Learning from experience: integrating disadvantaged young people through mobility schemes

ESF Transnational Cooperation Platform

Community of Practice on Employment, Education and Skills

Written by ICF
March 2022

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion
Unit G.1 — European Social Fund+

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2022

Manuscript completed in March 2022

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Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2022

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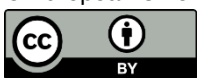

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PDF ISBN 978-92-76-53430-3 doi: 10.2767/48360 KE-07-22-489-EN-N

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What is the European Social Fund (ESF) Transnational Cooperation Platform?

Mutual learning is at the core of the ESF Transnational Cooperation Platform and its four Communities of Practice (CoP): employment, education and skills; social inclusion; results-based management; and social innovation.

The ESF Transnational Cooperation Platform gives CoP members, including managing authorities, intermediate bodies and other ESF stakeholders, the opportunity to participate in mutual learning activities and tackle common challenges together. The CoPs were created as a place for members to share ideas and concerns, deepen knowledge and expertise, and help one another to solve problems with practical approaches.

The mutual learning activities generate hands-on outputs such as toolkits, guides, practice mapping, checklists and recommendation papers that can inspire practitioners and policymakers alike.

Introduction

Trans-European mobility has been at the core of EU education policy since the introduction of mobility programmes in the 1980s when the Erasmus and Youth for Europe programmes were introduced (in 1987 and 1988, respectively).[1] Under the SOCRATES, Lifelong Learning Programme (particularly the Leonardo and Erasmus strands) and the Erasmus+ programmes mobility has become an important tool to provide young people with an experience of studying and working abroad. Significantly, the new Erasmus+ programme for the 2021-27 period will have an estimated budget of EUR 26.2 billion, almost double the amount allocated to the 2014-20 programming period, with 70% of the budget dedicated to mobility.[2]

Mobility programmes have demonstrated that they can have an impact on learners' skills and competences as well as wider skills such as level of autonomy, confidence, independence, and open mindedness.[3] In addition, a mobility period can help learners to define their future career and life choices. The evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme found that participants had a shorter transition time between education and employment.[4].The research on the longer-term investment of mobility programmes is in its infancy, for example, with ongoing research (at the time of writing) into the cost-benefit analysis of mobility programmes in Czechia. However, mobility should be considered as a longer-term investment in individuals, particularly those from vulnerable groups as they may endure less periods of unemployment compared to their peers.

Historically, existing mobility programmes such as the Leonardo programme and Erasmus+ programmes have tried to target those with fewer opportunities as part of the focus on social inclusion, but they have not been extremely successful. The category of 'fewer opportunities' is extremely broad and has tended to cover young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs), unemployed and underemployed, people with disabilities and minorities.[5] The mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ 2014-20 programme found that just 11.5% of the total number of participants in Erasmus+ were disadvantaged young people. The evaluation stressed that the programme needs to do more to reach out to more vulnerable young people.[6]

In 2008 the German ESF managing authority recognised that vulnerable young people and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds were less able to partake in transnational mobility opportunities as they faced multiple barriers, thus decreasing their opportunities to develop transversal and work-based skills that could help boost their employability. The German managing authority established the IdA (Integration through Exchange) programme in 2008 which aimed to integrate disadvantaged young people into employment, vocational training and education by improving their skills, knowledge, and experience through traineeships in other EU countries. The key feature is a project cycle in which an internship is embedded, including an intensive preparation and follow-up phase for participants and comprehensive pedagogical support.

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[1] *Learning Mobility in the Field of Youth*, web article by Lisa Briga (May 2018), available at https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/learning-mobility

[2] European Commission (2021), Erasmus+ 2021-2027: Enriching lives, opening minds through the EU programme for education, training, youth and sport, available at https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/ff1edfdf-8bca-11eb-b85c-01aa75ed71a1/language-en

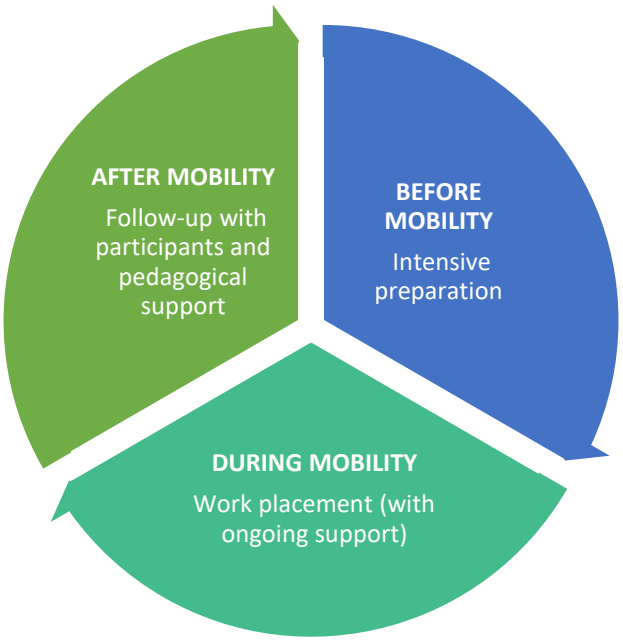
[3] European Commission (2017), Combined evaluation of Erasmus+ and predecessor programmes, available at https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/3d783015-228d-11e8-ac73-01aa75ed71a1/language-en)

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] European Commission (2018), Mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme (2014-2020), available at http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/FR/TXT/?uri=COM:2018:50:FIN

Figure 1 Three phases of mobility programmes



The ESF Learning Network on Transnational Mobility Measures for Disadvantaged Youth and Young Adults (TLN Mobility) was established in 2013. TLN Mobility emerged, motivated by the very good results achieved by the IdA programme (including an integration rate of up to 60%), with other member states and regions were interested in setting up similar programmes. In order to bring together and synchronise these programmes, the TLN Mobility was set up, bringing together ESF managing authorities from 15 member states and regions. The TLN Mobility built on the results of the IdA project and aimed to integrate disadvantaged young people and young adults by improving their skills, knowledge, and experience through work-related learning experiences abroad. The mobility experiences offered via TLN Mobility are a stepping-stone for disadvantaged groups, who can then progress back into education, training, or suitable employment after their mobility period.

TLN Mobility developed an in-depth knowledge around the preparation of mobility calls for proposals and all aspects of the mobility lifecycle, including common quality standards and coordinated calls, and provided mutual support for projects including the establishment of a partner-search database. It also developed a Manual of Guidance,[7] which together with the Coordinated Call is a useful starting point for managing authorities wishing to develop new programmes or enhance existing programmes. As such, the network has been a useful starting point for transnational synchronisation of national and regional schemes that could be applied to future ESF mobility programmes.

[7] https://www.esf.de/portal/EN/Funding-period-2014-2020/TLN-Mobility/Coordinated-Call/Downloads/content.html

Figure 2 TLN Network Coordinated Call and Manual of Guidance

TLN Mobility can also provide managing authorities with practical support on all aspects of mobility programmes stemming from practical experience of the countries involved – including bilateral meetings, sharing information, and workshops.

In terms of achievements, the TLN Mobility reports that after mobility experience young people have a higher degree of self-confidence, purpose, and openness, and they have a clearer picture of what they want to do next. The experience, competences, and skills that participants gain during their mobility period are valued by employers and thus make them more employable. By offering mobility to disadvantaged young people, ESF is adding value to participants' lives and addressing a gap in the existing provision of mobility programmes.

There is now an opportunity to take forward the success of the TLN Mobility within the ESF+ context via the new ALMA (Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve) initiative,[8] which aims to provide young people, not in employment, education or training who are experiencing disadvantages, with intensive support throughout three phases of mobility:

- Before mobility: participants will receive intensive tailor-made training in their home country;
- During mobility: Participants will be offered a supervised work experience with an accompanying mentoring service, for 2 to 6 months in another EU member state;
- After mobility: Upon their return, they will receive continued support to guide them to use their new skills in their home country to gain employment or further education and training.

ALMA is an active inclusion initiative. It will target young people who have difficulties finding a job, or who are in long-term unemployment, have insufficient school performance or vocational skills, a migration background, or live with disabilities. It will be a flagship initiative

[8] For more information on ALMA, see https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1549&langId=en

for the European Commission within the context of the European Pillar of Social Rights and its launch will coincide with the European Year of Youth 2022.

ALMA can contribute to creating the conditions for other countries so that they can deliver similar initiatives as part of ESF+, thus providing young NEETs with opportunities to change their lives. Providing support to disadvantaged young people to become more employment-ready is even more important against a backdrop of rising NEET levels in all member states[9] (with a European average of 15% of young people classed as NEET). Young people have also been one of the hardest hit groups[10] by the COVID-19 pandemic and thus there is a real urgency for measures to be introduced to support this group.

Results from TLN Mobility Network

TLN Mobility Network factsheet: https://www.esf.de/portal/SharedDocs/Downloads/EN/tln/about-tln-mobility.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=1

TLN Mobility Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZexVMSa2ek&list=PLtAGM-UuCK6_rxfkYHYyVs33SopoLwZzg

This paper was produced following a Peer Review on 'Supporting disadvantaged young people to take part in mobility', which took place in May 2021. It aims to show lessons learnt from previous initiatives which can be useful for setting up schemes under the ALMA initiative. The paper includes practical examples describing how ESF managing authorities have addressed specific issues.

[9] http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do

[10] Eurofound (2020), Youth in a time of COVID, available at https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/blog/youth-in-a-time-of-covid

Table 1. The Mobility Lifecycle Stages: Overview of core and additional aspects at EU level, managing authority, and project promoter level at each stage of the mobility lifecycle

	Before		During		After	
	Core	Additional	Core	Additional	Core	Additional
EU level	• Framework and guidelines for managing authorities on designing calls for proposals					
	On-going aspects: • Evaluation and feedback incorporated at all stages • Events to bring together managing authorities to share experiences, challenges and common solutions and a sense of a community • Events to bring together project promoters to share success stories, impact of mobility and create a European community • Framework and guidelines for managing authorities on supporting projects					
Managing authority	• Support for project promoters in designing high quality mobility programmes • Support for projects to find partners • Publish and undertake selection process					
	On-going aspects: • Support to projects (more intensive support to those with less experience), including assigned point of contact to follow the project • Events to bring projects together, facilitating exchange of experience and networking, which will contribute to better quality applications • Monitoring of project, including technical implementation and financial management • Evaluation of projects on an on-going basis, with regular feedback loops with project promoters • Supporting projects with transnational cooperation, including challenges and advising on potential solutions					
Project promoters	• Establish project cooperation, partnership and matching with transnational partner • Language, work and cultural preparation • Bring mentor and participants together • Set up individual learning and development plans for participants • Tailored support package for participants • Preparation activities start two months before mobility	• Financial management preparation, or other (depending on group needs) • Use 'success stories' and peer to peer support, via group activities, to inspire participants and to create a support network	• Ongoing contact with target group • Work with transnational partner to ensure work placement suitable for participant • Mentor accompanies group (depending on needs) • Non-work based group activities to develop soft skills	• Psychological support to mentors	• Follow up with participants • Coaching support to support them with the next steps • Analysing and reporting participant progress • Set up an integration strategy • Prepare employers to provide employment for participants	• Support for employers when hiring participants • Use peer-to-peer support to inspire
	On-going aspects: • Measuring the distance travelled of participants • On-going dialogue between the sending and hosting organisations • Close monitoring of young people • On-going evaluation and creation of feedback loops with participants, to inform the design and evaluation of project activities					

1. Possible approaches for managing authorities

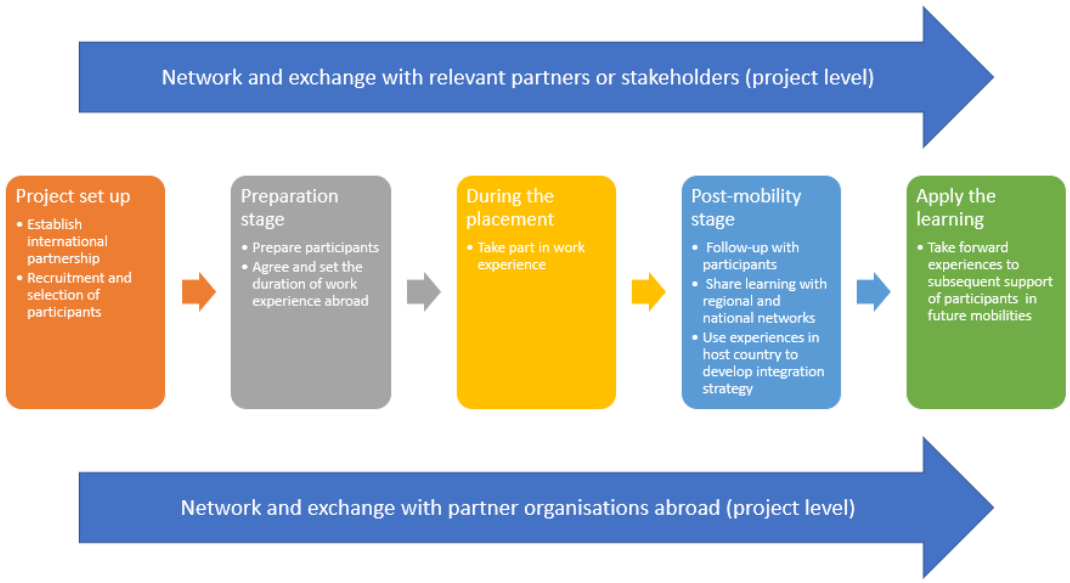
Off-the-shelf solutions for mobility programmes are available and they can be tailored to local needs

The TLN Mobility has developed a range of 'off-the-shelf' solutions – different models of mobility programmes and measures - that can be adapted to local needs and target groups. Detailed information is provided in the Coordinated Call framework document and Manual of Guidance, produced by the network. Managing authorities who are considering developing their own ESF+ mobility programmes can use these solutions as a starting point and they can be (and have been) adapted to local needs and target groups for national or regional calls. This can make it easier than developing a programme from scratch. The off-the-shelf solutions must be tailored to local needs so that they are fit-for-purpose.

Within mobility programmes, there are cornerstone aspects of the management that need to be considered and can be adjusted accordingly to local needs and target group. This includes:

- Selection and preparation of participants;
- Length of stay abroad for work experience. For example in the IdA programme this was between two to six months;
- Group size. For example in the IdA, programme groups included between 8 and 12 participants;
- Pedagogical support for participants before, during, and after the stay abroad;
- Allowances and reimbursements for participant-related costs and organisational costs;

Figure 3 Project lifecycle for mobility programmes



In addition, ESF+ managing authorities and intermediate bodies need to put in place quality standards. The IdA programme put in place minimum quality standards that covered the following aspects:

- Participant recruitment and selection: establishing mechanisms to identify participants who, with the appropriate level of support, will benefit from taking part in mobility in terms of integration into educaiton, training, and employment;
- Participant preparation: setting up individualised learning and development plans, as well as offering intercultural, language, and professional and practical preparation, and providing mentoring support;
- The stay abroad: ensuring that projects have a programme of support in place for developing non-formal skills and competences, language learning activities, and mentoring support;
- Follow-up phase: implementing methods to monitor and record participants' progress, and preparing employers to offer employment opportunities to the participants.

The experience of different countries and regions in the TLN Mobility shows that programmes, such as the ALMA initiative, can be developed in a flexible way that suits the managing authority. When managing authorities are starting with mobility programmes under ESF+ they may wish to start with limited roles, such as only sending participants, which is the approach that has been taken in Czechia. This approach could be tested through pilot projects incorporated into national or regional programmes. Managing authorities can then consider whether they want to increase complexity over time, for example, by introducing the requirement to host participants which is possible under the mobility programmes in Germany, Poland, Catalonia (Spain), and Sweden. This allows managing authorities and project promoters to become familiar with the mobility lifecycle and builds trust between these stakeholders.

In some cases, managing authorities may wish to consult with project promoters to gather their real-life experiences of delivering mobility projects on the ground via online surveys, questionnaires, and in-depth interviews. These valuable insights can be used by managing authorities to develop mobility programmes further in the future. Alternatively, managing authorities can develop mobility programmes that include both sending and receiving (hosting) participants. Activities are outlined within a cooperation agreement that outlines the specific tasks, roles, and responsibilities of each partner. Importantly, managing authorities are not involved in the hosting activities as this is arranged directly between the sending and the host organisations.

The duration of projects is also flexible and managing authorities can choose a length that suits them. Importantly, a single project cycle for one cohort of participants should be long enough to allow project promoters to engage in outreach and preparation activities. The time for these activities, particularly the outreach, is often much longer when working with vulnerable young people as they may not necessarily be registered with any services or organisations, such as public employment services.

Within the TLN Mobility, mobility programme duration varies from one year (Catalan region, Spain) to two years (Czechia) with a maximum of four years (in Germany). Longer programming periods do offer the advantage of less administrative work for managing authorities as they include fewer calls for proposals and selection of projects.

Lastly, managing authorities can apply flexibility with regards to different financial arrangements for project promoters. Flat rates, simplified cost options, and real costs are three different approaches used by managing authorities who are currently delivering mobility programmes. Managing authorities need to consider what type of financial arrangements would work for them given the resources available, and balance against what would work for project promoters. For example, real costs may be easier for projects to understand and to submit their financial information but undertaking the review and approval of project claims using real costs is a more time-consuming task that will require additional support for the staff involved.

Creating a mobility programme using a flexible building block approach

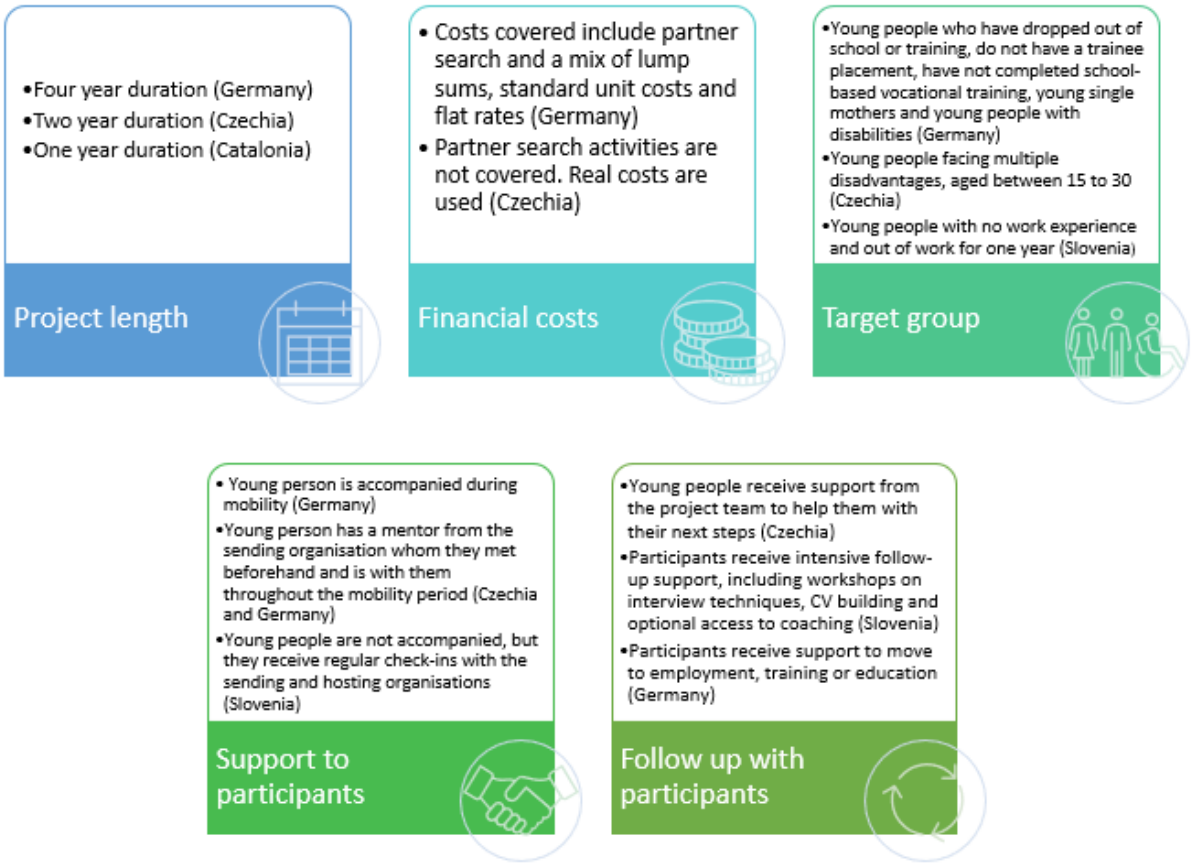
The core building blocks of a mobility programme are:

- Sending participants, or sending and hosting participants (if project partners are willing to do so);
- Project length;
- Target group;
- Financial costs;
- Support to participants;
- Follow-up with participants.

These building blocks can be adapted to the local context and the needs of the managing authority in charge.

In Germany mobility programmes have been in place since 2008 through funding of 114 projects between 2008-14 and of 32 projects between 2015-21. The objective is to integrate disadvantaged young people into employment, vocational training and education by improving their skills, knowledge, and experiences through traineeships in other EU countries. In contrast, mobility programmes are a relatively new approach in Czechia with two calls for proposals launched in 2015 and 2018, funding 18 and 14 projects, respectively. While in Slovenia, the managing authority has funded one pilot project led by the Employment Services of Slovenia. The diagram below outlines the core building blocks and how they have been flexibly adjusted by the German, Czech, and Slovenian managing authorities.

Figure 4. Building blocks of mobility programmes and flexible adjustment by managing authorities



Supporting mobility programmes under ESF +

Managing authorities can use the materials produced by the TLN Mobility to develop their programmes under the ALMA initiative. The existing materials and good practices can be adjusted to different settings. Established tools, such as the TLN partner search database, can be shared by managing authorities to help potential project promoters find suitable partners.

The TLN Mobility has also developed a Coordinated Call and comprehensive Manual of Guidance that outlines how to set up coordinated calls. It also includes useful examples of good practice from the TLN Mobility and from other mobility programmes.

The TLN Mobility can also support other managing authorities by organising bilateral meetings, small workshops, sharing example documentation, and offering ad hoc practical advice.

Managing authorities can start small and build on the approach over time

Managing authorities can start small in their approach to mobility and allow time to listen to projects, and work with them to adjust their delivery where possible. By adopting a flexible approach, managing authorities will learn what works and what needs to be improved for future calls. Experience from the Czechia and Slovenian managing authorities shows that different approaches to starting mobility programmes can be taken. For example, in Czechia their first call funded 18 projects whereas in Slovenia the managing authority has piloted one large multi-year project, covering several cohorts of participants, that is being led by the Employment Services of Slovenia (the public employment services). Through each mobility cohort the project can apply lessons learned and improve their delivery. These lessons are shared with the managing authority, and they can be applied to the development of programmes beyond the pilot programme.

The start-up and preparatory phase of mobility projects need more support or guidance in reaching and engaging their target group, establishing partnerships with relevant stakeholders, and establishing the systems, processes, and procedures that are specific to mobility projects. Organisations with less experience of mobility will need much more intensive support, 'hand-holding' as such, at the start and throughout the project lifecycle. With this in mind, managing authorities can start with a small cohort of projects as a way of building the capacity of the managing authority and project promoter.

Intra-mobility can be a useful tool to address challenges raised by cross-border mobility

Organising mobility activities or projects entirely within national boundaries (referred to here as 'intra-mobility') can be used as a tool to address logistical challenges that may occur to organising cross-border mobility, such as national/regional restrictions being in place for cross-border travel. During the COVID-19 pandemic, intra-mobility has been used by a managing authority and has led to positive results.

In Sweden, intra-mobility was introduced to the MOVES project[11] as a mechanism to go forward with mobility experiences notwithstanding the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent travel restrictions. The MOVES project responds to the ESF call in Sweden to provide mobility experiences for 200 people aged between 18 and 30 years who have become alienated from the labour market. The national project brings together six regional areas within Sweden to provide work placements for participants, whose specific needs and characteristics differ by region but who are experiencing similar difficulties in general concerning finding a job and low self-esteem.

The project partners suggested to the managing authority that intra-mobility could be used as a way forward in 2020 instead of stopping activities altogether. The partners also consulted participants: approximately half of them replied that intra-mobility was still attractive to them as cross-border mobility is a big step, considering that many of them had never even left their local community.

[11] *The MOVES project gives young people new opportunities,* video available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CJsmaOqMNRY (English subtitles available)

The COVID-19 pandemic restrictions also had an impact on the recruitment process as sending organisations have not been able to meet face-to-face with participants for the first information session. In the past, this session has proved to be very valuable to build links and trust with participants. Other aspects of the preparation and work placements have been adapted for delivery under COVID-19 conditions, including:

- Adapting in-person introduction sessions to online sessions, and subsequent individual and group sessions to online meetings and webinars;
- Providing IT equipment to those who do not have access to;
- Changing the content of preparation activities to include cultural references relevant for Sweden (local travel and dialects), information on working rights, and how they can actively take part in society so that participants are prepared for life beyond their placement;
- More time was spent on expected work behaviours (such as punctuality, as an example) and transferable skills, like communication as the preperation did not need to cover language preperation;
- During the work placement, mentors from the sending organisation were on location with the mobility participants for one week before the care and support of participants was transferred to the host organisation. Sending organisations remained on-hand to provide distance support, if required.

To date, 83 participants have been involved. In this intra-mobility scheme more than 90% of participants have reported that they felt happy and supported during their work placements. Results indicate that participants have benefitted from their intra-mobility experiences as they have moved away from home and many amongst them have been offered a job by their hosts.

Programmes should allow flexibility at project level

Flexibility is important in project delivery as the situation of target groups, host organisations or travel restrictions (as seen in the COVID-19 pandemic) may change. Managing authorities should therefore develop mobility programmes that allow for flexibility, particularly when they target vulnerable young people.

An important aspect of flexibility relates to the achievement of anticipated results. Traditionally, the success of mobility may have been measured by the number of participants who have completed the mobility period (in terms of an output indicator) or the integration rate and increase of employability (in terms of result indicators). When designing mobility for vulnerable young people, managing authorities may want to consider what flexibility they would like to include around the completion of mobility periods. For example, in Czechia the managing authority considers it a success if participants complete even a short period of their mobility scheme as this still represents a change and/or development for them.

It is also advisable for managing authorities to work closely with their project promoters in order to monitor progress of activities and be able to identify what (if any) changes are needed and why. Many managing authorities use a case manager approach, where managing authority staff are assigned a designated number of projects within the total

number of projects funded in a specific call. Project managers provide support and monitor their designated projects from notification to completion stages. The project managers develop an in-depth understanding of their projects, partnerships, and their target group. As such, managing authorities can take on a role of 'partner', or 'advisor' when projects are starting, by offering guidance, support, and feedback, and assisting projects to solve problems.

Managing authorities can use different tools to minimise the risk in mobility projects

Managing authorities can use the call for proposals and selection process to increase the quality of mobility projects and minimise the risk. It is highly recommended that managing authorities include the following criteria in the call for proposals, which can be reviewed when selecting projects:

- The sending and host organisation provide multi-skilled teams, appropriate to the needs of the target group – including trained mentors;
- Tried and tested outreach and engagement methods are in place for targeting and selecting mobility participants are detailed with the project application;
- Support mechanisms are in place for participants across all phases of the mobility lifecycle;
- Appropiate programme of activities are in place, tailored to the needs of the target group;
- Staff from the sending organisations should have appropriate language abilities so that they can assist participants in all facets of their mobility period;
- Optional: Experience within the partnership of mobility or ESF+ funding, at least for the host organisation,

In some cases, managing authorities may want to attract organisations who may have no prior experience of ESF funding but nevertheless are well placed to support young people, such as non-governmental organisations, community, or youth organisations. This should be done through the relevant calls for proposals.

Evidence from the TLN Mobility shows that managing authorities provide more intensive support to organisations with little or no experience of ESF funding. Intensive support may be required from the initial project concept to project completion, depending on the needs of each organisation. This intensive support will help to build capacity of less experienced organisations. It can also be considered as a longer-term investment as organisations may apply again in the future for larger mobility projects and, in time, they may be interested in applying for other calls for proposals.

Supporting calls for proposals and partner search activities

Managing authorities can find more information on what to include in a call for proposals, and methods of minimising risk, in the TLN Mobility Coordinated Call and the Manual of Guidance.

The TLN Mobility Network Partner Search Database can also be promoted as a source of experienced organisations. During the piloting phase in Slovenia, the piloting organisation (Employment Services of Slovenia) chose their experienced partners from the Partner Search Database, thus minimising potential risks involved in implementing mobility programmes.

The European Commission is in the process of updating these resources.

Mobility projects working with disadvantaged young people should engage with different organisations at an early stage

Mobility can provide an under-served target group – disadvantaged young people – with an opportunity to participate in activities that can contribute to their progress towards training or employment. Disadvantaged young people may experience multiple barriers that hold them back from entering employment. For example, they may be within a negative or damaging environment (e.g., in a household where there is substance abuse), geographically isolated (with lack of local, affordable transport), have addictions or other negatives behaviours, they may not be active in society nor trust authority of any kind. With these aspects in mind, mobility can provide a valuable experience to develop skills, self-esteem, and confidence that will help them to take more positive steps towards training or employment. Importantly, the success of such activities is not measured in terms of successful transitions into employment.

In many established mobility programmes, such as in Germany and Czechia, the target group is vulnerable young people who are furthest away from the labour market and who do not have any (or at least, few positive) work experiences. This target group may not be ready to undertake a full work placement in a different country and they are likely to need enhanced support before, during, and after the mobility period. The programme of activities should be designed with this in mind, for example, by combining the work placement with additional group activities that allow participants to develop soft skills, such as team working, communication, as well as work-related experiences that can help them to move into employment, training or further education upon their return.

It is therefore important for public employment services, youth organisations, and social service providers to be fully involved in this process. ESF+ managing authorities should encourage this involvement early on within the calls for proposals. Moreover, project promoters may want to work with these stakeholders in order to reach out and engage with the most vulnerable young people who cannot be identified by the managing authorities.

Clear communication about the added value of mobility programmes is important to create buy-in

When promoting a call for proposals, for instance under the ALMA initiative, managing authorities should clearly communicate about its added value, in particular with regards to the new opportunities offered to vulnerable young people. Managing authorities' communication efforts may want to dispel any myths that project promoters (or wider stakeholders) may have about ALMA and answer questions from project promoters.

It is important for managing authorities to undertake tailored communication with potential project promoters to gain their interest. Building awareness is also a must, in particular for some organisations who may not be aware of the possibilities offered, including the ESF+ support available. Managing authorities can disseminate the message by:

- including information in written materials and also online through, for example, newsletters, websites, and social media;
- organising face-to-face or virtual events and meetings – broader information sessions, tailored sessions for selected organisations (such as youth organisations), and meetings with individual organisations.

Arranging meetings with pre-selected organisations that may be interested in the call is a particularly useful approach to communicate the added value of ESF+ mobility. For example, in Czechia the managing authority organised one-to-one meetings with youth organisations who had experience of working with vulnerable young people. The managing authority was able to explain the purpose of the call and the added value of ESF mobility and respond to questions from the project promoters.

In addition, managing authorities may also want to meet with other labour market actors, such as public employment services, to inform them about mobility programme and to address any misconceptions. A meeting can also be used to develop agreements (formal and informal) to ensure that there are complementary practices between ESF+ mobility projects and other nationally-funded projects (where possible), such as those that may be run by public employment services. In some countries this type of dialogue may also help to perceived notions of competition between different organisations or programmes.

2. Experiences at project/partnership level

Prior experience of working with the target group and proposed support arrangements

At project/partnership level it is highly recommended that applicants are requested to demonstrate their experience of working with vulnerable young people.

Within the project application, applicants should also provide details on how they will outreach, engage, and recruit their target group. Outreach and engagement methods should be tailored to the needs of the target group. For example, applicants need to

explain how they will cater for prospective project participants who do not have access to computers or who may lack literacy skills.

It is also recommended that the project application outlines the support that will be available for the target group at each stage of the mobility lifecycle, in particular:

- How they will deliver preparation activities to their target group, including language, cultural, and work-related preparation – and how they will make adaptations according to the needs of the target group (e.g., organising evening sessions, pitched at their level of understanding, using trained tutors to deliver training);
- Arrangements and back-up plans for replacing dropout participants (if possible) prior to the mobility phase;
- How they will bring peer groups together before the mobility phase i.e., face-to-face and/or virtually;
- Support activities during the mobility phase via mentors for participants, and protocols for emergency situations and in cases where participants drop out during mobility;
- Follow-up with participants after completion and upon return home.

Mobility for disadvantaged young people requires clear and strong partnerships between sending and hosting partners

Mobility for disadvantaged young people who may be experiencing multiple barriers may involve more responsibility for the sending and hosting partners than other mobility programmes as the participants need more intensive support. Therefore, it is very important that the partnership between sending and hosting partners is well-established.

Managing authorities and intermediate bodies can include specific criteria within the calls for proposal to encourage good quality partnerships that offer offering ongoing support and guidance throughout the project lifetime. Managing authorities and intermediate bodies should request that applications describe in detail the following aspects:

- How the partners will get to know each other (understanding and agreeing common aims and objectives, organisational aspects and the target group, and more widely);
- How they will develop or deepen mutual trust – this can be demonstrated by evidence of cooperation in previous transnational projects;
- How the partners will develop a common view about the project and the stay abroad;
- How the partners will work together – e.g., how many meetings will take place and when, how they will be conducted (i.e., online or face-to-face), communication processes, working languages, and how partners will resolve any conflict that might arise;

- Roles and responsibilities of the staff/partner who will be involved, and in which activities, should be clearly stated. There may be a need for specialist organisations to be involved for specific groups - for example, for young people with disabilities.

In addition, the project application should also detail the learning experiences that will be provided by the host organisation and how they are relevant to the needs of the target group.

Managing authorities can provide guidance and support to projects on partnership issues, if and when required, as well as offering guidance or recommendations with regards to host organisations.

Creating networks of project promoters at national level cross-fertilises ideas and builds capacity

It is important for organisations involved in mobility to come together at EU, national or regional level. Networking activities (virtual or face-to-face) can bring together mobility promoters to share practices, approaches and practical solutions to common issues. By meeting annually or more often, organisations can become familiar with each other, build trust, support collaboration, and create a sense of a mobility community. In Germany the managing authority organises meetings to bring together their mobility projects – the sending and host organisations are invited, thus creating a unique opportunity to share challenges and solutions and helping to cement a network of mobility promoters. Lessons learnt about the support to participants.

Project staff need to tailor support to the individual

Vulnerable young people are not a homogenous group and within each target group, individuals will have very different needs. It is therefore important for projects to tailor support packages to the needs of every participant at each stage of the mobility lifecycle to ensure that those participants who need enhanced support receive it in the right way and at the right time.

Information about each young person gathered from the outreach, engagement, and recruitment stages can be used to develop a ‘support plan’. Any knowledge and insights shared by other partners whom they are working with can also be useful to consider – adhering to data protection regulations where personal information is shared. By gathering information project promoters can base their support on real needs, not perceived needs.

Information around support needs should be shared with the mentors who will be working with participants in the preparation stages as well as accompanying the young person during the mobility stage. The mentor should have a good understanding of the needs and backgrounds of each vulnerable young person who they are mentoring in order to tailor their support and guidance. In Czechia it is a requirement to have a Czech mentor accompanying the group during mobility. A similar requirement is in place in Germany. The mentor is involved in the preparation activities where they can get to know each

participant, and their needs. The mentor can then provide and tailor the appropriate support during the mobility period according to the needs of each individual.

Furthermore, insights and information also gained by the mentor during the mobility period should be shared with the project promoter on an ongoing basis so that the project promoter can best support the participant upon their return. One option is that the mentor provides regular updates to the project promoter on the progress of the mobility period and completes a short report upon their return. Such reporting can help the project to complete formal reports as well as contribute to measuring the development of each participant.

All participants should be accompanied by a trained mentor who supports them throughout their experience

Mobility programmes that target vulnerable young people should include a requirement for all participants to have access to a mentor throughout their mobility experience. Mentors play an important role in guiding and supporting the young person across each stage of mobility. They should build links and trust with the participants, which is very important to keep the latter engaged in the project particularly considering that some vulnerable young people may have a mistrust of authority. This will allow mentors to align their support as appropriate in order to help the young person make positive steps in their life. The role of mentor is a requirement for in the case of Czechia and Germany. By making it a requirement the managing authority ensures that vulnerable young people are supported appropriately during the mobility.

It is recommended that projects demonstrate already at the application phase that the mentors possess appropriate skills to work with the specific target group. Mentors may have a background in counselling or youth work, as well as in connection to any issues faced by the target group, such as addiction. Any relevant expertise and experience will better equip mentors to identify what the young people need, and so provide appropriate and targeted support to the young people who they will accompany throughout the whole process.

A mentor should accompany vulnerable young people throughout the mobility period

Mentors should accompany the target group throughout the mobility period if it is deemed necessary by the project promoter – or stated by the managing authority within the call for proposals. It is recommended that mentors always accompany vulnerable young people to ensure that they are fully supported and are thus capable to find their way around their new environment. From a vulnerable young person's perspective, they may find it useful to have a trusted adult upon whom they can rely on at any moment, in case they have questions or need help, particularly when in a foreign country.

In cases where participants are not vulnerable young people, for example, such as long-term unemployed graduates,[12] it is recommended that mentors attend at specific points

[12] This group is not targeted by ALMA

during the mobility, if at all. For example, a mentor could be onsite at the start of the mobility period and have regular check-in calls with the young person and perhaps (if needed) have one face-to-face meeting with the participant during the mobility period. This approach can also be used where intra-mobility is used, as in the case of Sweden (mentioned in Chapter 2).

Psychological support to participants can be introduced when mobility programmes are well established

Once the ALMA initiative is well established at national/regional level, managing authorities may want to add in extra requirements that help to deliver high quality mobility, but which are not a necessity for mobility programmes to work well. One of these optional aspects is the requirement for projects to provide psychological support to supplement the pedagogical support in place.

Young people from vulnerable groups may be experiencing mental health issues, drug or alcohol addictions or other issues which, when combined with the challenges during a stay abroad, can lead to very challenging situations for the participant or the group. Psychological support can then be offered to the participant or the group to help them deal with a difficult situation, improve their understanding of the situation or their reaction, and be in a better position mentally to continue with their stay abroad.

Undertaking activities to overcome negative stereotypes to support future participants

Disadvantaged young people most often consider mobility experiences as opportunities for other people and wrongly assume that they are not open to 'people like them.' For example, they may think that mobility is for young people who performed well at school, are from wealthy and/or stable families, or do not have a disability. Managing authorities and project promoters need to address these negative perceptions from the outset when they design programmes as they may have implications for the recruitment of participants.

Evidence from the implementation of mobility programmes in Catalonia (Spain) and Czechia show that the recruitment and preparation phases are the longest phases within the mobility lifecycle. The reason for this is that project promoters often need to seek out disadvantaged young people and take proactive approaches to reach out and engage them. Disadvantaged young people are most often outside of mainstream education or training schemes and may remain 'hidden' from society. The expertise of organisations, such as youth organisations and social services providers, can identify places where disadvantaged young people gather – whether that is physical locations (such as street corners, parks) or online (social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram) - and reach out to them. Over time, they can introduce them to mobility activities as a first step towards a pathway that will help them out of their disadvantaged situation.

In addition, other enabling factors will help project promoters to engage, support, and overcome negative perceptions. Specialised staff can provide intensive 'hand-holding' support at each stage of mobility that is tailored to individual needs so that they are aware of what they need to do, why, and by when, ensuring that activities or requirements are

as simple as possible. In addition, it is important for project staff to speak to participants in straightforward language that avoids any bureaucratic language and uses points that they will be most interested in. Mentors are also useful to provide a 'bridge' between project promoter staff (including those staff at the sending and hosting partners) and they are a trusted person for participants to go to before, during, and after the mobility experience. Experiences by project promoters in Czechia show that disadvantaged young people may be initially interested in the small amounts of money that are available for subsistence, and it is only over time they begin to see the wider benefits of mobility and what it could mean for their future employment prospects.

Project promoters can use success stories to show potential participants what is possible through a mobility scheme. This peer support can help participants engage in and benefit from a mobility scheme.

It is important for projects to use 'ambassadors', that is, former participants who have made positive progress after mobility, to show that mobility opportunities are open to disadvantaged groups. If disadvantaged young people do not see themselves represented in project dissemination materials, then they are likely to believe that the opportunities are not open to them. Practically, project promoters can set up a database of potential 'success stories' by systematically asking participants at the end of their engagement if they would be happy to be contacted in the future to share their experience.

Project promoters can ask former participants to speak at preparation sessions prior to the mobility placement (either face-to-face or virtual). From a participant perspective, they can ask a peer any questions that they have about the experience, what they should expect and other practical aspects. This approach has been successfully used by projects in Czechia where previous participants have provided inspiring talks as well as ad hoc support to subsequent cohorts.

ALMA should encourage the collection and use of success stories in line with data protection regulations. At European level, success stories can help promote programmes and demonstrate their impact, as well as giving a voice to and raising awareness of certain target groups (e.g., Roma) who may benefit from participating in mobility.

Peer support activities should take place before and during mobility for vulnerable young people

It is important for participants to build relationships with their peers, particularly for vulnerable young people. This peer support can be used to keep the participants motivated as well as engaged from the preparation stage throughout the mobility stage, acting as a 'support network' whilst they during their stay abroad.

It is recommended that as part of the preparation stage project promoters organise several activities that bring a cohort of participants together so that participants can get to know each other. For mobility actions that target vulnerable young people, project promoters should organise activities that make it easy for participants to take part in. For example, online activities are not suitable for young people who do not have good (and regular) internet access. When face-to-face activities are scheduled, project promoters should ensure that they take place in a geographic location close to the target group so that they avoid travel costs and overcome obstacles around possible lack of infrastructure (e.g., lack of public transport).

During mobility activities, vulnerable young people will also benefit from peer support activities outside of the workplace as well as common meals and social activities. By including a mix of team activities and social activities, participants will be able to develop their skills further and build friendships that will help to keep them engaged, motivated, and fully participatory in the mobility process.

Project promoters can assess the extent to which peer support activities are actually needed depending on the needs and characteristics of the target group. For example, a project promoter may find that educated young people or older participants do not require the same amount of support as a disadvantaged young person who has multiple barriers.

Preparation activities can include both core activities and additional activities appropriate to the needs of the target group

Language, cultural, and work-related activities are core preparation activities that should be incorporated into any cross-border mobility experience to help prepare the participant for what they will encounter, how to interact, and expected 'good behaviour' during the mobility period.

In addition, project promoters may also want to deliver additional preparation activities that are tailored to the needs of the target group so that they can be fully prepared for their mobility experience. Additional preparation activities can include preparation on behavioural expectations during their internships and support in managing their own money.

It may be useful for project promoters to develop activities to prepare them on what behaviours are expected, particularly for vulnerable young people who have displayed behavioural issues in the past, who have specific learning needs or who lack experience in the workplace, so that they are better equipped to interact in a new environment. In Sweden and Czechia preparation activities include group sessions on work-related behaviours as many participants have no work experience, or if they have had any work experience it is likely to have been a negative experience (as seen in the case of some Swedish participants). This preparation ensures that they are aware of what is required from them during the work placement, how to react to changing situations, and how to handle difficult conversations. In this way, for example, participants are able to react in a constructive manner if they receive any feedback on the work that they have done. The pilot project in Slovenia also noted that preparatory training can be helpful to manage expectations of what will happen during and after the mobility experience, which can help to reduce any dropouts at the start of the mobility period.

In addition to work-related behaviours and expectations, experience from the TLN Mobility shows that some groups of vulnerable young people may not have any experience of managing their own money or they may be in financial debts. In Czechia, mobility project promoters identified that some participants were in financial difficulties and would benefit from additional support in managing money. Projects introduced financial management training as part of participants' preparation so that they were better equipped during their mobility period to manage their money.

It is highly recommended that preparation activities start at least two months before a mobility period starts so that participants have time to take in information. Preparation

activities should be delivered using methods that are tailored to the needs of the target group, for example, online delivery of these activities may not be suitable for all vulnerable young people.

Measuring the ‘distance travelled’ by participants can demonstrate the impact

It is important to capture the self-development of mobility participants, particularly vulnerable young people, as well as recording more numerical information. Project promoters can incorporate self-assessment activities and questionnaires before, during, and after mobility to capture participants’ progress. For example, self-assessment questionnaires can be used as part of the registration process, during the stay abroad and after the mobility period has been completed to gather information on participants’ level of autonomy, confidence levels, and work-related skills such as communication, problem solving, and teamwork.

Project promoters can anonymise the results, summarise the outcomes, and report these developments to managing authorities to demonstrate the impact of their mobility activities under ESF. Project promoters may also want to use this information when engaging future participants to demonstrate the impact that mobility activities can have.

It is also worth noting that some countries are currently the return on investment of mobility programmes via cost-benefit analysis activities. However, this work is not yet published.

Further resources

TLN Mobility resources

TLN Mobility (2014). Manual of Guidance for Coordinated Calls on ESF Transnational Mobility Measures for Disadvantaged Youth and Young Adults, available at https://www.esf.de/portal/SharedDocs/Downloads/EN/tln/Manual%20of%20Guidance.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=2

TLN Mobility website

Video on TLN Mobility

TLN Mobilicat (Catalonia) approach: https://www.catalunyavoluntaria.cat/en/tlnmobility

Simplified Cost Options resources

European Commission (2021), Guidance on Simplified Cost Options: Flat rate financing, standard scales of unit costs, lump sums, available at https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:C:2021:200:TOC

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