



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

## SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH REPORT 2015

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

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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

## **MOB G.A.E.: Mobility as a source of personal and professional growth, autonomy and employability**

This is the summary of the key findings of a research carried out in the framework of the MOB G.A.E. project, co-funded by the European Commission within the frame of the Lifelong Learning programme, action KA4, and implemented in 2014-2015 by a Consortium of 18 organisations promoting mobility, from 14 European countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, and United Kingdom.

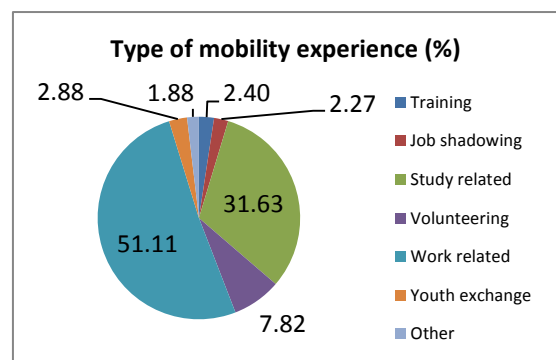
The aim of the project is to value and capitalize on international mobility experiences as a tool for learning, for personal and professional development, for enhancing individual autonomy, independence and employability as well as for increasing awareness of European citizenship and civic participation.

### **Research methodology and data collection**

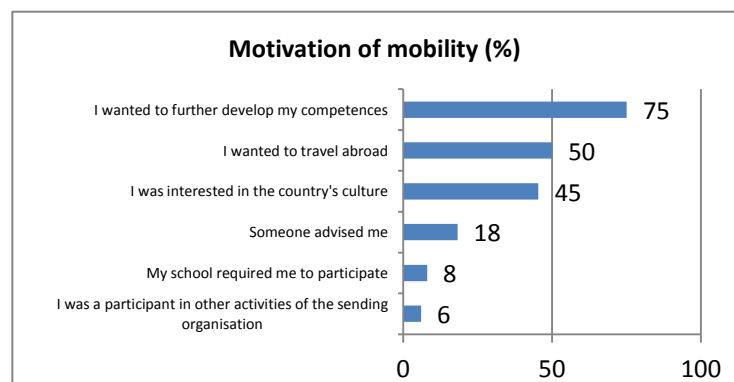
The research question orienting the design of the study, the data collection and analysis is: *In what way do mobility experiences impact on personal growth, professional development, and EU citizenship awareness?* A mixed methodology has been elaborated and implemented, combining an online questionnaire with interviews and focus groups organised with various stakeholders. With the contribution of all project partners, 2289 valid responses were obtained to the online questionnaire and qualitative data was obtained from 243 individual interviews and 25 focus groups.

### **Data analysis**

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. The largest part of the sample is divided between the two most common types of mobility: work-related mobility (51% of the sample), and study-related mobility (31%). 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 mobility experiences in EEA countries, in South Eastern Europe and in other countries. Most participants get involved in mobility between the age of 21 and 24.



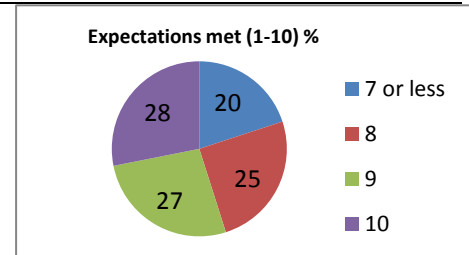
The development of competences, the interest in travelling abroad and the curiosity about other countries and cultures are by far the most frequent reasons stated by participants in the online survey and also consistently reflected by the answers given during the interviews and focus groups. We can therefore 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

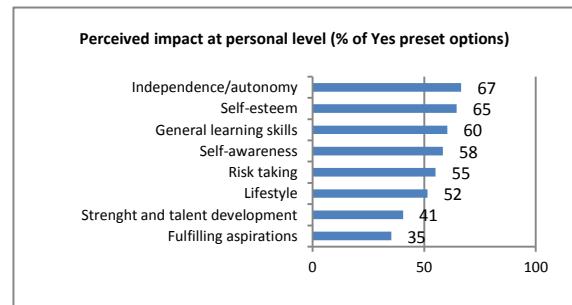
Additionally, the interviews and focus groups reveal another key motivation: learning another language or improving language skills.

The results obtained show a remarkably high degree of satisfaction with the mobility experience: 80% of participants consider that their expectations were met to a very high degree. The average score is 8.47 (out of 10). The most commonly mentioned effect of the mobility experience is on improving communication skills in a foreign language (83% of respondents).



### *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, on the self-esteem and on learning skills. Of course, improved learning skills have a positive impact also at professional level, even if participants are not aware of that or did not mention it explicitly. Interviewed participants declared having 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, to cooperate and to cope with difficult situations, to feel more at ease in social situations, to be independent, “to work in a team and lead”. Other quotes: “I learned a lot about myself”; “mobility programme helped me in achieving my full potential”; “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.”



### *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, three main types of impact related to professional development have been identified:

1. Development of an international professional profile, adding valuable elements to the CV.
2. Self-awareness, particularly of own ways of working, and self-confidence.
3. 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.

Some quotes: “I got a lot of practical experience”; “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”; it was “the first opportunity to engage in real work”; “I saw which kind of problems and situations can be encountered”; “I was also able to use my creative skills to help promote the company in a professional way”; “I did get valuable professional experience that is difficult to get in [my country]”; “the mobility gives you an impulse to move on, to start a professional career”.

### *Impact of mobility on European awareness*

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, associated also 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: “I am much more aware of what a European identity could be”; “I feel more European”; “I feel profoundly European”; “I understand better 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] makes you feel part of Europe”; “opened eyes regarding different European countries, how different but also similar everyone is”.

## Conclusions

A clearly positive impact has been acknowledged by participants on their personal development, on their professional evolution and on their European awareness. The mobility generates to the large majority of participants a more nuanced perspective on cultural diversity, intercultural relations and European affairs. 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.

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: “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”. 95% of participants would be ready to engage in a new mobility experience.

The success of a mobility experience is enhanced by:

- the logistic support provided by the host or intermediary organization, particularly at arrival;
- the support offered by the sending organisation through the regular monitoring;
- 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;
- the language training received or the pre-existing language competence, in the language of the hosts or in English, good communication skills but also previous work experience and specific competences also facilitate very much the success of mobility;
- the attitudes, personal qualities and competences of participants, mainly: openness, positive attitude, patience, self-confidence, flexibility, adaptability, resistance to stress and 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”;
- a serious commitment and willingness to make efforts for the mobility to be successful;
- the preparation before training, both done by the sending organisation, and individual preparation.

The main challenges perceived by mobility participants are:

- the competence in the local language, and the need to work sometimes with people with whom no language is shared;
- the pressure put on individuals by being away from home, in a different country and the need to adapt to a new culture new place, and to show a very high degree of flexibility.
- feeling homesick, due to the separation from family and friends and the difficulty to have a social life out of the work environment in the mobility country;
- being perceived based on stereotypes by people in the local society;
- challenges related to the work environment or to the relationships with colleagues and the need to handle problematic situations;
- assignment of tasks with little learning opportunities and which do not use the potential and competence of participants.

To ensure increased positive outcomes of mobility experiences and to overcome these challenges, the following recommendations have been formulated based on the results of the research.



### **Recommendations for policy-makers and the managers of the programmes**

- Promote the use of clear rules and code of conduct for those taking the role of mentor or tutor for mobility participants, with easy to use tools and checklists.
- Promote the use of “peer mentors” for each mobility participant: a young person of similar age and with similar interests, who voluntarily takes the responsibility to support mobility participants in social life outside the work programme.
- 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 to all types of mobility the system of on-arrival and mid-term trainings currently used for EVS.
- Ensure a better match of the skills of participants to the tasks to be carried out in the place of work.
- Stimulate a better reflection on what has been gained in a mobility experience 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.

### **Recommendations for sending organisations**

- Improve coordination with host or intermediary organisations in preparing the mobility project.
- 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 to ensure better mutual information.
- Provide adapted training before departure to all future mobility participants, regardless of the programme supporting the mobility with emphasis.
- 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, monitoring and evaluation of the mobility.
- Provide language courses combined with cultural awareness training
- 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.
- Ensuring support in access to cultural and social activities, including through a “cultural passport”.
- Provide opportunities for mobility participants to reflect on their achievements during mobility.
- Provide opportunities for a critical but constructive reflection on similarities and differences between the lifestyle and cultural environment in their home country and in the mobility country, as well as on EU issues. The aim should be to overcome simplistic positive or negative judgments based on stereotypes, prejudices and populist messages encountered in political discourses and in the media.

### **Further reflection**

Organisations member of the MOB G.A.E. consortium are committed to disseminating 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](http://www.mobgae.eu) website is offered as a platform for exchanges on this matter and can be used by young people and 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.

