



2015/2257(INI)

17.11.2015

DRAFT REPORT

on Erasmus+ and other tools to foster mobility in VET – a lifelong learning approach
(2015/2257(INI))

Committee on Culture and Education

Rapporteur: Ernest Maragall

Rapporteur for the opinion (*):
Enrique Calvet Chambon, Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

(*) Associated committee - Rule 54 of the Rules of Procedure

CONTENTS

	Page
MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION.....	3
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT	8

MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on Erasmus+ and other tools to foster mobility in VET - a lifelong learning approach (2015/2257(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), in particular Articles 165 and 166 thereof,
- having regard to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, in particular Article 14 thereof,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020')¹,
- having regard to the Council resolution of 27 November 2009 on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018)²,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 establishing 'Erasmus+': the Union Programme for education, training, youth and sport³,
- having regard to the Council recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (2012/C 398/01)⁴,
- having regard to Decision No 2241/2004/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on a single Community framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences (Europass)⁵,
- having regard to the Council recommendation of 28 June 2011 entitled 'Youth on the Move' – promoting the learning mobility of young people⁶,
- having regard to Recommendation 2006/962/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning⁷,
- having regard to its resolution of 6 July 2010 on promoting youth access to the labour market, strengthening trainee, internship and apprenticeship status⁸,
- having regard to the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for

¹ OJ C 119, 28.5.2009, p. 2.

² OJ C 311, 19.12.2009, p. 1.

³ OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 50.

⁴ OJ C 398, 22.12.2012, p. 1.

⁵ OJ L 390, 31.12.2004, p. 6.

⁶ OJ C 199, 7.7.2011, p. 1.

⁷ OJ L 394, 30.12.2006, p. 10.

⁸ OJ C 351 E, 2.12.2011, p. 29.

lifelong learning (EQF-LLL)¹,

- having regard to the different instruments for recognition of competences, such as the European Framework of Certifications (CEC), the European Credits Transfer System (ECTS), the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) and the European Skills/Competences, Qualifications and Occupations project (ESCO),
 - having regard to the Commission communication of 20 November 2012 entitled ‘Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes’ (COM(2012)0669),
 - having regard to Rule 52 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Culture and Education and to the opinion of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (A8-0000/2015),
- A. whereas learning mobility and training mobility have repeatedly proven their potential to contribute to high-quality education and employability, particularly in the context of successive European Union programmes in the field of education and training;
- B. whereas non-formal and informal learning have an important contribution to make in tackling current challenges in lifelong learning, such as early-school leaving, unacceptable numbers of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) and skills shortages and mismatches;
- C. whereas recent socio-economic developments accentuate the need to make lifelong learning and vocational education and training (VET) systems not only more efficient, but also more accessible and inclusive with respect to disadvantaged groups and people with special needs;
- D. whereas the regional and local level is pivotal to exploring new paths for mobility and is crucial to establishing contact with entrepreneurs, all types of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and the relevant trade unions, and engaging them in promoting the mobility of young people and apprentices;
- E. whereas entrepreneurs and trade unions must be part of the reflection on mobility structures;

Taking stock of results, identifying key challenges

1. Acknowledges the important role and the results of existing programmes and initiatives for mobility;
2. Points out that the existing mobility initiatives have contributed to improving not only learners’ civic values and sense of belonging to Europe, but also their academic skills and job prospects, more specifically those skills linked to problem-solving capacity, planning and structuring, capacity to act and adapt in face of new situations, decision making, knowledge of foreign languages, and communication, as well as those related to personal skills that impact employability such as confidence, motivation, curiosity,

¹ OJ C 111, 6.5.2008, p. 1.

critical thinking and assertiveness;

3. Singles out certain problems in the implementation of mobility actions in Erasmus+, such as reduced funding, problems with the use of electronic tools for mobility management, and insufficient information and training targeted at school and colleges staff;
4. Underlines the key aspects that need to be taken into account when assessing the success of the implementation of mobility actions: learners' economic capacity to engage in mobility; recognition of studies between countries, whether via credits or certificates; level of language knowledge; organisation of the curricula or studies;
5. Encourages the European Union to define a statute of the 'European Apprentice';
6. Notes that early school leaving is one of the most distinct problems faced by mobility target groups, and that better vocational options lead to fewer dropouts from education and training;
7. Points out that a number of factors that impact the expectations of young people being trained in VET systems can be identified, in particular socioeconomic factors, family typology and a lack of guidance (and tutorial) tools once compulsory secondary education has been completed or during vocational training courses;
8. Stresses the role of educational systems in better equipping students with both academic and transversal skills, and thereby enhancing their aptitude to match labour market needs;

Access: improving mobility options for young people in vocational training

9. Encourages the creation of a framework that identifies as clearly and precisely as possible the mobility options for young people in VET, mainly through cross-platform campaigns launched by public authorities, with the coordinated participation of all stakeholders who play an active role in, and have an influence on, VET;
10. Asks for complementary measures between the European Social Fund (ESF) and Erasmus+, and good coordination of all actions at all levels – national, regional and local planning;
11. Underlines the need to compensate for the obstacles that derive from the lower socioeconomic status of students in VET through measures such as a possible increase in the amounts of individual grants from the Commission, or an increase in the contributions made by Member States and regional and local administrations, intermediate institutions or NGOs, whether funded from their own budgets or via partnership schemes involving businesses, foundations and organisations that collaborate in the system of qualification and vocational training in their region or territory;

From mobility to employability: validation and recognition of learning outcomes, skills and competences

12. Notes that current and future measures to tackle skills mismatches should both facilitate the involvement of employers, businesses and local communities, and be better connected with forecasts concerning labour market developments and future skill needs;
13. Draws attention to the diversity and uneven development of validation and recognition systems between Member States, despite growing convergence in the last decade; stresses the need to facilitate the validation and recognition of skills and competences acquired in companies or training centres in different Member States;
14. Encourages further measures to promote the recognition and validation of learning outcomes, including those developed through non-formal and informal learning, particularly through better use of existing tools such as Europass and ECVET;

Towards more efficient, accessible and inclusive mobility programmes

15. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to define and strengthen the role of intermediary institutions – both territorial and sectoral – involved in the preparation, management and follow-up of mobility, and to assist in the setting-up of such institutions at national, regional and local level;
16. Stresses the need for such intermediary institutions with adequate budgetary and human resources to enable mobility organisation and management structures to guarantee the involvement of the network of vocational training schools, and to have the power and capacity to establish operational alliances and agreements with potential partners both at home and among the participating states in mobility programmes;
17. Encourages further measures to facilitate access by disadvantaged groups and people with special needs to Erasmus+ mobility actions;
18. Supports all accompanying measures first of all to assist apprentices in their wish to go abroad and later to help them better communicate their acquired skills through mobility, and develop their self-assertiveness in order to make the richness of their experience visible and worthwhile;
19. Emphasises the importance of quality teacher training and of monitoring, evaluation and quality assurance in the field, and the need to encourage inclusiveness and tolerance in mobility programmes;
20. Emphasises the need, at all levels, for good communication vis-à-vis entrepreneurs to have them on board for further recognition of the experience acquired by the young people taking advantage of mobility schemes;
21. Supports all measures in line with Erasmus+ objectives taken by entrepreneurs to develop mobility schemes for young employees or apprentices either by branch of activity or in interaction with bodies representing the industries, such as chambers of commerce and industry and the relevant trade unions;
22. Asks for the setting up of a one-stop-shop mechanism for pooling data and communication tools in order to provide a convenient and efficient service for those seeking information and support on the various mobility programmes existing at EU,

national, regional and local level;

o

o o

23. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission, and to the Member States.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

The introduction of Erasmus+ in the place of the various preceding programmes has marked a major step forward for mobility as a concept across the European higher education area.

It must, however, be acknowledged that mobility is less prevalent in vocational educational training (VET). The previous programme, Leonardo, successfully completed a first phase of establishing a programme of simultaneous work and study exchanges for participants in countries other than their countries of residence.

Combining the programmes into Erasmus+, on one hand, and the after-effects of the economic crisis observed since 2008, on the other, have revealed a structural deficit within vocational training mobility programmes.

It is clear that differences in academic outlook and curricula, the organisation and management of educational establishments and relationships between the education system and business give rise to greater complexity, costs and operational difficulties to mobility programmes between countries and European regions.

Specifically, severe difficulties have been encountered in the recognition and accreditation of study and working practices between certain countries. The gradual process of adopting and implementing the Europass and ECVET programmes, which are, however, very well designed, has been held up by a considerable, and not always acceptable level of resistance.

The economic and social realities in the various Member States are further evidence of the urgent need to breathe new life into this form of vocational education across Europe. Data showing a radical imbalance in unemployment rates between some European regions also call for an adequate, multidimensional response.

There are regions with real rates approaching zero, while others display abnormally high unemployment of over 40% among their young people, who have, moreover, often failed to complete secondary school or vocational training.

This unacceptable disparity is chiefly attributable to differing performance of their respective economies and the characteristics of each country's production model, but it also highlights how absurd it is for Member States, even those within the eurozone, to suffer from difficulties that would appear at first glance to be contradictory and conflicting.

In some cases there have been clearly not enough skilled young people to meet the needs of a given productive economy, while in others society has been seriously damaged by an inability to provide job opportunities for thousands of recent young people who have recently left their country's education system, with or without qualifications.

It thus makes sense for a genuine, and ambitious mobility programme catering for both of these needs to be an integral part of any overall strategy for economic recovery and reducing rates of youth unemployment that are completely unacceptable for each country and Europe as a whole.

There is thus an increasingly pressing need for some of the Erasmus+ programme's current lines of work to be more ambitious in both quantitative and qualitative terms.

Similarly, the recognition, accreditation and quality control processes that are to serve as a common framework for all Member States need to be completed as soon as possible. This

common environment is indispensable for formulating and implementing mobility programmes that education systems can provide and the productive sector of the economy must, in its own interest, accommodate.

But while this European framework is under construction, what we can do now is implement policies aiming to overcome some of the difficulties that existing assessments have identified and, in some respects, quantified.

Firstly all new strategies to be identified and implemented must have two essential features:

- their implementation must be fully shared between each country's educational systems and productive sectors;
- they must offer maximum flexibility so as to adapt to very different realities, while featuring certain common elements to facilitate coordination and work efficiently in the service of mobility, which must be seen as a useful tool in ensuring employability and social integration.

Secondly, strategies must also consider the highly specific characteristics that define the target group and that pose the greatest complexity or are objectively the hardest to overcome.

Indeed, due consideration of socioeconomic factors, types of family and degree of predisposition or otherwise to completing stages of education leads us to conclude that, for certain students cannot make the same natural, seamless progression towards European mobility as in undertaking university studies.

In vocational training, meanwhile, the benefits seen as natural for European mobility in higher education are not yet afforded due importance: financial assistance to overcome prior limitations, mutual recognition of studies, qualifications and experience, sufficient command of second and third languages, organisation of curricula and respective studies, legal aspects of recruitment procedures.

It is therefore necessary to stress the undisputable benefits mobility offers in terms of employability.

These include the acquisition of values associated with European citizenship and a sense of belonging to Europe, and, especially, those directly relevant to stable and quality employment: problem-solving ability, event organisation and planning, performing in new or unforeseen situations, decision-making, etc.

as well as more individual skills such as entrepreneurship, innovative curiosity or personal assertiveness.

Lastly, a review of the various issues requiring urgent action shows the obvious damage caused by the persistence of early school leaving, or early abandonment of vocational training, in several countries.

Here again, European mobility offers a wide range of possible responses progressively aiming to dissuade students from taking this personal decision that is giving rise to a major accumulated social and productive deficit.

If we also consider the 2020 strategy's targets concerning job creation and global competitiveness, there is ample justification for us to outline objectives, lines of action for the European Union and each country, specific action for the Commission to take and changes or improvements that can be made to the Erasmus + programme.

1. Expanding and improving mobility options for students in vocational training. Beginning with the establishment of a common framework setting out simply and clearly the possibilities open to them: the courses available, location, professional sector, the range of professional activity, companies, duration, the final qualification they are working towards, etc.
2. Agreeing to take joint, complementary measures to be shared between the European Social Fund and Erasmus+ with a view to coordinating and strengthening the programmes, avoiding overlaps or duplication in the use of EU funds and ensuring the appropriate allocation of responsibilities at national, regional and local levels.
3. Paving the way for the increased funding that will be needed to overcome the complexities and specific difficulties facing those involved in these EU programmes, with due consideration for the necessary degree of involvement and effort of each stakeholder: educational administration bodies, businesses, management bodies and intermediaries, families and students, foundations and social organisations, etc.
4. Establishing programmes for removing obstacles and creating the appropriate environment for successful mobility initiatives: reducing language barriers, familiarity with different cultural realities and productive socio-economic backgrounds, etc.
5. Agreeing a timetable and specific targets for the Europass, ECVET and EQAVET programmes to lay the foundations for a European area of reliability and mutual trust between stakeholders, an essential element in achieving the ambitious targets of the programmes.
6. Identifying with sufficient clarity intermediaries to assume new operational roles and responsibilities in ensuring mobility, a key task that is currently only partially completed. The relative weakness of vocational training as a whole is all the more evident in this area when compared with the undisputed strength of the network of European universities, which ensures that bilateral relationships yield optimal results.

Establishing joint regional agencies or consortia in partnership between educational establishments and business thus appears the best operational solution.
7. Ensuring that mobility paves the way for employability. The first battleground concerns the recognition of not only studies but also of acquired skills and accredited professional experience, including that obtained in other countries through mobility programmes.
8. Adapting educational systems to successfully address skills mismatches.
9. Paying particular attention to the training and mobility of teachers involved in the process of vocational training, by means of specially designed exchange programmes for them, with or without the obligation to accompany and train groups or students.

10. Building sector- or region-specific business clusters to be directly involved in running mobility programmes as recipients of trainees and as providers of professional experience tailored to meet the desired educational objective.

These 10-point guidelines for policy action are intended for all vocational training stakeholders and require the explicit leadership of the European Commission and specialised agencies in the sector, particularly CEDEFOP, which must be given a key role and well-defined, well-respected responsibilities.