



Impact of Staff Mobility in Erasmus+ Mobility Projects Vocational Education and Training and Higher Education

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Executive Summary

The Erasmus+ programme promotes transnational mobility to a wide range of target groups: from pupils, students and adult learners to teachers, managers and administrative staff in various organisations active in the field of education and training. Mobility represents a tangible form of institutional cooperation taking place in the framework of so-called mobility projects in the programme's setting.

The European Commission considers mobility projects in higher education and vocational education and training sectors to be active tools for increasing employability of mobility participants. The impact of periods of study or traineeships abroad on pupils and students is a frequent research subject of various surveys and studies. Their findings usually match in stating that mobility abroad during one's university studies or vocational training is an effective means for personal development as well as preparation for the labour market. At the same time it can be assumed that motivating and preparing pupils and students for their mobility abroad is done best by those teachers who have participated in such mobility themselves and are able to disseminate their positive experience further.

When it comes to staff mobility, one of the requirements of the Erasmus+ programme is that staff mobility must be an integral part of the strategic development plan of the applicant organisation. It is also expected that mobility outcomes remain applicable and sustainable within the sending as well as the receiving organisation, if possible. The main reason is the ambition of the European Commission to establish a clear link between the in-service training of employees and the real needs of organisations involved in mobility projects, and thus boost the impact of Erasmus+ funding.

The present study seeks to find answers to the following questions – What is the current situation in mobility projects in higher education and VET sectors? Are the mobile staff members satisfied with their mobility? Do they perceive any impact on their own professional development or on their organisation seen in the context of the organisation's needs?

The study was initiated by the SAAIC - the National Agency for the Erasmus+ Programme for Education and Training and the Euroguidance centre in Slovakia. Its purpose has been to ascertain the impact of mobility projects in VET and higher education sectors, with a focus on staff mobility. The research team has looked at how, upon their return, mobility participants perceive the extent of their professional development and what the correlation (if any) would be between staff mobility and the impact on the participating schools and higher education institutions.



The study consists of two parts: The first one focuses on analysing the impact of staff mobility on teachers in secondary vocational schools and HEIs, respectively. The analysis starts with a comparison of the impact of both mobility types on professional development. It is then followed by an analysis of correlation between professional development and various satisfaction aspects. It is concluded by a complex analysis of factors influencing the level of professional development related to mobility including the perceived organisational impact.

The second part compares schools participating in the Erasmus+ programme on the one hand with those that have not been involved yet, on the other. The analysis is based on the evaluation of how these two groups succeed in achieving 15 selected targets set by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic in annual Pedagogical and Organisational Guidelines (POP).

The approach and methods applied in the study are the following: The main basis for analysis has been data collected through participant reports related to both mobility types (VET and HE teachers) in 2014 and 2015. Each target group has their own specific report, nevertheless, there are sections where the questionnaires overlap and it is these parts that have been analysed - questions regarding professional development, satisfaction and organisational impact, in particular. This information was further complemented by general data on mobility projects concerned, such as participants, sending and receiving organisations and mobility costs. Finally, a specific questionnaire was deployed to schools in order to collect data for evaluating the achievement of POP goals.

Main findings:

- High satisfaction rate concerning the mobility was recorded in both groups of mobility participants (VET and HE teachers). For both, VET as well as HE teachers, a distinct ceiling effect was observed, since a large majority of respondents scored their satisfaction level as very high.
- Upon return from mobility, both groups reported a rather positive subjective level of professional development. However, secondary school teachers' responses indicated that their mobility had had a significantly higher impact on their professional development than was the case of HE teachers. Unlike VET teachers who considered the mobility impact to be strongly positive, HE teachers displayed a certain negative attitude, even if, in general, the impact they perceived was still rather positive.
- When examining correlations of professional development, only a weak correlation was identified between mobility satisfaction and professional development – in both groups. On the other hand, a very strong correlation was identified between professional development and the perceived impact of mobility on the sending and receiving organisation. The more progress in professional development respondents reported, the larger was the positive impact they perceived on their institutions. Vice versa, the stronger was the impact of mobility on their organisation that respondents expected, the higher was the level of professional development they perceived. In a more complex analysis of factors influencing professional development, it was again the



perceived organisational impact, mobility satisfaction as well as mobility duration and the awarded grant amount that proved to play the most important role. All these factors seem to have a positive impact on the teachers' professional development.

- In fulfilling the goals of pedagogical and organisational guidelines by secondary vocational schools that had and had not been involved in the Erasmus+ programme, respectively, no significant differences were detected in relation to any of the 15 selected targets (methodological shortcomings of the survey being one of the causes). Nevertheless, possible differences were signalled as far as international cooperation and promotion of dual vocational education are concerned (apparently, the former being the advantage of schools involved in the programme, the latter of non-participants).

Before drawing any conclusions the following limits and constraints of the study must be noted:

- The study is based on secondary analysis of data that have not been generated and methodologically designed for ascertaining impact or comparing participants. This also leads to self-assessment questionnaires, filled-in by mobility participants and examining subjective level of professional development, having unknown validity (i. e. what they really measure if anything, apart from a subjective opinion). The research team managed to demonstrate satisfactory psychometric quality of some parts of the questionnaires for being subsequently used in scales and further analysed. Still, several individual items cover very complex phenomena which cannot be examined in one question in a valid way. It would be advisable to create more appropriate tools for research on professional and personal development in the future.
- As mobility participants fill in their reports shortly after their return from mobility, it is not possible to estimate long-term impact in a sufficiently precise way.
- For the purpose of drawing comparison between participants of different sectors of education and training it is necessary to align the composition of participant reports. At the moment they overlap only to a limited extent.
- In the POP analysis of schools participating and not participating in the Erasmus+ programme, only a very small number of non-participants took part in the survey. This prevents an estimation of differences between these two groups. A higher number of respondents would increase the chances to support the significance of any differences identified, if they really existed.

On the basis of the study's findings several conclusions and recommendations have been drawn:

- From the high satisfaction rate in both groups of respondents (VET and HE teachers, respectively) it can be concluded that mobility experience is highly valued. For the programme's purposes this may mean that opportunities



offered by the Erasmus+ programme do address the needs of its target groups and the quality approach applied across all programme actions has proven its legitimacy. The POP survey may also indicate that in the current situation in the Slovak education and training system, Erasmus+ is an effective (and unique) tool for supporting transnational cooperation.

- The study shows that participants link their positive Erasmus+ mobility experience with their own professional development. However, secondary school teachers tend to perceive their professional development more positively than higher education teachers. This difference in perception may be explained by different types of organisations as well as a different set-up for organising mobility within each of these sectors (e. g. different interaction between the sending and receiving organisations and the participant).
- The most important factor supporting professional development is the extent of impact participants perceive on their sending and receiving organisations. The study implies that professional development of mobility participants (VET and HE staff) is closely linked with (perceived) organisational impact. In other words, the more progress in professional development participants perceive, the larger positive impact they expect on their institutions; and vice versa, the stronger is the expected impact of mobility on the organisation, the higher is the level of professional development participants perceive. Especially interesting and important for the programme is the latter finding. If individual mobility is clearly linked to strategic development of the sending organisation and it is properly communicated, the mobility participant also considers the mobility period to be important and beneficial for his or her professional development. It can be assumed that by strengthening the institutional approach in mobility projects the effectiveness of mobility at individual level will also increase (and the effectiveness of funding, too). Despite the fact that this reflection is just one of several possibilities, the perceived organisational impact is a factor that deserves to be further explored and developed.