding organisations compared to other activities of the YFJ (see section on relevance).

4.6 Results that would not have been obtained by other alternative options

The YFJ is a unique umbrella organisation that brings together EU youth umbrella organisations. As such, the YFJ has established an important status, having access to high level discussions and events, the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of Europe, as well as to international organisations such as the UN. This makes the YFJ a stronger lobby organisation in the youth field than any other individual organisation.

Due to the broad range of topics covered by the member organisations, the YFJ can easily mobilise specific knowledge relevant to young people and guarantee a certain level of representation in this as all member organisations have to meet certain representation criteria. This feature makes the

position of the YFJ strong as it is an important civil society partner for the EU institutions in many subjects.

The vast majority of interviewees (both members and non-members) do currently not see real alternatives to the YFJ. There is no other way that the EC can get in touch directly with such a large representation of young people, with 100 organisations collectively speaking as one voice to the EC. There may be slight variations in the set-up, however the broad view that goes beyond national interests cannot be provided by other organisations.

For the effects on the wider group of stakeholders the majority of the respondents stated that the effect the YFJ has on the working practices in their own organisations, working practices in their country, decision makers in their countries and young people in their countries would have happened to some extent without the activities of the YFJ (70%). Some 15% of the respondents were of the opinion that these effects would not have happened without the YFJ, an equal percentage of respondents felt that these effects would have happened to a great extent. This is not surprising as these effects are not the core issue of the YFJ.

Our conclusion is that the YFJ is a stronger lobby organisation in the youth field than any other individual organisation. The vast majority of stakeholders agree that specifically in representing youth towards the EU, there are no real alternatives.

4.7 Comparison with previous evaluation

The YFJ and other bodies supported by the Youth in Action programme were evaluated over the period 2004-2006.⁶⁰ The scope of this evaluation was a bit broader than the European Youth Forum alone. This evaluation concluded: "The support for the YFJ does not necessarily have an impact on its members' ability to involve more young people in their activities or increase the ability of members to raise more funds. The greatest area of impact of the programme on the YFJ is that it strengthens the YFJ as a lobbying body in relation to the European Commission. The support for the YFJ cannot be considered to have had a measurable impact upon young people across the EU."

According to the evaluators of the previous evaluation, the YFJ is more than a lobbying organisation; it is also a powerful network, a reservoir of expert knowledge and offers an apprenticeship for young people who are interested in taking up political and administrative positions in the future. The YFJ can be seen as combining activities associated with democratic parliaments, political parties, political networks, think tanks and lobbying groups, social movements and trainee and apprenticeship schemes, but is especially focused on advocacy and lobbying.

The evaluators stated further that the YFJ gives its members the opportunity to participate and make their voices heard in a forum which has more resources, greater professionalism and more impact than the range of NGOs and National Youth Councils (NYCs) from which participants are drawn. The YFJ promotes a form of active citizenship which offers valuable experiences to participants who are already engaged and have a sophisticated understanding of democratic processes. It does not, however, engage a large number of young people significantly below the age of 25 or directly involve youth who are not organised in the NGOs that are members of the YFJ.

⁶⁰ The evaluation partnership (2007), Final external evaluation of the Community action programme to promote bodies active at European level in the field of youth (2004-2006).

The current evaluation underlines the effectiveness of the YFJ in terms of its lobbying and advocacy work. The “-out-reach” function towards young people shows more diverse results. Whereas members of the YFJ find that they are supported in their own roles regarding the support of young people, non-members are critical of this role of the YFJ. Generally they are not fully aware of the role of the YFJ and its effectiveness in lobbying, whereas they lack concrete examples of direct support for young people provided by the YFJ. Expectation setting, and a clearer hierarchy of objectives in the agreements with the Commission, may help to avoid such discussions in the future. The aim of the YFJ is to represent young people and to ensure that policies are formulated that are in the interest of young people. By doing so they are indirectly influencing young people’s lives.

4.8 Conclusions

Meeting the objectives

In terms of meeting the objectives our conclusion is that all 8 objectives are met to varying degrees. Objectives 1 and 2 that relate to representation towards the EU stand out as being particularly effective. This is confirmed by several sources of evidence. Concrete achievements include participation in high-level conferences, the role in the structured dialogue and relationships with other bodies. The examples of agenda-setting indicate that the objective is achieved. Additionally the survey results and interviews show that the large majority of stakeholders are of the opinion that the YFJ advocates the ideas and interests of young people to a great extent. As regards communication about coordination of the position of its members, the YFJ could increase transparency.

Objectives 3 and 4 that relate to information exchange are met to a large extent, however views of the broader group of stakeholders surveyed are more mixed and a clearer communication planning for each target group would enhance effectiveness. Several suggestions were made to increase effectiveness specifically in the area of information sharing.

Objective 5, i.e. promoting and preparing the participation of young people in democratic life, is less effective than the other objectives. The YFJ is contributing to this objective via the structured dialogue. More indirectly, the objective is achieved through the processes and events organised by the YFJ, but the YFJ is not directly targeting individual young people. As noted in the chapter on relevance, in our view this is not the task of the YFJ, which represents youth organisations, and expectations on this aspect should be managed clearly.

Objectives 6 and 7 (related to contribution to policies) are met as well, although the visibility and short-term impact is often unclear. Under Objective 8 (related to discussion and reflection on youth in Europe and in other parts of the world) important activities have been undertaken. However a clearer focus could enhance effectiveness.

Meeting the principles

In terms of meeting the principles, we conclude that the YFJ meets all four principles (having the broadest possible representation of youth organisations, being autonomous in the specification of its activities, ensuring the broadest possible involvement of non-member youth organisations and the contribution to the political processes relevant to youth at EU level) to a large extent. At the same time, each principle intrinsically involves tensions, whereby finding a balance is a struggle.

The YFJ is rather successful in finding a balance between increasing the number of organisations involved, and at the same time ensuring that the criteria for becoming member are respected and

carefully assessed. It might be interesting for the YFJ to have a review of its members every few years in order to give relatively new or increasingly important organisations a chance. Also, it could be valuable to review important themes that are not covered among member organisations and actively target those NGOs able to cover these themes.

With regard to the autonomy of the YFJ, there could be a certain tension between the expectations of the Commission based on the objectives of the legal base of the Youth in Action Programme and the actual activities the YFJ carries out. The structured dialogue, which was originally a strong wish from the EU-level institutions, shows that agreement on working processes can benefit both sides, as long as the contents of the activities is decided autonomously.

Non member organisations and some other stakeholders comment that the YFJ is not directly involving individual young people, both organised and non-organised, whereas its primary role is to represent the member organisations vis-à-vis the European institutions and organise activities for members. There is a “pyramid-structure”, in which the YFJ represents and has contact with youth organisations, and youth organisations represent and have contact with youth.

Meeting the objectives of the YiA programme

The YFJ contributes to achieving the Youth in Action programme objectives. Contact between the various actors in the field of youth is particularly well supported by the YFJ. The objective on social cohesion and inclusion is more difficult to relate to the work of the YFJ.

Results that would not have been obtained by other alternative options

There is general consensus amongst stakeholders that maintaining direct contact with a large selection of young people, and taking into account a diversity of opinions, is a challenging task for the European institutions. The YFJ is a means to represent youth, on a broad range of topics, and facilitate communication with a broad range of young people in Europe. Although other structures may be worth exploring, at this point the evaluators find that the current option, whereby opinions are channelled through the YFJ, is the most suitable mechanism at EU level.

5 Efficiency and sustainability

In this chapter we present our findings regarding efficiency. However, the analysis of the efficiency is rather difficult, due to the following facts:

- A monitoring system has only recently been set up to register events and numbers of participants. The monitoring reports provided to the Commission are rather descriptive and do not provide a comprehensive overview of activities, participants and outcomes of the activities. Hence, over the evaluation period no structured figures are available in terms of inputs and outputs that can be linked to each other;
- In relation to the above, the YFJ did not work with output and result indicators. The YFJ has only recently started establishing indicators. In addition, it is very difficult to formulate SMART indicators for e.g. lobbying activities. Influences of lobby work are often rather implicit and can take a long time before they materialise.

As a result, the chapter is more descriptive in nature, since a sound analysis of the (cost) efficiency based on the materials available is not possible. This issue will be elaborated in this chapter.

5.1 The organisational structure

The YFJ consists of several statutory bodies:

General Assembly: This is the highest decision making body of the YFJ, meeting at least twice a year (European Youth Forum, 2010, Statutes). It consists of representatives delegated by the member organisation and is composed of the two types of members: National Youth Councils and International Non Governmental Youth Organisation (European Youth Forum, 2010, Statutes). The tasks of the General Assembly are:

- To adopt policy guidelines and work plans of the YFJ;
- To accept new members;
- To adopt amendments to the statutes;
- To adopt rules of procedure;
- To adopt the budget and approve the accounts;
- To evaluate the work of the YFJ;
- To elect or dismiss the Board members and the Financial Control Commission and the external auditors;
- To disband the organisation;
- To ratify the appointment of the Secretary-General according to the Rules of Procedure (European Youth Forum, 2010, Statutes).

Council of Members: three delegates of full, candidate and observer members each one (European Youth Forum, 2010, Statutes).

The tasks of the Council of Members are to:

- Define the policies, vision and direction of the YFJ in line with the guidelines of the General Assembly; and
- Create the opportunity for exchanges, cooperation and networking among members of the YFJ (European Youth Forum, 2010, Statutes).

Board: There are eleven Board Members of which there is one President and two Vice-Presidents (European Youth Forum, 2010, Statutes). These Members are elected for two years by the General Assembly. The tasks of the Board are:

- to define the overall strategy in line with the mission, the adopted work plan and guidelines of the General Assembly and the policies of the Council of Members;
- to prepare the meetings of the statutory bodies and working structures;
- to be responsible for financial and budgetary matters and to secure financial integrity;
- to ensure that the performance is measured and, moreover, to oversee the implementation of the work plan;
- to select the Secretary-General and, moreover, to supervise and to evaluate the work of the Secretary-General;
- to ensure external representation of the YFJ;
- to maintain contact with and between the members of the YFJ;
- to participate when necessary in all meetings of the YFJ and speak at those meetings;
- to create the non-permanent working structures (European Youth Forum, 2010, Statutes).

Financial Control Commission: This consists of two members each of National Youth Councils and International Non Governmental Youth Organisation and these members have voting rights (European Youth Forum, 2010, Statutes). A Board member, the Secretary-General and the Administrative and Financial Director take seats in this Commission but have no voting rights (European Youth Forum, 2010, Statutes). This Commission is responsible for the internal audit of the finances of the YFJ. Furthermore, it is an advisory board for the Board, Council of Members and General Assembly on the allocation of resources and identification of new resources (European Youth Forum, 2010, Statutes).

Secretary-General: He/she is elected by the Board and ratified by the General Assembly (European Youth Forum, 2010, Statutes). The tasks of the Secretary-General are to supervise and coordinate the work of the Secretariat. Therefore the Secretary-General is responsible for the daily functioning of the YFJ, with the guidance and delegation of the Board (European Youth Forum, 2010, Statutes).

Consultative body on membership applications: This consists of four member organisations namely two from the National Youth Councils and two from youth organisations (European Youth Forum, 2010, Statutes). The Secretary-General assists this body. The task of this body is to review the applications of potential members and report on this to the Board. Existing members should inform this body if there are changes to their membership status (European Youth Forum, 2010, Statutes).

Secretariat: This body prepares the work of the other statutory bodies and it does the daily work of the YFJ under the responsibility of the Secretary-General (European Youth Forum, 2010, Statutes). The secretariat is composed of a group of staff members appointed by the Secretary-General and an Administrative and a Financial Director who are both appointed by the Board (European Youth Forum, 2010, Statutes). At the moment the YFJ has 25 FTE staff, of which one is specifically employed for the structured dialogue and some interns and consultants.

5.1.1 *Opinions of interviewees on the organisation and processes*

Most members do not consider it necessary to change the organisational structure of the YFJ: it all works in a satisfactory and efficient way. According to an interviewee, even more working groups and General Assembly meetings could be organised to make the programme less condensed but this is rather expensive and would require extra financial resources.

In general the YFJ is perceived as being well organised by interviewees and especially the member organisations. The General Assembly meetings and the working groups are generally efficiently organised and the YFJ provides space to members to be actively involved.

In general, the selection process of members is found to be transparent and in most cases there is agreement that the selection criteria are good.

Opinion of interviewees on the consultation process

Member organisations are generally very positive on the consultation and decision making process. All important decisions and policies are voted on during the General Assembly meetings that are organised twice a year. In addition to this, members are involved in working groups and bureau meetings to prepare specific policies that are voted upon during the General Assembly meetings. For consultations, the strong secretariat has an important role. The only critical note mentioned is that the quality of the surveys differs.

Although most interviewees indicate that the YFJ is democratically organised, there are also some critical remarks. The decision making process of the board and the voting process is by some perceived as less transparent than it could be.

One example of a critical remark was related to the 50-50 division, which takes into account the voice of the NGOs and the National Youth Councils equally, even though the number of NGOs is higher. The rationale behind this can be justified, since NGOs often are one-issue organisations while councils have a broader view on the situation in their countries.

However, also the participation in working groups is strictly organised along the principle of 50-50 participation. This gives the votes of individual councils more power and it does not always necessarily lead to including the best experts in working groups.

Furthermore, it is mentioned that, as a result of becoming an organisation with many members, there are processes of coalition forming and that there is not always enough time to discuss the proposals with their own organisations before voting as some proposals are only briefly presented before.

The evaluators consider the consultation processes of the YFJ to be democratic. Although some critical remarks were recorded, these do not seem to critically undermine the democratic process. It is up to the YFJ to consider whether and how the YFJ would adapt their processes based on the remarks made.

5.2 Overview of inputs and cost effectiveness

As mentioned above, there is no sound overview available to the evaluators of the inputs and outputs (during the evaluation period no output data was recorded), not even ones that could be used to link inputs to outputs or results. The evaluators have made an attempt to generate an overview of the activities in order to identify what has been done against which costs, but it proved to be impossible based on the information available⁶¹. The evaluators did have access to the financial regulations and the monitoring reports which give indications on the cost effectiveness of the YFJ.

⁶¹ For an overview of methods that can be used for assessing the cost-efficiency and how these can and cannot be used in this evaluation: see Annex 5.

On average, approximately 78% of the eligible costs in 2007-2011 were paid by DGEAC under the YiA programme action 4.2. Another 14% of co-funding is raised by volunteer time and partnerships. Membership fees covered an average of 5% of expenses and the CoE contributed on average 4% of expenses.

In the period 2007-2010 the largest portion of the budget, some 52% to 61%, applied to the running costs of the YFJ (for 2011 this seems to be lower but comparison is not possible as the presentation of the budget is different from other years). Another 38% to 43% of the budget was spent on activities. This represents the additional costs for the activities, which are on top of the staff input to the activities (hence part of the employment costs should be allocated to the activities, but the evaluators did not receive detailed information on this). The remaining budget is for costs not included in a grant (non-eligible costs for the EU operational grant and are costs that are covered by other sources that the YFJ generates).

Salaries are only paid to the staff of the secretariat and are based on the salary scales that are set in Belgium for people working in the non-governmental sector in the field. Due to the fact that the YFJ is based in Brussels, where the taxes and social security contributions are relatively high, the operational (employment) costs are relatively high as well.

There are quite a few bodies of the YFJ for which no salaries are paid, such as the General Assembly, Council Members Board, Financial Control Commission and working groups. Given that for those only costs are covered, it can be concluded that the YFJ generates quite some voluntary contributions (covered by the member organisations) to their organisation, in addition to the contributions it generates in organising activities.

For the costs of people attending meetings, normally reference prices are used for the reimbursements of the costs for flights. Travel costs for a distance less than 500 kilometres are reimbursed on the basis of train tickets. According to the financial rules of the YFJ, hotel costs are only reimbursed up to 90 euros per night including breakfast in a 2-3 star hotel. Staff members are entitled to use single rooms, while participants of events are covered for a stay in double rooms. Travel to and from the airport is covered on the basis of public transport, in exceptional cases taxis are allowed. Per diems are covering small costs (30 euros for staff members and trainers from the pool of trainers). Other costs are reimbursed based on actual expenditure for main meals and travel costs. Despite these rules, some interviewees made a remark on the use of hotels and indicated that (in some cases) these could be less luxurious. At the same time it is indicated by interviewees that the travel rules are rather strict and thus efficient.

As the YFJ is a bilingual organisation, all activities are planned to be organised in 2 languages, which means that simultaneous interpretation is arranged. If only one to two people need translation, interpretation is not provided officially, but is done by the YFJ staff.

In general, member organisations express very positive opinions about the efficiency of the YFJ, although some mention it to be a bit bureaucratic, which they consider to be normal for the type of organisation the YFJ is. Overall, the YFJ is perceived as a very professional organisation that works in an efficient way and does not carry out activities that are not relevant.

As some interviewees stated:

"The YFJ tries to do as much as possible for the budget it has".

"They are doing a very good job for the amount of resources [the YFJ] get".

"Secretariat and coordination of the structured dialogue is quite a lot of work and [the YFJ] do it well."

According to the majority of interviewees, the staff are professional and employed in sufficient numbers for the many tasks it has. Only a few interviewees consider that the YFJ employs more staff than needed. The evaluators consider that this discussion is very much connected to the discussion on ambition levels and expectations of what the YFJ should do in terms of activities. Although there is no hard proof of efficiency, as there is no detailed overview of what exactly is done for the man hours spent, the results of the interviews suggest that the YFJ is efficient in terms of number of staff.

It is generally acknowledged that the YFJ is in a rather advantageous position regarding the funding it receives (whereas other organisations receive lower grants and have to actively fundraise). At the same time, there is a view that, given the status and the role the YFJ has, there is a need to have a sustainable and strong organisation. As an interviewee states: "it is important to have a strong organisation to be able to achieve something in the advocacy and lobbying work". At the same time, it is acknowledged that measuring the efficiency of advocacy and lobby work is rather difficult.

The evaluators support the idea that a strong and professional organisation is needed to obtain the status the YFJ has and to maintain access to decision makers at a high level. At the same time, the evaluators conclude that the data are not sufficient to judge on the cost-efficiency as it is not known what is spent on individual activities. The qualitative information available on the reimbursement of costs and the fact that people working for different YFJ bodies do so on a voluntary basis, suggests that the YFJ works efficiently.

5.3 Proportionality of the grant

Most member organisations are satisfied with the level of funding from the EU and the activities that the YFJ can carry out for this. Although some would like to have additional budget and indicate that more can always be done if more budget were to be available, in general the opinion is that the size of the grant is fine.

At the same time, there are some questions raised, especially from the side of the Commission, concerning requests for additional financing of the activities relating to providing the secretariat for the structured dialogue. The reasoning for these questions is that the YFJ already receives quite a substantial amount of funding and the structured dialogue is in the interest of the YFJ as well as representing young people, which should be the role of the YFJ. On the other hand, having the secretariat function is at the request of the Commission, resources that the YFJ would otherwise have used for other purposes are now used for their role in the structured dialogue, which would justify the request of the YFJ to ask for additional resources for this task. In addition to this, it is considered to be inappropriate to ask the Commission for extra funding for the participation in youth conferences, while operational costs of the YFJ are already paid for.

What would continue with less funding?

If the EC grant of the YFJ would diminish, the YFJ states that it would employ fewer people and fewer activities would be organised, which is in line with the statement many interviewees make

that there would be not so many opportunities for finding other sources of funding. On the other hand, there are arguments for finding alternative sources to guarantee sustainability and not to be highly dependent on one donor.

As an interviewee states:

"There would be not much left without the support of the EC – voluntary contributions may help for some activities."

If the grant of the Commission were to be reduced, according to the YFJ, it would be up to the members to decide which activities would continue and which not. However, members find it difficult to identify activities that are less relevant; if there would be less funding, some interviewees mentioned that the YO Fest, a festival with political debates, interactive activities and concerts would be less relevant. However, as of 2013, the YO Fest is mainly financed by other sources than the EC grant.

The size of the grant and the appropriateness of the size of the grant is in the opinion of the evaluators very much subject to the ambition level that is to be reached. No ambition levels were set for the work of the YFJ for the evaluation period. This implies that there is no benchmark to which we can relate the appropriateness of the size of the grant. At the moment it seems that the main stakeholders (Commission, members and other stakeholders in the youth field) are satisfied with the activities carried out by the YFJ. As concluded in the previous chapters, most activities of the YFJ are assessed as being relevant and moreover, most are assessed as being effective. Furthermore, as concluded earlier in this report, there are indications that the activities of the YFJ are organised at low cost. Summing this up, we can conclude that the grant is appropriate for the activities carried out.

In case the Commission finds certain activities of less relevance in future, it might decide to define more specifically to what type of activities or objectives it is willing to contribute to. However, in light of the broad objectives as defined in the legal base for the YiA programme, the majority of the current YFJ activities are in line with the objectives. Furthermore, the main stakeholders are generally satisfied with what is done with the budget available. At the same time, it might be worth considering alternative financing solutions; this issue will be discussed in the next section.

5.4 Alternative financing solutions: pros and cons and the efficiency and effectiveness of the use of an annual grant

At the moment the YFJ is sponsored by one external alternative source of funding: Microsoft. The Yo!Fest event of 2013 is for a big part financed by alternative resources (European Parliament, Open Society Institute, Microsoft and the Belgian lottery), showing that it is possible to raise alternative sources for the financing of specific activities.

Most interviewees, however, do not see many possibilities for alternative financing sources, especially in the current economic crisis. There is a fear that the YFJ would compete for the same funding sources as their member organisations.

In the former evaluation⁶² it was concluded that if the programme were terminated, the Commission would weaken significantly the organizations which it has supported over a number of years, and it

⁶² Final external evaluation of the Community action programme to promote bodies active at European level in the field of youth (2004-2006).

is difficult to see replacement funds coming from other sources for an important number of these organisations).

Almost all members indicate that there is no room to increase their contribution to the YFJ. The contribution is calculated for National Councils on the basis of GDP per capita and is thus proportional to the welfare level of the country (500 euro to up to 4,030 euro on an annual basis). For NGOs the membership fee is fixed (almost 1,400 euro). If the membership fee were to rise, some organisations indicate that they would consider terminating their membership. It is also mentioned that for some organisations the contribution is already too high.

Arguments used against finding alternative sources, such as financing by the private sector, are that this would influence the independence of the YFJ and would threaten the sustainability of the organisations as there would not be a stable source of financing.

It is indicated that the funding of the EU is very important to guarantee sustainability and independence, as an interviewee states: "The organisations would die if it is not funded by the EC to ensure quality and quantity of the activities". Another states: "[Private funding could affect independence and corporate funding should be ethically in line with the YFJ agenda](#)". That dependence on EC funding also might influence the independence of the YFJ is illustrated by this quote of an interviewee: "[It might be difficult to criticise the EC if funding comes from them mainly](#)".

An important argument for finding alternative sources, on the other hand, is sustainability as well: at the moment the YFJ is highly dependent on one main source and if financing from this source were to end, the YFJ would not be able to rely on other sources. From the Commission and policy point of view there might be a wish to finance mainly the activities that are directly contributing to the objectives of their policy. This would mean that alternative sources would be needed to cover those activities that are not the priority of the Commission.

The evaluators find that an important advantage of being subsidised for a large amount is that the YFJ can concentrate its activities on its core tasks. As financing is guaranteed there is no need to spend time on fundraising. Also, by having a stable source of financing, it is easier to plan all activities in advance. If activities were to be dependent on fundraising, the final implementation of the activity would be dependent on the success in finding resources, risking that insufficient resources are found.

As shown in the section on Relevance, from the side of the Commission, it is questionable whether all activities of the YFJ are as important to the objectives of the EC. As a result, the Commission might consider bringing the contribution in line with their priorities. The evaluators see several options which are mainly linked to the political and policy choices to be made by the EC:

- An option could be continuing the contribution to (a part of) the operating costs, but establishing limits for certain activities and/or defining for which YFJ activities the grant may be used for and which not. The principle that the YFJ is independent in deciding on their work plan is not endangered by this as the YFJ is free to find alternative sources for those costs that the Commission is not covering. It is more about the Commission to decide what it would finance in line with its objectives;
- Another option might be to gradually reduce the grant of the YFJ in general, to provide the opportunity to search for alternative sources. The drawback of this option would be that the YFJ might need quite some resources for fundraising in order to guarantee a sustainable stream of finances and that there might be more insecurity on the means available. The evaluators of the evaluation carried out in 2007 indicated that the Commission should not consider terminating the programme (in terms of reducing contribution to organisations) or putting too much pressure

on applicants to look for alternative funding sources, as the beneficiaries currently see the possibility of obtaining similar funding elsewhere as highly unrealistic⁶³. This statement holds true in the current timeframe of the crisis as well, although this would not mean that the option of alternative financing sources should be excluded. It does mean, however, that if this option is chosen, the feasibility should be closely monitored.

In the opinion of the evaluator, the use of an annual grant is efficient as it guarantees the financing of the activities of the YFJ and no further efforts have to be taken by the YFJ to generate funds. A multi-annual grant provides even more guarantees of sustainability to the YFJ. At the same time, the evaluators are of the opinion that almost full dependency on one funding source is not a desired situation in terms of sustainability. Also, the evaluators are of the opinion that it is worth considering one of the above mentioned options, providing the opportunity to further aligning the financing with the priorities of the Commission.

5.5 Sustainability

The sustainability of the YFJ as such is very much connected to the discussion on the financing sources and the continuity of those sources (see above). Most interviewees consider that if there would be less funding from the EU, most activities would stop. The YFJ indicated that there would be a need to dismiss people and that the choice for the activities that would continue would be up to the members of the organisations. The interviewed member organisations do not see many possibilities for the continuation of the activities without funding. Some interviewees indicate that some activities might continue as voluntary activities but that this would be very difficult.

In terms of sustainability of the knowledge gained by the YFJ, the YFJ actually involves alumni in order to ensure that use can be made of the knowledge gained. The sustainability of the activities is difficult to assess, as often the outcomes are not known. The activities directed to capacity building of organisations lead to sustainable results, especially in those cases where the YFJ was successful in assisting the setting up of new organisations. In terms of membership the YFJ is sustainable as well, the number of members is even growing. The sustainability of the information activities is more difficult to assess, as information is generally something that people use at the moment the information is topical. The YFJ has a wealth of information and knowledge on youth issues and policies which is a valuable source for many and which is sustainable as long as the YFJ exists. The YFJ has also built a big network of contacts, of which the sustainability is mainly dependent on the existence of the YFJ and the staff available to maintain those contacts. In this respect it is also helpful that, as a spin-off, many former YFJ employees secure jobs in influential organisations.

5.6 Monitoring mechanisms

The YFJ submits annual plans and monitoring reports to the EC. Both are linked to the objectives that are set by the members of the YFJ but not explicitly to the objectives as mentioned in the legal base establishing the YiA programme. From the perspective of the YFJ this is logical, as the YFJ is accountable to its members. However, it is not logical from the point of view of the Commission, which would ideally need information on the progress on the objectives set out in the legal base. This does not necessarily mean that the activities do not contribute to the objectives of the legal base; it does mean that a rather time-consuming assessment is necessary to link the activities to

⁶³ The evaluation partnership (2007), Final external evaluation of the Community action programme to promote bodies active at European level in the field of youth (2004-2006).

the objectives, to assess whether there is an adequate contribution to the objectives of the legal base.

The monitoring reports are rather descriptive and in most cases they do not include sufficiently detailed information on achievements or expected achievements. The evaluators would expect more structured information on activities per objective based on inputs (budget) and output and result indicators (e.g. outputs such as participants in training, hours spent on lobbying activities on a certain subject, policy papers produced, distribution of publications in numbers and results such as, outcomes of lobbying activities, policy positions adapted, etc.). In order to assess cost-efficiency of the activities it is important that these input and output/result indicators are clearly linked to individual activities.

Related to the above, until recently the YFJ did not have a monitoring system. YFJ is currently developing one in which applications for participation and selected participants in activities are registered. The system also covers modules for e.g. voting, which makes the voting process more efficient and which registers the outcomes of the voting. The system, however, does not link the inputs (budgets) with the outputs as the inputs are not registered in the system. If there is a need to better monitor costs in relation to outputs, it might be better to build these features into the system. In this case, it might also be helpful to assign the hours of the staff to the different activities and to monitor whether this assignment is correct by registering hours per activity. A careful decision needs to be made on this in terms of costs: what is the extra administrative burden to register this and what does it deliver in terms of management information.

Linked to the above, the YFJ did not have any output and result indicators defined for their objectives and activities. The YFJ has only started developing those indicators recently. This is a process that is in development and there are some difficulties in defining good indicators for the rather soft interventions for which direct effects often will not directly or visibly occur, such as for the lobby activities. However, it is acknowledged that there is a need for these indicators as, till now, there is no structured information available on what has been reached. Also it would be helpful to set ambition levels to be able to assess whether and to what extent activities meet expectations.

Also in the former evaluation of the YFJ⁶⁴ it is concluded that in order for the YFJ to work towards the stated goals of the programme, the reporting procedures for the YFJ should emphasize metrics and concrete achievements, such as growth in membership and success at reaching multipliers, and ideally offer proof of how the organization has progressed compared to previous years. The metrics should be defined through consultations with the YFJ. As mentioned before this monitoring system is currently under development.

5.7 Communication and dissemination

Relaying information from the EU to the national youth councils and non-governmental organisations is one of the objectives of the YFJ (as described in the legal base, Decision No 1719/2006/EC). In section 4.2 (under objective 3) we already presented the extent to which the results of the actions of the YFJ has been properly disseminated to stakeholders and the public and to what extent the YFJ fully exploited the potential communication and dissemination tools. In this section we only present the main findings from our analysis on the communication and dissemination of activities of the YFJ.

⁶⁴ Final external evaluation of the Community action programme to promote bodies active at European level in the field of youth (2004-2006)

The YFJ uses a mix of communication means, targeting different groups and it is clear that quite some efforts are taken in communication. The member organisations receive most information which generally covers their needs and on which they are satisfied. However, some organisations feel somewhat overwhelmed by the amount of information they receive. Hence, there is room for improvement in structuring the information so that members can easily find the information relevant to them. Members do realise that this requires quite some efforts, as the different organisations have different information needs.

The YFJ has also quite some means that reach out to a wider public, such as their website, social media and the newsletter to which everyone can subscribe. Whether organisations or people use this information is up to them as they have to actively search for it. As a result, there is room for improvement in more actively targeting non-member organisations. At the same time, it should be considered whether the efforts to do so are balanced with the objectives of the YFJ. Information provided through the website could be improved.

5.8 Conclusions

Efficiency of the use of resources

To evaluate the efficiency of the use of resources within the YFJ, it is necessary to have access to detailed monitoring data e.g. inputs and outputs and the link between those two. The current monitoring data do not allow for the assessment of cost efficiency. However, based on the outcomes of the interviews and on the assessment of the internal financial regulations, there are strong indications that the YFJ generally is running efficiently e.g. salaries are based on the salary scales set in Belgium for people working in the non governmental sector. At the same time, the YFJ attracts quite some input on a voluntary basis and staff inputs from their member organisations. Also, the YFJ attracts co-financing for activities by hosting countries or organisations and normally reference prices are used for the reimbursements of the costs for flights. Despite those positive remarks, as mentioned, it is necessary to collect data that allows for a better assessment of efficiency than currently possible.

Organisational structure

The set-up of the organisational structure and processes are generally satisfactory according to the stakeholders. In terms of meetings and voting processes, some critical remarks are made on the division of members by councils and other organisations (both groups have the same weight while there are more NGOs than councils), as well as the transparency of the voting process. Time between receiving proposals and the actual voting is also mentioned as a point for attention.

Proportionality of the grant and alternative sources

Based on the outcomes of the interviews it can be concluded that the size of the grant to the YFJ is satisfactory in relation to their expectations. Although there are always possibilities to carry out more activities, there is no real need indicated for this. The size of the grant and the appropriateness of the size of the grant is of the opinion of the evaluators very much subject to the ambition level that is to be reached. No quantitative ambition levels were set for the work of the YFJ for the evaluation period. This implies that there is no benchmark to which we can relate the appropriateness of the size of the grant. In terms of sustainability, the grant is found to be essential by the majority of the stakeholders, although they also see a threat in being dependent on mainly one funder.

The advantages of searching for alternative sources would be that the YFJ is spreading its risks as it is now in a situation of donor dependency. If there would be alternative funding sources, not all

activities will immediately stop when the Commission withdraws its contribution. It would also diminish the risk that the YFJ is influenced by its main funder (although there are no signs that this is currently the case). For the European Commission the advantage would be that it would be more selective in the activities it supports, leaving those activities out that are less relevant to its policy.

The drawback of alternative funding sources is that the YFJ has to spend time and effort to search for fundraising. In cases of fund raising for specific activities there is particularly a risk that not enough resources are generated. Hence, there would be more insecurity.

Given the economic situation and the possibilities for finding new sponsors, it is clear that some care has to be taken to avoid drastically reducing the support. If the Commission would choose to reduce the contribution, there should be some time to adjust to the new situation and to find alternative sources. Otherwise, the YFJ would seriously weaken and less activities would be carried out, compromising the achievement of the objectives. The extent to which the achievement of objectives would be compromised is depending on the scale of the reduction and the choices that would be made by the YFJ and/or the Commission in terms of what activities would still be financed and which not.

Sustainability

In relation to the above, the sustainability of the YFJ as such is very much dependent on the contribution of the EC. The question is whether this is desirable for both the YFJ and the EC. The sustainability of the outcomes of the actions of the YFJ is more difficult to assess as often the outcomes are not known. However, the YFJ works actively on the sustainability of their knowledge by involving alumni and using their knowledge. Results of capacity building activities seem to be sustainable, especially in those cases where the YFJ was successful in assisting the setting up of new organisations. In terms of membership the YFJ is sustainable and still growing.

Monitoring

The monitoring provisions over the evaluated period are considered to be weak by the evaluators. The YFJ does not provide structured information on the activities carried out, the costs and composition of costs, the outputs and achievements. Only very recently has the YFJ started setting up a system in which they register participants. However, this system is not (yet) providing sufficient monitoring information as there are no clear monitoring indicators (yet).

From the Commission's side, there are no clear requirements set in terms of what information the (annual) monitoring reports should contain. The monitoring reports are not explicitly and sufficiently connected to the objectives of the legal base of the YiA programme, neither is structured information provided on achievements. Moreover, financial information on activities is not provided in a structured way, let alone the composition of costs (e.g. what is paid for by the YFJ and what costs are summed up to the total costs per activity). Financial information on activities should be more detailed and better structured. Given the size of the budget the YFJ receives, the evaluators consider it justified that the Commission sets clear criteria for the reports, guaranteeing that better information is provided on costs of activities and on achievements (outputs and results). The 2007 evaluation made similar remarks on this subject ("The Commission should focus on quality control of the activities organised by the NGOs and the YFJ.")⁶⁵. The YFJ does always evaluate its meetings, but monitoring of concrete outputs and results still needs further improvement. As mentioned, the system that is being developed by the YFJ provides for improvements in this field and it is worth considering the further development of this system into a full monitoring system in which activities, budgets, outputs and outcomes are registered.

⁶⁵ The evaluation partnership (2007), Final external evaluation of the Community action programme to promote bodies active at European level in the field of youth (2004-2006).

6 Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

6.1.1 Relevance

Intervention logic

Ecorys concludes that the intervention logic of the grant agreements between the EC and the YFJ does leave room for improvements:

- The YFJ objectives, as set by the legal base for the Youth in Action Programme (Decision No 1719/2006 EC), are rather broad and partly overlap with each other. Moreover, there is no clear hierarchy between the objectives. There is a clear need to streamline these objectives;
- The YFJ is financially highly dependent on the grants from the European Commission, while it is independent in the determining of its activities; the member organisations of the YFJ vote on the activities executed. However, representatives of the funder (the Commission) have certain needs and expectations, based on the objectives of the legal base of the Youth in Action programme, while at the same time the members of the YFJ have needs that might differ from the objectives in the legal base. Practice shows that this is not a significant problem.

Relevance of YFJ activities to the objectives set out in the legal base

The statutes of the YFJ are not congruent with the legal base of the YFJ. As a result, the YFJ work plans do not make a clear connection between the specific objectives, priorities and activities as laid down in these work plans and the objectives for the YFJ as laid down in the legal base. The evaluator finds this to be an omission.

Although links between the legal base, the work plans and activities are not explicitly elaborated on in the YFJ documents, links can be found between them. We conclude that the activities undertaken by the YFJ have strong relevance to the objectives of the YFJ as set in the legal base for the Youth in Action Programme (Decision No 1719/2006 EC): All the groups of activities of the YFJ, except for the membership services, appear to link strongly to one or more objectives of the YFJ. These membership services are highly valued by the member organisations of the YFJ, which also contribute to part of the budget of the YFJ. The most relevant objective of the legal base to both the European Commission and the member organisations is representing youth organisations vis-à-vis the EU.

Relevance of YFJ to the YiA programme, Erasmus for All and the Youth Strategy

The YFJ generates feedback and policy input from youth (organisations) throughout Europe. This policy input is considered to be very important by the EC. Having one platform that generates inputs from the wider youth field is a useful instrument to structure and channel opinions and input. The YFJ activities and objectives are relevant for (a part of) the objectives of the Youth in Action programme, the Erasmus for All programme and the EU Youth Strategy.

Relevance of YFJ activities to the broader target groups

A majority of the organisations in the youth field find the activities of the YFJ relevant to their organisation (national agencies of the Youth in Action programme; research institutions/ organisations linked to youth work; SALTO-youth resource centres; informal youth groups; and national, European and international non-governmental youth organisations, national governments, national youth councils). Some activities that stand out in terms of relevance to member

organisations in the youth field are capacity building, representation, lobbying and advocacy work and dissemination of information.

Complementarity

The YFJ is complementary to other organisations in the youth field since the YFJ is a unique structure on EU level, bringing youth organisations together and lobbying and advocating for the interest of young people.

6.1.2 Effectiveness

Meeting the objectives

In terms of meeting the objectives our conclusion is that all 8 objectives, as set in the Decision No 1719/2006/EC, are met to various degrees. Objectives 1 and 2 that relate to representation of the EU stand out as being particularly effective. Objectives 3 and 4 that relate to information exchange are met to a large extent. However, views are more mixed and a clear communication planning for each target group would enhance effectiveness. Objective 5 raises the question to what extent the YFJ represents youth directly. In our view this is not the case and expectations should be managed clearly. Objectives 6 and 7 (related to contribution to policies) are met as well, although the visibility and short-term impact is often unclear. Under Objective 8 (related to other parts of the world) important activities have been undertaken. However, a clear focus could enhance effectiveness.

Meeting the principles

In terms of meeting the principles of the Youth in Action programme, we conclude that the YFJ meets all four principles to a large extent.

The YFJ is successful in finding a balance between increasing the number of organisations involved and respecting the rules and assessment procedures for new members. The YFJ could increase effectiveness of its ambition to reach out to youth by reviewing its members every few years in order to give relatively new or increasing important organisations a chance. Also, it could be valuable to review important themes that are not covered among member organisations and actively target those NGOs able to cover these themes.

With regard to the autonomy of the YFJ, there could be a certain tension between the expectations of the Commission based on the objectives of the legal base of the Youth in Action Programme and the actual activities the YFJ performs. However, the independency of the YFJ is fully respected by the Commission. The contribution of the YFJ to the structured dialogue process, which was a key requirement of the EC shows that an agreement on working processes can benefit both sides as long as the YFJ has the freedom to decide whether it incorporates the activity proposed in the work plan.

Many assume that the YFJ is directly representing individual youngsters, both organised and non-organised, whereas YFJ sees its primary role as to represent the member organisations vis-à-vis the European institutions and the legal base establishing the Youth in Action Programme is ambiguous on this issue. There is a “pyramid-structure”, in which YFJ represents Youth organisations, and youth organisations represent youth.

Meeting the objectives of the YiA programme

The activities of the YFJ contribute to achieving the Youth in Action programme objectives. Contact between the various actors in the field of youth is particularly well supported by the YFJ. The objective on social cohesion and inclusion is more difficult to relate to the work of the YFJ.

Effectiveness for the wider group of stakeholders

Our conclusion is that the work of the YFJ has a moderate positive effect on the wider group of stakeholders, which is not surprising as the activities of the YFJ target the wider group only indirectly by influencing policies relevant to them. Hence, members are significantly more positive on the effectiveness of the activities of the YFJ for them, as these organisations are directly involved and represented by the YFJ.

Results that would not have been obtained by other alternative options

The YFJ is a stronger lobby organisation in the youth field than any other individual organisation. The YFJ has gained an important position in the youth field and has access to key decision makers, stakeholders and influential organisations.

6.1.3 Efficiency

Monitoring

The monitoring provisions over the evaluated period are considered to be weak by the evaluators. The YFJ does not provide sufficiently structured and detailed information on its activities, outputs and achievements. Only very recently the YFJ has started setting up a system in which they register participants. However, this system is not (yet) providing sufficient monitoring information as there are no clear monitoring indicators (yet).

The annual reports of the YFJ are not connected to the objectives and principles mentioned for the YFJ in the legal base establishing the YiA programme, neither is structured information provided on its achievements. Furthermore, it is impossible to link the financial overview with the activities carried out.

Organisational structure

The set up of the organisational structure and processes are generally satisfactory according to the stakeholders.

Efficiency of use of resources

As mentioned, the monitoring data do not allow for assessing cost efficiency. However, based on the outcomes of the interviews and on the assessment of the internal financial regulations, there are strong indications that the YFJ generally is running efficiently e.g. salaries are based on the salary scales set in Belgium for people working in the non governmental sector, there are quite some inputs on a voluntary basis, the YFJ attracts co-financing for activities by hosting countries or organisations and normally reference prices are used for the reimbursements of the costs for flights. Despite those positive remarks, as mentioned, it is necessary to collect data that allows for a better assessment of efficiency than currently possible.

Proportionality of the grant and alternative sources

The grant provided to the YFJ is proportional to the activities carried out and the status the YFJ has. Since it is a lobbying and advocating organisation, having access to high level organisations and people, it needs to have a strong professional base.

There are some dilemmas related to the financing of the operating grant: by the EC: donor dependency is a threat for the sustainability while at the same time the structural financing of the EC guarantees sustainability as long as it continues. Although in practice the independency of the YiA is respected by the Commission, a further dilemma is the expectation the Commission has

regarding the activities of the YFJ and the relevance of the activities to the Youth in Action programme.

Most stakeholders do not see many options for alternative sources for funding. The evaluators consider that there might be options for fund raising for specific activities of the YFJ but agree that, at least on the short run, alternative sources would not be available to replace the contribution of the EC completely or to a large extent.

However, the advantages of searching for alternative sources would be that the YFJ is spreading its risks as they are now in a situation of donor dependency. If there would be alternative funding sources, not all activities will immediately stop in case the Commission withdraws its contribution. It would also diminish the risk that the YFJ is influenced by its funder (although there are no signs that this is currently the case). For the EC the advantage would be that it would be more selective in what activities it supports, leaving those activities out that are less relevant to its policy.

The drawback of alternative funding sources is that the YFJ has to spend time and effort to search for fundraising. In cases of fund raising for specific activities there is particularly a risk that not enough resources are generated. Hence, there would be more insecurity. For more structural grants, by e.g. private companies, the drawback could be that the YFJ might have to take the messages from the private company into account, although this does not have to be the case.

Given the economic situation and the possibilities for finding new sponsors, it is clear that some care has to be taken to avoid drastically reducing the support. If the Commission would choose to reduce the contribution, there should be some time to adjust to the new situation and to find alternative sources. Otherwise, the YFJ would seriously weaken and fewer activities would be implemented.

Sustainability

In relation to the above, the sustainability of the YFJ as such is very much dependent on the contribution of the EC. The question is whether this is desirable for both the YFJ and the EC. The sustainability of the outcomes of the actions of the YFJ is more difficult to assess as often the outcomes are not known. However, the YFJ works actively on the sustainability of their knowledge by involving alumni and using their knowledge. Of those activities where the YFJ was successful in influencing the policy of legal bases, the sustainability is guaranteed. Results of capacity building activities seem to be sustainable, especially in those cases where the YFJ was successful in assisting the setting up of new organisations. In terms of membership the YFJ is sustainable and still growing.

Communication and outreach

The YFJ uses many communication tools and informs members and non-members through newsletters, publications and websites, as well as social media. In addition to this there are internal newsletters for the members. The member organisations are generally satisfied with the information they receive, although further structuring of the information might help in selecting what is relevant to the receiver. YFJ could increase the direct contact with broader stakeholders. Also, information provided through the website could be improved.

6.2 Recommendations

Relevance

- Ecorys recommends the EC to set a more general objective for financing the YFJ in a future programme, and to avoid (maintaining) any objectives that are additional to the objectives the YFJ has established itself. This would lead to a better alignment between the objectives of the YFJ as set out by its members and as set in the future programme or legal base justifying the (financial) contribution to the YFJ. During this process the only objectives that should be laid down in the regulation are those that are coherent with both the goals of the future programme and the goals of the member organisations of the YFJ. This implies that the YFJ's work is based on a common ground between the EC and the YFJ member organisations;
- The EC could better rationalise the objectives that are set in the legal base of the YiA programme: a reduction in the number of objectives is desirable;
- As mentioned previously, tension could occur according to the current intervention logic if there are differences in expectations of member organisations (contributing with member fees and voting on activities to be undertaken) and the European Commission (financing the YFJ with annual grant agreements). This potential conflict could be minimised if the EC makes clear decisions on the intervention logic and if the EC implements "framework independence", a situation in which the EC does not influence the opinions of the YFJ but does influence the delineation on the type of activities executed.

Effectiveness

Although the effectiveness in terms of achieving most of the objectives related to YFJ is rated as high, there is room for improvement in the following areas:

- Ecorys recommends the EC to encourage the YFJ to improve its monitoring system. For assessing the effectiveness of all objectives, the monitoring systems (including the use of indicators) should be improved; especially in areas where the work of the YFJ is less visible to the wider group of stakeholders (i.e. lobbying) a clear and transparent track record of achievements is important;
- The EC could improve the legal basis of the Youth in Action Programme (Decision N°1719/2006/EC) to reduce the ambiguity on the role of the YFJ: is it an organisation directly involving unorganised young people and non-members or is it an organisation based on a "pyramid-structure", in which the YFJ has contacts with youth organisations, and youth organisations have contacts with young people?

Efficiency:

- If the Commission wishes to guarantee an alignment of its contribution to the YFJ with its own objectives, we recommend the EC to consider options for a better definition of what is financed, e.g. by setting thresholds for the financing of certain types of activities or by excluding activities that are less relevant to EC policy. At the same time, if the European Commission would consider reducing the grant, it is recommended to gradually reduce it to give the YFJ enough time to search for alternative sources. This reduction of the grant will reduce donor dependency of the YFJ and therefore will better guarantee its sustainability;
- It is strongly recommended to the EC to encourage the YFJ to monitor the inputs, outputs and results in a structured way, so that the EC gain better insight in the effectiveness and efficiency of the YFJ. The EC could do this by defining a report structure that allows for the assessment of the activities and their outcomes. This report structure should follow the objectives and their relating activities. Indicators should be quantitatively defined wherever possible (inputs in terms of budget and hours), outputs in terms of participants, advices, etc. However, as the outcomes of the activities of the YFJ are often soft and intangible, some results may be defined in a more

qualitative way. In order to reach this, it is recommended that the EC and the YFJ define the indicators together and agree on a format allowing for a structured way of reporting;

- In relation to the above, it is recommended that the EC encourages the YFJ to further develop their monitoring system, allowing for linking inputs to activities, outputs and results.

Other recommendations:

Furthermore, we recommend to the EC to encourage the YFJ to address the following issues:

- as regards communication about coordination of the position of its members, the YFJ could increase transparency;
- with regard to conveying information to its members, further refinement of the channels currently used could be considered. The information needs vary widely among members, depending on the geographical locations, the maturity level of the organisation and the thematic interests. The YFJ could consider to provide information based on profiles of its members which is facilitated by current technologies;
- improving the focus of the activities carried out with regard to the objective of engaging in discussion in other parts of the world, as the current activities are rather scattered;
- managing the expectations of EU institutions and the youth field on the role of the YFJ: is it an organisation indirectly involving unorganised young people and non-member or is it an organisation based on a “pyramid-structure”, in which the YFJ has contacts with youth organisations, and youth organisations have contacts with young people.



P.O. Box 4175
3006 AD Rotterdam
The Netherlands

Watermanweg 44
3067 GG Rotterdam
The Netherlands

T +31 (0)10 453 88 00
F +31 (0)10 453 07 68
E netherlands@ecorys.com

W www.ecorys.nl

Sound analysis, inspiring ideas