

## LEARNING MOBILITY FOR ALL: A LIFELONG LEARNING APPROACH TO TARGETS, PROCESS AND MONITORING

The Strategic Framework for Cooperation in Education and Training signals to Member States common priorities, so the whole Union harmonises their work for the next decade. The new Framework 2021-2030 continues to include lifelong learning and mobility as priorities, as it was in previous EU strategies, but as opposed to the previous strategy, it fails to put forward learning mobility targets for 2030. In short, there is no benchmark to measure the EU's progress in “making learning mobility a reality for all” – a key objective of the framework and the [European Education Area](#) as well as one of the main requests by citizens through the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE)<sup>1</sup>. This topic is particularly critical since a key target of the previous strategy – [20% of mobile higher education graduates](#) – was not reached. Additionally, great disparities exist between the Member States, as the latest Education and Training Monitors describe<sup>2</sup>. They also show that the countries with a larger number of mobilities are those that also complement EU programmes with national initiatives, thus indicating that a solely EU-based initiative is not sufficient.

### ● LEARNING MOBILITY TARGETS

**Why is it important to establish targets?** The Lifelong Learning Platform considers clearly defined targets a key element to not only measure the progress in the learning mobility priority of the Strategic Framework but also to support the delivery of the European Education Area. Consequently, by widening the setting of targets to all education and training sectors, the EU would ensure a lifelong learning dimension, giving visibility to all forms of learning and the importance of learning mobility in all educational sectors and stages of life.

Developing appropriate indicators and setting context-relevant targets improve data collection for informed decision-making, as well as the quality of mobility opportunities, and reinforce the inclusion dimension by ensuring all learners have equal access to these opportunities and tailored support when undertaking a mobility. We now have an opportunity to strive for common EU targets for learning mobility for learners and educators, namely in Higher Education, VET, school education

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<sup>1</sup> [48 Proposal: Culture and Exchanges - Measure 1](#): Promote European exchanges in different fields, both physically and digitally, including educational exchanges, twinning, travel and professional mobility (including for teachers and local elected politicians). Such exchanges should be made accessible across Member States for all, regardless of their age, level of education, background and financial means. With this overall aim, the EU should inter alia strengthen existing EU level exchange and mobility programmes, such as the European Solidarity Corps, Erasmus+ and DiscoverEU, and ensure more widespread and diverse participation in these programmes... The local and regional authorities, under the auspices of the Committee of the Regions have a key role to play in this matter.

<sup>2</sup> Education and Training Monitors: [2022](#), [2021](#), [2020](#), [2019](#), [2018](#)

and adult learning. Following the [Council conclusions on a benchmark for learning mobility from 2011](#), an indicator of the percentage of young people participating in learning mobility could also be included.

The establishment of targets and benchmarks must always reach further and contribute to boosting the quality of learning mobility. To this end, those learning providers that will contribute to the achievement of any targets and benchmarks in learning mobility, and who hold the expertise of running mobility programmes, should be supported to achieve improved access to EU and other funding programmes through a simplification of the administrative burden of the programmes and adequate capacity building for providers and organisations to navigate the different programmes. A better structural financing of the learning mobility sector, coupled with active participation of providers and organisations can ensure the success of inclusive mobilities.

**What should be the targets? How should they be defined?** The targets should be more ambitious than the ones of the previous Strategic Framework, yet realistic and achievable. Existing targets should be doubled, while covering a period of 10 years. Therefore, securing ample space to improve current programmes and mobility schemes and develop new complementary ones if needed, with a long-term perspective in mind. The Lifelong Learning Platform would like to see in any upcoming Council Recommendation a specific commitment to setting targets by the time of the next programming period. This commitment must be reinforced by clear reference to a co-creation process which actively involves all relevant stakeholders including civil society organisations representing learners, educators and beyond.

**Quality physical mobility at the centre:** Learners demand real learning mobilities. This entails considering mobilities that have as key tenets: a physical movement of learners accompanied by clear learning objectives. Virtual learning and blended formats gained renewed attention due to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, virtual exchanges must not be individually counted towards mobility indicators in order to patch up mobility targets. We strongly advise against the use of the term ‘virtual mobility’ as it is misleading and does not represent the physical movement of learners<sup>3</sup>. Virtual exchanges also erase the opportunity of social engagement in a different country and cultures, and do not represent an alternative for those disadvantaged learners who deserve an equal opportunity to benefit from learning mobilities. Data collection on virtual exchanges, blended mobilities (combination of virtual formats and physical mobility of learners) and physical mobilities

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<sup>3</sup> [Programme Guide 2023 - Learning mobility](#): Moving physically to a country other than the country of residence, possibly combined with a period of virtual participation, in order to undertake study, training or non-formal or informal learning. It may take the form of traineeships, apprenticeships, youth exchanges, teaching or participation in a professional development activity, and may include preparatory activities, such as training in the host language, as well as sending, receiving and follow-up activities.

should thus be raised and processed separately in a way that allows for data disaggregation and transparency.

### ● LEARNING MOBILITY PROCESS

**Addressing barriers to mobility:** Any future Council Recommendation on this matter must acknowledge the different types of barriers faced by participants, establishing clear categories based on evidence. Examples coming from Higher Education propose a categorisation which can be relevant for different sectors: institutional, environmental and attitudinal barriers<sup>4</sup>. These categorisations point to the importance of awareness raising, information sharing and guidance of learners. Evidence shows that together with financial and linguistic barriers, targeted information addressing the concerns of different target groups play an important role in engaging learners in mobilities<sup>56</sup>. Whole-institution approaches are needed to surmount those barriers: educational institutions are important actors in this, but also families, and informal networks (i.e. volunteering organisations) are important to foster motivation in learners<sup>7</sup>. Exchange must be facilitated and encouraged at the local level among learning providers, learners, parents, NGOs and other civil society actors.

In order to improve the process of mobility for learners and change their perceptions and attitudes towards learning mobility, more investment is needed in information and guidance support for learners with research suggesting better segmenting the audience through a combination of digital and local outreach, and building bridges between information providers and learners directly<sup>8</sup>. Another facet of information needs concerns the funding available for learners. More transparency is needed in terms of what is covered with the funding and when it will be available<sup>9</sup>. More and better public investment is also necessary to ensure learners from lower-income backgrounds have equal access to information and financial support matching their needs. Similarly, learners from rural areas require more and better public investment to ensure their access to information, as this tends to be more easily accessed in urban areas.

Increased funding for individuals should be accompanied by more support to strengthen the structures of learning providers that can set up those mobility opportunities ensuring quality and

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<sup>4</sup> [Allinson K., Gabriels W.\(2021\)](#). Maybe it will be different abroad; student and staff perspectives on diversity and inclusion in student exchanges. Social Inclusion and Engagement in Mobility (SIEM project) Research Report

<sup>5</sup> [Eurodesk \(2022\)](#). YOUTH INFO SURVEY 2022. Mobility and the Role of Youth Information.

<sup>6</sup> [Allinson K., Gabriels W.\(2021\)](#). Maybe it will be different abroad; student and staff perspectives on diversity and inclusion in student exchanges. Social Inclusion and Engagement in Mobility (SIEM project) Research Report

<sup>7</sup> [Erasmus in schools project \(2022\)](#). Erasmus in Schools. Research on the knowledge and the interest of high school students regarding International Mobility: report on the findings of the survey

<sup>8</sup> [Eurodesk \(2022\)](#). YOUTH INFO SURVEY 2022. Mobility and the Role of Youth Information.

<sup>9</sup> [Erasmus Student Network \(2022\)](#): For more inclusive & engaging Erasmus+ mobilities. Technical recommendations to adapt the Erasmus+ documents involved in Erasmus+ student mobilities.

inclusion. Educational institutions, especially schools, experience difficulties in managing certain types of mobility which require specific support to the learners (i.e. individual pupil mobility). Civil society or non-governmental organisations that facilitate learning mobility also require flexibility to allocate funding based on learners' needs. Similarly, although VET centres recognise the positive spillover effects of learning mobility, their staff is not sufficiently prepared to facilitate their processes of internationalisation. Any upcoming Council recommendation should highlight how cross-sectoral cooperation between educational institutions, civil society, policy makers and non profit organisations experts in learning mobility is the key to ensuring access to and quality of mobility programmes.

**Ensuring the availability of support services** is paramount for facilitating successful mobilities. Learners experience different needs, while access to housing, health care, leisure, accessible learning conditions, access to scholarships becomes ever more difficult as a mobile learner. There needs to be sufficient resources and incentives to maintain such services in order to ensure that learning mobility is tailored to the specificity of the beneficiaries. Disadvantaged learners (socio-economically disadvantaged, learners with disabilities) require allocation of funding based on their particular situation as well as tailored support services that allow them to navigate the different resources that are available to provide them with an equitable mobile learning experience. If the framework is to expand to broader categories of learners that can engage in mobility, the benefits of transnational paid educational leave cannot be stressed enough. As this is missing in many EU countries, guidance on how it can be achieved is crucial as it would facilitate the participation of adults in employment in mobilities, while also supporting those most disadvantaged adults who might have experienced income loss<sup>10</sup>.

**Blended mobilities and virtual exchanges:** During the Covid-19 pandemic isolation period, virtual exchanges became a backup option for learning mobility. In the aftermath of the pandemic, virtual exchanges as a type of mobility have gained traction, misleadingly referring to virtual mobilities. The Lifelong Learning Platform, expects the Council Recommendation to draw clear lines and decouple this from the understanding of mobility and in the calculation of learning mobility indicators. However, virtual exchanges have proved they can be an added value to physical mobility if used as support to enhance the experience of the learner before, during and after their physical mobility. This format of blended mobility should be encouraged only insofar as it presents benefits to the learner's experience and, as highlighted previously, it should remain possible to also understand the data separately when monitoring the achievement of mobility targets.

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<sup>10</sup> [European Association for the Education of Adults \(2023\): Widening Access to Adult Learning through Transnational Paid Education Leave Schemes for All Workers.](#)

**Greening learning mobility:** Virtual exchanges have also been put at the forefront as a way of greening learning mobility programmes. Endangering learning mobility itself, as funding shifts from physical mobility to virtual exchanges in the name of sustainability. While all sectors must strive to ingrain sustainability in all their activities, funding decisions should be made through holistic evaluations of programmes and infrastructure. From the use of transport to undertake mobility not just of learners but also staff and giving incentives to shift to greener options as well as improving the infrastructure of learning centres and households; shifts that need increased public funding to allow learners to exercise their right to education, including experiencing learning mobility. Education must remain a public good, as it is together with the health sector a foundational pillar in our societies. Any guidance coming from the EU must underline the importance of structural changes needed to ensure learners are able to undertake mobility in sustainable ways, including through additional financial support at national and regional level. Cross border mobilities can also be further encouraged as part of mobility programmes at different levels.

**Recognition and validation:** No mobility programme is complete without the recognition of the learning periods abroad and the validation of the competences acquired by the learners. Funding needs to be available to implement recognition and validation systems that are easy to navigate for learners, parents and learning providers. The Council Recommendation must provide clear measures to the Member States to foster trust and transparency across education systems, as well as establish new and improve existing systems to widen their scope to all sectors of education and training. The school, VET, adult learning and non-formal learning sectors should be properly supported in this process.

**Regional and local level:** The Council Recommendation must provide clear guidelines for Member States to work with the regional and local levels. These actors have a key role in administrative support and in the creation of adequate structures to support learning mobility. When regional and local governments invest in these areas, there is a boost in participation in learning mobility projects. Regional and local funding for mobility can support EU and national funding in ensuring mobility is widened to more sectors, creating synergies among different funding programmes, including EU programmes such as ESF+, Interreg, etc.

## ● MONITORING LEARNING MOBILITY

**Quantitative and Qualitative indicators:** The Council Recommendation must provide Member States with clear guidelines for monitoring all learning mobility across the EU. Quantitative indicators must be accompanied by qualitative indicators, which allow civil servants and decision-makers to have a more comprehensive understanding of the situation and take appropriate action to address the issues that arise. In order to calculate the indicators, we can consider the percentage of mobile

learners within the total number of learners in a particular sector, following the model from Higher Education. This model can be adapted to match the characteristics of each sector through a consultation process that includes governmental, academic and civil society representatives.

Any upcoming Recommendation should support the development of a cross-sectoral monitoring process, where mobilities across different sectors and EU funding programmes are counted as well as national, regional and local mobility programmes, including those that are undertaken by individuals with private organisations (nonprofit and for profit). If given the right frameworks and tools, learning providers and other supporting organisations will be able to accurately record their learner's mobilities.

Moving beyond quantitative data, no decision-making process is complete without adequate qualitative indicators to ensure policies and programmes can be improved in the right direction and in a more comprehensive manner. The monitoring of learning mobility should also include the learning outcomes and how learners are supported before, during and after their mobility period. Civil society organisations can also be valuable partners by raising the voices of learners, learning providers and mobility facilitators on the ground.

**Quality data management:** The Council Recommendation must also provide guidance to standardise and raise the quality of data collection across Member States. The EU, national, regional and local levels have clear responsibilities in data collection, analysis and use of the findings. Despite this shared responsibility, the sub-national levels need additional support to build their data management capacities in order to ensure quality data is collected and that the collection complies with standards across Member States, guaranteeing coherence and comparability. Failing to support regional and local administrations will hurt the achievement of our common goals.

At all times, transparency must be kept, from the way data is collected, to the availability of the data and its analysis presented to the general public as well as how the data is used for decision-making. Despite the information on learning mobility having lost its relevance within the publication, the Education and Training Monitor remains a key medium to present the learning mobility progress at the EU, national and regional levels. Scoreboards have also been shown to be dynamic tools that can ensure the availability of data on a more regular basis and provide a centralised and transparent database accessible to all stakeholders. The presence of mobility findings in the Education and Training Monitor must cover all sectors of learning, as in recent years the Monitor narrowly collected more data on Higher Education with a detailed attention provided to VET in the latest edition due to COVID-19 impacts. At the same time, this overview of learners' mobilities must be complemented by data collection on educators' mobilities. Lastly, The Lifelong Learning Platform would like to see the

streamlining of mobility data and scoreboards in the European Semester, to ensure that EU recommendations regarding national funding in education and training will also target mobilities.

**The role of public funding:** To effectively operationalise the monitoring process and develop a quality monitoring system, sufficient public funding is needed from all levels, from EU funds to national, regional and local funding. The funding must be distributed according to the needs of the different actors and ensure they reach the actors most in need. As highlighted previously, building the capacity of civil servants, learning providers and educators to guarantee quality data collection is essential and cannot be properly implemented without adequate resources.

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