



**Mobility as a source of
personal and professional growth,
autonomy and employability**

**RESEARCH REPORT
2015**

This publications has been produced by the MOB G.A.E. consortium, consisting of the following organisations:

Accademia Europea di Firenze, www.aefonline.eu

AMADEUS Association, Wien, www.amadeus.or.at

CAP ULYSSE, Bordeaux, www.capulyse.fr

DEP Institut, Barcelona, www.dep.net

EUROYOUTH Portugal, Lisboa, www.euroyouth.org

Gesellschaft für Europabildung, Berlin, www.europabildung.org

Institutul Intercultural Timisoara, www.intercultural.ro

Intern Europe, Belfast, www.interneurope.org

Nexes Interculturals de Joves per Europa, Barcelona, www.nexescat.org

North West Academy, Derry, www.northwestacademy.net

ONECO, Sevilla, www.oneco.org

PARAGON EUROPE, Mosta, www.paragoneurope.eu

PLATO Educational Services, Limassol, www.plato-edu.com

Pro European Network, Sofia, www.proeuropean.net

REDE INDUCAR, Porto, www.inducar.pt

Semper Avanti Association, Wrocław, www.semperavanti.org

VUSTE ENVIS, Praha, www.vuste-envis.eu

Zavod za Novodobno Izobraževanje, Maribor, www.zni.si

The full text of the report in English, its summary in multiple languages and details about the MOB G.A.E. project can be found at www.mobgae.eu

Contact: info@aefonline.eu and iit@intercultural.ro

 Reproduction and use for non-profit and academic purposes of any elements of this report, except the cover illustration are allowed under the condition of mentioning the following reference:

MOB G.A.E. Consortium, Mobility as a source of personal and professional growth, autonomy and employability. Research report, 2015

© Cover illustration by Barbara Cantini, www.barbaracantini.com

The MOB GAE project (code 543296-LLP-1-2013-1-IT-KA4-KA4MP) has been co-funded by the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Union.

This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein

Contents

Preface	4
Introduction	5
Methodology and data collection	7
Research question and argumentation	7
Research methods and instruments	8
Data collection	9
Analysis of data	11
Respondents and their mobility experience	11
Demographic data and country of departure	11
Mobility experiences.....	14
Perceptions related to expectations and impact.....	17
Impact of mobility at personal level	19
Impact of mobility at professional level	21
Impact of mobility on European awareness	23
Suggesting mobility experience to others and being ready for a new one	25
Facilitating factors, challenges and suggestions	26
Facilitating factors.....	26
Challenges perceived during the mobility	27
Suggestions for improving mobility experiences	28
Testimonials	30
Tina, from Maribor to Madrid: Erasmus Student exchange experience	30
Joanna, from Poland to Italy: Youth in Action programme – Youth exchange.....	30
Hanna, from Germany to Italy: Lifelong Learning Programme – Leonardo da Vinci.....	31
Conclusions and recommendation	32
General conclusions	32
Recommendations and further reflection	34
Recommendations for sending organisations	34
Recommendations for intermediary and host organisations	36
Recommendations for the management of the programmes.....	34
References	37
Glossary.....	39

Preface

All members of partner organisations involved in the research presented in this report had experiences of living, to study, work or learn, in a different country and were convinced that such mobility experiences can be an important source for personal and professional growth, autonomy and employability. They also realised that this conviction remains personal and subjective unless it is backed by scientifically valid evidence and widely disseminated.

Young people's mobility has been considered, in recent years, a key action supporting the full development of the potential of Europe's human talent and social capital and contributing to tackling socio-economic challenges and fighting rising levels of unemployment. The Erasmus Impact Study (2014), that measured for the first time the impact of Erasmus programme (2007-2014) on employability skills, demonstrates that young people who study or attend a training abroad enhance their employability and their career development skills:

1. the risk of facing long-term unemployment is reduced to half;
2. one in three trainees are offered a position in their host company abroad after the traineeship;
3. they develop an entrepreneurial attitude and most of them continue to live and work in an international environment.

The Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 of 11th December 2013 establishing "Erasmus+ the Union programme for education, training, youth and sport", emphasizes the importance of creating closer links between EU programmes and policy developments in education, training and youth, and the wish that EU action should be structured to respond better to the lifelong learning paradigm. The role played by international learning mobility in this framework is central in helping to achieve the objectives set out in the Europe 2020 Strategy and Copenhagen process (2011-2020), taking especially into account youth unemployment and NEET's as main priorities, because it supports the development of soft skills, of autonomy and responsibility, which are preconditions to employability. The renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018), also emphasises the need to consider all young people as a resource in society, facilitating their participation in the development of policies affecting them.

Furthermore, international mobility programs, such as *Erasmus*, *Leonardo da Vinci*, *Youth in Action* represent the most positive side of Europe, its "human face". Through international mobility programs, "the other" is not seen as an enemy or a competitor, but as a friend and companion, as someone who can support you in your self-discovery as well as in the social and professional context. These experiences can also be seen as opportunities for building a stronger sense of European identity and for learning active citizenship in practice. International mobility has now become a natural element in the personal and professional path of many young people and adults. Despite this, the success stories of young people studying, working or learning abroad do not receive much attention in the media, often remaining known only to researchers of the field or to those who had the chance to enjoy a mobility experience.

Having in mind the need to gather evidence and learn from the experiences of those involved in mobility experiences, as well as the need to disseminate these evidences and lessons learned 18 organisations from all around Europe, created the consortium behind the MOB G.A.E. project in the framework of which this study has been produced.

Introduction

MOB G.A.E stands for *Mobility as a source of personal and professional growth, autonomy and employability*. It is a project, co-funded by the European Commission within the frame of the Lifelong Learning programme, action KA4¹ and implemented in 2014-2015.

The partners of the Consortium represent mostly private organisations promoting mobility as a tool for learning and growing. They are located in 14 different European countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, and United Kingdom.

The aim of the project is to capitalize on the value of international mobility experiences as a tool for learning, for personal and professional development, for enhancing individual autonomy and independence and for increasing awareness of European citizenship and civic participation.

The organisations involved have taken up a double and complementary challenge:

- evaluating the impact of international mobility experiences in a longitudinal perspective, requesting input from former beneficiaries of various support programmes, with focus on the Lifelong Learning Programme (Erasmus and Leonardo da Vinci) and on Youth in Action Programme;
- disseminating the conclusions of this evaluation and generating reflection and debate among potential future beneficiaries and different stakeholders in the field, in order to increase the number of successful mobility experiences in the future.

This document presents the results of the research carried out by the partners in order to evaluate the impact of mobility experiences and gather evidence and suggestions to support improvements in this field.

The research has been designed by Inducar (PT) in cooperation with the Intercultural Institute of Timisoara (RO), Accademia europea di Firenze (IT) and DEP Institut (ES). All partners have contributed to data collection through qualitative methods and to the promotion of the online survey. DEP has supported the research team, by setting-up the online questionnaire and managing the quantitative data collection process.

The Intercultural Institute of Timisoara has been in charge of analysing data and formulating conclusions and recommendations, in cooperation with Inducar and Accademia europea di Firenze. Cap Ulysse (FR) is managing the BLOG of the project, which collects mobility stories from all partners. This report was drafted by the Intercultural Institute of Timisoara with support from Accademia europea di Firenze and benefitted from feedback provided by all partners.

¹ code543296-LLP-1-2013-1-IT-KA4-KA4MP

This report is mainly addressed to:

- stakeholders acting as promoters, hosting, sending and intermediary partners, interested in improving the quality of their work;
- all those who would like to participate in a mobility programme, interested in learning from previous experiences and preparing for a successful mobility experience;
- all those who participated in the various mobility programmes, to stimulate the reflection on their experience and on how they can capitalise on it for their future personal and professional growth.

Therefore, considering that the audience of the report includes mostly practitioners and people interested in its practical elements, a simple and accessible language has been chosen for formulation of the report, without emphasis on the technicalities but keeping its message accurate and scientifically valid.

The report is divided into three main parts, starting with a description of the **methodology** used for data collection, including the **analysis of the data obtained**, and ending with a set of **conclusions and recommendations**. A list of **references** and a **glossary**, presenting how project partners understand the key concepts addressed in the research, are also included. Therefore, before or during the reading of the interpretation of the data, it is advisable to check the glossary, as the definitions are not repeated into the text.

The part presenting the analysis of data is also divided in four chapters, referring to:

1. the characteristics of respondents and their mobility experience, looking at various elements like:
 - gender, level of education, work situation, country of departure;
 - period and type of mobility, country of destination, duration and number of mobilities, age when mobility took place, and the main motivations for departure;
2. the expectations and perceptions of the impact of mobility at different levels:
 - the impact at personal level;
 - the impact at professional level;
 - the impact on European awareness;
 - disseminating the mobility experience and the willingness to encourage others to engage in mobility experiences;
3. the identification of the main challenges and of the facilitating factors which contribute to the success of a mobility experience, as well as the inventory and analysis of the main proposals formulated by participants in the research for the improvement of the mobility programmes;
4. three testimonials, presented as examples of concrete experiences and of their impact.

Many more testimonials, details about the research instruments used in this research, as well as information about the other project activities, can be found on the website of the MOB G.A.E. project: www.mobgae.eu.

Organisations involved in the MOB G.A.E. consortium are thankful to all those who contributed to this research, particularly the mobility participants and other stakeholders who filled-in the online questionnaire, responded to interviews or participated to focus groups.

Methodology and data collection

Research question and argumentation

The research question is very important for structuring and orienting the design of the study, the data collection and analysis, as well as the interpretation of the results. In our case, the research question is:

In what way do mobility experiences impact on personal growth, professional development, and EU citizenship awareness?

Thus, the research supports the main goals of the MOB G.A.E. project, and contributes to:

- providing evidence for and capitalizing on the value of the international mobility experiences as a tool for learning, personal and professional development;
- valuing international mobility experiences as a tool for stimulating self-awareness in terms of active citizenship and community participation;
- improving the tutoring and mentoring practices and tools of the mobility experiences, considering them as learning processes in which participants should plan their learning paths according to their personal and professional objectives;
- providing arguments for the recognition of competences at the end of a mobility experiences, in accordance with the ECVET system;
- promoting the best use of the results of mobility experiences and valorising success stories, good practices, and changes generated among various stakeholders involved;
- informing a large public on the impact of EU mobility programmes;
- stimulating reflection on intercultural dialogue, fostering rights, European citizenship and social cohesion processes;
- improving the co-operation among the different stakeholders of the mobility field, in order to boost the quality of the experiences and of the links between education, training, and professional life.

More specifically, the research aims at investigating if and how a mobility project experience can influence attitudes, skills, knowledge and behaviours. The focus is on what makes a person employable, socially integrated, independent, and able to continuously learn from experience in order to grow at a personal level and contribute to a better society.

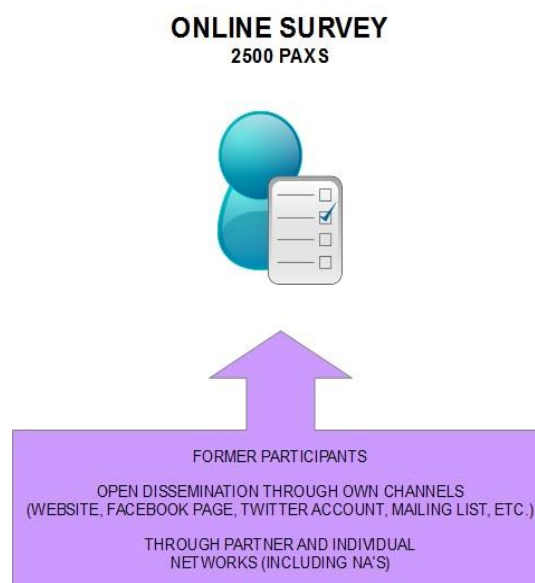
A key challenge, of which those involved in the design of the research were aware, refers to the importance of obtaining valid data, not biased by the fact that partners of the project are open supporters of international mobility, based on their rich previous direct experience. From this perspective, the open research question, which allows for positive, but also negative or inexistent impact, was considered appropriate to avoid this risk.

Research methods and instruments

Considering the research question, the commitment to obtain accurate and reliable data, and therefore the need to obtain both objective and subjective information, a mixed methodology has been elaborated. This methodology combines a large-scale quantitative survey with qualitative elements appropriate for the various target groups and allowing for a “triangulation” of different sets of findings.

An online questionnaire has been used to gather statistical data about the participants and their mobility experiences. The structure of the questionnaire is presented on the www.mobgae.eu website. Its content was designed in order to cover the main elements needed to answer the research question:

- data about the respondents, including nationality, country of departure, gender, level of studies, work situation;
- data about the mobility experience, including type of mobility, supporting programme, destination country and city, age at the time of mobility, motivation to participate in the mobility;
- degree to which expectations were met, impact on personal development, impact on professional competence and impact on European awareness.



To facilitate both the process of filling-in the questionnaire and the data analysis, based on the experience of partner organisations and on the review of the results of other similar studies, a list of options was offered to questions related to motivation and perception of impact. The option, “other”, associated with an open field, was also included. Participants were asked to rate the degree to which the mobility experience fulfilled their expectations from 1 (not at all) to 10 (expectations totally met).

One of the questions also asked respondents if they were willing to provide additional details by responding to an interview, and those interested could indicate the email address where they could be contacted for an appointment.

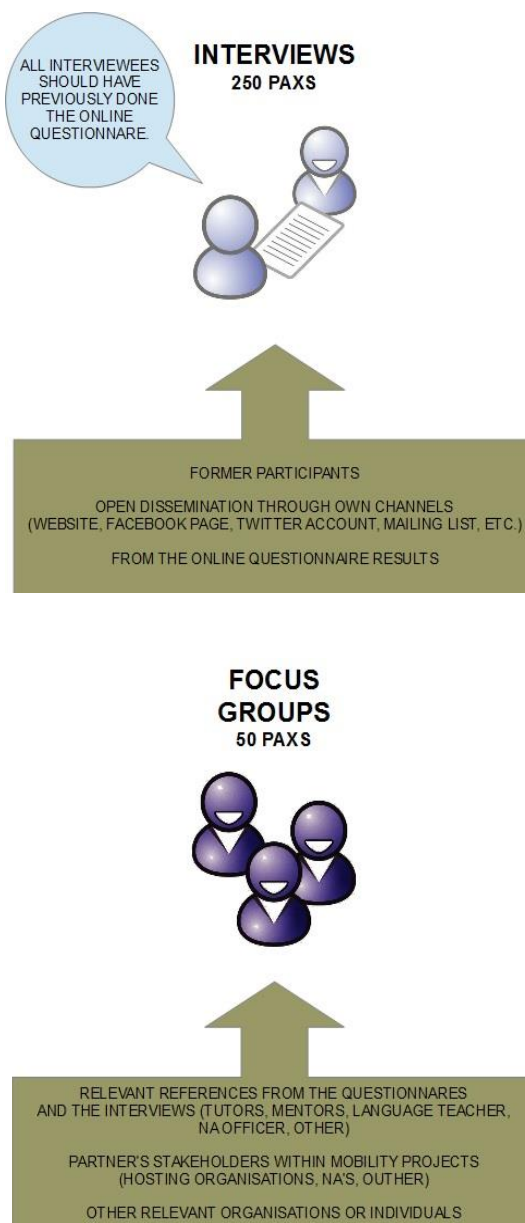
To collect qualitative data regarding the key elements of a mobility experience each partner was given the task to interview some of those who responded to the questionnaire and expressed availability for this. Additional qualitative information was obtained from focus groups organised with various stakeholders. For both the interviews and the focus groups, specific guidelines were used. The structure of the questions is presented on the www.mobgae.eu website. The guidelines for interviews and focus groups were developed considering that the ones involved in the data collection are in most cases practitioners and do not have a research background.

A part of the interview questions cover the same topics as the online survey (motivation, expectations, impact at personal level, on professional development and on European awareness) but asking participants to explain, give examples and illustrate the impact by describing elements of their current situation. This data therefore complements and helps explain the results obtained from the online survey.

Another part of the interview questions aims at pointing out what makes a mobility experience successful and how it can be improved. Thus, some questions refer to facilitating factors, challenges, support measures and suggestions for improving the quality and impact.

A mobility project requires the active involvement of a variety of stakeholders, including persons responsible with the selection, preparation and supervision of participants on behalf of the sending organisation, mentors, tutors, trainers, language teachers in the host or intermediary organisation, as well as other people interacting directly with the participants, for example in relation with their work, study or learning project.

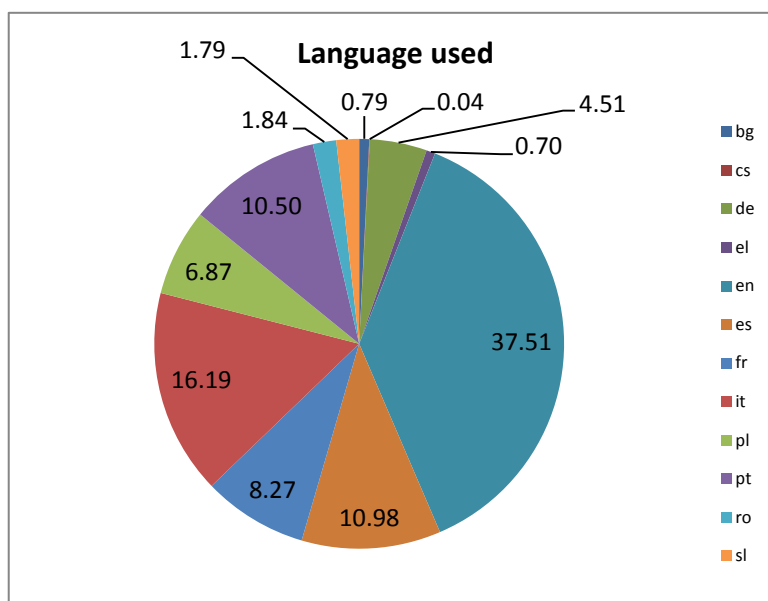
To collect input from all these categories of stakeholders, focus groups were organised. The questions refer more to qualitative elements, including the profile of participants, factors enhancing the success of a mobility experience, their opinion about current support measures and their suggestions for improving mobility programmes.



Data collection

With the contribution of all project partners, the invitation to fill-in the online questionnaire was sent to over 40000 former mobility participants and 2813 responses were received. After their check, 2230 resulted as fully completed and some of the others were also almost totally completed which raised the total number of valid questionnaires to be analysed to 2289.

The online questionnaire was made available in all the national languages of the partners: Bulgarian, Czech, German, Greek, English, Spanish, French, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian and Slovenian. This proved to fit with the needs of participants as only 31% chose the English version of the questionnaire, the others using various other languages. Italian, Spanish, French, Greek or Polish versions were used by large numbers of respondents.



Based on the fact that the 18 partner organisations are based in 14 EU countries and work with hundreds of mobility participants every year, it was possible to get very close to the original target also in terms of number of interviews and focus groups.

Thus, 243 individual interviews and 25 focus groups were made in Italy, Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Cyprus, France, Germany, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain and UK. The recordings of the interviews and focus groups were transcribed and for most part translated into English.

For practical reasons, to protect the privacy of the respondents and considering that this report is not intended for a scientific audience, quotes from interviews and focus groups are made without identifying the speaker. However, the corpus of data collected or parts of it can be made available for further scientific analysis to interested organisations under specific terms agreed with the MOB G.A.E. consortium.

Analysis of data

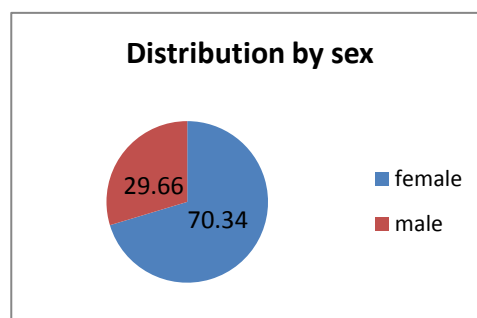
Respondents and their mobility experience

Demographic data and country of departure

Considering the inherent limitations of an online survey, the sample obtained reflects in a reasonable way the envisaged diversity in terms of gender, level of education and country of departure.

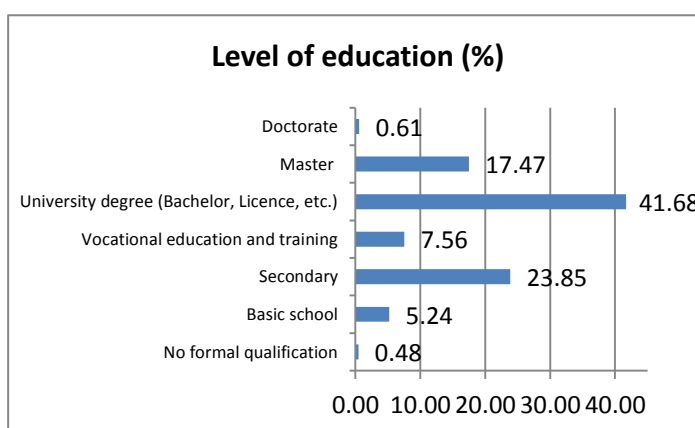
Gender distribution

The online survey has been widely promoted in different countries but the response has been significantly larger from women than from men (70% to 30%). This gender unbalance is to a large extent a reflection of the fact that more women than men have been involved in mobilities. Although some programmes did not publish gender disaggregated data, for example, 61% of the beneficiaries of the ERASMUS Programme are women². The fact of having over 60% females is a common feature of national and transnational studies related to the impact of European transnational mobility women³. This difference does not affect the validity of our results because the gender variable is not correlated with any other variable from our data. The even higher difference reported by surveys can also probably be explained by the fact that women are more open to taking time to answer the questionnaire and to share their mobility experience. This remains an issue to consider in terms of future information and awareness raising policies and initiatives.



Level of education

Most participants (over 41%) had a first cycle university degree, 24% had secondary education at the time of the mobility and 17% had a master degree. 7.5% have a vocational training, 5% basic school and less than 1% have a doctorate or no formal qualification. This reflects the general situation of mobility participants, as important mobility support programmes, like Erasmus, target university students.



However, graduates of vocational education, included among the beneficiaries of some work-related mobility programmes, like Leonardo da Vinci, are also well represented in the sample.

² Details are available at http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/statistics_en.htm

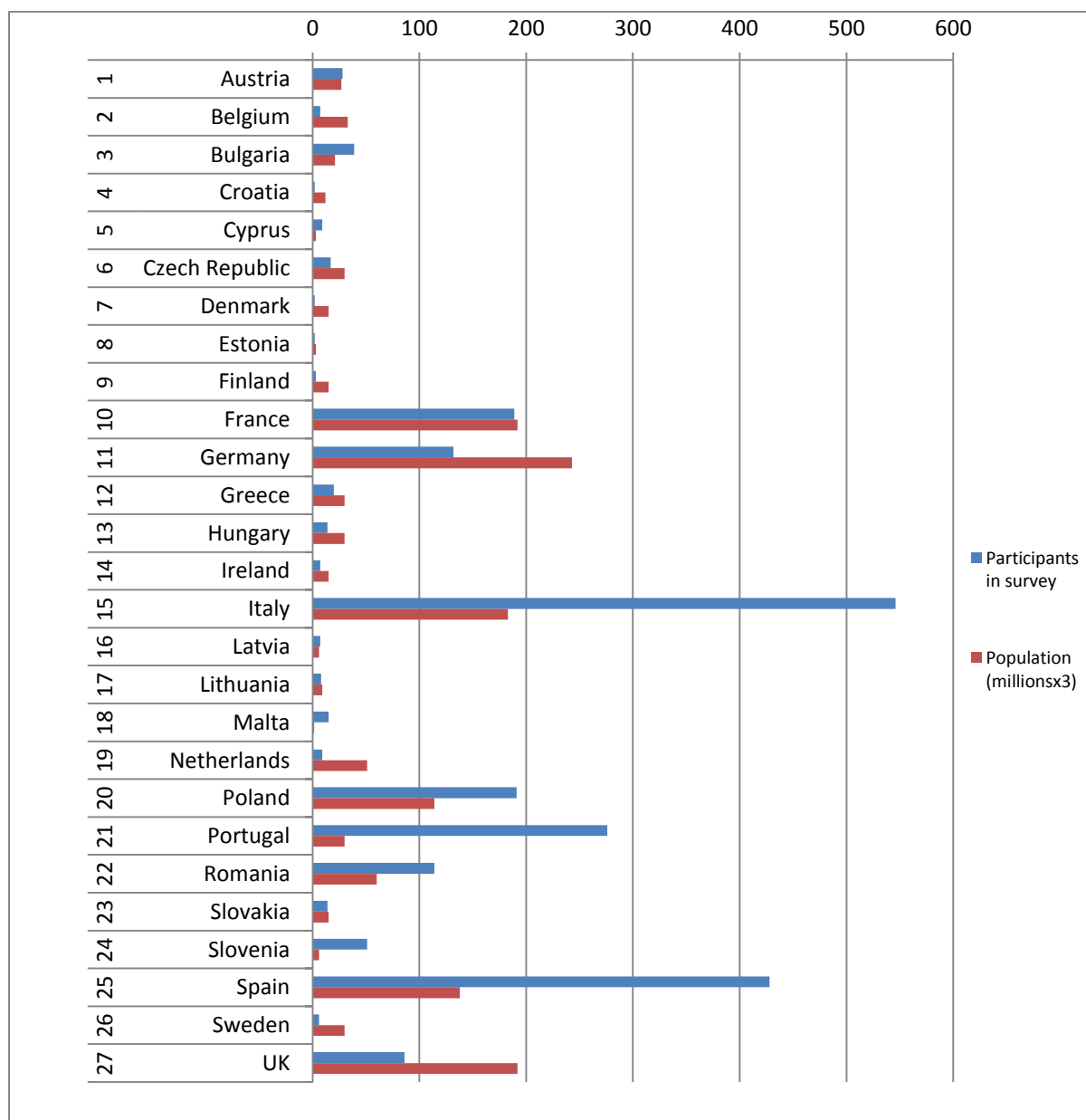
³ An example is "Erasmus impact study: effects of mobility on the skills and employability of the students and the internationalisation of higher education Institutions" – European Commission, September 2014

Country of departure

As expected, the majority of respondents come from EU countries (97%). There are only few participants from non-EU European countries and from out of Europe.

The fact that the partners of MOB G.A.E. project are located in 14 EU countries and have a wide network of contacts with organisations involved in transnational mobility across Europe and beyond, as well as the extensive promotion of the online survey allowed for obtaining answers from people with mobility experiences in all regions of Europe.

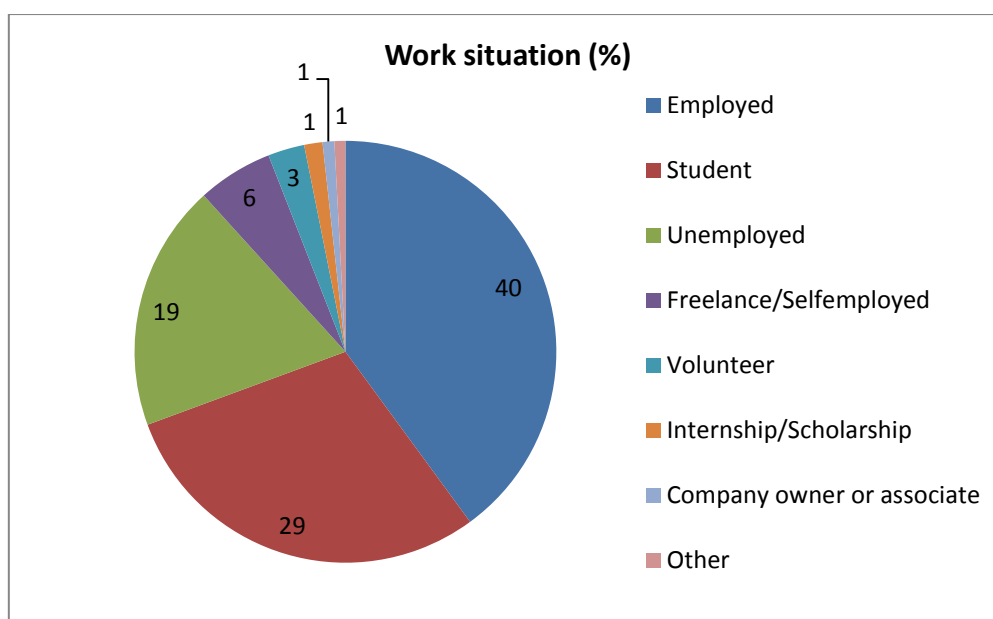
Departure from	No of participants
EU	2226
EEA	2
South-Eastern Europe	9
Eastern Europe	29
Turkey	11
Out of Europe	12



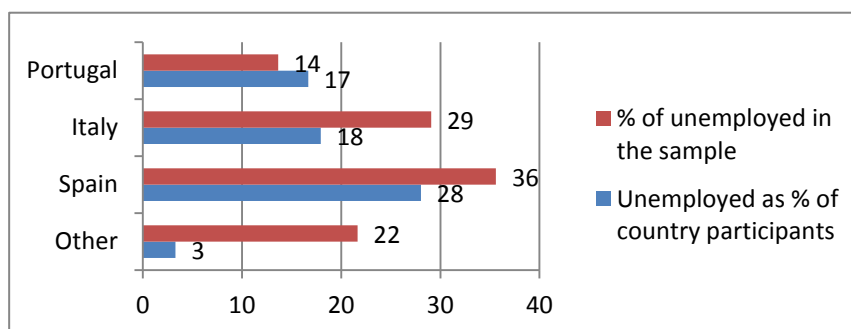
Luxembourg is the only EU country not represented in the survey. The ratio between the number of respondents from one country and the population of the respective country (in millions of inhabitants) ranges from 0.4 to 9.3 for all countries, except three of them. Slovenia, Portugal and Malta have this ratio of 25.5, 27.6 and 30, which means they are overrepresented in the sample. Spain, Cyprus and Italy have a higher than average presence (ration of around 9), while Denmark, Croatia, Netherland, Finland, Sweden and Belgium are less represented (with the ratio ranging between 0.4 and 0.64. All other EU countries have the ration between 1.34 and 5.57, which shows a representation in the sample relatively proportional to their population.

Work situation

The largest proportion of participants in the survey (40%) is of those employed at the time of filling-in the questionnaire.



There are big differences in the percentage of unemployed participants in the survey considering their country of departure. The largest part of unemployed participants come from Spain (36% of the unemployed in the whole sample), Italy (29%) and Portugal (14%). All other countries share only the remaining 22% of the unemployed in the sample. For the same three countries, Spain, Italy and Portugal, the percentage of unemployed in the country sample is much higher (28, 18 and 17%), while for the other countries it is only 3% (only 3% of the respondents from these countries are unemployed at the time of filling-in the questionnaire, therefore after the mobility). These figures are much lower than the figures of youth unemployment in all countries, which corresponds to the findings of other studies (such as the recent Erasmus impact study) indicating that mobility participants are less likely to stay unemployed than young people without mobility experience.



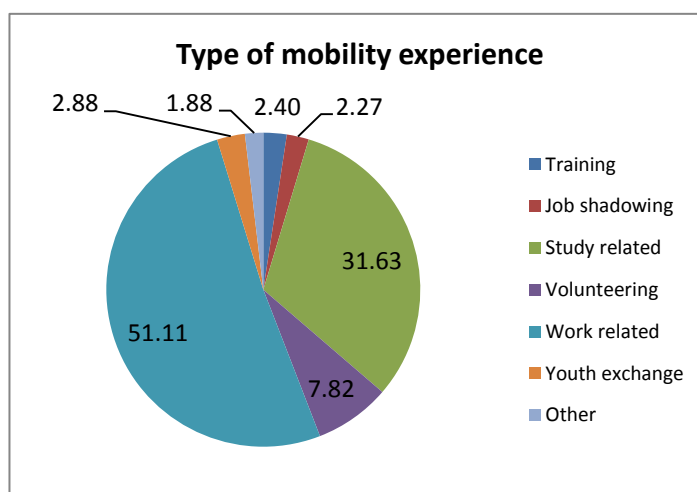
Mobility experiences

A large majority of respondents attended mobilities in the framework of the programmes implemented from 2008 to 2014 (corresponding to calls launched from 2007 to 2013). Therefore, almost all of the judgments made in the responses to the survey, as well as the comments made in interviews and focus groups, refer to the structure of these programme. However the fact that 28% of the respondents had the mobility in 2014 needs to be considered when analysing the impact of the mobility. For them, the memory of this experience is very fresh, so they can easily recall their motivation and assess their satisfaction, but it is too early to discuss about impact.

Period of mobility	no
1980s	1
1990s	24
2000 to 2007	161
2008 to 2014	2082
2014	635

The largest part of the sample is divided between the two most common types of mobility:

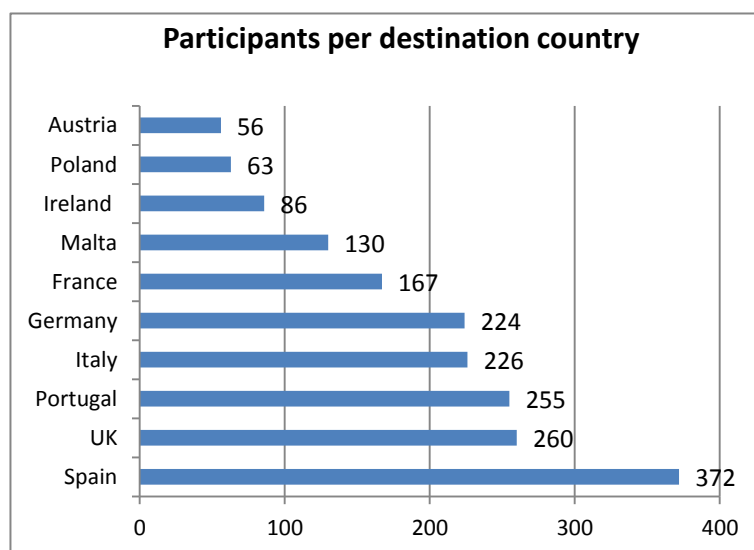
- work-related mobility (51% of the sample), made possible mainly by the Leonardo da Vinci component of the Lifelong Learning programme, and
- study-related mobility (31%), to a very large extent supported by the Erasmus programme.



Volunteering has also a large share of the sample (almost 8%), corresponding mainly to the European Voluntary Service, while the other types of mobility have smaller shares of around 2%.

All EU countries are covered in the sample as destination country and there are some mobilities in EEA countries, in South Eastern Europe and in other countries.

The distribution by destination country is, of course, not balanced, but this is also the case in reality⁴. Spain, UK, Italy, Germany and France are leading in our sample, like in the general statistics provided by the programmes.

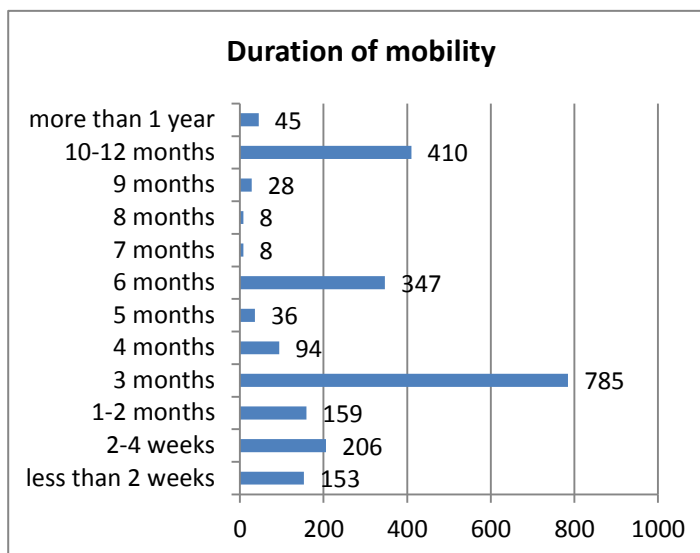


⁴ As illustrated by the data available at http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/statistics_en.htm

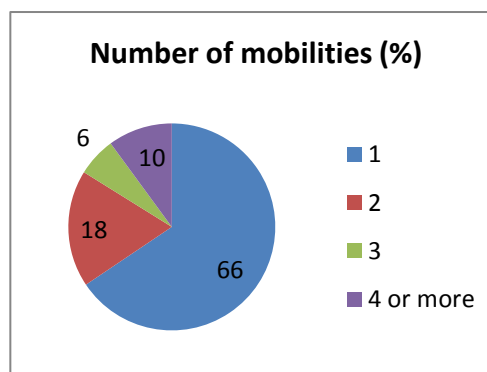
Less than 50 participants had mobilities in the EU countries not mentioned in the table above.

Malta, Portugal and Spain are over-represented in the sample as destination countries. This can be explained by the composition of the MOB G.A.E. consortium and the capacity of the various partners to mobilise participation in the survey. Such differences are typical for the use of open access online questionnaires but the distribution obtained does not distort significantly the validity of the results, on the contrary, the sample is overall reflecting the reality of mobility experiences.

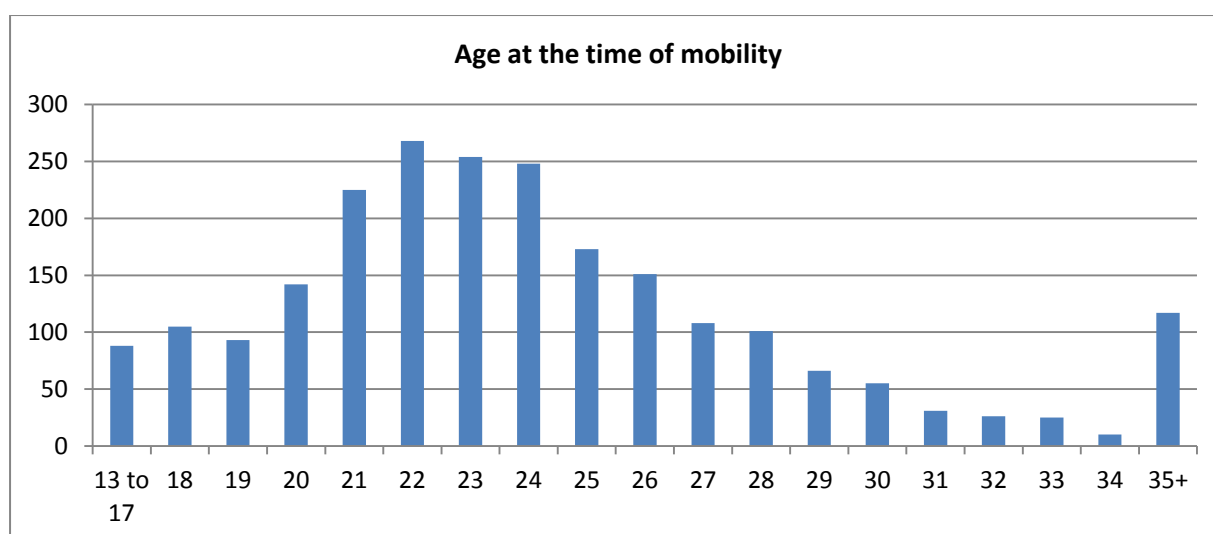
The duration of the mobility in the sample reflects well the most common types of mobility supported by the main programmes: 3 months mobility (34% of the sample), 6 months mobility (15%) and mobility with the duration of around a year (18% of respondents have been involved in mobility with duration from 10 months, the duration of a university year, to 12 months). Short-term mobility, of less than 3 months, is also well represented in the sample.



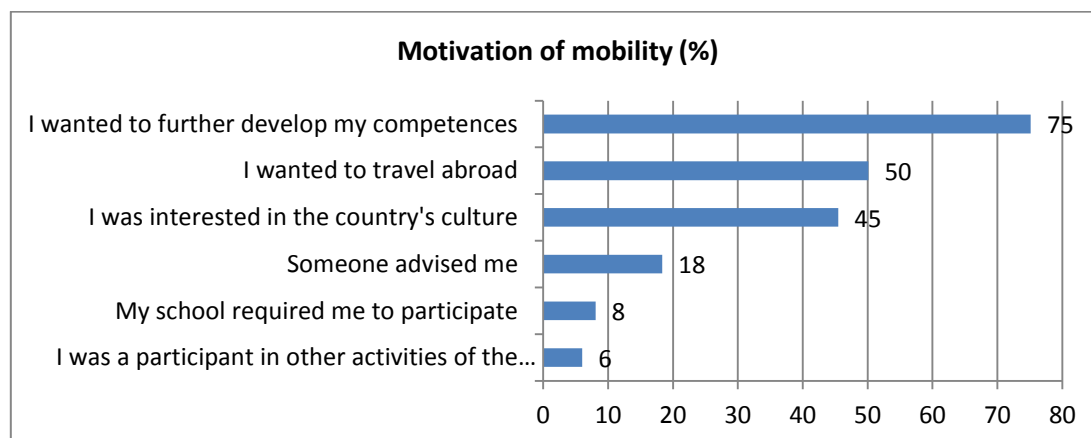
The majority of respondents had only one mobility experience (66%), 18% had two mobility experiences, 6% had three and 10% had four or more experiences of mobility.



The fact that over 30% managed to benefit from more than one mobility experience corresponds to the statements made by the large majority of respondents to interviews who express willingness to repeat mobility experience.



As shown by the graphic above, age distribution is normal (Gauss curve) and indicates that most participants get involved in mobility between the age of 21 and 24. Of course, for study-related mobility, it is normal that mobility takes place while young people are in university. This is also confirmed by the interviews with participants in work-related mobility. In most cases, the answer to the question “When decision to go in mobility occurred?” is shortly after graduating from university (bachelor degree or master). Beneficiaries of mobility younger than 21 and older than 24 are however, also represented in the sample. There are also some participants with an age higher than 35, mostly involved in doctoral studies, teaching exchange programmes, or work-related mobility, but their number corresponding to each year is much lower.



The development of competences, the interest in travelling abroad and the curiosity about other countries and cultures are by far the most frequent reasons stated by participants in the online survey. These main types of motivation are also consistently reflected by the answers given during the interviews and focus groups. We can therefore identify three main types of participants, based on their motivation:

1. “The pragmatic”, interested in boosting her/his career through the mobility experience
2. “The traveller”, interested in breaking up with the home routine and meeting new people
3. “The cultural explorer”, interested to learn about the culture of the country of destination

Considering also the qualitative data collected, a major motivation is the desire “to get a new life experience”, the curiosity to discover “different realities” and to “meet new people who belong to different cultures”. Sometimes the decision to spend time in another country is taken as a response to the perception of a lack of opportunities in the home country in the current socio-economic context: “I felt stuck in my country”. A very frequent motivation is also to become more independent.

Many interviewees mention as motivation the wish to gain some work experience or to decide about their future career: “at the time I wasn’t sure about what I wanted to do, so I thought it would help me decide”. Others have more personal motivations: for example, a participant with migration background, wanted to know the country of her parents, “her other country”. Additionally, the interviews and focus groups reveal another key motivation: learning another language or improving language skills.

Regarding expectations participants had prior to travelling abroad, similar categories can be identified:

- Applying the knowledge acquired during studies to a work situation, learning more useful or practical things; Gaining practical experience to increase job opportunities; understanding the approaches used in another country in the profession chosen;
- Testing the ability to manage situations and relationships in a different cultural environment; Building self-confidence and the capacity to live in an independent and autonomous way: “being on my own”;
- Getting to know another country, a different culture;
- Learning the language of the country of destination and developing language skills also in other languages used to communicate with the team or the host organisation.

Many interviewed mobility participants claim having had no particular expectations, just wanting to experience something new and to learn something new.

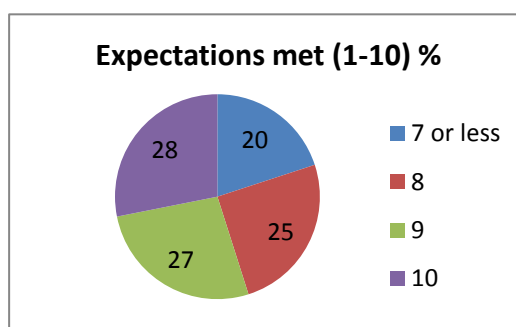
Perceptions related to expectations and impact

Mobility participants taking the online survey were asked to rate from 1 to 10 the degree their expectations were met during the mobility experience (1 meaning that expectations were not met at all and 10 meaning they were totally met).

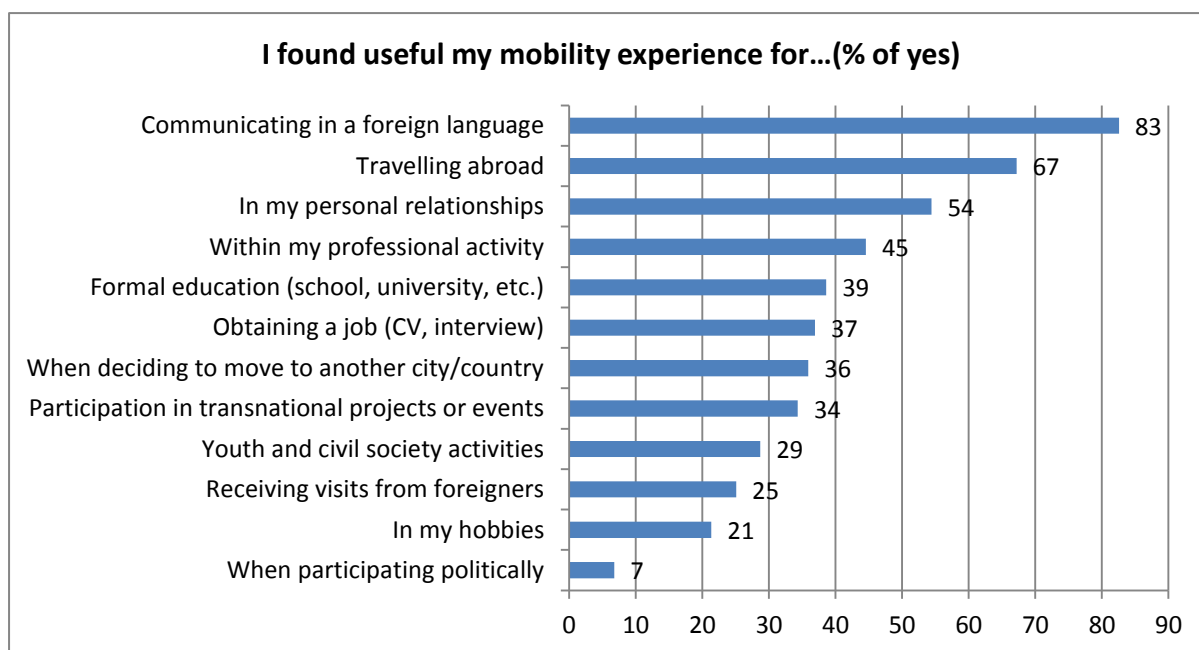
The results obtained show a remarkably high degree of satisfaction with the mobility experience. Thus, participants in the survey consider that their expectations were met:

- to a very high degree (8-10) by 80% (1828 respondents), of which:
 - almost totally met (9-10) by 55% (1246 respondents)
 - totally met (10) by 28% (638 respondents)

The average score is 8.47 (out of 10). Only 4% (1 in 25) of the participants consider that the mobility experience generated an impact below their initial expectations (scores of 5 or less). The perceived relevance of the mobility for personal autonomy, professional competence and European awareness is lower, as shown in the following section, but in all cases more than half of the participants rate it between 8 and 10.



As shown by the graphic below, the most commonly mentioned use of the mobility experience is on communication in a foreign language (83% of respondents). Travelling abroad and personal relationships are also fields in which the mobility is perceived as useful by a majority of participants in the survey. Considering that a large proportion of participants were still students when they responded to the online questionnaire and most of them were engaged in a study-related mobility, it appears normal that they rate mobility as useful for their formal education, while those engaged in work-related mobility consider it useful for their professional competence. Overall, 65% of respondents consider that the mobility was useful for study or for professional competence.



A majority of respondents also appreciate the mobility as relevant for their personal autonomy, professional competence and European citizenship. General results have also been compared with the ones for each of the main types of mobility.

Relevance for personal autonomy:

- 64% (1447) very relevant (8-10), of which
 - 40% (901) almost totally relevant (9-10)
 - 22% (489) totally relevant (10)
 - Average: 7.8 (out of 10)

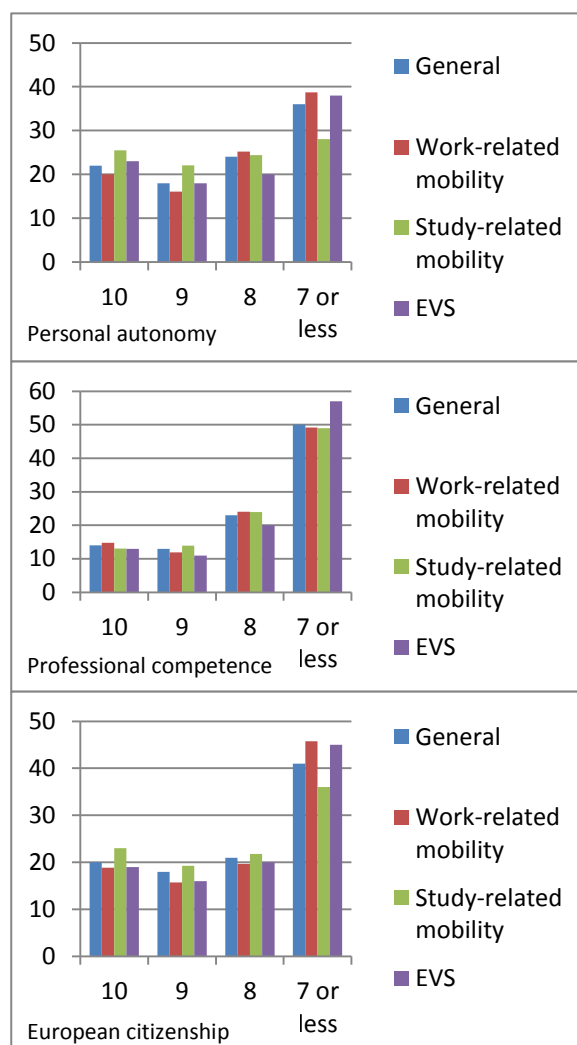
Relevance for professional competence:

- 50% (1131) very relevant (8-10), of which
 - 27% (601) almost totally relevant (9-10)
 - 14% (308) totally relevant (10)
 - Average: 7.25 (out of 10)

Relevance for European Citizenship:

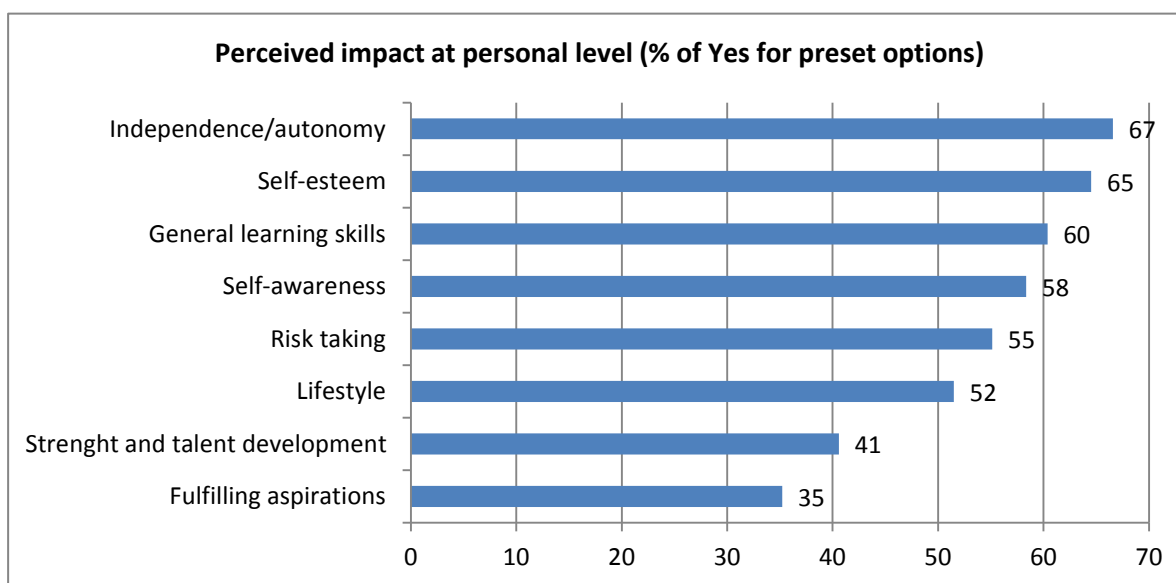
- 59% (1317) very relevant (8-10), of which
 - 38% (844) almost totally relevant (9-10)
 - 20% (466) totally relevant (10)
 - Average: 7.6 (out of 10)

The results show no significant difference between the types of mobility, except for a slight higher relevance of study-related mobility for personal autonomy and European citizenship.



Impact of mobility at personal level

Responses to the online questionnaire show that the highest relevance at personal level is on the feeling of autonomy, self-esteem and learning skills. Of course, improved learning skills, it is known, also have a positive impact at a professional level, even if participants are not aware of it or did not mention it explicitly.



Data obtained from the interviews provides additional elements regarding the impact of the mobility experience at a personal level.

One interviewee acknowledges that “any programme which throws people from all sorts of backgrounds together in a new environment would challenge someone on a personal level”.

For many participants interviewed by partners, the mobility had a very high impact: “It has been an experience that really changed my life”.

More precisely, the mobility experience led to the development of:

- Social and communication skills;
- Intercultural competence;
- Self-awareness and self-management;
- Language competence.

In terms of social and communication skills, participants mention they learned “to cope with stress and deal with people”, to be more assertive, to be more open and not afraid to expressing feelings and ideas. Increased abilities to communicate, to cooperate and to cope with difficult situations are also reported. Many report a significant impact on their social relations after returning from the mobility. They consider that they have better social skills, are more open to new contacts with people, know better how to make contact with people they do not know, and feel more at ease in

social situations. For example, one participant declares that she learnt how to better get in touch with teenagers and another considers that the mobility helped “building up new personal relationships” or increased confidence in relation to existing relationships.

For instance, a participant stated that she realised that she liked being in an international environment a lot and, for many, the time spent in the mobility was an important opportunity to learn about other European cultures, particularly in acquiring knowledge and understanding of the culture of the host city, region or country, and helping them to break stereotypes about other people. They also became aware of differences between ways in which universities, companies and various organisations operate in a different country, about different regulations and associated procedures. Other interviewed mobility participants consider it important that they got used to a different working atmosphere. That strengthened their empathy, self-confidence, tolerance, helped them to become more open-minded and enabled them to identify, understand and respect different perspectives and approaches. The mobility gave a boost to the ability and trust in making contact and dealing with people who have another cultural background. One participant explains that by being required to deal with many people coming from all around the world made him learn to be more flexible. Many other statements confirm this type of impact and also report increased ability to communicate in an intercultural situation.

Improvement in self-awareness is commonly reported by several interviewed participants: “I learned a lot about myself”. Many also consider that they feel increased ability and wish to be independent. As a result of the mobility some participants changed their way of life after returning to their home city, for example by living alone in an apartment. Some participants declare that the mobility helped them improve time-management and structuring of assigned tasks or generally organisational skills. Some learned “to work in a team and lead”. On a practical level, the ability to live independently reflects in an increased ability of getting oriented in a big city when travelling or in deciding to move and live in another country. Some participants actually moved to the country of mobility or decided to have a family there.

Some consider that the mobility tested their limits but also made them more positive and happier: “the mobility programme helped me in achieving my full potential”.

One participant expressed well the opinion of many: “the mobility programme is a life lesson. You understand how to be on your own. Mainly I would say that it opened my way of thinking and opened my mind-set.”

Many participants report improvements in language skills. Some could learn the language of the host country, others improved competences in the language used to communicate with the hosts: “I am now fluent in English”. Some others consider that the mobility experience made it easier for them to learn foreign languages in general.

Impact of mobility at professional level

Improvement of language skills is by far the element most frequently mentioned in terms of impact of the mobility at professional level. Besides that, we can identify from the responses on the online questionnaire, three main types of impact related to professional development:

1. The first concerns the awareness that the mobility experience helped develop an international professional profile, adding valuable elements to the CV.
2. The second type of impact is on self-awareness, particularly related to awareness of one's own ways of working, and on self-confidence.
3. The third type of impact refers to the acquisition or improvement of both general skills, like planning, organising, or working in a team, as well as of skills and knowledge related to a specific profession.

The distribution of responses is presented below (participants had to respond "yes" or "no" to each of the options of response; the diagram presents the percentage of "yes" for each option):



The interviews also confirm that many participants consider that they gained important new knowledge and skills related to their professional development or consolidated competences they had: "I got a lot of practical experience". Their general understanding of the professional environment evolved: "It helped me understand the working world more"; "I learned how complex it is!"; "I learned how a small company is run. I was able to see the different elements that make up a company".

For some, the mobility offered the first opportunity to "engage in real work", or to apply things learned during studies in a practical situation: "I saw which kind of problems and situations can be encountered". Others used their personal qualities for professional development: "I was also able to use my creative skills to help promote the company in a professional way". The mobility also contributed to learning concrete elements related to their profession which will be useful in future career.

Many participants are aware of the added value brought by the mobility. For example, one participant declared: “I did get valuable professional experience that is difficult to get in [my country]”. Another one referred to an evolution from passivity to a proactive attitude during the mobility: “for a while, as an intern, it is easy to be shy and follow orders, but through time you learn to contribute and suggest ideas and bring your own set of abilities to the work place.”

For some participants the mobility resulted in the confirmation that they really want to work in the respective sector or in the decision to adjust the career path or to focus on more specific elements within the sector. Many reveal that their view of the profession has changed, they realised differences between theory and practice, as well as between the way the profession is practiced in different contexts.

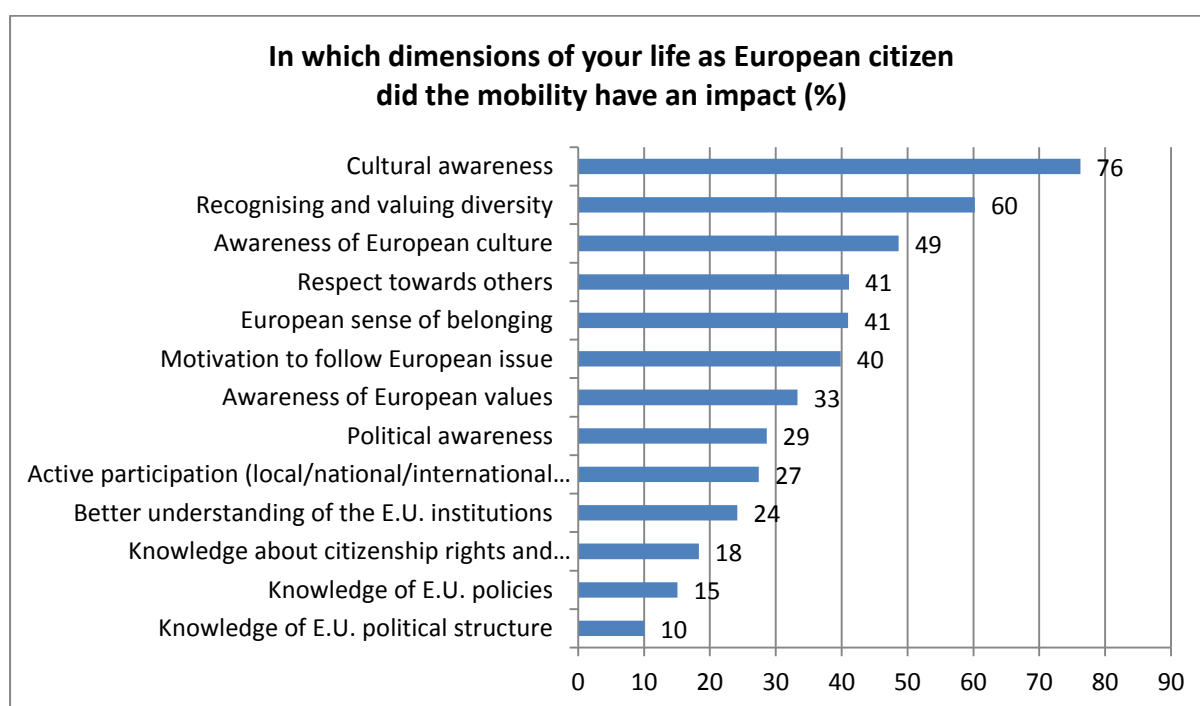
Several participants gained more confidence in their professional perspectives: “the mobility gives you an impulse to move on, to start a professional career”. Many considered that the experience of mobility significantly increased their chances to get a job and to progress in career in the future. All have included the mobility in their CV and those who received certificates attached them, being persuaded that this increases their chances of success. In many cases participants actually confirmed that positive impact:

- “when an interviewer asked me if I would be comfortable relocating and being alone in a new country, I mentioned my ERASMUS as evidence that I could”;
- “skills accumulated during the job experience and the skills gained by the tasks that I had to complete helped me when having to apply for my first job”;
- “I found a job and I am still working there now”;
- “I created my own architecture studio”;
- “I started working as freelancer”;
- “less than one year after the mobility, I had my first fixed-term contract”;
- “I gained chances that he wouldn’t have considered [for my professional career]”;
- “I got to know what kind of professional path I would like to take and I was also offered an employment in [the desired area]”.

Impact of mobility on European awareness

Only for a small proportion of the participants in the online survey the mobility experience (less than a quarter) contributed in increasing their knowledge of EU institutions, policies or political structure. However, over three quarters declare that their cultural awareness has improved and for 60% their attitude towards diversity is more positive.

A large part of the respondents, over 40%, appreciate that they have an increased awareness of a common European culture, a sense of common belonging to Europe and a higher interest to follow issues in other countries and at European level. In a logical connection, 41% also consider that their respect towards others has been enhanced by the mobility experience. The distribution of responses is presented below:



Three main categories of perspectives towards the European dimension can be identified in the interviews and focus groups:

1. A positive regard to European identity and values, appreciation of the EU integration process and of the benefits of European cooperation, sometimes associated with relevant new knowledge;
2. A pessimistic view of EU, of Europe in general and of the perspectives of European cooperation;
3. A tendency to take a global perspective and go beyond the limits of the continent.

The first type of attitude prevails in all the countries where the MOB G.A.E. consortium is represented and where interviews were taken and focus groups were organised. Some participants considered the reflection on the European dimension a key part of their responses, while for others it was not so important and they only confirmed briefly that the mobility had a positive impact on

their European awareness. One participant stated that the mobility did not have an impact on his European awareness because he had already strong European feelings before departure in the mobility: “I always felt more European than [citizen of my home country]”.

Most participants reveal that the mobility changed the way they perceive the European Union. Many participants acknowledge that the experience of mobility contributed to strengthening their sense of belonging to the European Union: “I am much more aware of what a European identity could be”; “I feel more European”; “I feel profoundly European”; “I better understand the structure of different organisations, institutions and the whole European system”; “I became a European citizen and I understood more of European politics and economy”; “[The mobility] is something that makes you feel part of Europe”.

The mobility helped a participant realize that [in Europe], “even if belonging to different countries or cultures, people are part of a common background characterized by the same values and beliefs”. Another one declares: “I have been able to see common European influences and values”. A significant number of participants engaged in the mobility without thinking much about the European dimension but the experiences they had made them aware of this and generated this feeling of common belonging.

Some participants associate being European with concrete life situations. For example:

- “when you speak another language you can easily move and live in another country”;
- “I got used to having friends and colleagues from other countries”;
- “the mobility increased my wish to travel, to get to know other countries”;
- “being regularly informed about the decisions made at European level”;
- “you have the opportunity to live anywhere you like, you're not stuck in your home country. It gives you the chance to do that”;
- “Europe offers countless opportunities for work also”.

Many participants declare in this context increased ability to identify cultural similarities and differences within the EU: “[the mobility] makes you think about your origins and compare different cultures”, “increases awareness of differences between EU countries”, “opened eyes regarding different European countries, how different but also similar everyone is”.

For some, the increased European awareness is associated with the willingness to take action and contribute to further promoting it: “once more [the mobility] showed me that there is a common European identity, but it shouldn't just be there, we should find ways to make it flourish and integrate it into our lives otherwise it remains a utopian idea which has nothing to do with us.”

The second category, less represented but having a clear message, is that of some participants who had a pessimistic view of Europe before the mobility experience and the mobility did not change that: “unfortunately the European Union is just an economic union, it is not a political union, neither a social one, and the further you go the more you realize that it is always like this and things are not changing”. In the same spirit, another participant declares: “I came to the conclusion that there's little European consciousness in Europe”.

Others, while reporting an increased awareness and critical understanding of similarities and difference, as well as of inequalities and power relations within Europe, consider that the mobility enforced their perception of the big distance between citizens and EU institutions.

Finally, a third category of participants, also much smaller in numbers go beyond European awareness, taking a global perspective. One participant reports becoming more distant towards a European feeling, but has now the feeling of belonging more to the world, than just to Europe. Others also declare feeling a citizen of the world, with increased cultural and civic awareness and having a better global understanding.

Suggesting mobility experience to others and being ready for a new one

Over 99% of the participants in the online survey and all the participants in interviews and focus groups declare that they recommend to others to engage in mobility experiences. Many participants interviewed confirm also that there are many cases when their advice was followed by colleagues and friends.

This confirms that the impact of a mobility experience is not only on those who are doing it but it extends to other people in their environment.

Many say they regularly tell people about the positive experience of the mobility, talking about it even many years after it took place. Asked why they would recommend mobility experiences, the answers are very positive, as illustrated by these examples:

- “It’s a great opportunity, and you're missing out on a life changing experience by not taking it up”
- “if you don't do it then you are missing out”
- “I think it is a fantastic opportunity”.

A very large number of respondents to the online survey (95%) would be ready to engage in a new mobility experience. In interviews this is explained as being due to the awareness of the benefits generated by the mobility and by the increased confidence in the ability to overcome the challenges related to cultural differences, working or studying in another place and being immersed in another culture.

Facilitating factors, challenges and suggestions

Facilitating factors

Several clear categories of factors facilitating the success of a mobility experience can be identified from the interviews and focus-groups.

The most frequently mentioned is the logistic support provided by the host or intermediary organization, particularly at arrival, but also sometimes the support offered by the sending organisation through the regular monitoring of the participants. Many welcomed the assistance received regarding accommodation, practical and administrative issues, as well as daily life issues like public transport or cultural activities. Also, one participant emphasises that “good communication between the home organization, participants and coordinators or host countries always means that the mobility project runs smoothly”. The financial support of the mobility programme is also seen as essential.

The attitude and availability of members of the team of the host organisation, as well as the mentor, tutor or coach designated by that organisation are also considered by many as essential for the success of a mobility experience. Such support is seen as useful in several ways: it provides a good working atmosphere, helps solving problems and difficult situations and supports the effectiveness of the concrete activities assigned, by clear tasks, guidance, contacts and connections. The role of the mentor is seen as related to making sure tasks are clear and to providing support both professionally and personally.

The language training received is also appreciated by many as critical for the participants who do not have competences in the language of the host country or region before engaging in the mobility.

Pre-existing language competence, in the language of the hosts or in English, good communication skills but also previous work experience and specific competences are also likely to improve the success of mobility.

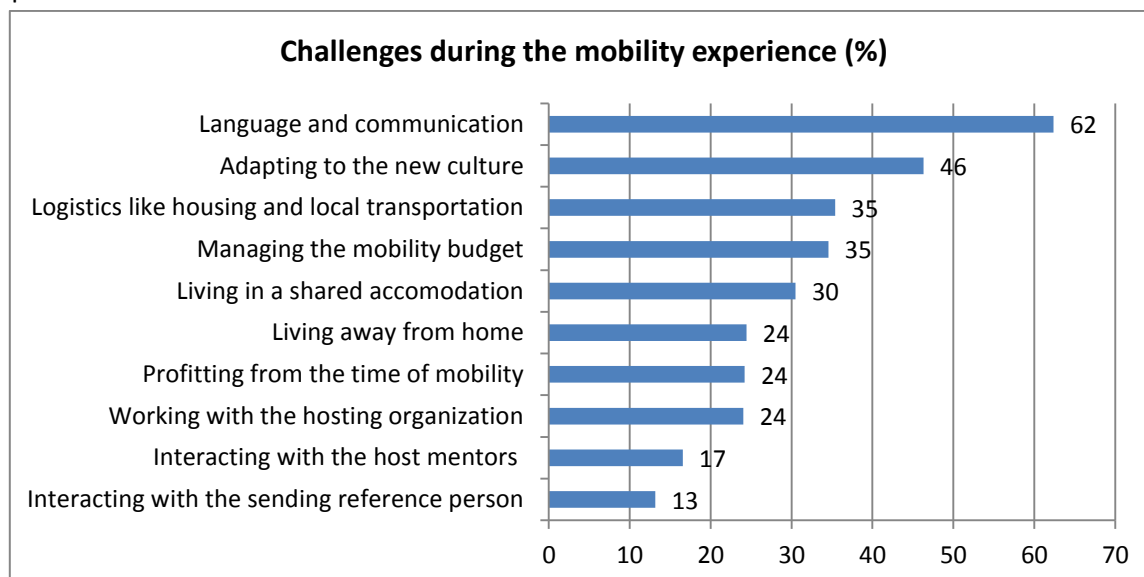
For many participants the most important facilitating factor is represented by their attitudes, personal qualities and competences. Openness, positive attitude, patience, self-confidence, flexibility, adaptability, or the resistance to stress are mentioned as important attitudes, as well as the capacity to engage with people and make friends: “they need to be able to handle challenges and get on with other people”; “you have to be willing to work and adapt to a new environment and make an effort with the language, and to meet new people you have to put yourself out there”.

Having a serious commitment and willingness to make efforts for the mobility to be successful is also appreciated as very important. One participant states that: “it’s a good thing, that the application process and everything can be quite long, because then it will deter people who aren’t serious about doing it from applying”

Preparation before training, both by the sending organisation, and individual preparation, also facilitates a positive mobility experience.

Challenges perceived during the mobility

The online survey revealed the following evaluation of challenges encountered during the mobility experience:



Relatively similar results have been obtained from the interviews and focus groups. Indeed, having limited or no competence in the local language, as well as the need to work sometimes with people with whom no language is shared, raised a challenge to many participants in mobility.

The pressure put on individuals by the new situation in which they find themselves during the mobility and particularly the need to adapt to a new culture is also frequently mentioned in the interviews and focus groups. Some participants perceive significant stress related to living in a new place, being away from home, having to speak with different people, being independent, and to the need to show a very high degree of flexibility. Feeling homesick, due to the separation from family and friends and to the life in a new country is considered by many as a major challenge.

Fear of xenophobia/racism was also an issue revealed by interviews, concerning, for example, situations in which local media was portraying in a very negative way the immigrants from their country of origin and that made them “feel under pressure”, although, with time they learned to become more distant.

Challenges related to the work environment or to the relationships with colleagues and the need to handle problematic situations were also mentioned. Another situation revealed is when volunteers feel they “are exploited”, meaning that they are given tasks which should be performed by the staff of the host organisation or they are given minor and monotonous tasks from which they feel that they have nothing to learn.

A key type of challenge is related to social life during the mobility. First, such challenges are perceived right at the beginning of the mobility experience: “I felt like there was not enough opportunity to engage socially, and I don’t think we were given enough time to adapt to our

surroundings before going straight into Greek lessons. I addressed this by taking my own initiative to explore the city and find my way around and look for free events to participate in". As time passes by, participants also feel the need to have contact with people outside their work environment and sometimes consider this a significant challenge. There are also many participants who cannot recall particular challenges encountered during the mobility.

Suggestions for improving mobility experiences

As illustrated also by the survey results, many participants in the research were totally satisfied with their mobility experience and do not think anything needs to change: "no change, all was good".

However, several proposals were formulated and should be taken in consideration to counter some of the challenges and risks identified and to increase even more the chances of a successful mobility experience.

Some proposals concern improvements in the selection procedures and in the preparation before departure:

- Better communication between the sending organisation and host or intermediary organisation in providing potential participants with clear details about opportunities offered, in order to avoid raising unrealistic expectations;
- Allowing participants to choose the cities they want for the mobility, not to be assigned to a city by the sending organisation;
- Providing training before departure for all types of mobility supported by EU funds;
- Organising virtual meetings between selected participants and their future host or intermediary organisation in order to:
 - o make sure that mobility participants know what they will be offered and what will be expected from them;
 - o make the mentor(s) of the host or intermediary organisation aware of the skills, interests and potential of the future mobility participants, beyond what is specified in the CV and motivation letter, in order to adjust their offer accordingly.

Several proposals were also made regarding improvements of the organisation of the work during the mobility:

- Elaborate clear rules and code of conduct for those taking the role of mentor or tutor for mobility participants. These could be accompanied with easy to use tools and checklists;
- Put more emphasis on language skills development, provide more funding for language courses that take place in the mobility country;
- Combine language learning with 'cultural and social induction';
- Favour, whenever possible, the delivery of language lessons and of cultural induction sessions in groups, not individually;

- Require periodic meetings with participants, mentors from the host and, where appropriate, intermediary organisation, and, if possible with the reference person from the sending organisation, in order to ensure a better match of the skills of the participant to the tasks carried out in the place of work;
- Better organization of on-arrival and mid-term training for EVS and adopting this model for all types of mobility;
- Provide opportunities for mobility participants in a region to contact each other and meet;
- Ensure that there are cultural activities and induction in place to support people coming to the country. One way to ensure access to cultural activities can be the delivery of a “Cultural passport”, allowing free entrance to cultural institutions and events;
- Require and support all host or intermediary organisations to identify and prepare a “peer mentor” for each mobility participant received. This can be a young person of similar age and with similar interests, who voluntarily takes the responsibility to support mobility participants in establishing social contacts in the local society and in managing social life outside the work programme. Clear guidelines and a code of conduct should be elaborated for such peer mentors and for their interaction with mobility participants. This relationship should be a horizontal relationship mutually beneficial. Such a measure would respond to the need expressed by a significant number of participants to get more support in their social life and take this pressure from the mentors who are employed by the host or intermediary organisation.
- Prepare adapted guidelines and resources to support a better reflection on what has been gained in a mobility experience. There are currently requirements for evaluation, which are useful, but the results obtained show that many participants do not actually realise what they learned and how the mobility changed them and are not aware of how the achievements of the mobility experience can be valued in multiple life situations, including professional life, as well as personal and social relationships.

Testimonials

Tina, from Slovenia to Spain: Erasmus Student exchange experience

"I went on Erasmus Student Exchange in 2009/10 when I was 25 years old. I attended Erasmus because I knew it would broaden my perception of the world. Firstly, I decided to stay in Madrid for 5 months and decided to make a prolongation for 5 months more, because I liked the city and the possibilities that the city has to offer very much. I met many interesting and great people from all around the world and travelled around Spain and Europe.

I learned Spanish in a short period, because my classes were in Spanish language. It was a particularly good experience for me, because now I can communicate in Spanish language. Because I do not come from a multicultural city as Madrid is, I've gained a deeper global awareness. I learned a lot about myself thanks to the interaction with people from all around the world.

I have got to know the cultural differences and consequently gained higher tolerance towards people who function and see things differently. I also gained flexibility and a capability to establish a conversation with people more easily.

It was a positive experience and I think it had a great impact on my life. Since my participation in the mobility program, I understand better how people live and think in other countries. I am still in touch with some people who I met and after my experience, I have travelled to see them. I have made some great friendships and connections. I am more employable and have the capability to adapt myself to new surroundings and environments more quickly than before the mobility experience."

Joanna, from Poland to Italy: Youth in Action programme – Youth exchange

There is a phenomenon in chaos theory called "butterfly effect". Cutting a long story short, the one small change in one state can cause significant differences in another one. I like to think about the youth exchange in Italy, in which I participated in 2011 as my own "butterfly effect", because it had enormous impact on my development and decisions I made later on.

After the final exams and graduation from high school, together with groups from Poland and Portugal I took part in a youth exchange within Youth in Action programme called "Voluntary? With pleasure!" in Turin, Italy. The main goal of the exchange was to get to know voluntary work from each perspective and area of voluntary service. Together, we were working with disabled people, painting the day room for local community; having the seminars with EVS participants and sharing our own experience as a volunteer in own country. The people I have met there and their ways of thinking have really broadened my horizons and caused immense changes in my life. The most important was that for the first time I felt myself independent and ready to open myself for new experiences.

Hanna, from Germany to Italy: Lifelong Learning Programme – Leonardo da Vinci

8 years, 8 jobs, 8 different countries...

I have always loved travelling, or even more so, I adore not only getting a glimpse of a culture, but actually getting completely immersed in it by actively taking part in the everyday activities of its people.

After having spent several years living abroad in countries like the US, Portugal, France, Spain, New Zealand and Austria, the time had come that I felt I needed another change in my life. The one country that was still on my list and that I had not yet had the chance to live in was ITALY. At that moment I had arrived at a turning-point and knew that my nomad years of globe-trotting had come to an end. An inner voice was telling me that it was time to find a more stable job and to calm down a bit. I could not keep living a student's life, while at the same time being a full time worker.

So, I took this chance that the European "Arte factum" (part of the Lifelong Learning -Leonardo da Vinci Programme) grant offered me and I went to Florence, Italy, for 6 weeks. Even though it was a rather short time period, I gained so much from it and would highly recommend everyone else to seize an opportunity like that.

Not only have I greatly improved my linguistic skills, but I also met many dear people and friends. Within a few days, I completely felt at home in Florence.

Furthermore, the internship that I was partaking in was very significant for my current career. I was working in the HR-department of a public state office – and guess where am I now? I am indeed working for a state office in Germany!

In the end, this stay has served as being a form of "rounding off" my years of travel, has helped me to overcome my "restlessness" and instead to develop a kind of desire to finally arrive and settle down.

Many more stories of participants to European mobilities covering various countries, but also some reflecting the views of other stakeholders involved in the process, are presented on the www.mobgae.eu website. They confirm the key ideas revealed by the results of the online survey, as well as by the interviews and focus groups and their message was also taken into account in drawing the conclusions and recommendations presented below.

Conclusions and recommendations

General conclusions

At the end of the interview, participants were requested to describe their mobility experience with three adjectives. The most frequently mentioned ones are: *exciting, enriching and challenging*. These three words illustrate well the multiple dimensions of a mobility experience, responding to the needs and interest of young people, providing opportunities for growth and development, but also requiring effort, testing the limits, questioning stereotypes and moving people out of their comfort zone, to reflect on themselves and on their life and make decisions for their future.

Other words mentioned, some of them multiple times, are equally relevant and include: *helpful, unforgettable, enjoyable, interesting, useful, insightful, rewarding, impressive, successful, marvellous, incredible, horizon widening, funny, eventful, colourful, active, important, surprising, valuable, fruitful, recommendable, human, informative, innovative, pleasant, fulfilling, intense, sweet, adventurous, spontaneous, mind-opening, magical, intercultural, touching, fantastic, maturing, autonomous, génial, different, cultural, responsible, intense, chaotic, formative, revealing, enthusiastic, intense, contagious, stimulating, necessary, productive, unique*. They show a largely positive impression about the mobility experience and an impact at both practical and emotional levels.

The results obtained prove that the quantitative approach of the online survey, which reached a high number of participants in mobilities across Europe and beyond, was well complemented by the input provided by the qualitative approach of individual interviews and focus groups.

The data collected in parallel in countries from all the regions of Europe proved a good coverage in terms of countries of departure, countries of mobility, types of mobility and mobility programmes, age, educational background and other criteria.

One of the strongest messages expressed by the data collected in this research is that a very large majority of mobility participants are very satisfied with their mobility experience. The research conducted confirms previous findings on the validity of the European mobility experience and its important contribution to the internationalisation of the learning path, as a source for personal and professional growth, autonomy and employability.

A clearly positive impact has been acknowledged by participants on their personal development, on their professional evolution and on their European awareness. The results also revealed that more needs to be done to increase the awareness among participants of what the mobility has brought to them personally and professionally, as well as for the identification and recognition of personal and social skills (*soft skills*) and of their impact and importance for professional life. Not all feedback received regarding the mobility experiences is positive. The research provided an open framework for former participants and other stakeholders to point out any problematic issues and the elements

they were not happy with during the mobility. This confirms the methodological validity of the research and represents very useful input for identifying what needs to be improved in the management of mobility projects.

Language competences stand out as a key element of the overall process. The wish to improve language skills is the most important motivation for engaging in a mobility project, but they are also outlined as key facilitating factors, as key challenges and as major benefits of mobility experiences.

In the perspective of participants, several factors seem to favour positive outcomes, including the support structures (language lessons, orientation and supervision, preparation, etc.), their own attitudes, such as the openness to new experiences in a different cultural environment, or the willingness to learn the local language.

Factors that hinder or limit the success of mobility experiences have also been identified. These include the language and intercultural communication challenges, the need to cope with unusual situations while being away from home, the challenges raised sometimes by the new work environment, as well as the difficulty to have a social life besides work in the host society.

Our research also clearly confirms that the mobility generates in the large majority of participants a more nuanced perspective on cultural diversity, intercultural relations and European affairs. In most cases, this translates in increased intercultural competence and a feeling of belonging to a diverse but united Europe. In many cases also, young people involved in mobilities realise how much still needs to be done to ensure that European identity, based on principles and values, and a global citizenship become a reality and are embedded fully in our societies. The research comes at a decisive moment in the history of Europe, in a period in which European Institutions are considered negatively in public opinion, as never before. Mobility can have a strong effect in terms of “affiliation to Europe”. The research reported on the one hand a positive attitude towards Europe, as an ideal project, and on the other a critical reflection about European Union and its functioning. This highlights not so much a distance towards citizens, but rather a distance between the reference principles and their practical implementation. There is therefore a problem of perception and a problem of essence that needs to be analysed, because it's in this space that grows the sense of European citizenship, hand in hand with the building process of a cultural identity and its associated narrative. The present report aims to contribute to the development of critical thinking and active citizenship, able to support the effective implementation of the European ideals through a reflection based on experiences and stories of young people from across the continent.

Several practical suggestions have been formulated to address these challenges and make mobility experiences more successful, related both to a more thorough preparation before departure and to a better management of the mobility through cooperation between sending, intermediary and host organisations, considering the key role of the mentors or tutors, but envisaging also the potential involvement of other local stakeholders and a set of measures to reduce the impact of stressful factors and enhance the effectiveness of the mobility experience.

Therefore, besides strongly confirming that mobility programmes bring important benefits for the participants, at personal and professional levels, and that they contribute in bringing together in a spirit of understanding, respect and cooperation the young people of European countries, the

research on long term impact of mobility experiences can be seen as a working tool for youth workers and decision makers has two main types of outcomes:

1. At the level of the organisations involved in the MOB G.A.E. consortium, the findings of the research have been used as a basis to design pre-departure preparation training modules, to be used by all partners and disseminate all around Europe. The research has been particularly significant for work placement managers and mentors, trainers and educators, EVS tutors: they have evidence of the importance of their work and the impact of professional “mentoring and tutoring” in a quality mobility experience.
2. At a more general level, a set of proposals for improving the structure and the implementation of mobility support programmes can be formulated. They are presented in the following section.

Recommendations and further reflection

The results of the research described above provide evidence that the success and the effectiveness of mobility experiences can be enhanced if the main stakeholders take into account certain elements. From this perspective, the following recommendations target the policy-makers and the managers of mobility support programmes, as well as the sending, host and intermediary organisations.

Recommendations for policy-makers and the managers of the programmes

- Elaborate, disseminate and require or encourage the use of clear rules and code of conduct for those taking the role of mentor or tutor for mobility participants. These could be accompanied with easy to use tools and checklists.
- Require and support all host or intermediary organisations to identify and prepare a “peer mentor” for each mobility participant received. This can be a young person of similar age and with similar interests, who voluntarily takes the responsibility to support mobility participants in establishing social contacts in the local society and in managing social life outside the work programme. Clear guidelines and a code of conduct should be elaborated for such peer mentors and for their interaction with mobility participants. This should be a horizontal relationship that is mutually beneficial.
- Provide funding for language and cultural awareness courses that take place in the mobility country.
- Support projects which provide training and offer opportunities for exchange of experiences for language teachers and peer mentors.

- Expand the system of on-arrival and mid-term trainings currently used for EVS for all types of mobility.
- Require periodic meetings with participants, mentors from host and, where appropriate, intermediary organisations, and, if possible with the reference person from the sending organisation, in order to ensure a better match of the skills of the participant to the tasks carried out in the place of work.
- Prepare or support the development of adapted guidelines and resources to stimulate a better reflection on what has been gained in a mobility experience, in order to make participants realise what they learned, how the mobility changed them and how the achievements of the mobility experience can be valued in multiple life situations, including professional life, as well as personal and social relationships.
- Promote and support improved recognition and validation of qualifications and competences acquired during a mobility experience, including the promotion of a more effective use of Europass certificates.

Recommendations for sending organisations

- Make contact, in written but also through virtual meetings, with host or intermediary organisations, at the start of a project, in order to understand fully the opportunities that can be offered and the reality of the work environment that participants will encounter.
- Consider the interests, preferences and motivation of participants in the selection process.
- Organise virtual meetings between selected participants and their future host or intermediary organisation in order to:
 - o make sure that mobility participants know what they will be offered and what will be expected from them;
 - o make the mentor(s) of the host or intermediary organisation aware of the skills, interests and potential of the future mobility participants, beyond what is specified in the CV and motivation letter, in order to adjust their offer accordingly.
- Provide training before departure to all future mobility participants, regardless of the programme supporting the mobility. The training should be adapted to the background and needs of participants and include awareness that their attitudes play a decisive role in the success of a mobility experience. Emphasis needs to be put on attitudes like openness, patience, self-confidence, flexibility, adaptability, positive attitude towards others, tolerance of ambiguity, and resistance to stress and challenges.
- Cooperate with the host or intermediary organisations in monitoring and evaluating the performance of mobility participants.

Recommendations for intermediary and host organisations

- Support the sending organisation in the preparation of participants before departure and cooperate in the monitoring and evaluation of the mobility.
- Provide language courses combined with cultural awareness training ('cultural and social induction'). Such training should be delivered by specialised staff, not by classical language teachers, and should be organised, whenever possible, for groups of participants, not individually.
- Recruit, prepare and supervise peer mentors to support mobility participants in establishing social contacts in the local society and in managing social life outside the work programme.
- Provide opportunities for mobility participants in a region to contact each other and meet.
- Ensure support in access to cultural and social activities. One way to do this could be the delivery of a "Cultural passport", allowing free entrance to cultural institutions and events.
- Provide opportunities for mobility participants to reflect on what they learned and how the mobility changed them, in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes, and on how these achievements can be useful in their personal and professional life.
- Provide opportunities for reflection on similarities and differences between the lifestyle and cultural environment in their home country and in the mobility country, as well as on impact, benefits and challenges related to European relations and EU policies. The aim should be to promote a critical but constructive reflection and overcome simplistic positive or negative judgments based on stereotypes, prejudices and populist messages encountered in political discourse and in the media. The research shows that few participants consider that the mobility experience made them more aware of EU issues but confirmed that the mobility can be an excellent setting to stimulate such reflection and encourage active European citizenship.

Further reflection

Organisations member of the MOB G.A.E. consortium are committed to disseminate the conclusions of this research and invite all organisations involved in mobility programmes to join in the reflection on how to make mobility experiences more successful and in promoting the implementation of the recommendations presented above.

The www.mobgae.eu website is offered as a platform for exchanges on this matter and can be used by organisations active in this field for sharing their experiences related to the types of support offered to mobility participants and to the most effective methods, tools and procedures used for this purpose. Of course, the voice of young people is very welcome in this further reflection and will be taken into consideration, as it was in the research presented in this report.

References

- 2014 Kaléido'Scop, [Mobilité et retour à l'emploi. Etude d'impact](#)
- 2014 European Commission, [Erasmus impact study: effects of mobility on the skills and employability of the students and the internationalisation of higher education Institution](#)
- 2013 Centro de Estudos Sociais (CES) da Universidade de Coimbra, [Estudo de avaliação dos impactos da mobilidade para estágios Erasmus e Leonardo da Vinci](#). Agência Nacional para a Gestão do Programa Aprendizagem ao Longo da Vida.
- 2013 Arturas Deltuva, kitokieprojektoi®, [Factors supporting learning in mobility projects](#). Project UNIQUE Year of Learning: Youth on the Move!
- 2013 (1) International Conference "[Mobility Spaces, Learning Spaces - Linking Policy, Research and Practice](#)".
- 2013 (2) International Conference [Mobility Spaces, Learning Spaces – Linking Policy, Research and Practice](#).
- 2013 [Elisa Briga, Linking Youth Work and Learning Mobility: The Practice Perspective](#).
- 2013 Maria – Carmen Pantea, [Building evidence-based interventions in youth work: a proposal for reporting practice](#). EPLM Conference.
- 2013 European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, [Towards a Mobility Scoreboard: Conditions for Learning Abroad in Europe](#). Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
- 2013 Friesenhahn, Günter J. et al., [Learning mobility and non-formal learning in European contexts - Policies, approaches and examples](#). Council of Europe Publishing.
- 2012 ICON-INSTITUTE, [Study on Mobility Developments in School Education, Vocational Education and Training, Adult Education and Youth Exchanges](#). European Commission,
- 2012 [Cedefop, Necessary Conditions for ECVET Implementation](#). Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
- 2011 Cedefop, [Employment-related mobility and migration, and vocational education and training](#). Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
- 2010 Youth Express Network, [Youth Impact – Research on the impact and added value of working with young people at the international level](#). Youth Express Network.
- 2004 Wolfgang Hellwig, Uwe Lauterbach, Hermann-Günter Hesse, Sabine Fabriz, [Evaluation of EU and international programmes and initiatives promoting mobility: selected case studies](#). Cedefop.
- 2004 Maren Heise, Wolfgang Meyer, [The benefits of education, training and skills from an individual life-course perspective with a particular focus on life-course and biographical research](#). Cedefop

1998 Søren Kristensen, [Transnational mobility in the context of vocational education and training in Europe](#). Cedefop

1998 Hillage, J. & Pollard, E. Employability: Developing a Framework for Policy Analysis. London: DfEE

Statistical data:

Statistics for All - Lifelong Learning Programme statistics: <http://www.statisticsforall.eu>

Erasmus statistics: http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/statistics/ay-12-13/annex-2_en.pdf

Youth unemployment: http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/themes/21_youth_unemployment.pdf

Glossary

This glossary was created for the MOB G.A.E research, based on the project's application and on the European programmes' framework, in order to assure a common understanding between the different partners of the consortium.

Mobility Experience

Period of time spent in another country along which one may gain valuable experience of life, study and work, with the aim of developing competences (knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired through formal, non-formal and/or informal learning processes), thus increasing the opportunities available in the future.

Personal Growth

Improvement of ones' awareness and identity to enhance quality of life and contribute to the realization of dreams and aspirations, by accessing resources that support human development at the individual level.

Autonomy

Ones' ability to make informed decisions, take responsibility and self-manage several individual aspects of life, allowing for the possibility for independence within a certain community.

Professional Development

Continuous competence acquisition for career development, acknowledged or not, within formal, non-formal and informal settings.

Employability

Additionally to the existing variables of the labour market, employability refers to a person's capability for gaining and maintaining employment (Hillage and Pollard, 1998), which depends on knowledge, skills and attitudes and the way these assets are presented to employers.

European Citizenship

Sense of belonging to a wider community of countries 'United in diversity', by being aware of the cultural features implied, knowing what is the EU and what that means to ones' daily lives and taking part in EU decision-making.

