



Warum nicht?
Studie zum internationalen
Jugendaustausch:
Zugänge und Barrieren
» Zugangsstudie

Access Study on international youth exchange

Results of the research project



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The Access Study - from practice for practice

International youth exchange offers young people space and time for important experiences, as well as personal development. It should be a natural part of the lives of young people, regardless of their origin or education. However, there has been a distinct lack of reliable studies on the accessibility of international youth exchange programmes. The key issue being why young people are not participating in such programmes.

The study 'Why not? Study on the International Youth Exchange: Access and Barriers', or 'Access Study' for short, was designed for this reason. From 2016 to 2018, the percentage of young people participating in international youth exchanges was measured. The focus of the research was to find out what kind of young people were interested, which youngsters were aware of such programmes, what factors influence this and what kind of obstacles are there.

These gaps in research also reveal questions in the field of action which led to the design of the research. The study was developed and monitored in close cooperation between research and practice. It was embedded in the work of the nationwide network 'Research and Practice in Dialogue - International Youth Work (RPD)'. The network is regarded as an important stakeholder in the field of international youth work in Germany. It supports and organizes interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral exchange between science and practice. The concept and implementation were developed together with partners from research and the sponsors, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) and the Robert Bosch Foundation. A multi-methodological and interdisciplinary approach was chosen to explore individual, as well as structural, barriers and potential ways of accessing a youth exchange. Four research partners implemented the study jointly.

The ongoing work on the study was accompanied by an advisory board. It consisted of experts of institutions and support centres for international youth work and international exchanges in school and vocational training. The results of the study were also presented in the context of symposiums and conferences with experts from practice and research.



Concept of the research

The Access Study is integrated into a theoretical discourse on international youth work, which in recent years has been accompanied by a psychological research on youth exchanges¹ and socio-educational research on youth work². For the Access Study, different scientific perspectives were put together:

- SINUS Institute (Dr. Silke Borgstedt) conducted a representative survey of 2,380 young people aged 14 to 27. Their model of youth lifestyles in Germany was used to cluster the target group and to reach participants, as well as non-participants. Young people were asked about their experiences in youth exchanges and their motivations to participate in future programmes. The data was collected by means of an online surveys (N=2,000) and personal interviews (N=380).
- From a psychological perspective, the Institute for Cooperation Management 'IKO' (Heike Abt) used qualitative data from 49 interviews to analyse the group of the non-participants and created a typology of this group. The sample was drawn from the SINUS sample. In addition, IKO analysed existing literature on the topic.
- The findings were supplemented and enriched by a special quantitative evaluation. Existing datasets collected through i-EVAL, which is a self-evaluation tool for international youth exchanges coordinated by the research association 'Freizeitenevaluation' (Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Ilg, EH Ludwigsburg, and Judith Dubiski, TH Cologne). The researchers also implemented a long-term panel study with the help of i-EVAL.
- From the perspective of a theoretically extended youth work research, the institute for non-formal education at the University of Applied Sciences Köln, TH Köln (Prof. Dr. Andreas Thimmel and Zijad Naddaf) analysed the structural framework of international youth work in Germany. For this purpose, 40 experts* and a group of young people were interviewed. The researchers also summarised the complete results and connected the outcomes of all parts.

Through this spectrum of quantitative and qualitative results, the Access Study focuses not only on individual motives and barriers young people face, but also the discursive and structural framework of international youth exchange. The multidimensional approach makes connections between individual narratives and structural conditions visible. Thus, the study turns perspectives from individual to policy issues, developments and opportunities.

1 Alexander Thomas/Celine Chang/Heike Abt (2007): Erlebnisse, die verändern. Langzeitwirkungen der Teilnahme an internationalen Jugendbegegnungen. Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

2 Exemplary: Andreas Thimmel/Yasmine Chehata (Ed.) (2015): Jugendarbeit in der Migrationsgesellschaft. Praxisforschung zur Interkulturellen Öffnung in kritisch-reflexiver Perspektive, Schwalbach/Ts. 2015 and Wolfgang Ilg/Judith Dubiski (2011): Begegnung schafft Perspektiven. Empirische Einblicke in internationale Jugendbegegnungen Berlin/Paris/Warsaw: German-French Youth Office and German-Polish Youth Office, Berlin/Potsdam

Core area – Definition of international youth exchange

The Access Study focuses on 'international youth exchange' as the core area of the study. The research partners agreed on this collective term. It classifies selected formats of organised stays abroad (Figure 1):

- International youth exchange
- Workcamp
- Voluntary service
- Student exchange (individual)
- Student exchange (in a group)
- Internship abroad (under the condition that the respondents are students in vocational schools or are in vocational training or already have a vocational qualification)

Classification of formats			Research object: International youth exchange
	Individual mobility	Group mobility	
Organised in a formal education context	Semester abroad	School trip abroad	
	School exchange (individual) Internship abroad (vocational education)	School exchange in a group	
Organised in a non-formal education context	Voluntary service	International youth exchange, Workcamp	
	Work & Travel Au pair	Youth camp abroad, Trip abroad (with choir/orchestra, sport association, youth association, youth club, church/religious organization...)	

Fig. 1: Classification of analysed formats and of the research object

The formats can be assigned to different technical and political fields of work. On the one hand youth work as part of child and youth welfare, and on the other as part of school. In recent years, experts have begun to differentiate between formal and a non-formal education sector³. For the Access Study the distinction between formal and non-formal education contexts was adopted, even if there are formats that cover both areas or even the area of informal education.

Leading questions of the research

For the different research parts of the Access Study the following questions were leading and were examined from different perspectives:

- Who is currently participating in formats of international youth exchange? (SINUS, research association Freizeitenevaluation)
- Which young people remain excluded? (SINUS, IKO, research association Freizeitenevaluation, TH Köln)
- Which formats are known to young people? (SINUS, IKO)
- How do young people get information about international youth exchange? (SINUS, IKO, research association Freizeitenevaluation)
- What are the reasons for participation? (SINUS)
- What are the difficulties and concerns of participants beforehand? What are their expectations and what are their actual experiences? (SINUS, IKO, research association Freizeitenevaluation, TH Köln)
- What are the personal and structural barriers to participation? (IKO, TH Köln)
- Who is interested in participating? (SINUS, IKO)
- What conclusions can be drawn from the findings?



3 See Thomas Rauschenbach/Hans Rudolf Leu/Sabine Lingenauber/Wolfgang Mack/Matthias Schilling/Kornelia Schneider/Ivo Züchner (2004): Konzeptionelle Grundlagen für einen Nationalen Bildungsbericht. Non-formale und informelle Bildung im Kindes- und Jugendalter, Berlin

Participants in international youth exchange

Which offers of international youth exchange, i.e. the defined core area of the study, are used? How many and which young people take part in these offers? In order to figure this out, the survey of SINUS first recorded what kind of stays abroad young people between 14 and 27 generally experience.

Since it was assumed that young people do not necessarily know the professional terminology, they were asked about experiences abroad beyond holidays (alone, with family, friends) as so-called organised stays abroad with a minimum duration of five days. They were given a choice between 15 different answers.

The results show that trips abroad with school class (without encounters with partner organisations) are the most commonly used format (see Figure 2). 52 % of the interviewees have already undertaken such a trip abroad with the school and more than 90 % of the respondents know the format. Less used and less known are youth camps abroad (without meetings with partner organisations), which are organised by sports clubs (14 %), a youth association (11 %) or the church or a religious organisation (10 %).

In second place in terms of participation and visibility is the student exchange in a group or a class. 17 % of the young people interviewed had already experienced such a format. Another 72 % know the format. All other offers are used by less than 10 % of the young people. Only a relatively small group of 6 % of those surveyed took part in an international youth exchange. There are clear differences between long-term and short-term formats. Only a very small proportion of respondents have participated in formats that cover a period of several weeks or months. These are, for example, individual student exchanges (5 %), Work & Travel (4 %), Au-pair (3 %), semester abroad, voluntary service abroad and work camp abroad (2 % each).

As far as the core area of the study is concerned, 49 % of the young people know at least one format from this spectrum, i.e. one of the following: international youth exchange, work camp, voluntary service, individual or group student exchange or internship abroad, even if they have not yet participated in it.

A total of 26 % of young people in the age group 14 to 27 in Germany have at least experienced one of these formats. Another 26 % have experience with organised stays abroad outside the core area of the Access Study (see figures 2 and 13).

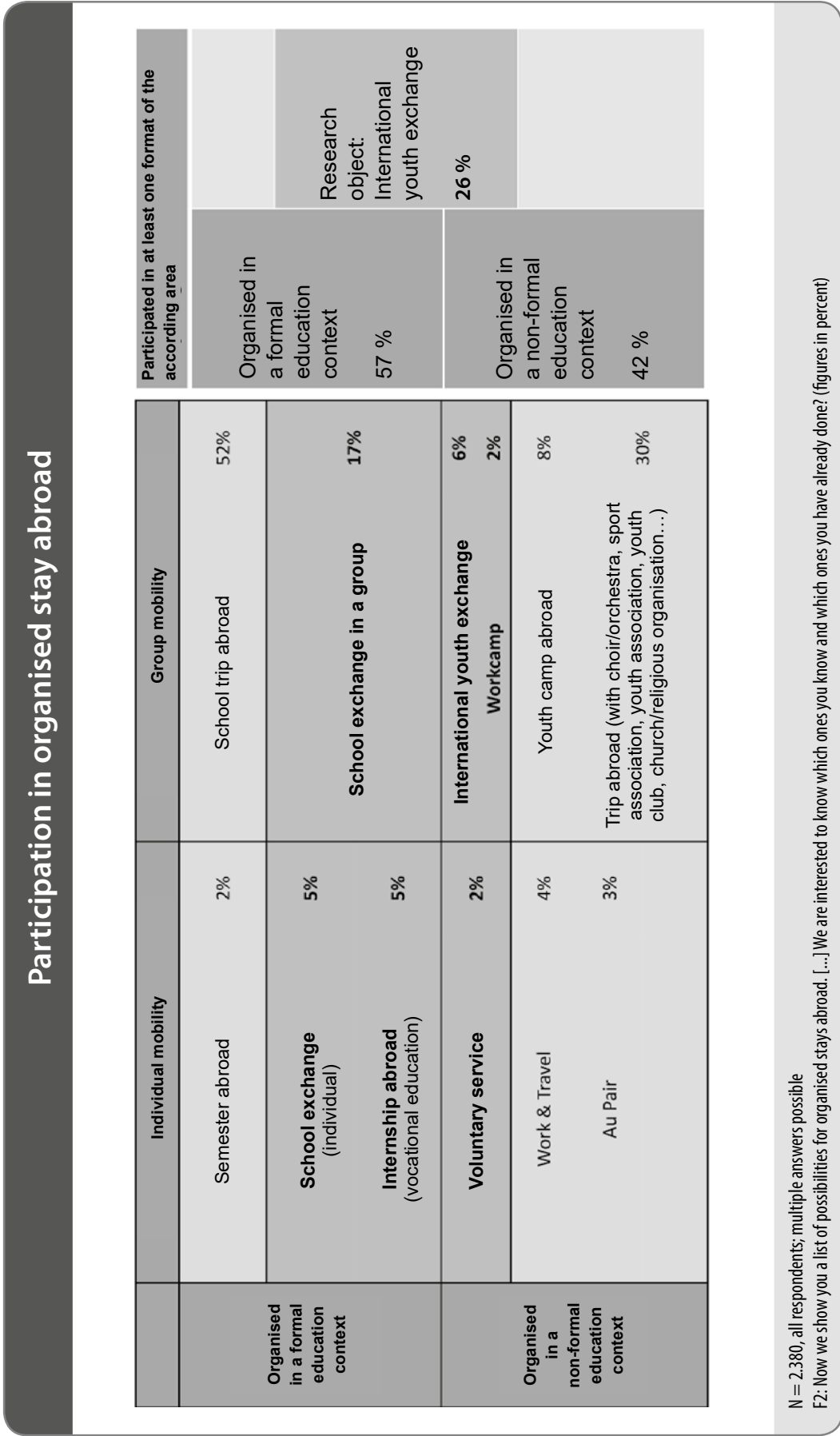


Fig. 2: Source: SINUS. The diagram shows the percentage of participation; multiple responses possible

Social backgrounds of participants

One basic assumption of the researchers was that participation in international youth exchanges is dependent from formal educational backgrounds and socio-economic conditions of young people. Therefore, the SINUS survey included, according to the desired school-leaving qualifications of the young people, the educational level of the parents and the economic situation of the family⁴.

SINUS also included the milieu belonging of the respondents in the study. For this purpose, the model of the SINUS lifestyles of young people was used, which is structured in seven clusters (see Figure 3)⁵. In addition, the visited school types or the desired qualifications as well as the economic situation are taken into account. In this model, for example, also the value orientation, aesthetic preferences and leisure behaviours are taken into account. This approach offers a more differentiated understanding of the different youth target groups and helps to address in a target group-specific design.

The SINUS survey showed that formally low educated young people are not only the smallest proportion of participants in organised stays abroad, but are also underrepresented in terms of their share in population. With increasing educational level the probability of participating in an organized stay abroad is also increasing. Only the trip abroad organised through a youth centre is an exception. This offer is also used by the formally low educated according to their share in population.



⁴ The young people were asked for their personal assessment (from 'rather poor' - to 'rather wealthy'), since it cannot be assumed that young people will be able to calculate the exact net household income of their parents. In connection with the questions of the present study it is decisive how the own socio-economic situation is classified within the immediate social environment.

⁵ See Marc Calmbach/Silke Borgstedt/Inga Borchard/Peter Martin Thomas/Berthold Bodo Flaig (2016): Wie ticken Jugendliche 2016? Lebenswelten von Jugendlichen im Alter von 14 bis 17 Jahren in Deutschland, Download: <https://www.springer.com/de/book/9783658125325>

Brief description of SINUS Youth Milieus

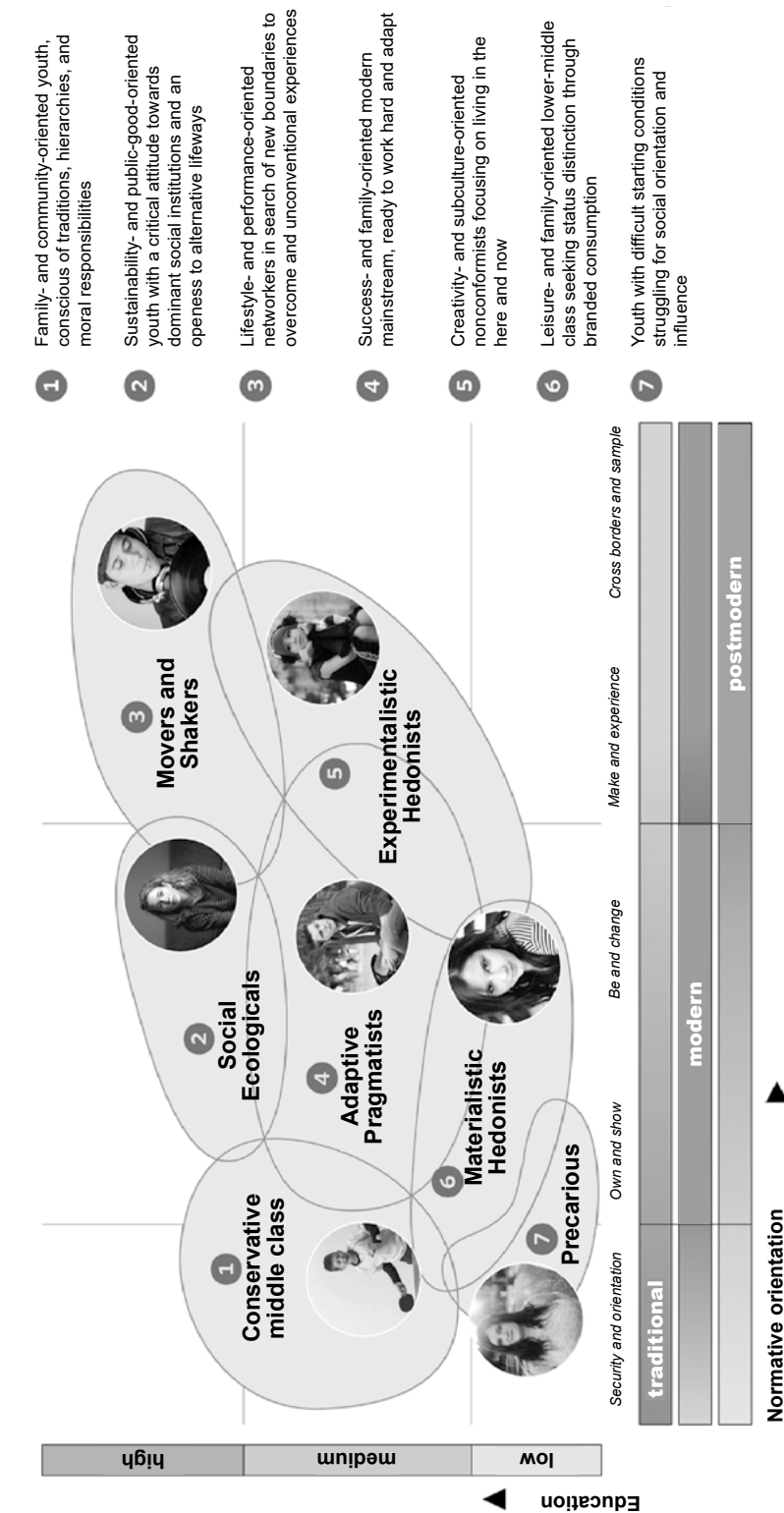


Fig. 3: Source: SINUS

Differences in formats

Looking on the characteristics of participants, the results for group formats in school exchange are striking. The formally high educated are disproportionately participating even more so than with other formats (43 % compared to 27 % on average, see Figure 4). Formally low educated make up a much smaller share of 11 % than in the total sample. One of the main reasons for this is the fact that a student exchange is much more frequent in high schools than in other school types. In addition, school exchanges, both as part of a group as well as individually, are, according to the respondents, in two thirds of the cases financed by the family of the participants or by the participants themselves. It is not surprising that young people from well-educated backgrounds are more likely to participate than young people from economically disadvantaged families.

The SINUS survey comes to different results for international youth encounters. In this format, young people from economically disadvantaged families with 28 % ('rather poor') or 1 % ('poor') are almost representative (see Figure 5). Nevertheless, young people from very wealthy families with 11 % clearly are represented disproportionately. It can therefore be stated that the participant profile of international youth exchanges shows a less severe socio-economic constriction than in school exchanges. While 60 % of participants in individual school exchanges come from wealthy or rather wealthy homes and 31 % of one or both parents have an academic background, participants of school exchanges in groups show these attributes with 67 or 43 %. This corresponds to the fact that in youth encounters 43 % of funding is provided by the family, compared to 75 % in the case of school exchanges (see Figures 4 and 5).

There are further differences with regard to the distribution of sexes among participants. In school exchange programs girls and young women present 55 % of all participants, whereas in youth encounters female participants come to 43 %. The average age is 15. This counts for school exchange in a group as well as for youth encounters (see figures 4 and 5).

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School exchange in a group/class (17 %)

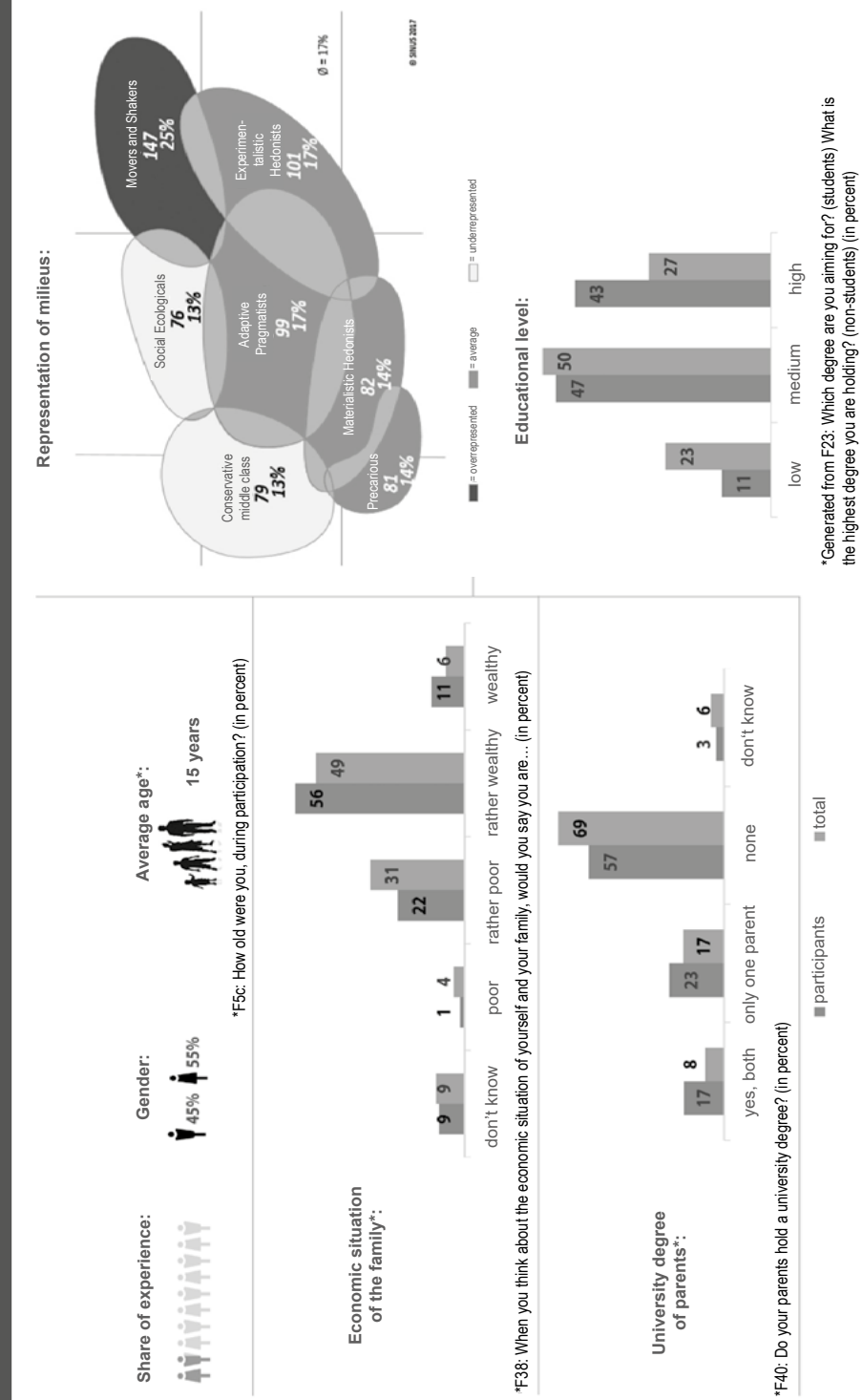


Fig. 4: Source: SINUS

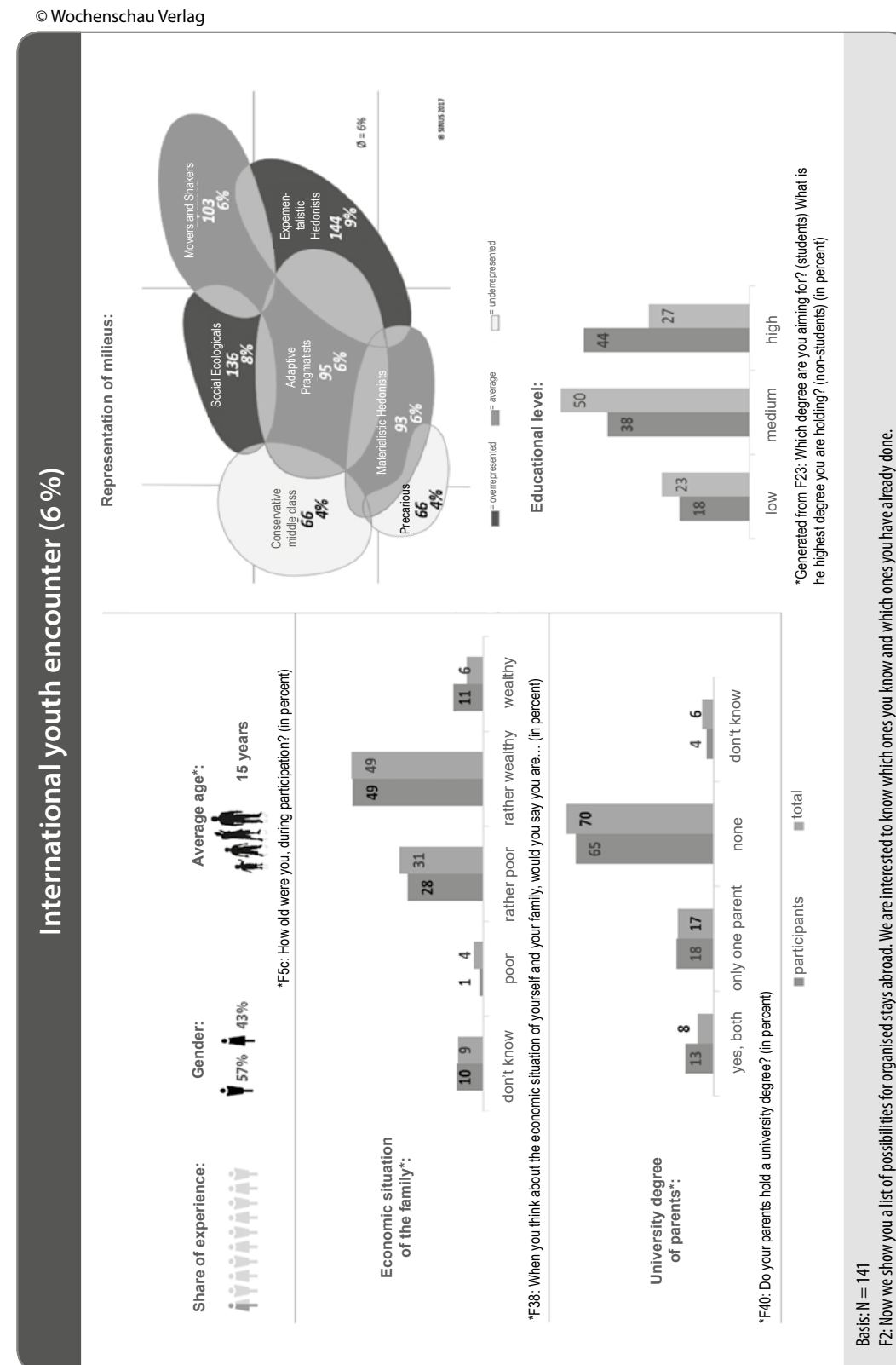


Fig. 5: Source: SINUS

Participants in youth encounters

In addition to SINUS, the research association 'Freizeitenevaluation' also investigated differences between participants in international youth encounters through an evaluation of existing data collected with i-EVAL for the year 2017. Particular characteristics of young people being underrepresented in international youth encounters were identified. The evaluation was based on the indicators that are collected as standard in the evaluation of international youth encounters. Therefore, a distinction was made between participants with an academically oriented background and the group described as 'underrepresented', who came from a non-academically oriented educational background. This refers to young people who have already embarked on or may be pursuing an academic career (Gymnasium, university studies) as well as young people for whom an academic career is rather unlikely (for this purpose, the figures for special schools, lower secondary schools, in vocational training, vocational schools and job-seekers are calculated)⁶.

The evaluated data were collected at youth encounters which have taken place between 2005-2017, and were organised by different organisations and with different partner countries⁷.

The evaluation provided indicates an uneven distribution of participants with regard to the types of school attended (see Figure 6). Overall, far more young people with an academic educational background took part in the encounters than those with a non-academic background. The data from the panel study in 2017, which was started as part of the Access Study, also shows a tendency for young people with (aspired) academic careers, who are clearly disproportionately represented in youth encounters.

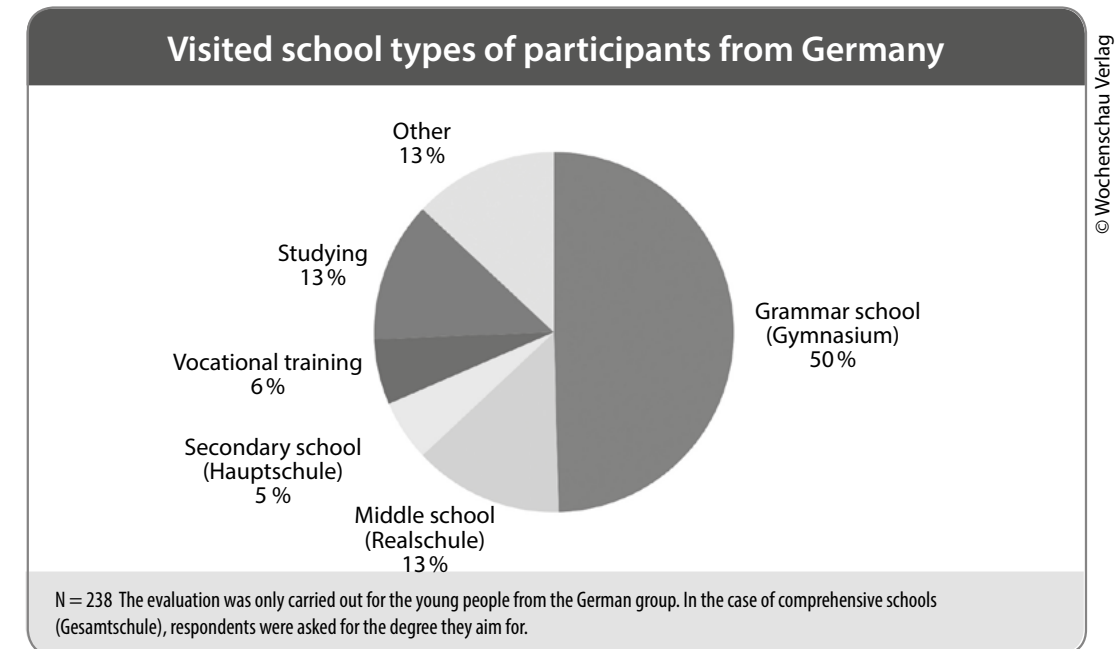


Fig. 6: Schools visited by participants of international youth encounters;
Source: Special evaluation i-EVAL

⁶ As more detailed information is not available from the standard questionnaires, this classification can be considered the best available screening. Young people who ticked one of the answer options (academic career unlikely) or no answer were not included in the contrast group comparison presented here.

⁷ The data collection in the research association 'Freizeitenevaluation' includes data from all institutions that provide corresponding data sets. Since some institutions or regions are more involved than others, the data analysed is not fully representative.

Comparing the two contrasting groups of participants in youth encounters (academical career/non-academic career), they differ in their age distribution (see Figure 7).

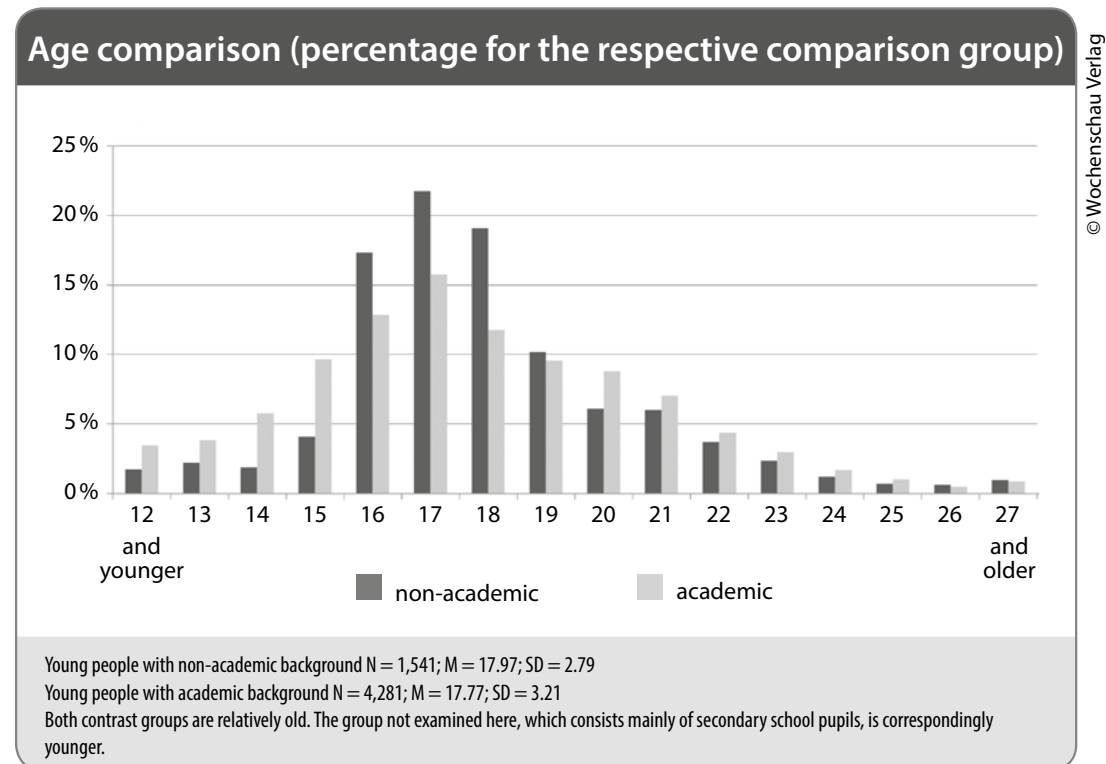


Fig. 7: Source: Special evaluation i-EVAL; M=mean; SD=standard deviation

Among the academically oriented young people both the younger and the older age groups are somewhat more strongly represented. Among those with a non-academic background, for example, only 6 % are under 15 years of age, while this age range among young people with an academic education accounts for 13 %.

There are also differences in the gender distribution of participants in youth encounters. Among the academically oriented young people, girls make up almost two thirds (64 %), while the gender ratio among young people with a non-academic educational background is much more balanced, with 'only' 55 % being female. This highlights that the overrepresentation of participants with an academic background goes hand in hand with the overrepresentation of female participants.

The question of whether they are taking part in a youth encounter for the first time is more frequently answered positively by young people with a non-academic educational background (58 %) than by academic young people (only 48 %). Repeated participation is more common among the group with academic background (see Figure 8).

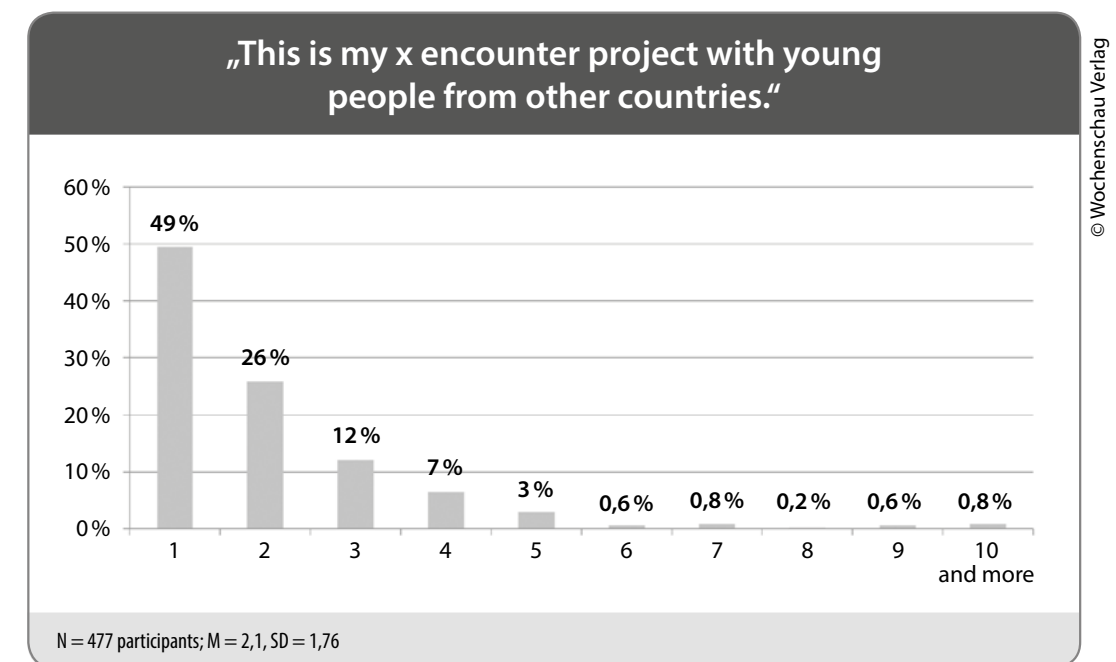


Fig. 8: Source: Special evaluation i-EVAL

Information about international youth exchange

In its survey, SINUS asked which formats of organised stays abroad are known to young people and how they heard about them. Most of the young people, namely 63 % who are familiar with at least one of the given 15 formats, state that they have heard about them through friends or family. This shows the great importance of the private social environment. 60 % have learned about it at school. This can refer to classes and teachers but also to classmates because from the young people's perspective school is a social place where they meet friends. 43 % of the interviewees became aware of the possibility of a stay abroad via the internet. Again, the most important source of information here are social networks. Peer communication thus plays a central role [see Figure 9].

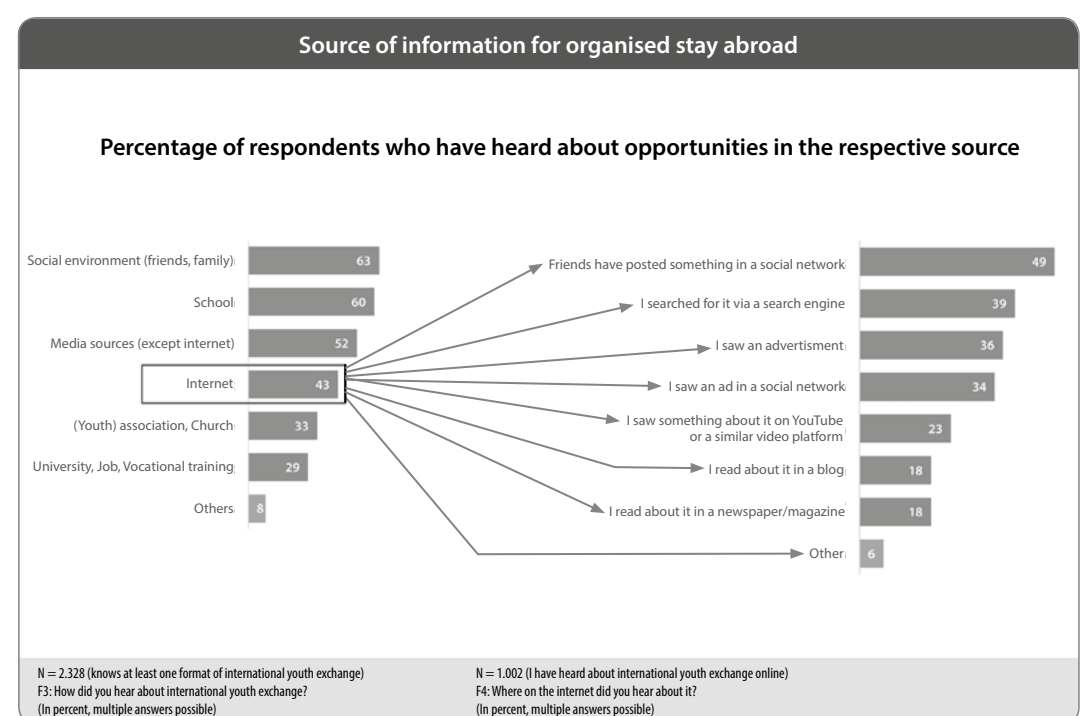


Fig. 9: Source: SINUS

In the interviews with young people who had not yet participated in any format of international youth exchange conducted by IKO, it also became clear that interviewees had received information about international opportunities in the school environment, e.g. through information events, information material and reports from other young people who have already participated. In addition, information was expected from or at school. For example, one respondent said: 'Or any events at school. There are these strange people from banks and police coming all the time, so they could probably do something useful and promote stuff like a stay abroad.' Half of those interviewed by IKO were offered at least one concrete offer to participate in a school exchange. 22 of the respondents stated that they had not yet received a concrete offer to participate.

How did participants of international youth encounters become aware of the offers? This question is again answered by the analysis of i-EVAL data for the year 2017. The (non-representative) database consisted of 440 answers from participants of youth encounters in Germany, which were analysed by content analysis [see Figure 10].

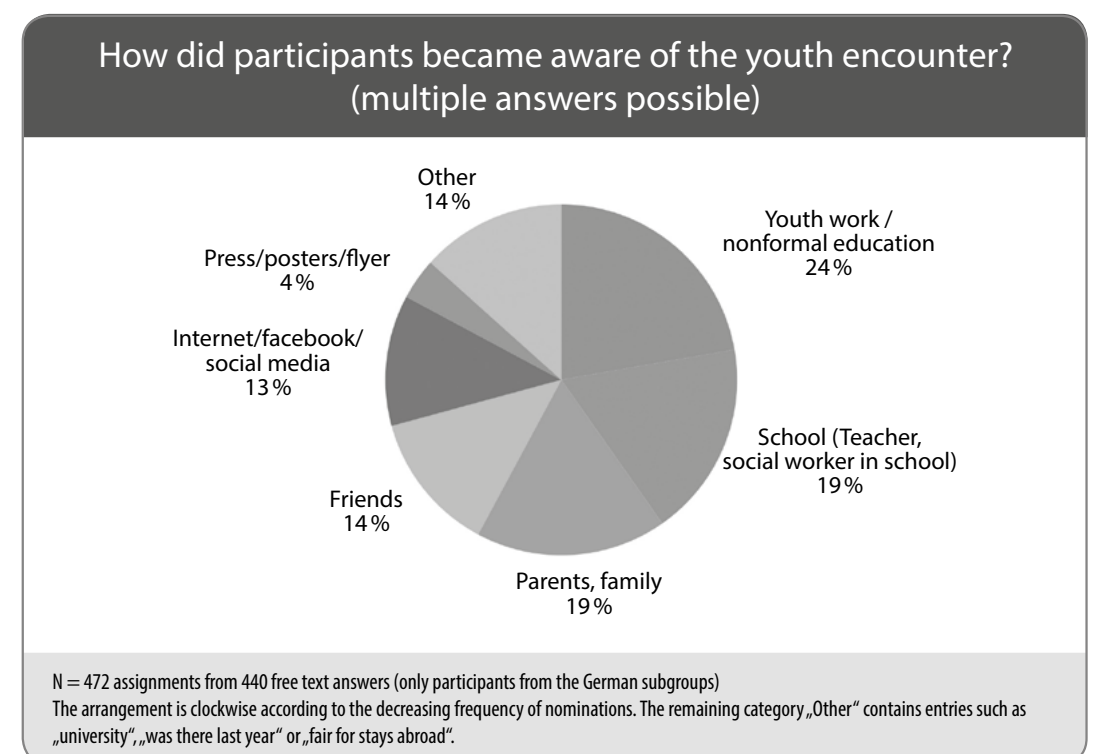


Fig. 10: Source: Special evaluation i-EVAL

The answers of the participants show how different the ways are in which they became aware of the youth exchange. According to the results, the non-formal sector or youth work plays the most important role. For example, young people were addressed by a local youth group, a youth club or also from national umbrella organisations of youth work.

In each case 19 % of the young people reported that they were made aware of the encounter through school or from family contexts. In the case of school, not only teachers but also social workers at schools were mentioned. After that friends were mentioned. Explicit mentions of media used make it clear that examples of digital media were mentioned three times as often as print products.

Schools as sources of information

The question of access and barriers to international youth exchange in the context of the different types of schools requires a separate research, which could not be carried out in the frame of Access Study. However, the role of schools was reflected by the researchers in the context of disseminating information about opportunities of participating in international youth exchange.

Wolfgang Ilg, responsible for the part of research association 'Freizeitenevaluation', evaluates the role of schools as follows: 'Young people who have not yet participated in a youth exchange can hardly imagine that they could get such information in any other way than through school. De facto, however, school is only the second most important source of information among the actual participants, after organisations, of non-formal education. A plausible assumption to explain this discrepancy is that young people without previous participation experience often do not see the field of youth work as a potential vehicle for international youth encounters - even those who have contact with local youth work. A stronger dissemination of information about international youth encounters thus seems possible if youth work institutions make the international aspects of their work more publicly known than before. In concrete terms, local youth work could and should put more effort into that. Moreover, those institutions that do not offer international activities by themselves could refer to youth encounters of umbrella organisations and could become multipliers.'

Zijad Naddaf, who has conducted interviews with youth work professionals and young people for TH Köln, also notes that the role of schools for possible approaches to lowering access barriers (for example by providing information at school) and for a better understanding of the field as a whole should be further discussed and researched: 'Although a first superficial glance seems to convey something else, school is not a place where international youth work reaches everyone. The target group question is often decided with regard to a certain performance level of young people, which is inherent in the school system. From this point of view, turning international youth work towards the school system can mean that again not 'everyone is reached' but that we are dealing with two highly demanding systems. There is a danger that the exclusionary selection mechanisms, which exist simply because of the division into school forms, will be strengthened. These are criteria such as performance and competence (as a prerequisite for participation) or the acquisition of competence (as the goal of participation), i.e. ultimately optimisation and reward rationales. If participation were to be decided on the basis of school criteria, new access points would often not be opened up, but rather categories of the so-called disadvantages would be identified and reproduced.'

Motivation for participation

What motivates young people to take part in organised stays abroad?

In the SINUS survey, the list of the most frequently mentioned relevant reasons is headed by intrinsic motives. For 90 % of the young people participating in international youth exchanges, it is about having fun and enjoying themselves. It seems to be almost as important to gain new experiences and impressions (89 %). 75 % of the participants also feel inspired by the opportunity to get to know another culture. Followed by 74 % who say that they want to get to know new people and 69 % who want to improve their language skills. For 68 % of those surveyed, it is also about being able to become more independent, and for 58 % it is about doing something meaningful or social.

Friends and acquaintances are not only important sources of information for an organised stay abroad, but also give impulses for participation. 58 % agree that they have been motivated by the participation of friends. Young people also see participation as a chance to get away from home for a while (54 %) or to do something without the people they know (44 %). To sum up, a stay abroad also offers an opportunity to reinvent yourself in a new social setting during a phase of development marked by significant changes.

The motives of the underrepresented participants show similar results to those of the other participants. For them, having a good time, as well as new experiences, come first. But while the hedonistic motive is relevant for 90 % of all participants, this applies to only 82 % of participants with a lower formal education. On average, 89 % expect new impressions and experiences compared to 84 % of the underrepresented participants. The desire to get to know another culture (77 % compared to 68 %) or new people (74 % compared to 66 %) is also less important to the underrepresented participants than to the other participants. More often, however, the underrepresented respondents said that their participation was a parental request (39 % vs. 49 %), a duty (35 % vs. 45 %) or a chance (34 % vs. 48 %). The motive of getting away from one's own family for a while was also more common among them.

What could motivate young people who have not yet participated in an organised stay abroad to do so in future? The motives of those who have not participated so far, show a broad spectrum and are similar to the motives of those who have participated before. 10 of the 15 aspects mentioned above achieve approval ratings of over 58 %. The focus is on hedonistic motives and personal development. 82 % want to have fun and have a good time. This is more important to them than improving their own career opportunities.

Expectations in international youth exchange

When the 'unexperienced' young people, who have not yet participated in a organized stay abroad, are asked what criteria should be met in order for them to take part, 79 % put safety issues first (see Figure 11). In addition, 76 % consider it important that the offer takes place in a 'great' place. 77 % of those surveyed said that the stay would have to be financed. For 73 %, a good internet connection is a prerequisite. And being able to communicate well is an important requirement for 72 %.

IKO also showed that, in addition to the lack of information about international youth exchange the question of costs is seen as a decisive obstacle.

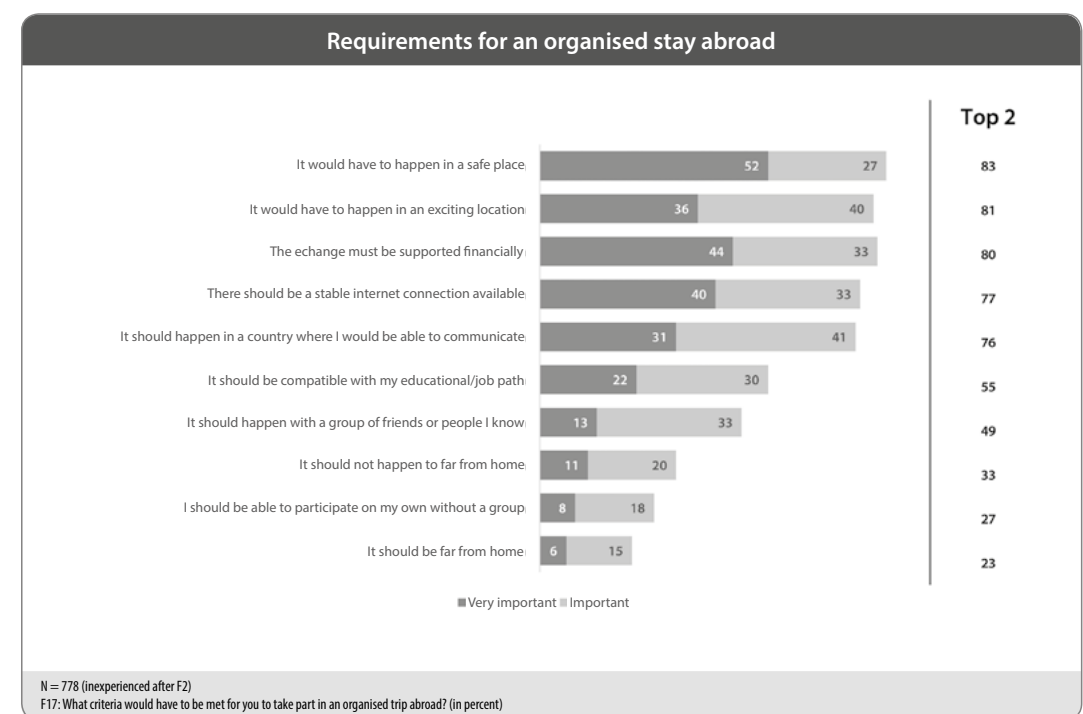


Fig. 11: Source: SINUS

SINUS asked 'experienced' young people what difficulties they anticipated before participating in international youth exchanges. The results show that young people with lower formal education perceive almost all aspects that can cause difficulties more often than participants as a whole. Exceptions to this are doubts about being able to cope with the situation and the desire not to be separated from a girl or boyfriend. These concerns affect both groups equally.

It is noticeable that almost 40 % of the participants with a lower formal education have not known about the exchange opportunities for long, while this applies to only 20 % of the total. Linked to the fact it is primarily the social environment that shapes access to youth exchanges, this effect reproduces itself: the lack of awareness among the target group of under-represented participants leads to a lack of participation, which in turn means there are hardly any peers or role models with relevant experiences. This is also reflected in the support of an exchange project by the parents. At 32 %, twice as many under-represented participants say that their parents did not want them to participate, while this is only true for 16 % overall.

Typology of non-participants

IKO interviewed 49 young people who had stated in the SINUS survey that they had not yet participated in any form of international youth exchange. The interviews with non-participants aimed to gain deeper insights about the individual composition of barriers and their perceived relevance among the young people.

The qualitative survey resulted in a categorisation into 'motivated' and 'unmotivated' non-participants. Those motivated were again divided into 'rejected', 'prevented' and 'inhibited', the latter being the largest group. The group of the motivated would have liked to take part in an organised stay abroad and from today's perspective usually regret that this did not happen. They were a) rejected because the action did not take place, because they did not pass a selection procedure or because they did not meet certain criteria, b) prevented because they had no windows of opportunity in their school career for an activity they were familiar with, serious illness, visa difficulties or serious family situations made participation impossible for them, c) inhibited because of a lack of information, [anticipated] excessive costs or anxiety prevented them from participating. In many cases, the obstacles were related to the formats that the respondents were familiar with. For example, an interviewee who only had information about formats with homestay indicates 'What bothered me about the exchange was that people would come straight to my home.'

Overall, the interviews showed that a variety of individual-biographical and structural conditions prevented the interviewees from participating in a youth exchange. In the group of 'unmotivated' who were not interested in participating and who do not regret not having participated so far, other obstacles were also noted. In the interviews they made it clear that they had other priorities, ties at home were in the foreground or simply had no interest in a stay abroad. They had information and offers, some of them were even motivated by others to participate, but they actively rejected the opportunity. From today's perspective, they regret less often than those motivated that they did not participate. In addition, the group of unmotivated people also includes people who, due to trauma, show no interest in such experiences.

All in all, many different barriers for non-participation are mentioned, which could be removed by (suitable) exchange formats, sufficient funding and time windows in school or professional careers (also for non high school students). The interviews also show that non-participation can be justified by certain assumptions, such as the idea that organised stays abroad are for a longer period of time, require certain language skills or cost a lot of money - these barriers as well as the expressed anxiety, could be lowered by providers of international youth exchange formats.

Discursive and structural barriers

In addition to individual obstacles, there are structural and so-called discursive obstacles to participation in international youth exchange formats, and more generally to organized stays abroad. Discursive barriers arise for example when young people have certain preconceptions about formats that guide their expectations and thus also decide whether they want to participate or not. This starts with the fact that the formats of international youth exchange have a very different degree of familiarity. In many cases, an organised stay abroad is associated with long-term formats that are believed to require certain achievements, such as good grades or language skills or that are particularly expensive.

So-called structural barriers are present when offers are actually associated with high costs or when certain exclusionary conditions for participation exist, for example when formats are only offered by certain institutions. The attended school alone often determines whether someone can participate in a school exchange individually or in a group. Therefore, it is also important to note that if a format is known, there is not necessarily an option to participate, but that selection mechanisms are often effective. Furthermore, individual formats can only be realised to a very limited extent because of a certain, and at the same time short, time frame - typically after finishing school and before starting a further training period.



Interest to participate

A large number of research findings from the Access Study show that it is not usually a lack of motivation on the part of the young people that leads to non-participation, but rather discursive or structural obstacles. This is also confirmed in the SINUS survey, in which young people were asked about their potential interest in participating: 'What opportunities for an organised stay abroad could you imagine to take part in?'

The vast majority of those young people who have not yet had any experience of organised stays abroad find at least one format that interests them among the 15 formats offered in the SINUS survey. The most popular are the language course abroad (23 %), the internship abroad (21 %) and Work & Travel (20 %). From seventh place onward, the most popular formats are in the core of international youth exchange: with 12 % voluntary service abroad, work camp (10 %) and individual school exchange (8 %). Participation in a youth encounter can be imagined by 5 % of the previously 'unexperienced'. Of those without exchange experience, 29% completely refused to participate in an organised stay abroad (see Figure 12).

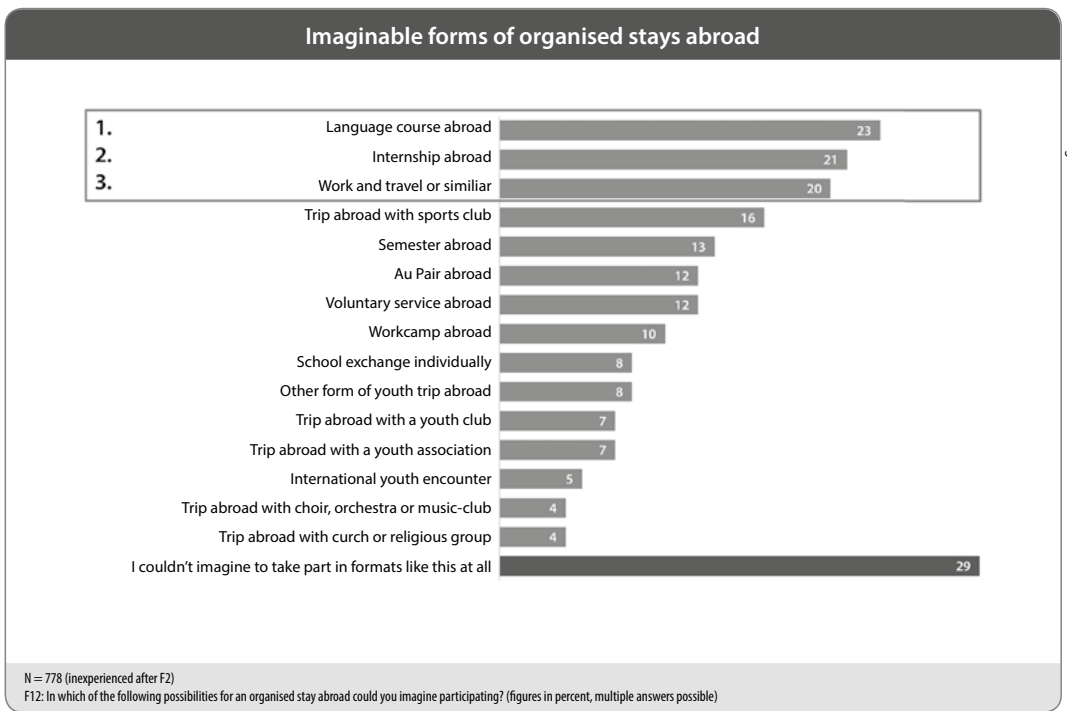


Fig. 12: Source: SINUS

Potentially interested target groups

The researchers identified three groups of young people who can be considered as potentially interested target groups for international youth exchange. The first group are the 'exchange experienced', who make up 26 % of young people. They have taken part in at least one format of international youth exchange in the non-formal or formal area, i.e. they have gained experience either with an international youth encounter, a work camp, voluntary service, a school exchange, either individually or in a group, or an internship abroad.

Furthermore, there are two groups who have not yet had any experience with international youth exchange, but who have expressed an interest in it. The first group, also 26 %, have experience with other formats of organised stays abroad, e.g. au-pair or a school trip abroad. The second group, which makes up 11 % of all young people surveyed, have never been abroad beyond private (family) trips, but can imagine taking part in one of the formats of international youth exchange.

Overall, it can therefore be assumed that 63 % of all young people and young adults have a potential interest in formats of international youth exchange (see Figure 13).

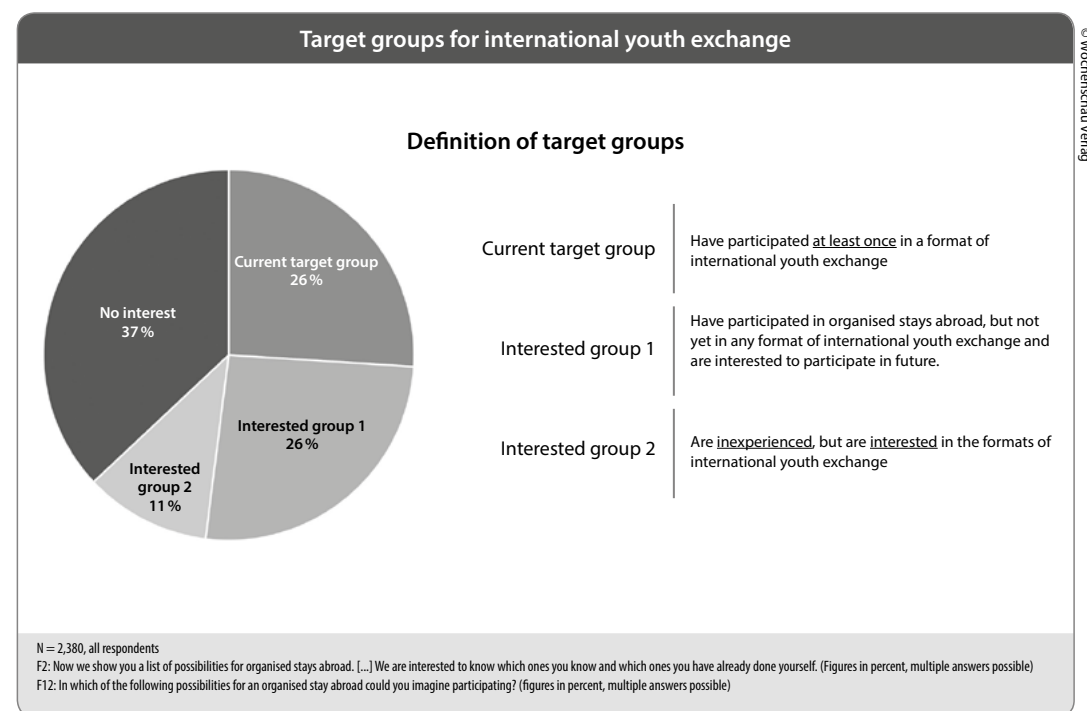


Fig. 13: Source: SINUS

Interest in connection to social milieu

For the analysis of the three groups of potentially interested or willing young people, SINUS used the model of the SINUS lifestyles of young people aged 14 to 29 (see Figure 3). It was shown that among the young people who have experienced an exchange the 'expeditives' ('success- and lifestyle-oriented networkers looking for new frontiers and unconventional experiences') are clearly over-represented, while there is a significantly higher proportion of 'adaptive-pragmatic' ('the performance- and family-oriented modern mainstream with a high willingness to adapt') among the other two interested groups. In addition, 'precarious' young people ('young people with difficult starting conditions struggling for social orientation and influence') are clearly over-represented in the group of unexperienced but interested in a youth exchange.

The international youth encounter is particularly appealing for the 'experimentalist hedonists' ('the fun and scene-oriented nonconformists with a focus on life in here and now') and the 'socio-ecological young people' ('those who are concerned about sustainability and the common good, young people with a socio-critical attitude and openness for alternative life concepts'). The latter are looking above all for opportunities for exchange and substantive debate on social, political, historical or religious issues. The experimentalist hedonists feel particularly at home in international youth encounters whose focus is on cultural forms of expression around music, dance, theatre or art (see Figure 14).

In general, the question whether someone wants to participate in an international youth exchange does not depend on the milieu affiliation. As the results show, interest and motivation are high across all milieus and socio-demographic characteristics, even if there are format-specific interests and different approaches. Overall, the analysis shows not only where the barriers lie, but also where they are not, namely among the young people themselves. The fact that young people with formally lower levels of education are underrepresented once again indicates that the reasons for non-participation are less individual-motivated barriers than discursive and structural ones.

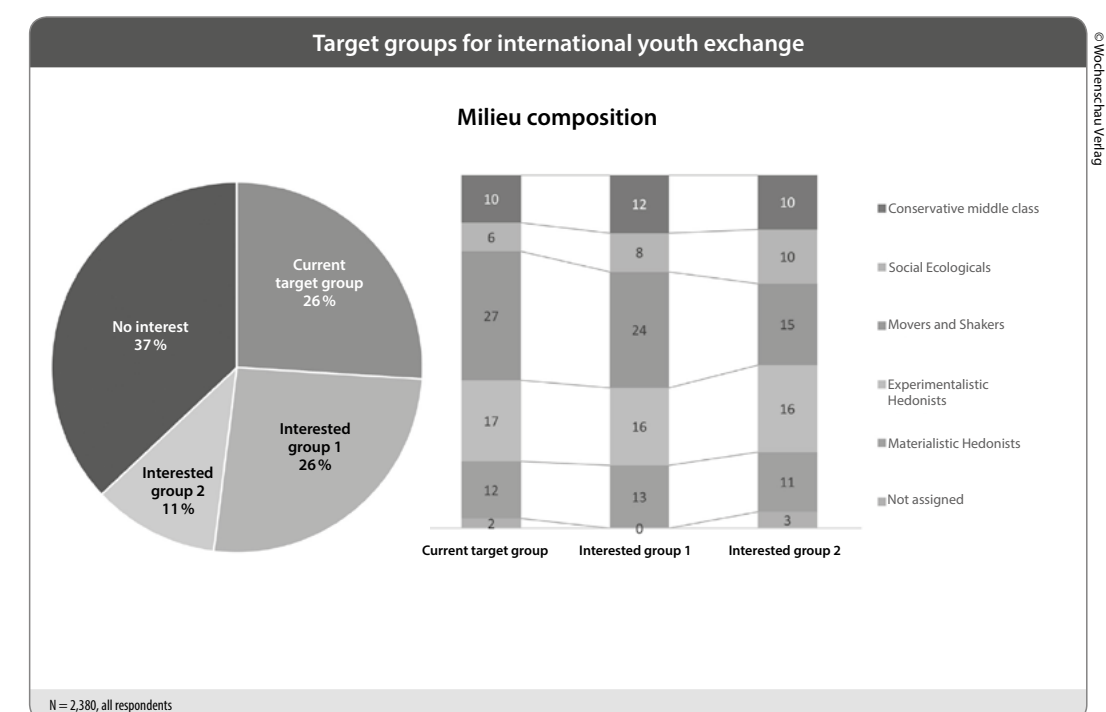


Fig. 14: Source: SINUS

Experiences of the under-represented

What are the experiences of young people who have taken part in international youth exchanges abroad?

The analysis of data collected by the research association 'Freizeitenevaluation' shows the satisfaction of young people with their participation in international youth exchanges. 87 % of the underrepresented young people said that they could recommend such an encounter to their friends. This is only 5 % less than among young people with an academic education. Only in 2 out of 14 aspects can there be found a significant difference in the satisfaction ratings of the two groups. The young people with non-academic education were somewhat more dissatisfied with accommodation and food. In the pedagogically interesting aspects such as group activities, programme, atmosphere, staff, group, rules and free time, the satisfaction values of both groups are almost identical. In the overall assessment, both are at a similarly high level. Those young people who tend to be underrepresented in youth encounters do not feel uncomfortable there.

SINUS asked about experiences of the so-called underrepresented young people with participation in international youth exchange formats. Overall, the young people drew a positive balance of what they had experienced. In direct comparison, however, the group of underrepresented young people had many of the positive experiences less often than other young people. This concerns getting to know new people, a grown self-confidence, the improvement of language skills or a better understanding of international connections. Only the statement 'I didn't have to be with my family' was rated significantly more frequently by the participants with a lower formal education.

The results on the topic of foreign language deserve special attention. The survey of non-participants by IKO showed that the language barrier was prohibitive to participation. Although the language was never mentioned as the first reason for non-participation, it is noticeable that the fear of difficulties to communicate is present in almost all interviews.

The SINUS survey showed that participants who are underrepresented in international youth exchanges perceive communication difficulties much more frequently than those who have a higher formal education (44 % compared to 28 %). At the same time research association 'Freizeitenevaluation' showed that difficulties with foreign languages were the exception for both groups. The statement: 'I only spoke to others in my mother tongue' was agreed by 12 % of the academically oriented and 18 % of young people with a non-academic background. But a lack of foreign language skills obviously did not lead to problems in international youth encounters. Especially the non-academically oriented young people (and among these, especially those who only spoke in their mother tongue) stated that they could communicate without foreign language skills. This is said by 65 % of the academically oriented and 72 % of the non-academically oriented young people. Nevertheless, this reveals a barrier that poses a particular challenge to young people who face difficulties in learning a language or who have less foreign language classes at school.



Perspectives of experts in international youth work

The research institute of nonformal education at TH Köln interviewed 40 experts and a group of young people on the structural framework conditions of international youth work. With the aim of presenting a new perspective on barriers, the interviews were analysed using post-structuralist theoretical approaches.⁸ Zijad Naddaf, who conducted the research, notes: 'From the interviews, the hypothesis can be derived that the circulating images and ideas of international youth work, which are reflected in the talking and thinking of the responsible professionals, are also reproduced in the services themselves.'

The analysis of the interviews makes it clear that in the structural framework of youth work, international youth work is considered a 'luxury activity' that is only suitable for certain young people.

'It's a luxury activity, and it's also very complicated. (...) And the young people with whom we work, (...) I don't think they would even say: 'I can't do that', they would simply say: 'this is not my world!', so 'other people do that!' (project consultant, work camps).

This image or idea functioned as an access barrier in many ways.

Construction of the 'disadvantaged young person'

The expressed division into 'normal' (or 'non-disadvantaged') and 'disadvantaged young people' is what researchers call a construction of difference and establishes a 'discourse of disadvantage'. Disadvantage is a conglomerate of attributions of presumed personality, behaviour or constitution traits (e.g. early school leavers, (long-term) unemployed, people from neighbourhoods in need of renewal, people with disabilities, etc.). This division has taken on a life of its own and leads to the fact that those who for whatever reason do not participate are often constructed as 'disadvantaged' young people.

The experts cited the division as a reason why activities of international youth work are not suitable for certain young people from their point of view. They consider this thinking itself as problematic and as a factor for exclusion.

For example: 'But I already have the feeling that this very blatant exclusion that we are making here (...) in such a way that the ones that we ourselves divide in our heads into 'disadvantaged', 'educationally disadvantaged', 'politically remote', 'non-politically remote' and so on, 'disabled' 'not disabled', this classification'. ' (Project consultant, work camps)

Similar opinions can be found in the statements of the young people interviewed in the group survey. For example, they assumed that certain achievements or individual behaviour patterns are a prerequisite for participation in an international youth encounter. Access to international formats is thus understood as a reward (or as a sanction in the case of non-participation).

⁸ See Andreas Thimmel (2013): Internationale Jugendbegegnungen. In: Ulrich Deinert/Benedikt Sturzenhecker, (Hrsg.): Handbuch Offene Kinder- und Jugendarbeit. 4th edition, Wiesbaden, Springer VS, p. 483-487

International youth work as a luxury activity

International youth work is also considered by the interviewed experts to be 'very complicated', bureaucratic and demanding work compared to other offers and projects of youth work. Thus, the image of international youth work is constructed as a closed system with high threshold access. In this construction the facilitation of international youth work is a question of administration and financing for institutions and organisations. This means that the extremely relevant question of the economic possibilities of young people as a prerequisite for access to youth encounters (participant contributions) is overlaid by the economic questions of the experts and institutions (demand, bureaucracy, workload, personnel and other resources).

One consequence is that international youth work is not seen as an integral part of youth work, but rather as an additional or even competing offer. Due to the administrative and financial effort and special pedagogical requirements, professionals assume that international youth work can only be organised as an on-top-activity to existing (apparently more necessary) educational and leisure offers or as an addition to the well-established offers of youth work.

If the professional claim of youth work is added to this, that young people should participate in the offers, e.g. in a preparation, then international youth work proves to be more suitable for privileged young people, among other things because of a 'bloated bureaucratic structure' (organiser of a workcamp) and because of increased, e.g. communicative, requirements. Other young people, it was assumed, are not up to the bureaucratic effort and the complex implementation. And it shows the opposite: As an on-top offer, participation in activities of international youth work quickly becomes a reward opportunity for those who meet certain expectations or bring certain skills to the table. This turns an opportunity open for everyone into an offer for the chosen ones. At the same time, the issue of disadvantage is individualised because it is reduced to behaviour.



International youth work – a problem of target groups?

The interviews show that the access question is closely linked to a question of target groups. The offers of youth work are assessed and classified according to target groups. As the interviews show, the pattern runs through the whole framework of conditions of international youth work. The interviewed experts mentioned that some of the support programmes in question also make the stigmatisation of young people as 'disadvantaged' a focus of support or a prerequisite for participation, thus consolidating the classification.

In addition: if the question of access is defined as a target group question, then the question of the function of international youth work and especially its programmatic orientation also plays a role. This is confirmed by the experts when they describe that the genuinely open encounter character of international youth work is functionalised by a certain funding logic and instructed for certain contents and associated goals. The idea of 'disadvantaged' young people is then linked to ideas about assumed 'deficits' in these young people which could be compensated by international youth work. In the following interview sequence, a 'logic of purpose' is displayed:

'One logic of purpose, [...], many, at European level, for European youth exchanges, the Erasmus Plus programme, terms that we also use, for example, that one is intended to improve young people's labour market competencies, is mainly to give young people skills through some kind of youth exchange, in other words, that they are qualified for a labour market.' (management level, youth association)

Zijad Naddaf sums it up: 'The programmatic demands made on offers of international youth work by politics and specialist discourses in recent years have led to the construction of a new disadvantaged target group, namely those who are lacking on specific and necessary qualities and which have not yet been reached. The target group that has been reached, on the other hand, has empirically proven certain privileges (such as 'being able to speak' or similar), which can be subsumed under the concept of cultural capital. Accordingly, this cultural and social capital seems to be available only in moderation, gradually, insufficiently or not at all to those who are underrepresented or not reached. With this concept, social inequalities and the connection between the distribution of resources and exclusion, stigmatisation and discrimination become visible and reflectable. But the processing strategies are based on the target group instead of the structural barriers to entry.'

Conclusion

The results of Access Study show: Although 74 % have not yet participated in any format of international youth exchange, 63 % of all young people can be considered interested and reachable if the relevant barriers are removed. In addition, the interest in international youth exchange activities can be ascertained across all milieus.

Barriers to access are primarily discursive and structural. In addition, there are individual obstacles which are as specific and biographically heterogeneous as the overall shaping of lifestyles and life plans of young people are diverse and complex. This does not mean that the reality of social inequality in societies is ignored, and of course it remains important to take the situation of structurally disadvantaged young people seriously and to address it. But social inequality is an expression of social power and power relations and a question of the distribution of goods and the possibility of participation, which must be dealt with by society. For this reason, the researchers in the Access Study plead for a shift in perspectives from the individual to the social structure as a result of their work.

For the researchers this means, above all, a reflection on and strengthening of international youth work in the sense of youth work. Consequently, in understanding subject-oriented youth work, it follows that autonomous subjects who act in a formative way in relation to the structured world are the starting point. This is the reversal of the prevailing perspective, which assumes that young people are responsible for international youth work 'to be interested' or that they should adapt their interest to the existing offers. Rather, it is clear that other more suitable forms of provision must be made possible for young people, most of whom are interested in international experience. It follows from this that a change of perspective is necessary. This can only be achieved by youth policy, youth work, youth education and youth association working together. It would also involve deconstructing the figure of 'disadvantaged young people' and supporting young people and young adults in their complex phase of life and their respective environments with professional youth pedagogy in order to be able to gain international experience.



The ongoing work on the study was accompanied by an advisory board. It consisted of experts from institutions of international youth work and school exchange as well as vocational training. In the following, members of the advisory board commented on the results of the Access Study.

Access Study in the perspective of youth work

Michael Schwarz, Bavarian Youth Council (BJR)

The Access Study has shown that young people are very interested in organised stays abroad. International youth work must be part of youth work as foreseen in law.

To think international youth work from the principles of youth work – a central result of the study – means

1. to reconsider the existing financial flows that make international programmes possible,
2. to reconsider the fundamental contexts and legitimated frameworks in which the respective formats are used and with which objectives and theoretical legitimations are underpinned,
3. to supplement the politically dominant formats with format variations appropriate to youth work and youth education, and thus to adapt them to the lifestyles of young people.

It is great that the study has shown that young people who have not yet had international experience do not lack motivation to participate in an encounter, but that it has not yet been translated into practical action. In this respect, the aim is to build on the existing motivation and to offer formats for interested young people.

From the point of view of youth work and youth policy it is especially important that the results of Access Study show the necessity of a conceptual justification of international youth work by a professionally equipped youth work. International youth work will not be able to take place where the core tasks of youth work are not adequately funded and staffed. International youth work is part of youth work and thus part of youth welfare, which has its legal basis in 'Sozialgesetzbuch' VIII [social welfare law]. According to §11 paragraph 3 SGB VIII, international youth work is one of six focal points of youth work. This legal basis is not always present among those responsible for youth work and youth policy. International youth work must become part of the training of specialists at universities. Modules on international youth work should be developed and offered in the training of honorary official specialists. A stronger presence in the professional discourse is to be aimed for.

A conceptual justification for youth work and especially for international youth work is not sufficiently present in politics. The approach to and acquisition of young people for international measures must be improved. Offers of international youth work must be communicated via youth associations, youth councils, schools and local authorities, but also via social media. There are special challenges in open child and youth work and youth work in rural areas because young people there are apparently more difficult to reach for international measures. New formats in international youth work must be developed. Young people should develop formats themselves together with the experts. The promotion and provision of financial and human resources must be made flexible and negotiable and is necessary at all levels. A dialogue with the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFS-FJ) should be sought in exploring possibilities in the framework agreements. This concerns both the amount of funding and the administrative modalities such as application deadlines. In technical matters, policy-makers should contact the sponsors and experts of international youth work, taking into account the interests of young people.

Thinking cross-border formats from the local level

Rolf Witte, German Federation for Arts Education and Cultural Learning (BKJ)

As the umbrella organisation for cultural youth education, especially extracurricular cultural youth education, the Federal Association for Cultural Child and Youth Education (BKJ) notes that the results of the Access Study, which have become known to date, are being discussed in the field of international youth work primarily under the aspects of the motivation and obstacles of individual young people who, as a target group, should be motivated to take an interest in international exchange as individuals and to register as participants.

In the field of cultural youth education, however, we are primarily dealing with a local and regional network of institutions throughout Germany, whose basic concept is still based on regular group work, even if some of them seem to have fallen behind the times. And it is in these groups that plans for cooperation with international partners and for concrete encounters are forged. To make a clearer distinction in the approach of the study between forms of provision by organisations that have to 'win' individual young people as participants and those that arise from local group work would certainly have been helpful in deriving even more concrete recommendations for action. But perhaps this can be examined more closely through a secondary analysis of all the data obtained.

The results of the Access Study, which have been published so far, also make it very clear that we actors in the field of international youth work must all rethink together. Up to now, many central offices, specialist and coordination offices, education officers and volunteers have been busy making young people, professionals and volunteers understand which formats and forms of international work are required and are only promoted through easy-to-read internet pages, information and counseling days, newsletters and support seminars, flyers and various other forms in their fields of work. And this variety of guidelines, regulations, requirements and restrictions - which ultimately revolve in far too much detail around a few possible formats - must first be understood by potential first-time applicants before they start planning a cross-border project. And with every new youth work that is set up, with every new generation of programmes, with every new special call for proposals, new guidelines and regulations are added. Hardly any other country invests so much from public and private funds in opportunities for international exchange as the Federal Republic of Germany. But probably no other country makes it so difficult for both the young people themselves and the youth workers to find their way through these opportunities.

The results of the Access Study say quite clearly that we urgently need to get away from this if we want to win as many youth work actors as possible for cross-border cooperation in partnership. All our central and advisory offices should actually listen to the local youth work organisations about the forms of approach and projects they can envisage with foreign partners. This is because only they know their target group well and if possible they should be able to develop suitable cross-border forms of work for them out of their own logic with 'their' young people - formats that do not overstrain them as providers and their young people as participants, but motivate them and are adapted to their financial and organisational framework conditions. The possibilities and limitations of a youth centre are simply different from those of a youth circus and those of a youth art school are different from those of a youth sports department. But all of them must currently plan their international measures according to the same logic and apply for funding.

That is why, in our view, the results of the Access Study call on all funding institutions to think, together with the funding agencies and foreign partners, about how at least some of the available funding could be granted under much more open conditions, how we can learn together from the local actors from the various fields of youth work, which forms and formats of encounter are also meaningful and profitable for the young people from their point of view. These experiences, which have been gathered on an experimental basis, should then help to make the funding generally more flexible, so that local youth work can really be won over in its breadth for cross-border learning and experience.



Engaging in exchange with research and practice of international youth work

Stephan Erb, German-Polish Youth Office (GPYO)

The findings of the Access Study make it clear that more young people can be won over to international youth exchanges. But they also show that this requires a change in thinking and action. Many are called upon to do so, not least the promoters of international youth work. What can we take with us for our work?

Information and advice for (local) youth work

If international encounters are described by many actors in youth work as a luxury activity, this is certainly due on the one hand to the (not) available human resources, but perhaps also to the fact that there is still too little appealing and easily understandable information on the other hand. The first step has already been taken with the joint regional information and networking days organised by the specialist and funding bodies of international youth work. At least in the German-Polish exchange, the numerous municipal partnerships offer points of contact to spread the offer even further.

Do not further intensify the 'discourse of discrimination'

The Access Study points out that young people who have been 'exchange-distant' up to now are not disadvantaged per se and that the narratives of the 'luxury activity' and the 'disadvantaged' are mutually dependent and reinforce each other. Offers of international youth work should therefore be fundamentally oriented towards the interests and strengths of young people and not towards alleged deficits. This is not contradictory to advocating greater involvement of hitherto underrepresented target groups, e.g. through vocational schools or youth social work institutions.

Review funding requirements and funding structures

The Access Study suggests making funding structures more accessible, thinking less in existing formats and opening up new access points. Here, in dialogue with youth work, it is necessary to take a closer look at where guidelines could be more easily formulated and streamlined and which new formats could be considered. However, the possibilities and conditions of the partner countries must be taken into account. Constitutive elements are the encounter character, the cross-border partnership and the participatory approach.

School and youth work must cooperate more closely

School exchange needs the methodology and places of out-of-school learning if it is to be more than internationally enriched teaching. Youth work needs schools as an access point to reach and inform young people who are not already participating in its offers or who are involved in extracurricular contexts. This must and can be taken into account in the promotion of international programmes, both in supporting cooperation in Germany and in cross-border project partnerships.

Discuss the results of the Access Study internationally

Understandably, the Access Study is initially limited to Germany. The next step must be to present it in the partner countries and to exchange information on research and practice in international youth work. Fortunately there are already concrete plans for this.

Lobbying in the areas of youth and education policies

The results of the Access Study confirm and support the joint lobbying work of the specialist and funding bodies of European and international youth work. Under the title 'Weltoffen leben' (Living Cosmopolitan) they have worked out the basis for a federal action plan in coordination with the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFS-FJ), which calls for non-material, political and financial support. The joint initiative 'Austausch macht Schule' ('Schools Exchange for Success') is committed to improving the framework conditions for school exchanges. Both initiatives aim to make European and international exchange experiences possible for all young people. And such initiatives can also be internationalized. In April 2019 a first conference took place in Warsaw, in which the German-Polish Youth Office (DPJW) brought the concerns of 'Schools Exchange for Success' into the education debate in Poland.



Decision-makers in youth, education and financial policy are in demand

Thomas Hoffmann, Foundation for German-Russian Youth Exchange

The Foundation for German-Russian Youth Exchange has been working for years to ensure that all young people have the opportunity to take part in a student exchange. The Access Study with its findings makes it clear that this requires additional efforts. According to the study, about two thirds of young people are interested in international exchange, but currently only about 10% are reached through extra-curricular activities while 16% are reached through existing in-school programmes. The reasons for this are complex.

However, two findings are noteworthy: Firstly, young people expect 'the school' to play a greater role as an information provider. Secondly, many professionals consider international youth work to be a 'high-threshold luxury activity' which is seen as a burden rather than an opportunity.

The proposals of the research team are unequivocal: youth work must be supported by sufficient resources at the local level and with the support of regional, federal and European actors, including our foundation, it can be strengthened. With regard to the proposals aimed at fundamentally changing the current funding logic, many practical questions remain open. What could such a funding logic look like? It is clear from previous practice that the planning of exchanges is made more difficult when rules, procedures, processes and responsibilities are unclear. Many international projects fail at this point. Therefore, a funding logic should always be characterised by clarity and transparency. This is something that must also be taken into account when changing the funding logic.

With regard to the perception among experts and teachers that international exchange is an additional burden, the Foundation for German-Russian Youth Exchange pursues, among other things, the approach of holistically promoting international exchange to consider and build bridges between formal and non-formal education. Further training courses are organised together with teachers and youth welfare specialists, conferences are held jointly with sponsors, and since 2018 there is a new line of sponsorship 'Zwei gewinnt' (two wins), which supports joint projects of school and non-school sponsors in international youth exchange. Experience shows that joint action bundles resources. Despite the many differences between the actors, the interests of both sides are served and additional exchange experiences for young people are made possible.

The central importance of access to information about the opportunities and offers of international exchange remains. How and by what means do the two-thirds of young people, who are generally interested in international youth exchanges, learn about the opportunities they have individually or as a group to experience or organise such an exchange? The fact that the Foundation for German-Russian Youth Exchange and its offers are neither known to many young people nor to many adults, may be explained by the fact that the institution is young, deals with a specific country and has so far not been involved in any major scandals. But the fact that all the specialist and funding bodies of European and international youth work and their offers are more or less unknown, shows that we are dealing with a systemic problem. In this respect, the proposals of the research team are not wrong, but are they sufficient to change something about the systemic problem?

Answers given by the young people in the Access Study provide a decisive conclusion: from the young people's point of view, school as an educational institution is required to provide information about serious offers of international exchange. This view is also shared by the specialist and funding agencies of European and international youth work and the Pedagogical Exchange Service. They have joined forces in the initiative 'Schools Exchange for Success' in order to start at exactly this point, at the change of the educational system. International exchange should become an integral part of school education and every young person should have the opportunity to take part in international exchange during his or her school career. Schools must be structurally strengthened in order to become central information points for international offers for children and young people. In every federal state there should be a strategy, adopted by the ministries of education and implemented by means of school supervision, to convey this information in schools. Only a centrally controlled flow of information will bring the serious offers to the schools. Especially for many target groups, which are currently considered 'far away from exchange', access can be successful. This change in the educational system would be a correct and necessary answer to provide young people with support and answers in a world that is characterised not just by internationality and diversity, but also instability. At present, education policy-makers often fail to recognise how well the instrument of international exchange is suited to achieving existing educational goals.

Another initiative of the specialist and funding agencies of European and international youth work is the call for a federal action plan 'Live cosmopolitan! - European and International Exchange Experiences for All Young People', which was developed in coordination with the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth. This is particularly concerned with eliminating the existing underfunding of the programmes of the specialist and funding agencies and massively expanding the opportunities and offers for young people to gain their own exchange experiences. The aim of this initiative is also a systemic change. International youth exchange should be a more integral part of non-school education and not a 'high-threshold luxury activity'.

When stated above, that additional efforts are needed to involve more young people in international youth exchanges, then the decision-makers in youth, education and financial policy at federal and state level are now also called upon, because in addition to the findings of the study, extensive implementation proposals are already on the table.

The Access Study as a starting point for the readjustment of international youth work. First thoughts for further professional discussion.

Daniel Poli, IJAB - International Youth Service of the Federal Republic of Germany

The study 'Why not? Study on International Youth Exchange: Access and Barriers', is initially very welcome. It fills existing gaps in our knowledge of how high the proportion of young people actually is who take part in international exchange measures and which young people are not reached by the offer. In addition, it generates new insights into accesses and barriers and describes which factors influence young people's decisions and which hurdles there are.

One of the central conclusions is that the 'international' should be thought of from the youth work perspective. This implies, on the one hand, the need to strengthen local structures financially and, on the other hand, to address the needs of young people. The interest in international exchange and encounters across all milieus shown by the representative survey supports this thesis.

In order to be able to classify these conclusions better, it would be helpful in a next step to relate the findings of the Access Study to existing research. For example, the results of the official child and youth welfare statistics since the 1980s show a trend towards the 'de-internationalisation' of youth work. Current data from the year 2015 show that international youth work offers only a share of about 2 % of all events and projects in child and youth work. In order to counteract this trend, and thus also take into account the high level of interest of young people in the offers, a differentiated measurement of the entire fields of action of child and youth work could provide further insights. According to official statistics, the largest part (34 %) of international youth work takes place within the framework of youth association work and is also lived here as a natural part of (professional) practice. A differentiated look would provide a more precise picture of the areas of youth work in which the 'international' is actually understood as a 'luxury activity', what regional differences exist, and which formats are preferred with which partner countries.

A further central point is the construction of the 'disadvantaged youth', which is mainly supported by the predominant selection practice in the school sector, as evidenced by the Access Study. With regard to youth work with its focus on group-related offers, the Access Study provides the right change of perspective, away from the individual to the social structure. For further professional discussion, it may also be helpful not to attribute the construction of difference solely to the 'discourse of international youth work'. Theoretical approaches such as Bourdieu's concept of habitus provide important clues as to why milieu affiliation and socio-economic background promote certain social practices and others do not. With regard to these distinction processes, the view could be broadened and international youth work could be understood as part of a broader educational discourse. On the one hand, this could help to find further explanations for the discrepancy between the high level of interest across the milieu and the fact that formally highly educated young people are over-represented in international exchange, and on the other hand, it could help to profile international youth work as an offer for all young people.

In summary, the Access Study represents an important contribution, to think about the field of work more strongly than before from youth work and the motives and interests of young people. Thus, new offers for the support and promotion of international youth work for all interested young people in the further professional discourse have to be developed.



On the way to more European and international youth work

Hans-Georg Wicke und Claudius Siebel, JUGEND für Europa (JfE)

The Access Study is another important building block in the efforts to further develop European and international youth work and to better anchor it in the field of child and youth welfare and in particular youth work. It also provides important findings for European youth programmes, which will be used in the further development of these programmes and may be important in view of the reorientation of the programmes from 2021 onwards.

The central finding is that a much larger group of young people than previously assumed is potentially interested in European and international youth work. This corresponds to the experience of the funding bodies, but also of the funding agencies (for example, in Erasmus+ YOUTH IN ACTION, currently about 50 % of eligible projects have to be rejected because the budget is insufficient). And it provides the arguments for a further effort to find sufficient financial means to provide European and international youth work.

Of even greater importance is the recognition that the relevant factors for participation or non-participation are independent of milieu, i.e. the blanket assumption that disadvantaged young people are not interested or can hardly be reached is not correct. It is therefore possible to use European and international youth work to address target groups that have so far usually participated less or not at all in such forms of youth work, if the right channels are opened up and appropriate formats are found. This is something we need to think about. However, in addition to the youth work, other fields of work in youth welfare also take this topic into consideration.

One reason for the non-participation of many young people in the offers of European and international youth work is the lack of adequate information. There is indeed a need for action in this area, also for the European youth programmes. It would seem appropriate to consider new formats in order to be better able to relate to the realities and needs of young people. If international and European youth work is to become an integral and self-evident component of youth work and youth welfare, a new or expanded narrative is needed that makes its positive effects comprehensible. It also needs to explain the significance of European and international youth work and how it can function in practice. To this end, prerequisites and framework conditions must be created, especially in the field of qualification and capacity building.

All in all, JUGEND für Europa shares the insight that the 'European' and 'International' must be (re)thought and conceptually justified from youth work. As the Access Study shows, youth work is the most frequently mentioned place where young people learn about European and international activities. Furthermore, youth work is the place where all young people can be reached best, especially without giving them the label 'disadvantaged'. This is because youth work primarily looks at the potentials of young people and considers where they are and what they want and need.

Recent efforts to advance European and international youth work, which have now received a further positive impetus from the findings of the Access Study, must finally be supported by the necessary political will at all levels.

What is needed is a youth policy strategy in Germany that makes European and international youth work a political priority within the framework of an independent, national and European youth policy. Strategic action plans are also necessary, which take into account the central findings of the debates and studies of recent years and transfer them into concrete measures. The local level has a special responsibility for the design and support of European and international youth work. Here, a paradigm shift seems necessary that goes beyond appeals. The local level must accept this responsibility, but it must also be enabled to accept it.

Ultimately, however, what is needed is a jointly supported initiative by all actors at the various levels and in the different institutions and structures of youth aid and youth work, that in turn receives a declared political will and a practical strategy. This should be combined with effective measures and steps to implement the common idea of 'More European and International Youth Work!'. Last but by no means least, the institutions and providers of youth work and youth welfare need to be prepared to consistently Europeanise and internationalise their work and services. The existing transfers and ideas do not seem to be sufficient for this.





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The results are also available in a publication:
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