



THE IMPACT OF ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME MOBILITY PROJECTS IN VET SECTORS ON ORGANISATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS

SAAIC, 2019

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study aims to determine the impact of Erasmus+ programme mobility projects on the development of professional, language and interpersonal skills of participants in the vocational education and training sector. The study focuses on the completed mobility projects which took place as a part of calls for 2014 - 2016.

The findings are divided into two parts. The first part contains the outputs from the analysis of sending institutions' answers; the second part deals with the findings acquired from individual participants in mobility projects.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – INSTITUTIONS

Information and suggestions from sending institutions were obtained from three sources:

- an online questionnaire sent to 145 institutions,
- personal/phone interviews with 16 representatives of selected institutions,
- final reports from completed mobility projects.

The biggest part from the sample of institutions (103) which answered the questionnaire was comprised of secondary vocational schools (68); there were also a smaller number of other schools and organisations active in the vocational education and training sector. In terms of the regional distribution, the institutions were located in all regions of Slovakia, mostly in the region of Banská Bystrica and Prešov. 18 schools were from the least developed districts of Slovakia.

The institutions implemented mainly learning mobilities of learners (pupils), mostly in companies abroad. In addition, the institutions implemented learning mobilities of staff or a combination of the two. The hosting organisations abroad were in 30 countries; the Czech Republic, Italy, and the United Kingdom prevailed.

One of the key findings of the study is that almost 70 % of institutions managed to meet the targets set in the European development plans thanks to their active participation in mobility projects, with the success rate ranging between 80 and 100 %. The important goals and objectives achieved by the institutions in the projects include the following:

- enhancing pupils' specific professional knowledge and practical skills,
- improvement of pupils' language competencies,
- modernisation and improvement of the quality of the education process,
- better employability of school graduates,
- making the school and study at the school more attractive,
- making new partnerships with organisations and businesses abroad and strengthening the existing relationships,
- enhancing the professional knowledge of employees.

More than 90% of institutions assessed the benefits of mobility projects for the development of pupils' professional knowledge and practical professional skills as excellent or very good. The range of professional knowledge and skills acquired by pupils was quite wide, as the survey included a variety of study fields. The study describes specific professional knowledge and skills acquired by pupils of 23 study fields. According to the institutions, pupils acquired knowledge of new materials and products; they learnt new work procedures and methods; they learnt to use new working tools, technology, and devices which are not available in Slovakia.

As far as language competencies are concerned, the institutions perceive an overall positive effect of mobility projects on the improvement of participants' knowledge and skills in foreign languages. 73 % of institutions assessed the improvement as excellent to very good. Most of them concurred that participants in mobilities managed to overcome shyness, the fear of communicating in foreign language and that they realised their strengths and development areas. Analysis of institutions' answers showed that pupils developed mostly the following foreign language knowledge and skills:

- using a foreign language in everyday situations,

- acquiring specific professional vocabulary in the foreign language, ability to use it correctly in oral and written communication at the workplace,
- solving problem situations at and outside the workplace.

It must be stated that the improvement of language knowledge and skills was in some cases limited by the length of mobility, implementation of the mobility in a language-related country or by the fact, that the host organisation's employees couldn't speak the agreed language of communication at an appropriate level.

Another interesting finding of the study is the high rate of soft skills development of pupils. Several institutions concurred that these skills are inevitable for successful employability, particularly in multinational companies and organisations. Development of participants' soft skills was observed particularly by schools which sent their pupils to companies. Pupils developed their ability to communicate with people from different cultures, schedule their work on an assignment, express their opinion, respond to feedback appropriately; they realised the principles of teamwork. In addition to these skills, pupils strengthened or nurtured also some personal characteristics: responsibility for one's actions, independence, self-discipline, proactivity, self-confidence, and respect in work and social relationships.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – INDIVIDUALS

Information and suggestions from individuals were obtained from online questionnaires; one was sent to employees and another to learners (pupils and fresh graduates) who participated in the learning mobilities in 2014 – 2017.

The sample of **employees** (54) who answered the questionnaire was to the greatest extent comprised by teachers of general and vocational subjects (37 respondents); there was a small number of other employees active in vocational training, e.g. vocational training teachers or headteachers, or deputy headteachers. Most employees worked at secondary vocational schools (35 respondents). In terms of regional distribution, the questionnaire was answered mostly by teachers from Bratislava and Košice region. Most often, participants in mobilities took part in vocational training which fosters the professional growth of VET employees in form of a placement or job-shadowing. Learning mobilities were organised mostly in the Czech Republic (17 respondents) and lasted from 2 to 7 working days (36 respondents).

One of the key findings of the study is that learning mobilities met initial employees' expectations, that is, they helped them to improve their professional knowledge and practical professional skills and implement new educational procedures and teaching methods. Almost all respondents assessed the improvement of professional knowledge and practical professional skills as excellent to good. However, the specific knowledge and skills acquired depended on the employees' positions in the home school (institution). The lower degree of improvement or the fact that the improvement of this knowledge and skills was not the subject of the learning mobility was reported mainly by the managing employees. 24 respondents subsequently used the acquired knowledge and skills in their profession within the range of 80 % to 100 %.

As far as the development of language competencies is concerned, the improvement is small compared to that of professional knowledge and practical professional skills. Almost all respondents (49) perceived the improvement of language skills as excellent to good, however 20 of them 20 selected the option 'good'. The respondents felt improvement mainly in the listening to the foreign language in daily and professional communication. The improvement of language competencies was often limited by the length of mobilities and implementation of mobilities in language-related countries.

Almost all respondents perceive the education mobility as an excellent or very good experience, in which they would participate again.

Regarding the sample of **learners** (275) who answered the questionnaire, the biggest part was comprised of secondary vocational school pupils (129 respondents); there were a smaller number of pupils from other types of schools (e.g. secondary vocational school, business academy, secondary healthcare school). The questionnaire was most often answered by pupils from Banská Bystrica and Prešov regions. Learners took their internships in different types of companies. Learning mobilities were organised mostly in the Czech Republic (57 respondents) and the United Kingdom (57 respondents) and they usually took 10 – 14 working days (131 respondents). 8 respondents did their placements abroad for more than 60 days; however, the questionnaire survey did not show any connection between the length of a placement and an overall better evaluation of the mobility impact.

One of the key findings of the study is that learning mobilities met pupils' initial expectations. In addition to learning about the new country, they wanted to enhance their practical skills and professional knowledge. Most respondents assessed the improvement of

professional knowledge and practical professional skills as excellent to good. On the other hand, it must be stressed that the sample of learners evaluated the perception of improvement of this knowledge and skills with the worst mark, compared to other surveyed groups; that is, approximately 13 % of learners perceive the improvement as poor and very poor, compared to 4 % of employees. The specific knowledge and skills acquired depended on respondents' study field (63 different fields). 164 respondents subsequently used the acquired knowledge and skills in their home schools within the range of 60 to 100%.

This group of respondents perceived the improvement of language competencies as greater than the improvement of professional knowledge and practical professional skills. 243 respondents, which are 88 %, assessed the improvement of language competencies as excellent to good. Respondents felt the improvement in daily and professional communication mainly in the listening to the foreign language and responding to the listening. The improvement of language competences in this group of respondents was limited by the length of the mobility and implementation of mobility in a language-related country. 173 respondents confirmed that the placement incited them to further foreign language study.

A total of 262 respondents (95 %) evaluated the educational activity in Erasmus+ programme as an excellent to very good experience, which they would like to participate in again. Most respondents also realise that a placement abroad is a valuable experience for their future career and plan to inform or have already informed their (future) employers about it.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, it can be stated that learning mobilities had positive changes on all three target groups: institutions, staff and learners. With the goal of further supporting and expanding the impact of learning mobilities in vocational education and training, we recommend the following:

at the European level, on the part of the European Commission:

- to support the exchange of experience from learning mobilities among the involved institutions as well as individuals, mainly employees, by means of specific platforms such as eTwinning, School Education Gateway, social media, multinational workshops focusing on sharing examples of good practice and publishing them regularly,
- to emphasise benefits of learning mobilities not only for sending institutions but also for receiving organisations; to help to increase the interest of quality educational institutions, businesses and organisations in all member states to actively participate in Erasmus+ programme.

At the national level, on the part of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic

- to provide the potential applicants with timely, complete and comprehensive information on the goals and possibilities of grant schemes funded from EU resources, including the Erasmus+ programme,
- to create opportunities for dissemination of good practice examples among individual grant schemes by means of seminars, trainings; to continuously monitor and evaluate the benefits of implemented projects at national, regional and local levels.

At the national level, on the part of the Erasmus+ National Agency for Erasmus+ Programme for Education and Training Sectors:

- to provide high quality information to the beneficiaries at all stages, including preparation, implementation of learning mobilities and evaluation of their impacts,
- to continuously monitor and publish examples of good practice by means of a wider range of media and workshops with the goal of inciting interest of institutions which have not participated in Erasmus+ programme yet,

- to provide potential applicants with extensive methodological support for preparation of projects; to focus mainly on areas which are identified by external evaluators as weaknesses in the submitted applications for grants,
- to continuously inform key employers in regions and employers' associations about the implemented learning mobilities in each study field within the Erasmus+ programme.

At the level of involved institutions:

- to clearly define and communicate to the participants – pupils and employees: specific professional knowledge, practical skills and language competencies to be developed abroad as well as possibilities of their further use,
- regularly evaluate the effect of learning mobilities on the participants – pupils and employees – after their return from learning mobilities, as well as after 6 - 12 months,
- to motivate employees, participants in vocational training abroad to actively share the acquired professional knowledge and skills with the members of school subject committee in order to contribute to the further professional training of pedagogical and professional employees at school and improve the quality of teaching of the given subject,
- to encourage employees who took part in vocational training abroad to actively transfer the acquired knowledge and experience into the changes of curricula and the content of selected vocational subjects, to create new teaching materials and aids, and to use the new methods in theoretical and practical vocational training,
- to create organisational and material conditions for employees to implement the acquired knowledge and skills in their home institution,
- to motivate participants in learning mobilities – pupils – to actively share the acquired knowledge and skills with their peers in the form of presentations, participation in vocational competitions, leading of vocational groups, workshops for younger pupils, as well as by means of social media,
- to inform the participants of learning mobilities – pupils – about the long-term benefits of vocational placement abroad, to bring their attention to the increased chances of getting a good job in Slovakia or abroad,
- to create project teams within institutions responsible for preparation and implementation of the project; to motivate staff to actively participate in the project as guiding persons and/or direct participants in vocational training and education abroad,

- to focus on a broader spectrum of receiving organisations; in addition to verified organisations, to actively search for new organisations offering quality vocational training,
- when selecting hosting organisations, to take into account their high professionalism, previous experience with implementation of similar projects, as well as the potential of hosting organisations to develop language competencies, particularly in languages required by employers,
- to openly share results and experience from learning mobilities with similar institutions in the region, by means of methodological days, open days, participation in sector conferences, exhibitions.