

ESF+ Community of Practice on Employment, Education and Skills – Briefing Note

Supporting the WEBINAR “Overcoming obstacles for young adults in work-based learning and internships abroad: Promising practices from ALMA and Erasmus+” on 21st September 2023

Introduction

Work-based learning, such as apprenticeships, can help young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) to re-enter education or employment and has in general been a successful approach to curb youth unemployment. Of course, the status and situation of being an apprentice or a “NEET” could not be more different; and when it comes to taking advantage of work placements abroad, both NEETs and apprentices face distinctive barriers compared to university students or other VET learners, and their mobility rates are low in comparison.

ALMA (Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve), a new initiative within the **European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)** and its forerunner TLN Mobility¹, have found effective ways to enable NEETs to develop new skills and personal competences through supported work-related experiences abroad. In the same vein, the **Erasmus+ programme** has also gained sufficient experience over the years in how to better serve the needs of apprentices, companies and VET providers in organising mobilities. How can these two funding opportunities for mobility which both have work-based learning at their heart best be used from the point of view of training providers and companies? How do they complement each other? Which solutions have projects within these programmes found to convince young people and companies of the benefits of working temporarily abroad, to overcome language and cultural barriers, to guarantee safety and well-being abroad, and similar challenges? The ESF+ provides support where it is needed, with a focus on vulnerable people: how can these solutions be replicated in its framework?

The event will address these and similar questions and is aimed at all individuals and organizations interested or involved in the international mobility of apprentices as well as of young people not in education, employment or training, especially potential promoters of new mobility projects.

European integration through mobility: a success story

Mobility programmes in Europe have a long history. Programmes for youth exchanges started in the wake of the catastrophe of World War II, sometimes as part of local bi-lateral town twinnings, sometimes as part of national programmes to increase intercultural understanding. In this context and given the aims of the then European Economic Community, it was perhaps inevitable that European mobility should become part of the EEC’s portfolio of activities. Pilot exchanges in higher education (HE) started in 1981, leading to the launch of the Erasmus programme in 1987 and in 1995 mobility for learners in vocational education and training (VET) was included in the Leonardo da Vinci programme with the realisation that mobility could be an added value for learners not just in terms of social and cultural competences but technical skills too. Mobility in VET proved popular: already at the end of the 2000s more than 80,000 VET learners were receiving support and similar numbers are still taking part each year. Indeed, so successful were the mobility programmes that in 2001 they become firmly embedded in EU policy through a European Parliament and Council Recommendation² that called on Member States to put in place measures to make participation easier, e.g. suggesting improvements to information on mobility and financial supports to widen access, and to improve outcomes for learners, e.g. by facilitating recognition of new competences acquired. Such themes have continued to be important

1 The ESF Learning Network on Transnational Mobility Measures for Disadvantaged Youth and Young Adults (TLN Mobility) led by Germany was launched in 2013.

2 Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 July 2001 [on mobility within the Community for students, persons undergoing training, volunteers, teachers and trainers](#). Official Journal L 215 , 09/08/2001

throughout the last two decades, with further steps such as the launch of the Quality Charter for Mobility³, the Youth on the Move initiative⁴, and most recently the Council Recommendation on automatic learning outcomes recognition⁵.

There has also been an increasing focus on opening up mobility to more and different groups of learners: to adults, to apprentices, to learners from outside Europe, for longer duration mobility and to learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. Disadvantaged learners were a key thematic action area of Youth on the Move in 2011. In 2014 participants in TLN Mobility started the work that led to a Transnational Mobility Call with disadvantaged youth and young adults at its core and ultimately to the ALMA initiative under ESF+ with its focus on young people aged 18-29 not in employment, education or training (NEETs). Alongside these developments, national mobility programmes have continued to grow and develop and there are now more than 50 mobility programmes for learners in VET other than Erasmus+ and ALMA across EU Member States⁶.

Overcoming obstacles for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds

Taking part in a transnational mobility programme can be a daunting prospect for anyone but for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds the obstacles to successful participation can be more acute. “Dispositional” barriers such as lack of confidence and self-esteem can undermine someone’s motivation to participate, whilst “situational” barriers such as lack of resources and time can make participation difficult or impossible (see Cedefop 2004). These sets of factors do not exist in isolation of one another but tend to be mutually reinforcing and interact in complex ways. For example, some potential participants may have had poor experiences at school which have given them negative perceptions of formal education and training, reducing their likelihood of participating in mobility programmes, and the communities and peer groups in which they live may reinforce such perceptions (ibid). At the same time, we should not ignore what disadvantaged people can bring to mobility periods, e.g. they may have heightened inter-cultural sensitivities if they come from multi-cultural backgrounds. And it is important to realise that people from disadvantaged backgrounds arguably have the most to gain from mobility which offers an alternative way of learning and a chance to unlock the underlying motivational issues which hold them back. Transnational mobility can create a “free space” by providing a foreign environment in which people can start afresh and experiment with aspects of their personality and vocational direction: key learning outcomes can arise from the sense of achievement of having coped with the challenge of learning abroad, leading to boosted self-confidence, self-esteem, sense of purpose and clarified personal goals and ambitions.

Promising Practices from Denmark, the Czech Republic and a new initiative from France

After giving an overview of the evolution of international mobility in the EU for apprentices and the specific challenges of disadvantaged groups, the webinar will briefly present Euro App Mobility, a new initiative from France to boost international mobility for apprentices and trainees, and showcase two mobility projects, one from Denmark and one from the Czech Republic.

Euro App Mobility (EAM) is a non-profit association, founded in France in 2020 and mainly financed by the French Ministry of Labour and some sponsors. It aims at developing international mobility for apprentices and trainees, on the model of Erasmus. It relies on existing networks of VET centres/schools, enterprises and institutions in France and in Europe. Its objective is to promote long-term mobility for vocational learners and make European mobility an integral part of apprenticeship contracts by removing all kinds of barriers: legal, academic, financial, pedagogical, linguistic, psychological. To facilitate cooperation with European institutions and to activate networking throughout Member States, *Euro App Mobility.EU*, a non-profit international Belgian association, was created in 2021, which will also support the creation of a European Vocational Education and Training Area.

Mercantec Vocational School in Viborg, Denmark, has established a collaboration with Rakvere Ametikool Vocational School in northeastern Estonia with grants from the Erasmus+ programme. Each year, a group of Danish carpentry students are hosted for a 14-day stay at the Rakvere Ametikool school home, sharing daily life with Estonian students as they learn to build a cabin guided by Estonian master carpenters. During the same weeks, Mercantec in Viborg

3 Recommendation (EC) No 2006/961 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on transnational mobility within the Community for education and training purposes: [European Quality Charter for Mobility](#), Official Journal L 394 of 30.12.2006.

4 Youth on the Move is a comprehensive package of policy initiatives on education and employment for young people in Europe. Launched in 2010, it was part of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. See also the Council Recommendation of 28 June 2011 ‘[Youth on the move](#)’ — [promoting the learning mobility of young people](#), 2011/C 199/01

5 Proposal for a Council Recommendation [on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education diplomas and the outcomes of learning periods abroad](#). COM/2018/270 final

6 See more information on Cedefop’s [Mobility Scoreboard](#). The Mobility Scoreboard is a tool for monitoring developments in IVET mobility policies and the implementation of the 2011 Council recommendation ‘Youth on the move’ in European countries

also hosts a group of students from Rakvere. In addition to carpenters, the schools have also exchanged cooks and bakers, painters, welders, car mechanics and bricklayers. Alongside such activities supported by Erasmus+, the OPU program, which is financed from the employers' reimbursement system, has enabled long-term stays abroad by Danish apprentices since the 1990s.

The project My Career Abroad by JURTA in Nebočady, Czech Republic, aimed to improving the situation of young unemployed people with disabilities in the field of vocational training for future employment and access to the labour market and, last but not least, to strengthen their social skills, sense of responsibility and self-confidence. The participants enjoyed the opportunity to get to know a different working environment, culture and customs of the foreign country during their cross-border internships abroad in Saxony (German border region to the Czech Republic) in mutual interaction with workers and clients of the foreign cooperating organizations. The main objective was to provide the target group members with the kind of support that would activate them and support their social integration after the end of the project participation, enable their return to the labor market (consolidation of specific work and social skills, possibly with the proposal to further develop professional qualifications) and eventually lead to obtaining a job.

The webinar will also be an opportunity to hear about the upcoming proposal for a Council recommendation on learning mobility and the toolkit on the mobility of apprentices currently being prepared for the European Alliance of Apprenticeships.

References and Further Reading

Cedefop (2004) [Disadvantaged groups in transnational placement projects](#). Cedeop Panorama Series 105. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union

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Cedefop (2022), [Recognising the learning outcomes acquired abroad by IVET learners](#). Policy Brief

EQAMOB – EUROPEAN QUALITY ASSURANCE IN MOBILITY: <https://eqamob.eu/>

EuroNews (22/04/2022). [Could Erasmus-style work placements help solve youth unemployment?](#)

European Commission (12/05/2023). [European Citizens' Learning Mobility Panel: 21 recommendations to make learning opportunities abroad a reality for all](#).