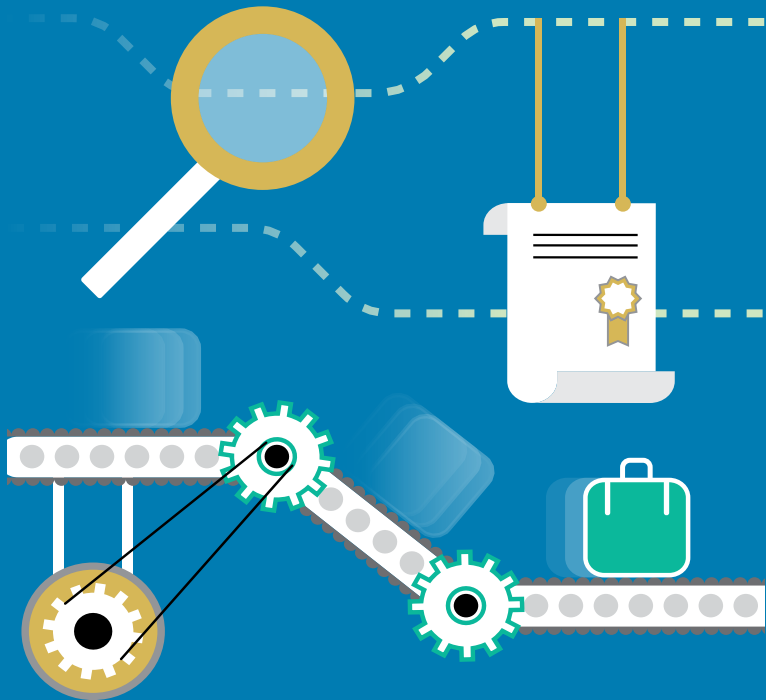


Tracing VET graduates with foreign mobility experience

Transnational research report








Home

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Tracing VET graduates with foreign mobility experience Transnational research report

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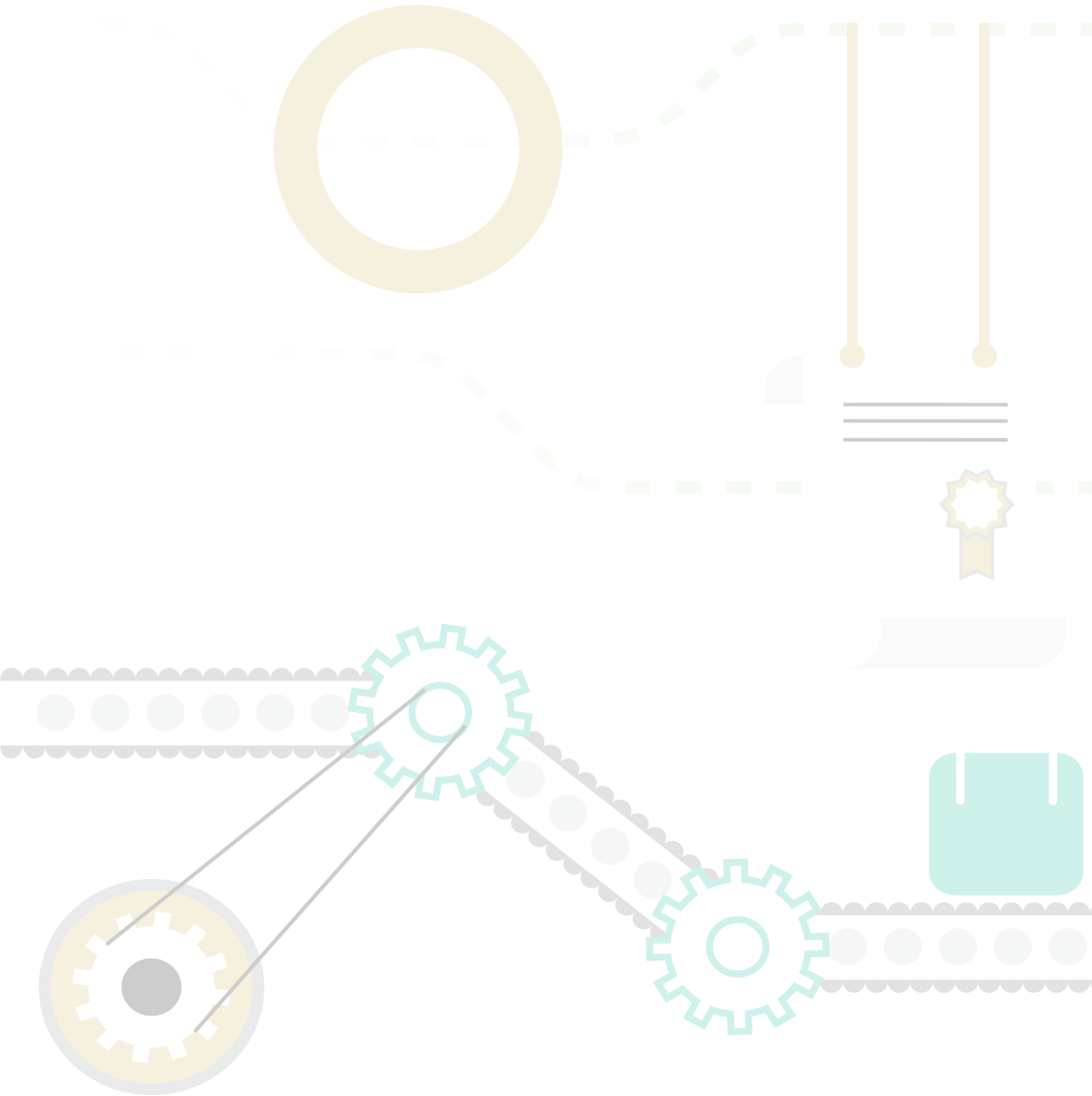
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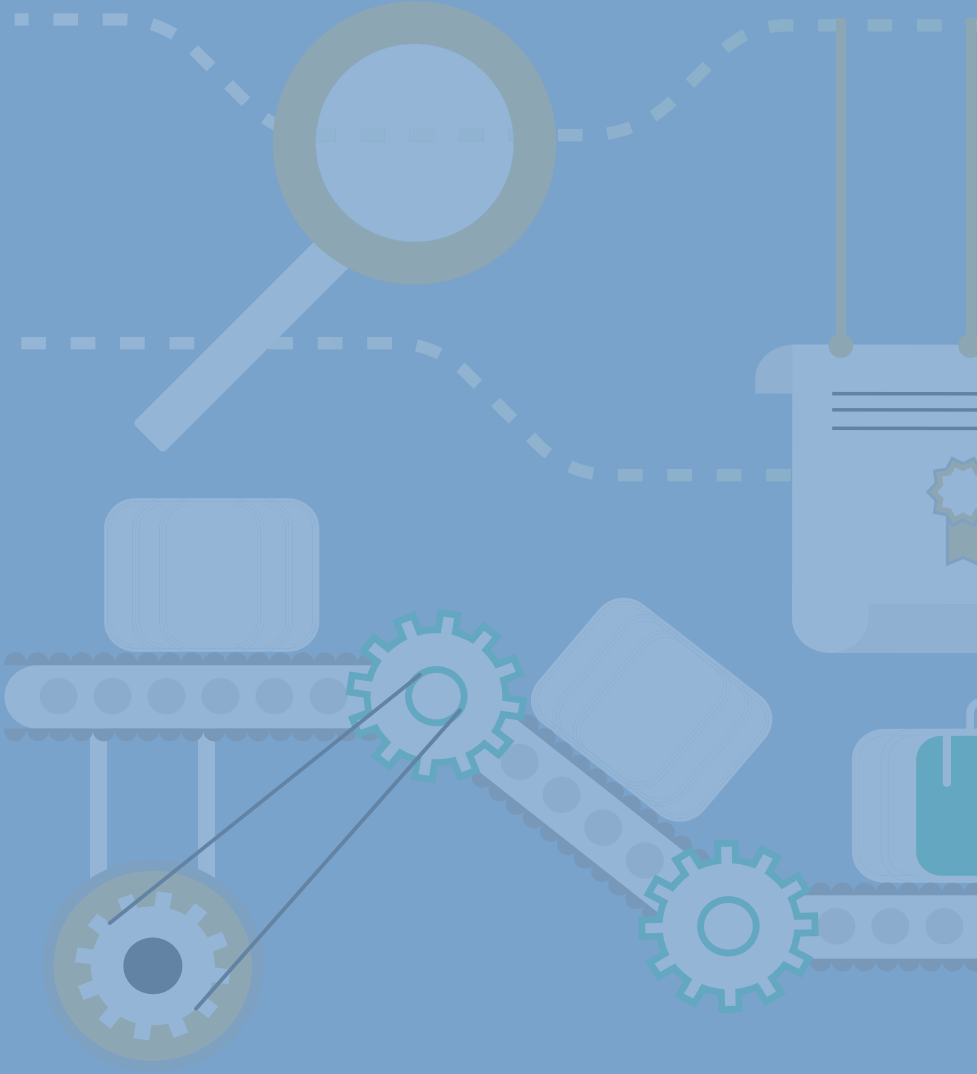
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I. Introduction



Home

A transnational learning mobility is often carried out to boost both the theoretical knowledge and practical skills of its participants. It is believed that support of such a kind might play a significant role in the vocational training of young people who are about to enter the labour market. In view of the challenges that European economies currently face, young learners' foreign mobility experience might contribute to their better competitiveness. By taking part in a traineeship abroad, the learners should be more likely to gain practical work experience and improve their language skills than by obtaining similar training at their school.

This report provides the outcomes of transnational research on the education and career paths of vocational school graduates with foreign mobility experience. This research project started in 2017, the same year as the 30th anniversary of the Erasmus programme was celebrated. Since 2014, when the Erasmus+ programme was launched, the European Commission financially supported mobility training abroad for over 650 000 vocational learners across the entire European Union¹. When taking into account the achievements of the preceding programmes, it can be safely stated that their overall range is broad enough to claim that the measuring of vocational education and training (VET) learners' mobility impact is worth social researchers' efforts.

The implementation of this research project has created an opportunity to draw conclusions from international cooperation between 10 European countries. The comparison of data collected in these countries gave us the opportunity to better understand the expectations of young mobility participants from different parts of Europe. It also allowed us to learn about the national contexts of vocational education and training and how foreign mobility is included in them. Finally, this research project allowed us to establish contact with former interns and trainees to learn more about their feedback on how (and to what extent) their training abroad was relevant not only to their needs but also to the requirements of the contemporary labour market in Europe.

The report has been divided into three key chapters that provide detailed results of the research. The first chapter includes information on overall mobility assessments provided by former participants. The second chapter gives more detailed information on what practical and theoretical skills the participants gained as a result of their placements. The third chapter describes how the further education and career paths of former interns were affected by their mobility experience and to what extent it impacted their professional lives. The final part of the report is the conclusions and recommendations

1 European Commission (n.d.). *Key figures*. Retrieved from: ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about/key-figures_en [accessed: 2/12/2020].

as to the quality of the mobilities based on the feedback and suggestions of former participants. Hopefully, their feedback will demonstrate a beneficial contribution to the further implementation of the programme and to subsequent initiatives in the future.

About VET learners' mobility projects

This research concerned mobilities implemented under the Erasmus+ programme and the preceding Lifelong Learning Programme known as the Leonardo da Vinci programme. The purpose of both these programmes was also to increase the quality, transparency and recognition of vocational skills across and beyond Europe. The first programme operated between 2007–2013 and aimed to promote a professional mobility and implement innovative educational solutions for raising professional qualifications, and it included financial support for internships abroad for vocational students. In 2014, a new EU initiative – the Erasmus+ programme – was launched, aiming to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe. It enabled various social and professional groups to study, undergo training and gain experience abroad. As this programme was created by merging seven other education programmes, it includes many different types of support in various education sectors. Nevertheless, the vocational learners and students remained a significant target group of the new initiative, while the mobility settings under both programmes turned to be rather similar in terms of their objectives and rules of implementation.

The VET learners' mobility is aimed at strengthening the quality of individual vocational training by implementing practical training in another European country. The traineeship can be carried out in an enterprise, public institution, non-governmental organization or in a vocational education and training centre. The participants of such training can be VET learners, students or recent graduates of vocational schools. Thanks to participating in an internship abroad, they have an opportunity to gain practical experience and to improve their language skills. In such a way, the foreign vocational mobility experience may facilitate their path from learning to employment. The supported mobility can last from two weeks to twelve months. Before that period, an integral part of the training cycle is the linguistic, cultural and pedagogical preparation at an institution that sends learners away for practical training overseas.

Table I.1: Research Scope – Mobility Settings’ Comparison

	Lifelong Learning Programme – Leonardo da Vinci	Erasmus+ Vocational Education and Training
Project’s implementation time	2007–2013	2014–2020
Mobility’s minimum duration	2 weeks	
Mobility’s maximum duration	39 weeks (approximately 9 months)	1 year (12 months)

According to both programmes’ rules, the mobility could be carried out in any country taking part in those programmes, which include:

- Member States of the European Union (depending on their membership status in a given year);
- Countries associated with the European Union in the framework of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and the European Economic Area (EEA), i.e. Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway;
- European Union candidate countries (depending on their status in a given year).

Both programmes were mainly addressed to institutions and other organizations active in the field of education. Vocational schools and other practical training institutions are the most common beneficiaries. While the participants obtain financial support for their travel and stay abroad, their sending organizations receive funding for the preparation and management of the mobility. The content of the mobility needs to be consistent with the vocational training, which is realized in the sending country and must be specified by the sending organization and the host organization at the application stage.

About the research partners

This research was carried out in cooperation between institutions from Austria, Belgium (Flanders), the Czech Republic, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg, North Macedonia, Poland, Slovakia and the United Kingdom. All partner institutions in this study act as National Agencies of the Erasmus+ programme. The National Agencies operate at a domestic level, and their tasks include: promoting the programme, providing all necessary information to applicants and other potentially interested parties, selecting projects for funding, supporting the participants and beneficiary institutions, cooperating with other national and EU agencies, and monitoring, evaluating and providing information about good practices and successful activities².

² European Commission (n.d.). *National Agencies*. Retrieved from: ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/contact/national-agencies_en [accessed: 2/12/2020].

The initial research on the education and career paths of VET graduates with transnational mobility experience was carried out in Poland between 2016–2017. The results achieved on a national level proved to be valuable enough to broaden the research to a transnational scope by adapting the methodology for transnational purposes. The invitation to take part in a common project was distributed around the internal network of Erasmus+ National Agencies. As a result, nine institutions joined the project consortium. Both the methodology and research agenda were commonly agreed during several meetings organized to discuss project details and to monitor the research progress. All activities were implemented in the closest possible way in each country by internal research teams or externally contracted researchers. The results of these domestic research actions were country reports that served as a basis for this report. It should be noted, however, that this publication contains only the most significant part of the findings stemming from the comparison of similar trends and patterns between countries. More detailed outcomes of all the research carried out at a national level have been included in national research reports developed by project partners.

Adopted methodology and research questions

The core objective of this research was to evaluate the impact of Erasmus+ VET mobility projects on the further career paths of mobility participants. The tracer study also covered intercultural and social dimensions of their mobility experiences stemming not only from learning by doing but also from learning in other national and cultural contexts. This project concerned the following research questions:

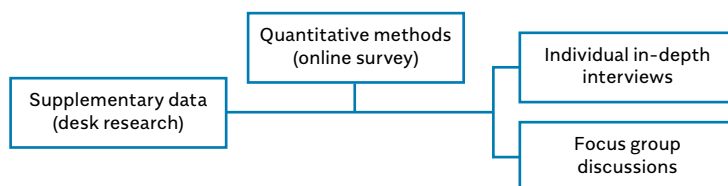
- Does a transnational mobility impact on the future careers and personal development of former interns and trainees and, if so, to what extent?
- What new competences and skills did mobility participants acquire or develop during their practical vocational training abroad?
- To what extent have the acquired competences proven useful, especially in the context of their professional status and standing in the labour market?

One of the most important research questions was determining the skills that learners managed to acquire or develop during their practical training abroad. The categorization of competences (professional, linguistic, social and soft) adopted in the study resulted directly from the guidelines of programmes covered by the study, which aim to make sure that project participants acquire these types of skills³. Such a specified catalogue

3 See the websites of the Lifelong Learning Programme (https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/2007-2013/lfp_en) and the Erasmus+ Programme Guide (https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/programme-guide_en).

of competences is also in line with the European Commission's strategy on lifelong learning⁴, in accordance with which it is important – and not just for young people – to acquire not only professional competences (associated with specific knowledge), but also key competences (e.g. knowledge of foreign languages) and horizontal skills (e.g. learning to learn, taking the initiative, entrepreneurship and cultural awareness).

Figure I.1: Main activities within the research framework



This research took into account both quantitative and qualitative techniques and was conducted between 2017 and 2019. The study also drew on data other than those directly obtained as part of the survey and interviews, while its results have also been supplemented with data obtained as part of desk research (mainly contextual information and a statistical summary of programmes' implementation). The triangulation of adopted tools resulted from the differing characteristics of the two respondent groups (both learners and graduates), and the triangulation of the planned research methods was primarily aimed at collecting in-depth information on participants' experiences related to both their mobility and its effects.

It should be added that the study also played a very important role as an ex-post evaluation of the completed interventions. Although it was not purely evaluative research, it covered a number of aspects, such as the relevance of the intervention, and the usefulness of newly acquired competences. The study results made it possible to carry out a quality assessment of VET mobility training across Europe. This assessment focused in particular on supporting learners in the acquisition of competences and recent graduates in entering the labour market.

4 European Commission (2008). *Improving competences for the 21st Century: An Agenda for European Cooperation on Schools*. Brussels: European Commission.

Online survey

The quantitative data within this research project were collected through an online questionnaire. In every country, the questionnaire was built on a similar core that consisted of 42 questions, among which the most frequently used were the scale questions that allowed participants to assess the mobility in terms of their content, quality, logistics and organizational aspects as well as in terms of their relevance to the needs of the contemporary labour market. The extent to which the particular competences and skills were gained after the mobility's completion was also measured by using the scales. For most questions, a five-degree scale was used to collect participants' feedback, where the higher the degree of assessment, the more positive the feedback. Of no less importance in this questionnaire were the demographic questions (including region and number of inhabitants in the place of residence, gender, occupational areas of training and current professional activity and mobility) and the multiple-choice and open-ended questions to collect more broad and detailed feedback and to supplement the qualitative data from interviews.

In every partner country, the survey was delivered with the support of online tools. A link to the questionnaire was also sent to former VET mobility participants' e-mail addresses. In addition, to increase the response rate in some of the participating countries, information about the research project was published on partners' websites and on social media. Also, the schools were asked to distribute information about the research among their graduates with mobility experience.

Table I.2: Total numbers of survey respondents

	Total number of valid cases
Austria	797
Belgium-Flanders	338
Czech Republic	2 252
Ireland	296
Latvia	335
Luxembourg	130
North Macedonia	237
Poland	2 592
Slovakia	590
United Kingdom	442
TOTAL SAMPLE	8 009

The quantitative methods covered the entire population of former VET mobility participants, while the only criterion applied to get enrolled in the sample was their participation in a placement organized by a given school. The invitation to participate in the study was addressed to those participants who gave their consent for further contact for taking part in evaluation activities that would eventually follow the project after its completion.

As the percentage data resulting from the calculations has been rounded for the purpose of a legible tabular presentation (rounded to one decimal place), some of the percentage components in the tables add up to one tenth error, which when rounded to the nearest integer gives the value of 100%. These differences are due only to the arithmetic rounding of the data, and not to calculation errors.

Individual and group interviews

The survey was followed by interviews and focus groups. The main purpose of the interviews was to collect qualitative data from the participants. Among the participants who took part in the individual interviews were active professionals, part-time employees and students. This was mainly due to the specifics of various education systems. While in some countries vocational school is usually the last stage of school education, in others the specifics and requirements of the labour market often impact the decision to continue education at subsequent stages.

Table I.3: The scope of quantitative data collection

	Number of individual in-depth interviews (IDIs)	Number of focus group interviews (FGIs)
Austria	5	2
Belgium-Flanders	10	3
Czech Republic	14	2
Ireland	4	2
Latvia	5	2
Luxembourg	2	2
North Macedonia	20	3
Poland	20	5
Slovakia	10	2
United Kingdom	25	3

The focus group interviews (FGIs) were carried out with current learners and recent graduates of VET schools with vocational learning mobility experience. Due to research methodology assumptions, during every conversation the group

of approximately 12 persons provided their opinions about their mobility and shared their individual benefits related to their own experiences. The participants also discussed the quality aspects of their placements while giving an assessment of both the content and organizational conditions. They were also asked about their future career plans and their expectations about future labour market requirements. Beyond the strategy of the same questions being addressed to participants during each FGI, group techniques were used to involve participants in more extensive work on assessing the placements. These measures were mostly applied to collect participants' associations linked with their stay abroad.

The individual in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted by moderators mostly face-to-face, with some exceptions when the interviews were held using phone or internet communicators. The target group were school graduates who had taken part in a vocational learning mobility abroad during their learning period at their VET schools. As some of the main topics of the conversations, the participants were asked to assess the quality of their placements and their relevance as to their career and education paths.

Research ethics

In all partner countries, this research was carried out in line with the same ethical principles. Firstly, each of the participants in this study was informed about the research purposes. Secondly, all respondents and interview participants were guaranteed with full anonymity as to presenting their testimonies in any publications that may follow the research after its implementation. Therefore, this report does not contain any personal data of the respondents nor any information about the sending schools of the participants. If any information allowing a given school or person to be identified was provided by the participants, such data have been anonymized in this report.

What also should be noted is that the quotations in this report have been abridged (particularly if respondents provided long answers that spanned many various topics) and edited to eliminate digressions on other topics, unfinished sentences and any colloquial language of the respondents. Nevertheless, none of those editorial amendments has impacted the quoted content, and the core objective of this publication was to retain the original meaning of each participant testimony that has been given in this report.

Limitations

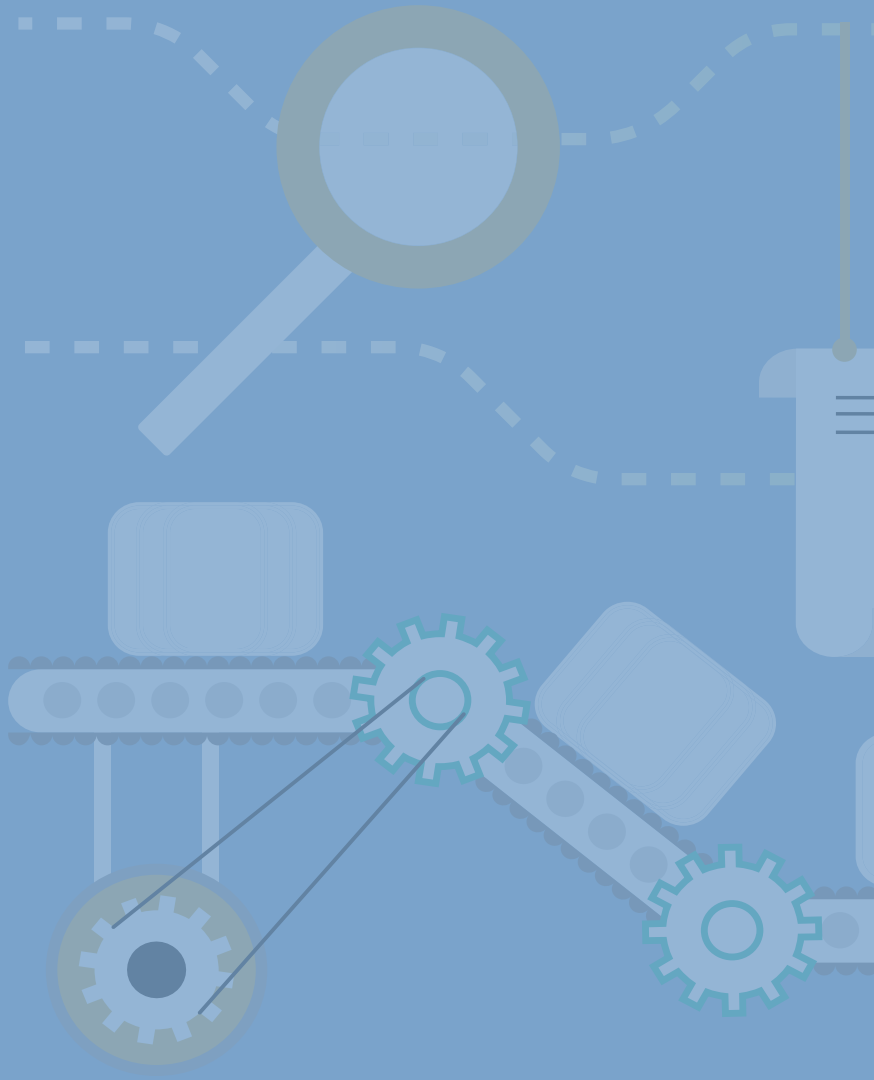
There are several aspects that may be considered as potential limitations of this research project. One of the most important conditions that significantly impacted the data collection was the difficulty of reaching the target research group. The main way of reaching the target research group was to use the contact

information that was provided by participants in their individual reports that each of them completed after their mobility. What should be mentioned is the fact that quite a significant number of placements was carried out long before this research's implementation. Therefore, in many cases, the contact data provided in the individual reports turned out to be out of date. This significantly impacted both quantitative and qualitative research implementation. The difficulties with reaching the respondents affected the overall research response rate to the survey as well as the number of individual interviews. There were similar obstacles concerning reaching the participants of individual interviews. An additional difficulty stemmed from the need to meet those interviewees in person and to spend more time in conversation with them. As this proved impossible in some countries, some individual interviews were conducted online.

What also should be mentioned among the substantial obstacles that might stem from the methodology adopted for this research purpose is a self-reporting data bias. As the main focus of this research was participants' feedback, a significant limitation in the interpretation of the results might be the selective memory of graduates as well as their attribution error, telescopic effect and, finally, an over-interpretation of the mobility's role in their further career paths. Given the inability to examine a control group (only mobility participants' contact details were available to use for research purposes), such a limitation concerns the interpretation of both the survey and interview data, and therefore it needs to be admitted that it remained fairly inescapable.

Also, the fact that this research was implemented transnationally turned to be the cause of several substantive and logistic obstacles. Firstly, what should be mentioned as an obstacle are the general difficulties in all countries covered by the study. In terms of logistics, a very important problem was keeping to the timeframe so that this study could be carried out simultaneously. Such an approach had to be excluded in terms of the research activities that were carried out in Poland a year earlier. Since the national Polish research gave rise to the idea of the entire transnational project, the experience of the research carried out in Poland served as a pattern for the common methodology adopted in other countries. Therefore, any methodological corrections and adjustments of the study to the transnational context could no longer be applied to the results collected in Poland. This also concerns research questions and topics that were entered into the survey when further agreements were made between research partners. Hence, data from Poland do not appear as part of the comparisons based on quantitative data distribution of such variables as the year and duration of participants' mobility experience.

II. Overall mobility assessment



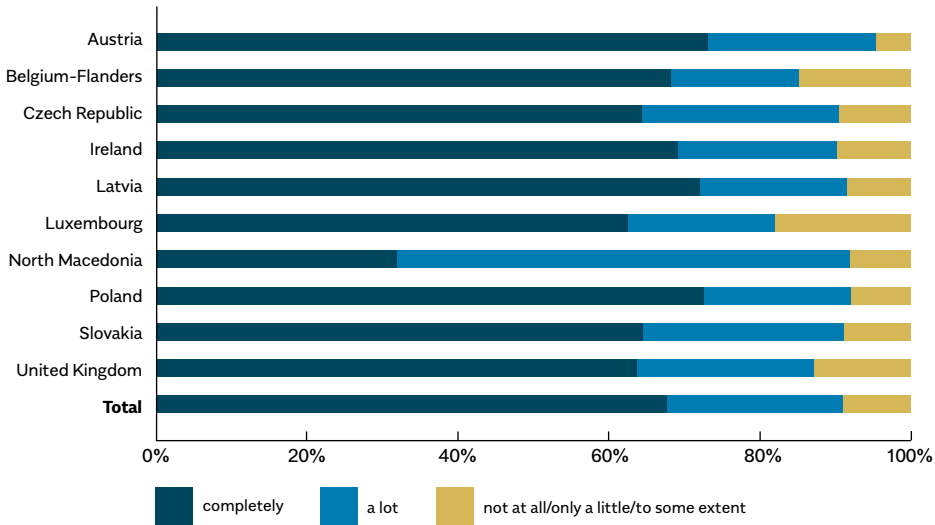
The following chapter addresses the overall mobility assessment through the eyes of former VET placement participants who took part in the quantitative part of the study (online survey) and/or in the qualitative part (focus group or individual interview). The focus of this chapter is on their motivation to take part in the project, the organizational aspects, the mentoring and support the participants perceived before or while being abroad and new contacts – social and professional – they have made due to their VET mobility experience. The mobilities' strengths and weaknesses as well as suggestions for improvement recognized by the participants will also be part of this chapter.

Going abroad with mobility programmes like Erasmus+ or Leonardo da Vinci was, in general, considered by participants an important life experience as a significant number of them had never travelled alone before and found themselves in completely new situations. Therefore, it is desirable to know how they perceived their stay abroad and what they took away for their educational training at home after completing their mobility programme. The interviewees assessed the VET mobility experience not only as valuable for their vocational education training but also for them personally. This chapter shows the different aspects of the programmes and depicts that the assessment thereof is a highly personal and multi-faceted topic.

The following illustrates the individual experiences of a mobility from the participants' point of view. The research questions discussed are: Where did the participants go? What was their motivation to take part in the project? How was the stay abroad organized, and how is the organization assessed by the respondents? Did they make new contacts during the traineeship abroad, and are the participants still in contact with the people they met during the traineeship abroad? What are the strengths and weaknesses identified by the interviewees, and what suggestions do they make for improving the mobility programme?

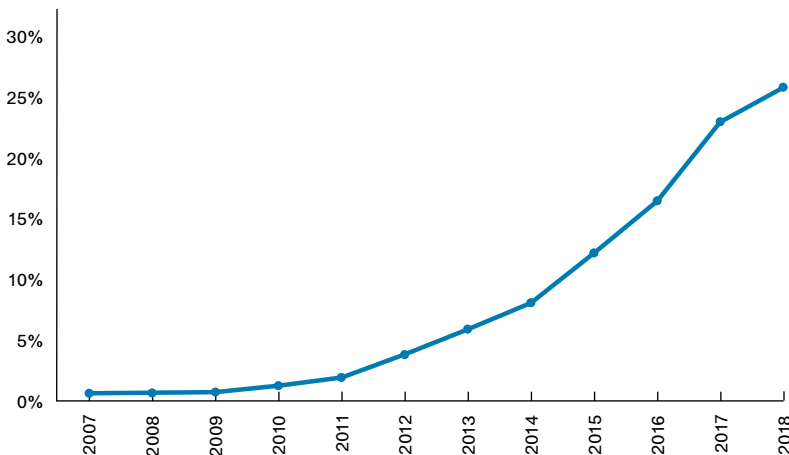
One precondition for successfully conducting interviews and filling in an online survey about the experiences of participants with VET placements is of course their ability to recall the time they spent on their traineeship abroad. The interviewees of both the individual and focus group interviews who verbalized their experience in the course of the study in detail and the respondents of the online survey were all able to do so. This can also be comprehended by looking at the quantitative results (see Figure II.1), as 91% of all respondents stated that they remember the time spent on their traineeship abroad completely or to a large extent.

Figure II.1: Ability to remember the mobility experience well (agreement with the statement: "I remember my time abroad as part of a training/work placement well", n=7 904)



One explanation for their good ability to remember the mobility experience might be that most of them were completed in the last few years, as it was challenging to reach older students (see Figure II.2).

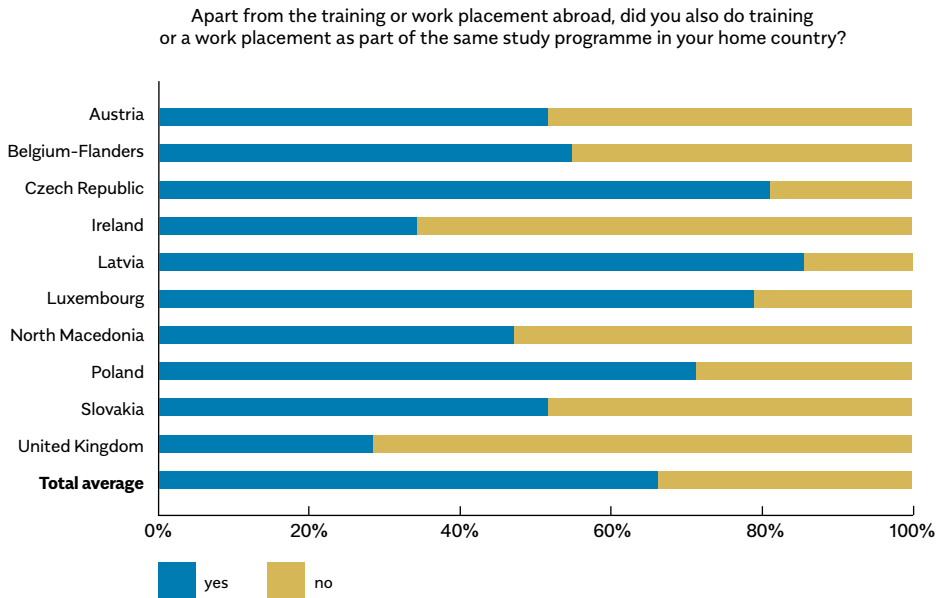
Figure II.2: Sample description. Year of mobility experience (n=5 622)⁵



⁵ The figures sum up to more than 100% as some respondents participated in more than one mobility; therefore, there are more mobility experiences than respondents.

Two-thirds of the respondents had completed a traineeship or work placement in their home country (see Figure II.3). Therefore, a relatively large number of the VET mobility participants had some experience with which to compare their mobility programme. The frontrunners concerning the completion of internships at home are Latvia (86%), the Czech Republic (81%) and Luxembourg (79%). The fewest respondents who had done a traineeship or work placement in their home country are found in Ireland (35%) and the United Kingdom (29%). The data show no correlation between the likelihood of recommending the mobility programme and whether or not the participants took part in a training or work placement at home additionally to their experience abroad.

Figure II.3: Training/work placement completed in the respondents' home country (n=7 990)



The data show a high level of satisfaction with the stay abroad and appreciation given to the opportunity to do an internship in another country, even though some aspects – mostly regarding the host companies or organizational aspects – were criticized by the interviewees. It is noteworthy though that nobody expressed complete discontent when reporting on their VET mobility experience. The negative experiences were compensated by overall developments of their personality and the opportunity to see the world. On the whole, good memories outweigh the negative ones.

With only a few exceptions, participation in internships abroad was not mandatory. VET placements are seen as a unique opportunity to get to know foreign countries and new cultures. Several interviewees described it as a “once in a lifetime opportunity”.

Getting an EU work placement in Slovenia was a huge privilege to me and meant an awful lot to me. If you get the perk, the privilege, the opportunity to do it – do it!

[Ireland, IDI]

Everything was good and without Erasmus+ I would probably not have had the opportunity to do a traineeship abroad like this. Also because it is probably often difficult to pay for the stay abroad, if you don't get a grant.

[Luxembourg, IDI]

The mobility programme enabled the participants to be more open-minded, independent and autonomous since, for several interviewees, this was the first time they could stay abroad without their parents. The majority of interviewees noted a positive influence of the time spent abroad on their language skills. However, the participants benefited not only personally but also professionally.

Going to Malta to do a four-week placement in the distribution centre was exactly what I needed in my VET training in the area of logistics. It has enriched my professional training and my life greatly. All the aspects of the training were perfectly organized by the teachers of my VET school in charge of internationalization. Also, the head of the school was very supportive and very interested in the placements. It couldn't have been better.

[Belgium-Flanders, IDI]

According to the respondents, their participation in the VET mobility enhanced their chances in the labour market and has been valuable for their curriculum vitae whenever applying for a job. Some participants had the opportunity to become acquainted with state-of-the-art technologies, new work environments, machines and techniques they did not yet know or would not have had the chance to use so at home. All the participants would recommend going abroad via a VET placement like Erasmus+ or Leonardo da Vinci.

It was definitely something exciting that I never would've done before, and I definitely haven't had the opportunity to do it since. So that was very beneficial. If I could do it again I definitely would. It was one of the most amazing experiences I've had. Meeting new people and taking the friendships back home, that for me was one of the benefits of it all.

And then exposure to the industry. You wouldn't really get another opportunity to do that unless it's part of a degree you're doing or something. So that was very beneficial.

[Ireland, IDI]

Motivation to take part in the project

The motivation to participate in a VET placement project and spend some time abroad was mostly the same for the interviewees. They wanted to experience something new and many of them aimed to improve their language skills. Nevertheless, the motivations they named when asked why they decided to participate in the project in the first place are vague. Most of them did not address any specific skills – one exception being language skills – that they wanted to learn or improve while being abroad. They rather wanted to see “something new”. The project is seen as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that needs to be seized.

I wanted to use this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to go abroad.

[Belgium-Flanders, FGI]

The expectations the participants had before taking part in the VET mobility match their motivations to take part in the project. They wanted to learn how people lived and worked abroad as well as acquire professional experience and practical skills. Improving their language skills in particular was a big expectation that was met by the programme. The participants desired to place themselves in completely new situations and boost their employability through doing so, as having served a traineeship abroad makes a candidate more attractive to prospective employers, in the opinion of the interviewees. As shown in Figure II.4, the respondents of the online survey are positive about that as well, even if they are not as confident as the interviewees.

For several participants from the Czech Republic, North Macedonia, Poland, Slovakia and the United Kingdom, this was their first time flying or travelling abroad. What all interviewees had in common are their curiosity and open-mindedness. They wanted to experience something new, adventurous and unfamiliar. They grew with the challenge.

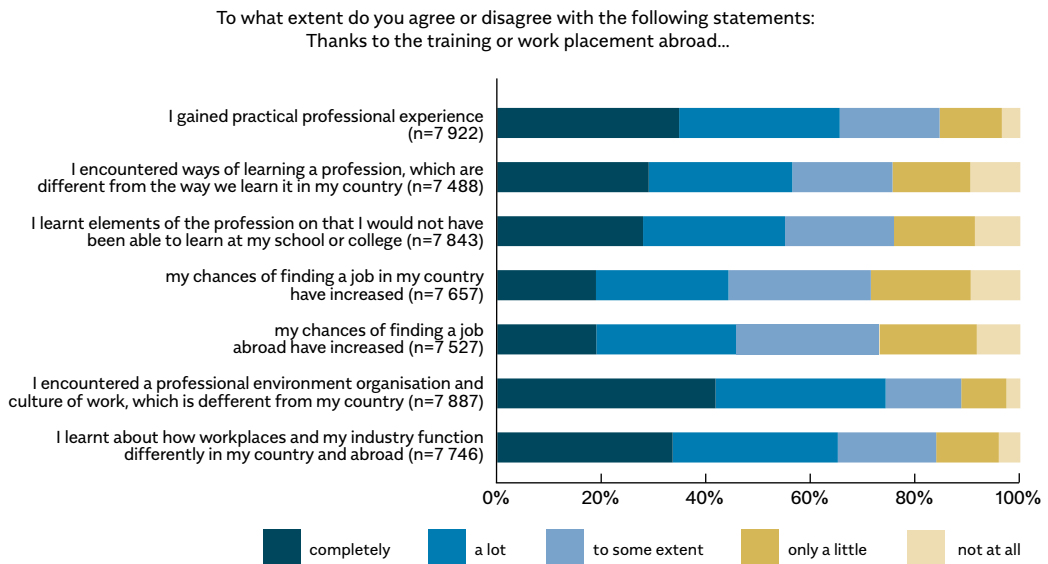
It was primarily an adventure and a new experience. I was very curious about living abroad and wanted to know if I could cope there and overcome the language barrier. I also wanted to know what the work of a logistician was really about. I am bored with theory – I prefer a hands-on approach.

[Poland, FGI]

Almost none of the participants stated that their mobility was mandatory. Several had to do work placements or internships because of their vocational education training, but in most cases these did not have to take place abroad. Therefore, going abroad was a conscious and voluntary decision.

The respondents of the online survey were asked to agree or disagree with statements concerning the advantages of working abroad in respect of possible learning outcomes (see Figure II.4). The statements concerning encountering a professional environment, organization or culture of work that is different from those at home (74%), gaining practical professional experience (66%) and learning about how workplaces and the industry the respondents worked in differ from what they know from home (65%) obtained most approval as respondents agreed to them a lot or completely. More than half of the respondents say that thanks to their training or work placement abroad they encountered ways of learning a profession that are different from the way they learn it in their country (56%) and that they learnt elements of the profession they would not have been able to learn at their school or college (55%). The respondents are least confident their work placement abroad would help them find a job in their home country (44%) or abroad (46%). Even though these are the lowest approval ratings, they are nonetheless still at a relatively high level.

Figure II.4: Learning outcomes thanks to participating in the training abroad⁶



⁶ Values smaller than 5% have been removed for reasons of legibility.

However, the VET placement participants also enhanced other skills that will be depicted when the strengths and weaknesses of the mobility programme are discussed later on.

The interviewees named personal as well as professional motivation for participating in the mobility programme.

Placements abroad really widen one's personal and professional horizon. It is so useful to experience how similar jobs are put in practice in another country.

[Belgium-Flanders, IDI]

I wanted to know more about my vocation and work.

[North Macedonia, IDI]

Personal motives like improving, expanding and consolidating language skills as well as the opportunity to see and learn something new in general were mentioned most frequently. In the Czech Republic, some interviewees said that they participated in the programme in order to avoid school duties, and some of the respondents in Poland thought of the placement abroad as a holiday. In addition to that, professional motives like expanding knowledge and skills with regard to the vocational education training and obtaining real-world experiences in comparison to training at school were also important for them.

I wanted to see the real-world scenario of what we were studying. It was a great insight into what we're actually doing. It's all very well and good being in a classroom and learning about this and that, but seeing it in the real world is a priceless asset. It was a great opportunity and I'm really glad I got to do it.

[Ireland, FGI]

And right from the start I was like, 'OK, give me something. I really want to learn this because I've only got a small amount of time'. And it is of course a huge benefit for me for the final apprenticeship examination in particular if I can say, 'Yes, I might not work in a shipping company, but I still got to learn about maritime transport'. That's another reason or actually the main reason why I decided on Las Palmas, because I knew they would definitely have a port or some logistics enterprise there no matter what.

[Austria, IDI]

They also saw their participation in the mobility programme as an opportunity for their further study and career, as they frequently mentioned the importance of their work placement abroad for their curriculum vitae. Receiving a placement certificate, employer's reference or a Europass Mobility certificate was also important to them.

As often mentioned, receiving support was an important factor for deciding to participate in a VET mobility. The method of support varied not only between the different countries but also between the individual interviewees, e.g. most of the schools and organizations provided the planning of the placements – covering travel, accommodation, work placements and on-site support. Whenever they did not do the planning for the participants, they were at least helpful wherever they could be. Financial funding was another big influencing factor. As pupils usually do not earn a lot of money on their own, it was of utmost importance to them that these placements were cofunded by the EU.

I tell her that it will be a new experience, that she will learn something new abroad, that she will be in a new environment. You will have gone to another culture; coming back, you will have something more than just what you have been taught at school. You don't have to worry about it financially, because everything is paid for you. Everything is refunded, so you won't have any problems in that regard either.

[Latvia, IDI]

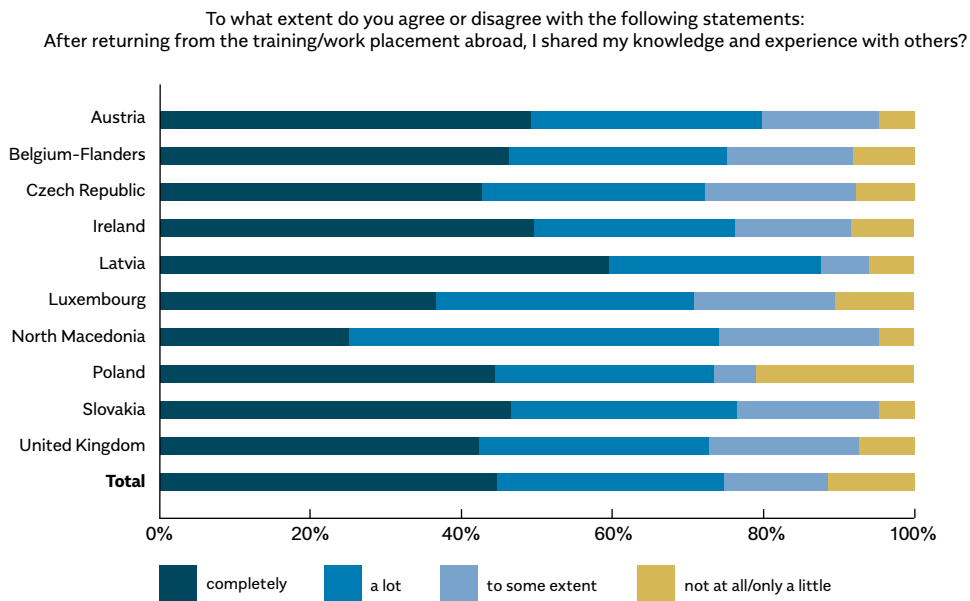
An intense promotion of the programme through institutions like schools was only mentioned in the interviews from Latvia, where pupils are informed about the possibility to go abroad in three different ways. First of all, there are public information events in VET institutions, including presentations and posters given by previous mobility participants. Secondly, educators from VET institutions play an important role and inform as well as encourage students to apply for participation in projects. Thirdly, mutual support of vocational education students is both an important source of information on VET mobility programmes as well as a source of encouragement for participation in such projects.

It all started with the fact that the students who had returned from the internship presented their experience. It was very inspiring for me, so it was what I wanted for some time. [...] It seemed a little unbelievable that you could live for a month in another country through the school and gain knowledge from strangers working in the same field.

[Latvia, FGI]

Many interviewees reported that they shared their knowledge and experience with others after returning from their traineeship abroad. The willingness of former VET mobility participants to do so is also very high, as three out of four respondents (75%) shared their experience with others afterwards. Only 12% of the respondents said they did not share their know-how or only shared a little (see Figure II.5).

Figure II.5: Sharing knowledge and experience after participating in a VET mobility (n=7 880)



Sharing one’s experience typically took place in rather informal conversations with friends and schoolmates. Some of the participants were asked to present their mobility experience during open days at their schools or to their schoolmates from lower grades who wanted to take part in a placement.

They introduced other students who had been to Finland before to give us an idea of what it was like to go there. And they showed us some photos and videos of what the place was like, what things they filmed in that studio and so on. So they gave us a rough idea of what the experience was like before we went there and what we would be doing before we got there.
[Ireland, FGI]

The importance of peer feedback is highly relevant, as – according to the respondents – it either strengthens one’s choice of vocational training career or shows them early on that it is not the field they wanted to stay in after having actually worked in it.

The patients in the home for retired people in Finland really appreciated my skills and competences, which made me feel happy and content. This reassured me that I had made the right choice in my profession.
[Belgium-Flanders, IDI]

The selection of the learners who could participate in the mobility programme was organized differently in the various countries. Some respondents described that these selection processes led to an increase in student motivation and therefore had an impact on the main education at school. In some cases, studying better – i.e. being more successful, getting better marks, showing more engagement in class, improving punctuality in delivering college assignments as well as increasing school attendance, thus demonstrating their hope to go abroad for an internship – was the outcome.

I think that motivated people want to come in more. My class were shockingly bad attendees; once Erasmus was mentioned, it picked up for a while.

[Ireland, FGI]

In the Czech Republic, particular learning outcomes (average marks), teachers' recommendations, a test of language skills and knowledge (especially in English) as well as a cover letter and doing an interview were necessary in order to be able to participate in a mobility programme. In Belgium-Flanders, only very motivated learners could participate in a mobility. They had to hand in a motivational letter and do presentations. The final decision was made by their teachers. In Latvia, most of the students had to undergo a selection process at their school: good study performance, motivation and good English skills were mentioned as the main selection criteria. In Slovakia, the selection procedure of pupils differed – some had transparent selection criteria, others were selected because of teachers' recommendations, and some pupils were selected randomly. Before the implementation of the placement, all respondents had a preliminary meeting where they met with a school management representative and the accompanying teachers or people from intermediary organizations. In Ireland, the selection process took into account a range of factors, including rate of attendance, engagement in class and punctuality in delivering college assignments. Participants who had been selected in this way emphasized that the process was competitive and that they felt proud of their achievement as a result.

Most participants did not know whether or not their schools were part of a VET placement programme when selecting a school in the first place. In the United Kingdom, those who were aware were typically completing a course which involved a language, e.g. Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). In the Czech Republic, it was especially respondents who were at a higher level of education (higher education institution or a tertiary technical school) who were aware of the possibility their schools offered for participating in a VET placement, but only one participant chose her secondary school because

of that opportunity. The fact that schools offered the possibility to complete a VET placement abroad was therefore not decisive for most respondents in this country. In Ireland, some of the interviewees had never even heard of Erasmus+ or Leonardo da Vinci before. Nevertheless, they were delighted when they learnt about the opportunity to go abroad. Many of their friends, colleagues or teachers played a vital part in recommending going abroad as part of the mobility programme as many of the interviewees had wanted to go abroad anyway. These projects were a good chance to do so.

In our third year we have a compulsory traineeship planned and I actually discovered through an acquaintance that you can do it abroad, and the acquaintance's daughter did the same in a hotel in England. So I thought, wow, going to England to work in a hotel, I'd really like to go and do that. Then I checked with the school to see if that would be OK, and they agreed. Our school also takes part in Erasmus+ [...], so you just had to apply, and then I was selected.

[Austria, FGI]

Personal growth may not have been a motive to participate in the mobility programme prima facie, but it was mentioned as an important outcome anyway. One should not forget, however, that even though it was mainly personal motives that had an influence when opting for the mobility programme, they have also had an influence on professional performance as well, as the participants use their new skills, increased knowledge and personal growth in a work-related context as well, since those two segments are strongly intertwined. It does not come as a surprise that most of the respondents would be glad to repeat the mobility.

In any case, everything was positive. If I were to study again, I would be happy to apply again [for this internship]]. Nothing bad can be said. It was worth it.

[Latvia, IDI]

I can only recommend it to everyone. [...] It's a unique experience. You don't get that kind of experience very often and it's unlikely to happen again.

[Austria, IDI]

The likelihood of recommendation is also shown in the quantitative data (see Table II.1). The respondents were asked to state on a scale from 0 to 10 (where 0 is "not at all" and 10 is "definitely") how likely it would be for them to recommend an internship or trainee placement abroad to other vocational

learners to help them enter the labour market. The results were assembled into three groups, namely:

- Promoters (score 9-10), who are loyal enthusiasts who give their account to others, telling them about their experiences while being abroad and therefore fuelling growth.
- Passives (score 7-8), who are satisfied but unenthusiastic, as they do not talk to others about their mobility programme.
- Detractors (score 0-6), who are unhappy with their mobility experience and who can damage the brand and impede growth through negative word-of-mouth accounts.

69% of the entirety of the respondents selected 9 or 10 and are classified as promoters. On the other hand, 11% selected 0-6 and would therefore not recommend a placement as they are part of the detractors. The remaining fifth (20%) are classified as passives. The results have also been compiled into a Net Promoter Score (NPS), which is the evaluation of their satisfaction and willingness to recommend a placement abroad. On average this NPS amounts to 58.5 points. North Macedonia, Slovakia and Ireland have the highest Net Promoter Scores when comparing the individual results.

Table II.1: Net Promoter Score (n=8 009)

Country	Detractors (0-6)	Passives (7-8)	Promoters (9-10)	NPS
Austria	10%	22%	68%	57.97
Belgium-Flanders	16%	26%	58%	42.31
Czech Republic	15%	21%	64%	49.47
Ireland	9%	15%	76%	67.91
Latvia	7%	20%	73%	65.37
Luxembourg	8%	21%	71%	63.08
North Macedonia	6%	13%	81%	75.11
Poland	10%	20%	70%	60.38
Slovakia	6%	14%	80%	74.07
United Kingdom	9%	18%	73%	64.79
Overall NPS	11%	20%	69%	58.53

Table II.2 shows the correlation between the duration of the mobility and the likelihood of recommendation of the VET mobility programme. It is interesting that participants who stayed for three weeks show the lowest likelihood of recommendation and that less than two-thirds of them (65%) are classified as promoters, whereas almost three-quarters (72%) of those who

stayed for one to three months recommend participating in VET placements the most. The correlation of the duration of the placement and the likelihood of recommendation is significant. However, the data show that participants staying abroad for more than three months are not the group who most strongly recommend the VET mobility programme.

Table II.2. Duration of placement and recommendation of internship/trainee placement abroad (in percentage terms, n=5 299)

Duration	Likelihood of recommendation		
	Detractors	Passives	Promoters
More than 3 months	10.4	21.5	68.1
1-3 months	9.1	18.9	72.0
4 weeks	10.7	18.7	70.5
3 weeks	13.6	21.8	64.6
2 weeks	11.1	18.5	70.4
Total average	11.6	20.1	68.3

Figure II.6: Recommendation of internship/trainee placement abroad and occupational area within which the placement took place (n=7 888)

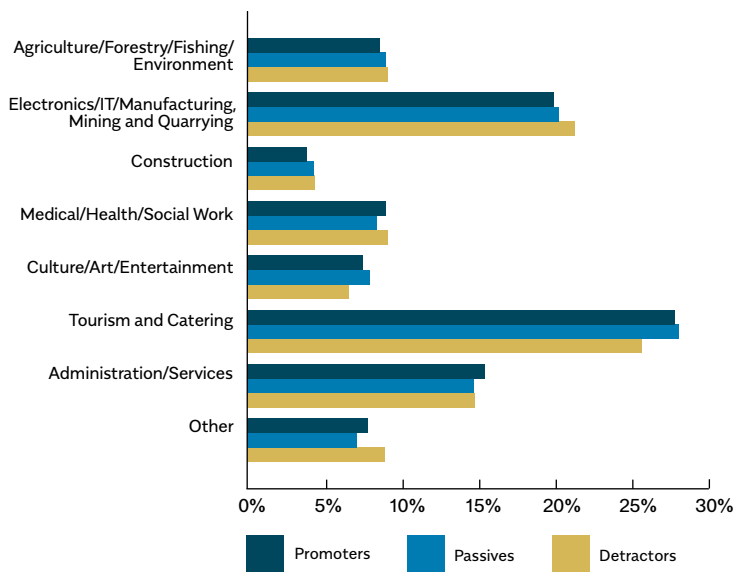


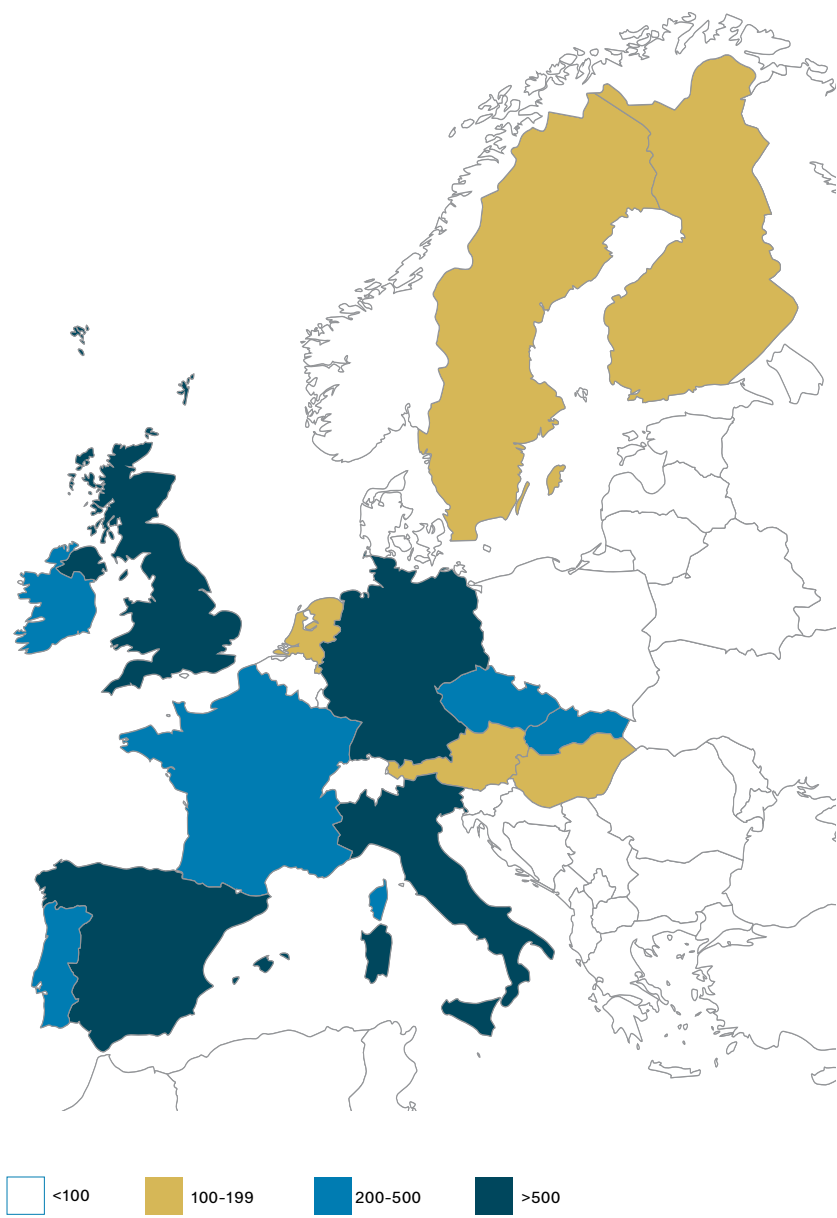
Figure II.6 shows the correlation between the occupational area within which the placement took place and the likelihood of a recommendation to participate in a VET mobility programme. Participants who were working in Tourism and Catering, Culture/Art/Entertainment or Administration/Services are more likely to be promoters, i.e. recommend the VET programme abroad as loyal enthusiasts. Respondents working in Electronics/IT/Manufacturing, Mining and Quarrying, Construction, Agriculture/Forestry/Fishing/Environment were for the most part not too happy with their mobility experience, and many of them are identified as detractors.

Organizational aspects

The discussion of organizational aspects reflects the diversity of the VET placements. There are many different factors and possible combinations of these to be considered concerning the organization of the mobility programme, e.g. duration of the stay abroad, types of enterprises as related to size and sector, types of accommodation or implementation of on-site support.

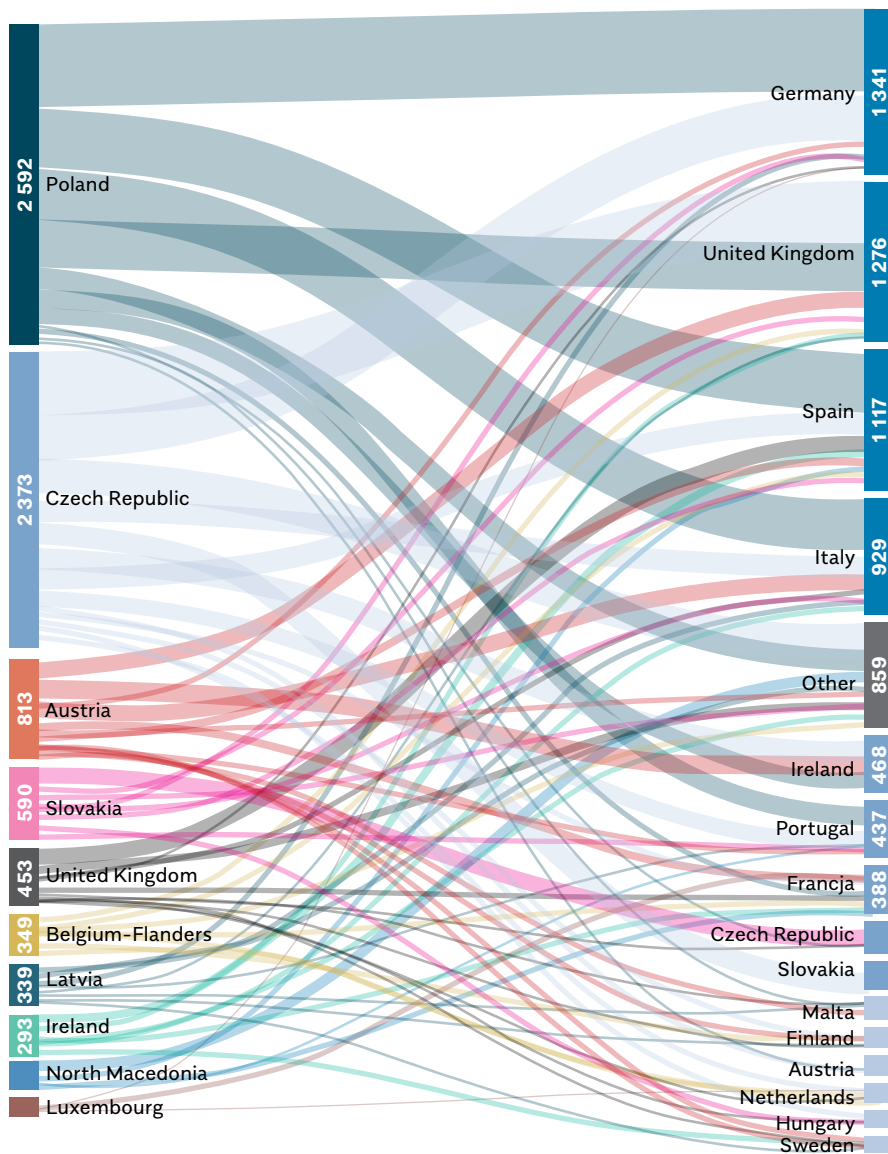
Figures II.7 and II.8 show the destinations most of the respondents of the online survey went to with Erasmus+ or Leonardo da Vinci. In Figure II.7 the European countries have been coloured in with different shades. The darkest shade represents the countries that were visited the most. More than 500 traineeships took place in Germany, the United Kingdom, Spain and Italy. Ireland, Portugal, France, the Czech Republic and Slovakia were the destinations of 200 to 500 mobilities. The yellow shade represents destinations that were visited by 100 to 199 respondents. These are Malta, Finland, Austria, the Netherlands, Hungary and Sweden. All other countries registered less than 100 mobilities. Figure II.8 explicitly depicts the flow of mobilities and shows where the participants from different countries travelled most often, allowing us to track where the respondents from single countries went to.

Figure II.7: Sample description. Overall amount of mobilities to VET placement destinations⁷



⁷ These figures represent the total amount of mobilities, not the amount of respondents.

Figure II.8: Depiction of where the participants of the online survey went to with Erasmus+ or Leonardo da Vinci⁸



⁸ These figures represent the total amount of mobilities, not the amount of respondents.

Preparations for the trip abroad were only mentioned occasionally in the interviews. In the Czech Republic and Latvia, these preparations often included language training (either English or the language of the host country). Some interviewees asked schoolmates or friends who had already participated in a VET mobility programme to share their experiences in order to be prepared. Organized preparation was appreciated by the interviewees.

Everybody who was going to go to Spain had a couple of days training for working with young people before we all split up into our groups and went to Spain. [...] I thought that training was very helpful, and it gave me a lot of information I could take with me to refer to that helped me with my lesson plans and things.

[United Kingdom, ID1]

Figure II.9 and Table II.3 show the environment in which the traineeship took place. On the whole, most traineeships were conducted in schools or small businesses, but it is clearly apparent that there are differences between the countries. More than half of the respondents from North Macedonia, for example, completed their mobility programme at a school whereas only 5% of the respondents from Luxembourg did so. Viewing all countries individually, it is evident that between a third and half of the total respondents did their work placement in small businesses, with the exception of North Macedonia, which nonetheless still sent a fifth of participants to smaller firms.

For the participants in Austria and the United Kingdom, it was important to work in the field they were trained for. Their main focus was a desire to see something new and to learn as much as possible during their stay. In the United Kingdom this was especially true for TEFL students getting the opportunity to teach English to foreign language speakers, students in health and social care studies working in nurseries and residential care homes, and carpentry students undertaking lessons in woodworking. For a small minority where this was not the case, this negatively impacted their experience in relation to the skills they obtained. Consequently, their expectations were not met and the potential for their placement to influence their professional development was limited. Nevertheless, most of the respondents said that they still learnt something and gained valuable experience, if not necessarily in their field of work.

Figure II.9: Environment in which the traineeships took place (n=7 991)⁹

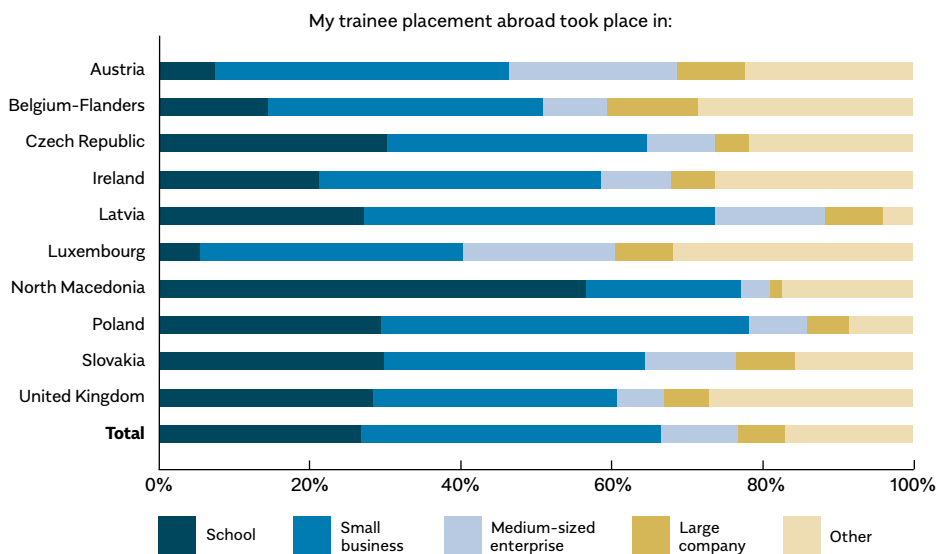


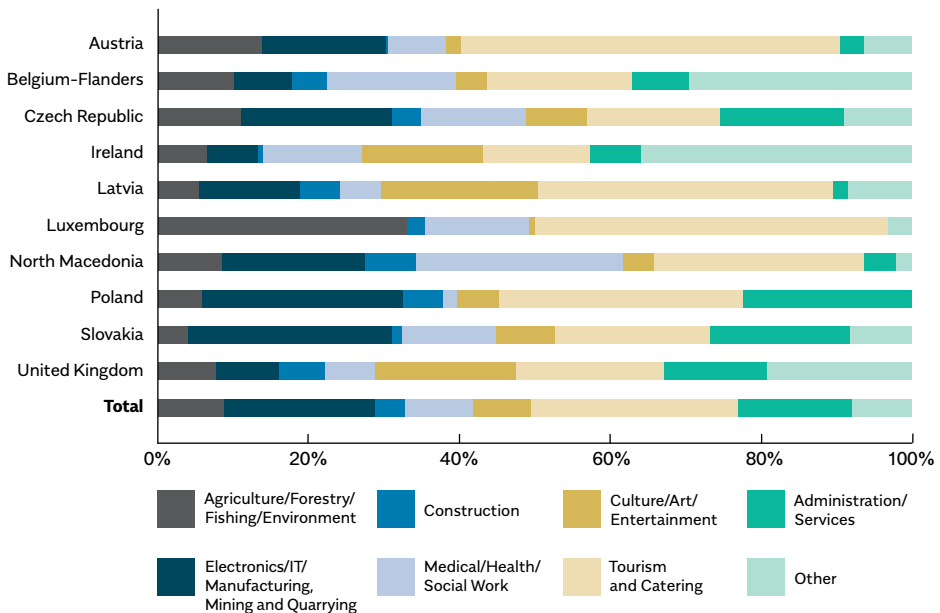
Table II.3: Environment in which the traineeships took place (in percentage terms, n=7 991)

	School	Small business	Medium-sized enterprise	Large company	Other
Austria	7.4	39.0	22.3	9.0	22.2
Belgium-Flanders	14.5	36.4	8.6	12.1	28.4
Czech Republic	30.3	34.4	9.1	4.6	21.7
Ireland	21.2	37.4	9.4	5.8	26.3
Latvia	27.2	46.6	14.6	7.8	3.9
Luxembourg	5.4	34.9	20.2	7.8	31.8
North Macedonia	56.5	20.7	3.8	1.7	17.3
Poland	29.4	48.8	7.7	5.7	8.4
Slovakia	29.8	34.6	12.2	7.8	15.6
United Kingdom	28.4	32.3	6.3	5.9	27.1
Total average	26.8	39.7	10.3	6.1	17.0

⁹ See Table II.3 for detailed numbers. Values smaller than 5% have been removed for reasons of legibility.

Figure II.10 and Table II.4 depict which kind of industry or occupational area the trainee placement was completed in. Tourism and Catering (28%) and Electronics/IT/Manufacturing, Mining and Quarrying (20%) are the two occupational areas in which almost half of the respondents of the online survey worked during their mobility programme. Learners from Luxembourg in particular worked in the agricultural sector (33%) and more than a quarter of the participants from North Macedonia (27%) worked in the field of Medical/Health/Social Work.

Figure II.10: Industry/occupational area within which the trainee placement was carried out (n=8 008)¹⁰



The sending schools rely on various organizational models. The schools may either organize the stays themselves, work with intermediary organizations, or have bilateral links or cooperate with other VET schools or companies. Sometimes the interviewees organized their stay abroad all alone and only got financial funding for their mobility activity. Usually the mobility programmes either combined theory and practice or involved only practical work. The trainee placements of some

¹⁰ See Table II.4 for detailed numbers. Values smaller than 5% have been removed for reasons of legibility.

respondents from Poland and Slovakia took place at vocational schools. Other than that, no other interviewees mentioned a theory-only placement.

And as I said, it really was a concept submitted from this date to that one. You didn't have to organize your own flight, and the accommodation was ready to go. The applications did of course require some work, but they were certainly manageable.

[Austria, IDI]

Table II.4: Industry/occupational area within which the trainee placement was carried out (in percentage terms, n=8 008)

	Agriculture/Forestry/ Fishing/Environment	Electronics/IT/ Manufacturing, Mining and Quarrying	Construction	Medical/Health/ Social Work	Culture/ Art/Entertainment	Tourism and Catering	Administration/ Services	Other
Austria	13.8	16.3	0.4	7.7	2.0	50.3	3.3	6.3
Belgium-Flanders	10.0	7.7	4.7	17.1	4.1	19.2	7.7	29.5
Czech Republic	11.0	20.0	3.9	13.9	8.2	17.6	16.5	8.9
Ireland	6.4	6.8	0.7	13.2	15.9	14.2	6.8	35.9
Latvia	5.4	13.4	5.4	5.4	20.9	39.1	2.1	8.4
Luxembourg	33.1	0	2.3	13.8	0.8	46.9	0	3.1
North Macedonia	8.4	19.0	6.8	27.4	4.2	27.8	4.2	2.1
Poland	5.8	26.6	5.4	1.7	5.7	32.3	22.4	0
Slovakia	3.9	27.1	1.4	12.4	8.0	20.5	18.6	8.1
United Kingdom	7.7	8.4	6.1	6.6	18.8	19.7	13.6	19.2
Total average	8.7	20.0	4.0	9.0	7.7	27.6	15.1	7.8

The combination of placement in a childcare centre and a few days attending lessons in a VET school was very useful and inspiring.

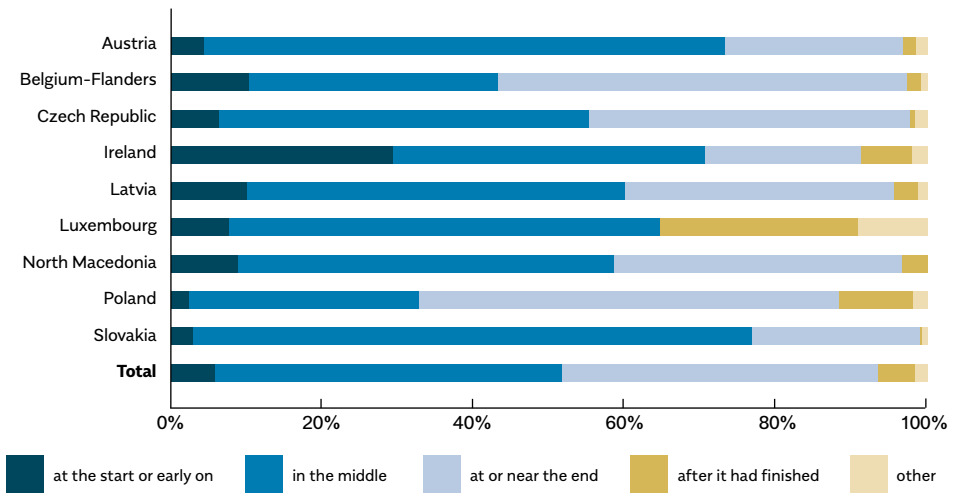
[Belgium-Flanders, IDI]

Our trainee placement was at school. We had five hours of special vocational training a day with two assigned teachers. One teacher was an expert in photography and creating videos. The second teacher was specialized in Cinema 4D modelling. We finished at school at 1 pm and then we had free time, we could do whatever we wanted.

[Slovakia, FGI]

Also, the stage of vocational education at which the mobility took place was important in consideration of organizational aspects. Figure II.11 and Table II.5 show at what stage of their vocational education the respondents of the online survey took part in a VET placement abroad. Very few (with the exceptions of Ireland and Luxembourg) participated in the mobility programme at the beginning of their vocational education training or after finishing it. Most either went abroad in the middle (46%) or near the end (42%) of their vocational education.

Figure II.11: Stage of education at which the training/work placement took place (n=7 567)¹¹



Moreover, the duration of the stay abroad was important for the assessment of the mobility. If the interviewees knew they only had a couple of weeks abroad, they were more willing to accept not-so-ideal circumstances.

We had a nice house and it was a bit far out, but my host family was not very friendly, I've got to say. So, I did not feel comfortable [...]. I would not have wanted to change quarters because I was only there for four weeks. But if I had stayed for half a year, I would not have been able to endure that.

[Austria, ID1]

¹¹ See Table II.5 for detailed numbers. Values smaller than 5% have been removed for reasons of legibility.

Table II.5: Stage of education at which the training/work placement took place (in percentage terms, n=7 567)

	At the start or early on	In the middle	At or near the end	After it had finished	Other
Austria	4.4	68.9	23.5	1.8	1.5
Belgium-Flanders	10.4	32.8	54.1	1.8	0.9
Czech Republic	6.4	48.8	42.5	0.6	1.7
Ireland	29.4	41.2	20.6	6.8	2.0
Latvia	10.1	49.9	35.5	3.3	1.2
Luxembourg	7.7	56.9	0	26.2	9.2
North Macedonia	8.9	49.8	38.0	3.4	0
Poland	2.4	30.4	55.6	9.8	1.9
Slovakia	2.9	73.9	22.2	0.3	0.7
Total average	5.9	45.8	41.9	4.8	1.7

Table II.6: Duration of the mobility period (in percentage terms, n=5 417)

	More than 3 months	1-3 months	4 weeks	3 weeks	2 weeks
Austria	13.6	53.1	17.7	9.2	6.5
Belgium-Flanders	2.7	8.3	19.8	32.5	36.7
Czech Republic	2.6	9.8	23.4	56.3	7.9
Ireland	8.8	6.4	0	54.4	30.4
Latvia	8.1	22.4	38.2	9.9	21.5
Luxembourg	10.8	78.5	5.4	5.4	0
North Macedonia	0.4	5.9	8.9	40.9	43.9
Slovakia	0.3	4.4	8.8	29.3	57.1
United Kingdom	1.4	17.8	14.9	58.2	7.4
Total average	4.7	18.2	18.6	40.3	18.3

Table II.6 shows how long the online survey respondents' traineeships abroad lasted. This shows that relatively short mobilities were most common on average. In Luxembourg, most mobilities (79%) lasted from one to three months, and in Austria more than half of the mobilities (53%) lasted this long, which is above average compared to the entirety of survey respondents. The relative majority of Latvian respondents (38%) stayed abroad for four weeks.

Approximately six out of ten respondents in the United Kingdom (58%) and in the Czech Republic (56%) stayed abroad for three weeks. In North Macedonia (85%), Ireland (85%), Slovakia (86%) and Belgium–Flanders (69%), short mobility periods of two or three weeks were most common. This topic will be approached in more detail when the mobilities' strengths and weaknesses are discussed (see Mobility strengths and weaknesses).

The interviewees were accommodated in hotels, hostels, student boarding facilities, with host families or in apartments they shared with other people. Most of the interviewees were satisfied with these arrangements, but in Latvia there were also critical comments about the accommodation as some participants encountered a number of inconveniences such as the instructions for using home appliances only being available in the local language, unsatisfactory hygiene requirements if the chosen residence was a student dormitory or hostel, poor sound isolation and, in some cases, overcrowded rooms or apartments. The mobility participants recommended that organizers pay more attention to living conditions in the future before sending students abroad.

We also didn't have good living conditions. We stayed at the hostel and everything was dirty there. [...] Of course, we immediately told our school project manager about it. We sent her videos, phone calls, text messages. Everything was passed on, also to the school that hosted us, but they replied that this was our place of residence, everything had already been paid for and nothing could be done, we could only go to the reception and complain.

[Latvia, FGI]

These diverse conditions make it hard, if not impossible, to compare all experiences and draw universal conclusions. Importantly, it seems to be that all participants were supported in one way or another and were satisfied with it – although the assistance they received differed substantially. The individual interviews and focus groups clearly showed that the organizational models had a significant impact on the course of their mobilities as well as on the obtained knowledge and competences, and they were crucial for the successful implementation of mobilities. That being said, it was not too relevant how the mobility was organized but rather how the participants felt about the support.

Our teacher took care of the logistics. She made the accommodation arrangements, which were nothing special, but they sufficed. It was a hostel. In case of any problems, it was she who always sorted them out. So, everything was handed to us on a silver platter.

[Czech Republic, IDI]

It was really well organized. We didn't have any issues. The travel was fine, the accommodation was good. We stayed in a little hostel I suppose. Most of us shared a room; there were two beds in the rooms so that we shared with one person. But they were my classmates, I'd known them for a year and a half at that point so I didn't have a problem with that. I thought it was well organized, I didn't expect any luxurious accommodation. There was enough space for us to keep our food and cook. It was good, it was like living independently in another country.

[Ireland, FGI]

Financial funding was not only one influencing factor on the motivation to take part in the project as already discussed above, but also an important organizational aspect. Whereas most of the respondents consider the financial support sufficient, in particular the learners who have completed their transnational mobility programme in the United Kingdom noted that it was very expensive.

We had pre-departure training and that went very well. It was just the introduction of what we were gonna do and what to expect. It was fully funded. I don't think I had to pay anything, so that was amazing. I didn't have to worry about anything while I was there. They kind of covered everything. It was all planned out for you. Like from the flights to the host family when you get there to arrival. Every day was kind of planned out and you didn't really have anything to worry about – it was a stress-free environment. While we were there we stayed with a host family. So I got up to have breakfast with them, I would walk or get the bus to work. It was about a 15- or 20-minute walk to where the office was.

[Ireland, IDI]

As most of the mobilities took place in groups, it was not possible to consider the interests of every learner individually. Nevertheless, the interviewees did not criticize this fact. They rather enjoyed that almost everything was taken care of – at least when they had not organized their trip by themselves – and were thankful they did not have to think about and plan their transportation, excursions or entertainment for themselves. Leisure time was mostly organized and represented an important part of the mobility.

The group events were definitely very important, i.e. the organized events, because we'd been to Dublin and it wasn't so easy to get to Belfast in a large group, but there we had a bus provided just for us, with air-conditioning and everything organized. So the procedure was definitely much better than if twenty young people had been parading through Dublin. So it was important, including for the exchange.

[Austria, FGI]

The respondents were satisfied with the offers of extracurricular activities they got, but they mostly did not ask for others in case they were not offered. This appears to have worked particularly well where events were organized for them but where provision was also made for participants to have their own free time to engage in activities. This dual approach both enabled participants to explore their host country and its history in a supportive environment and allowed them to discover their surroundings independently and establish their own contacts with local people. Such a model appears most beneficial for placements involving younger participants who might have limited previous experience of travelling abroad independently. The opportunity to learn more about the host country was an important aspect of the placement for the majority of the interviewees.

If something did not meet the participants' expectations, other things usually compensated for it and therefore nuisances were seen as stones on an otherwise interesting and positive road. Some interviewees described, for example, that they were not satisfied with their accommodation but that their work placement and the people they met compensated for it or vice versa. All things considered, most of the respondents thought of their VET mobility experience as a success, even if not all the aspects met all their expectations or wishes. One thing all of the participants had in common was that they disliked uncertainty. Therefore, the information provided in advance about where they were going to work or stay was very important for them.

Mentoring and support

The overall satisfaction concerning mentoring and support during the mobility programme is very high. Most of the interviewees stated that there were hardly any problems that could not be solved one way or another. They felt safe and well cared for. It is important to bear in mind that most of them were of a pretty young age when they went abroad, some for the first time in their lives. In the interviews the participants were asked about their satisfaction concerning the hosting company, the on-site mentoring and the support they received from their mentors or supervisors.

We were really happy with the company. On arrival we were welcomed and given information about the company by the director and assigned our mentors.

[Belgium-Flanders, FGI]

The participants were largely happy and satisfied with their placement as they got to learn something new and work with equipment, techniques, machines or programmes they had not worked with before, including because it was not available at their school or company at home.

We were really happy with the company. On arrival we were welcomed and given information about the company by the director and assigned our mentors.

[Belgium-Flanders, FGI]

The school in which we were trained was focused on art; they had various studios, such as a photo studio and a 3D studio. They had better multimedia equipment compared to our school – they had been focusing on multimedia for many years, and our school introduced this study field only recently.

[Slovakia, FGI]

In Poland, it is simply not possible to undergo such training, as renewable energy is not popular in our country. The biggest power plant in Poland is 25% smaller than the ones operating abroad.

[Poland, IDI]

Participants who undertook their training in companies were particularly satisfied with the following aspects: the possibility to see activities of several departments/workplaces in the company, independence in performing specific activities or tasks in the workplace, and the supervisor's partnership approach and trust that they had sometimes not yet experienced in their home country. Many respondents stated that they worked hard and they liked that. None of the interviewees complained that the hard work was not worthwhile.

It was tough in the beginning. A lot of learning about new things, you have no idea. We worked hard from 8:00 in the morning. We sat there over the project for eight hours a day and then afterwards did research – basically my day of learning was twelve or thirteen hours. It was a big time. Huge project. There were four of us in the group, we did 20 pages of a detailed project and then we had to pitch that to the guy who owns this company. We were just given a few points, and based on that we had to do detailed research for that company and prepare a report. So the owner would get from us a perfectly detailed analysis of his website, of how it's situated on social media. Amazing stuff. It was hard but it was great.

[Ireland, IDI]

Varying levels of satisfaction can be noticed especially in Austria and Latvia. There, some interviewees reported the preparation for the participants had not been sufficient. Furthermore, they reported a lack of communication and perceived either mental underload or overload. On the other hand, problems with the language barrier were mentioned in interviews in Latvia, Slovakia and the Czech Republic – especially concerning working and receiving feedback.

But in the enterprise itself we had to create Skype accounts on the first day and the [boss] avoided any contact with us. So he was in an office and we were in an open-plan office, which was huge, and he always contacted us via chat. He never came out of his office.

[Austria, FGI]

When you go out of your way to talk to them in English, at least in simple terms, they can barely speak it. So, there is such a big language barrier that they won't let you do anything too complicated, because they can't give you any feedback or support.

[Czech Republic, FGI]

Satisfaction was not only achieved on a professional level but also on a personal level. Most of the participants felt appreciated during their traineeship, which was of high value to them.

Needless to say, it is difficult for companies or schools to host students for only a short period of time – most commonly only a few weeks or months – and find something appropriate for them to work on. This largely depends on the business field as well as the abilities and attitudes of the participants.

When we arrived, the owner personally found out, together with the other managers [from the kitchen, restaurant, reception departments], what everyone could or could not do, what everyone liked doing and what the level of our knowledge of the language was. Then she grouped us accordingly. We were divided to work in shifts and we helped out their regular staff. Those who were doing a good job were given more responsibilities.

[Czech Republic, IDI]

Still, most participants were very satisfied with their hosting companies. The interviewees felt very well supported during their traineeship and the overall satisfaction with their mentoring was high.

Our mentor accompanied us everywhere we went. The teacher knew the city, she showed us every hotel and restaurant where we received our training, and she showed us the way to them. She accompanied us during the first visit to the company, she introduced us to the boss, and together we discussed the conditions of the internship. If anything happened, she was always there for us.

[Poland, IDI]

Similarly to the organizational aspects, the forms of mentoring differed greatly. Therefore, generalized statements can hardly be made. Sometimes teachers accompanied their students for a week at the beginning or even stayed with them the whole time. In other cases, coordinators from the sending or receiving

organization were responsible for support. Usually, their functions included the initial reception and placement for training in specific companies, giving participants an introduction to their surroundings as well as being available for various organizational issues and questions. Typically, the coordinator was the person to contact in cases of uncertainty. Sending organization staff tended to focus on the participants' emotional and physical well-being, while host organization staff more often provided practical and logistical assistance.

Often a teacher accompanied the interviewees during their mobility. Most of the time, the teachers and sometimes representatives from intermediary organizations stayed for approximately one week (typically the first week) to ensure that everything was running smoothly.

There were supervisors, but only for the first week. [...] Quite a nice person. Also relatively young, so he was also pretty funny and very collegial. And he was just there for us if we somehow had problems at work or something else.

[Austria, IDI]

Sometimes – especially when the mobility duration was short – they even stayed on-site for the whole time. The teachers were highly praised by the participants.

It all worked perfectly. The taxis were already waiting for us when we arrived. These then took us to our host families. We were able to contact the teacher at all times. She also visited us often at our workplaces and kept a log of everything and made sure that everything was OK. That all went smoothly.

[Austria, FGI]

Our accompanying teacher checked us every day, we went on trips together, he helped us to solve problem situations.

[Slovakia, FGI]

Some participants experienced one-on-one mentoring, while others received tasks for a whole week, which they had to perform. Concerning the participants in Belgium-Flanders, in some cases, tutors of the sending school gave their students assignments to be carried out during their placement (in agreement with the host organization). This very much depended on the type of work they were doing. Most of the respondents had one or more mentors – superiors and/or colleagues – within the company they worked at.

I especially appreciated the mentoring both by the Dutch colleague in the childcare centre and by the teacher of our VET school.

[Belgium-Flanders, IDI]

We were given a mentor at the beginning, but all employees took care of us and helped us.

[Slovakia, IDI]

Data collected in Belgium-Flanders in particular obviously emphasise reflection as all interviewees – except those who did their placement after graduating – stated that their transnational placements were evaluated by their mentors in the company. Their marks – based on the evaluation of their mentor – were integrated by the teachers in their final evaluation of the VET learner at the end of his/her year of training.

I liked the mentoring, which helped me reflect on what I was doing. When my tutor teacher visited me during the placement I was involved in the discussions with my mentor and I appreciated this greatly.

[Belgium-Flanders, IDI]

The on-site support not only covered topics concerning vocational education training but was also related to navigating logistical difficulties in the host country or culture.

In some cases where the respondents organized their mobility more or less on their own, their parents accompanied them while travelling, but they did not stay with them for their work placement. These interviewees could go to their host families and colleagues or superiors at work if they ever had questions and received support. The respondents emphasized that their teachers at home would contact them regularly to ensure that they were well and satisfied with their job and accommodation. Nonetheless, interviewees who organized their mobility on their own and did not have a specific contact person locally would have liked to have had somebody's help on-site who knew about organizational aspects. Especially in these cases, it could be helpful to put a procedure manual in place so that students know who and where to turn to in case of problems.

A buddy? [...] That would have been good.

[Austria, IDI]

The interviewees often stated that they were treated seriously by their international mentors. They were given a lot of freedom, but could always seek

advice and explanations from their mentors and thus make maximum use of the opportunity to acquire knowledge and practical skills. Some of the respondents in Ireland still maintain contact with their mentors via WhatsApp or email. This will be thematized in the next sections.

They were kind to us. They took into account that we were students and we did not have skills like them. When we needed a hand, they helped us.

[Slovakia, ID1]

The support of my mentors and the support of my teacher tutors being present during the placement had a great and lasting impact on what I learnt and acquired.

[Belgium-Flanders, ID1]

It must be a year and probably six or seven months since I got back. [I stay in touch with my mentor through] WhatsApp mainly, and now he's after actually signing up to Instagram where he puts up pictures of the research he's doing. So we keep in touch through Instagram and WhatsApp, and every so often emails. But mostly through WhatsApp. I'd be surprised if two weeks went by where we weren't messaging back and forth. Something like, if I see a specimen here that I'm unsure of, I fire it over to him and he'd help. He's still like a mentor in a way which is great. And he's always said he'd keep me in mind if there is any project that requires somebody, one that he knows I would have the skills to do.

[Ireland, ID1]

New contacts

All mobility participants had some sort of contact person(s) on-site. These could be teachers, supervisors, mentors, other colleagues from hosting organizations or host family members. Sometimes it was not easy for the interviewees to connect with strangers at first, but after a few days or weeks they found people they liked and were able to build new contacts.

The opportunities to meet new people largely depended on the way the internship was organized as some students worked with people from the country they visited or even other countries or met them at school, whereas other students were on an internship with other students from their homeland. It also was relevant how they spent their free time: some people spent it doing excursions and activities in groups with other participants from their home country, others spent more time immersing themselves in the local culture. Personal factors like language skills and confidence are also relevant concerning opportunities to meet and connect with strangers. But also people who did not describe themselves as very open-minded or confident before going abroad in the context of the VET placement benefited from the programme,

as the following quote, taken from an interview with a participant originally from Poland and studying business while doing a two-week entrepreneurship placement in the United Kingdom, shows.

It was brilliant. The group of people who attend the Erasmus+ programme – they really connected with our group. So basically our connections are growing – we have connections with those people, we text and catch up with each other. There were sixteen people in our group, plus the owner of the company and all the companies involved. So that was your network. So that was a nice experience because I'm an Irish participant with Polish descent, and at the time I was in college I couldn't really communicate at the level where I would feel confident enough to catch up with all the others. I always felt there was a barrier to me from a language point of view, and then because I'm older than them, why would they possibly want to catch up with me? It was great because after the placement, it kind of made me more open-minded. I found myself more like a part of the group.

[Ireland, IDI]

The participants tended to build closer and more sustainable contacts when they were separated into different organizations as they had to bond with people they did not know before.

Building a network and connecting with new people was facilitated for those who stayed with host families or shared housing with other students. Bonds with host families tended to be the closest.

My hosting family was perfect – we keep in contact, and they are planning to visit me in Slovakia.

[Slovakia, FGI]

Whether or not these contacts were kept over time after returning to their home countries depended mainly on the relationship the participants had with their superiors, supervisors, mentors, contact persons and colleagues on-site. If, for example, there had been a language barrier during their stay abroad or the relationship was distanced and impersonal, this circumstance unsurprisingly remained afterwards as well. Whether or not the interviewees stayed in contact with people they got to know during their time abroad differed from country to country. The duration of the mobility was also important for the contacts being upheld as it is relevant for consolidating them, though the opinions of the interviewees diverge concerning this point. Whereas some thought five weeks to be too short to sustainably bond with people, others described this amount of time as sufficient. Whatever the case may be, making contacts requires time to get to know each other and create mutual trust.

It takes time to get to know people, and as soon as you start to bond with them, you have to go back to your home country. So even five weeks is not enough. [...] For them to get to know you and learn more about your strengths and weaknesses, for them to consider you a part of their team and start to entrust you with work, it all takes quite a while. As soon as you are friends and everything becomes familiar, you have to go back.

[Latvia, FGI]

All interviewees from Belgium-Flanders and Ireland stated that they were still in contact with somebody they met during their VET mobility experience, but in Austria and the Czech Republic only half of the respondents said so. In North Macedonia, for example, most of the participants did not keep in touch. Contact is mostly maintained via social media platforms, email or messenger services.

Actually, on Facebook or Instagram. So the social media channels, because you are connected everywhere. [...] So you just stay in contact already. Apart from that, I mean, my situation right now is that I have little time and little money. But if I wanted to fly to Japan now, I know that I could write to her and say "Hey, have you got somewhere to sleep? Or can you show me around a bit?" And I'm sure she'd write back and say, "Yes, sure. Just drop by!"

[Austria, IDI]

A couple of interviewees even returned to visit their former colleagues or host families or welcomed them in their own home country. A few even went back to work at their host company or were invited to do so.

I made contacts where I lived, with people on the farm and a teacher in our partner school. The lady I'd stayed with came to Bohemia to visit me. She stayed in our home. We write to each other at Christmas. I met up with my English teacher when he was in Bohemia.

[Czech Republic, IDI]

If you have good contacts and you've made a good impression on certain people, then they're likely to offer you work and employment. Whereas, if you don't really come out of your shell and you don't really show people who you are and what you are capable of, then that is probably not going to be offered to you.

[United Kingdom, IDI]

Last summer, I worked abroad. I was invited by the company.

[Poland, IDI]

Being part of networks in the labour market has become more important in recent years. Nowadays, it is crucial to gain and keep contacts in order to

be successful in the world of work. In this regard, participation in mobility programmes is very useful in order to build international networks, as all participants acquired new contacts while being abroad. But only a few of them keep these work-related contacts over time. Participants in learning mobilities meet new people, be it at the workplace, at school, in host families, or during leisure activities. However, the questionnaire survey showed that many participants did not manage to retain the new contacts after they returned home from the placement. The mobility participants generally tend to maintain personal rather than institutional contacts, which can be observed in the quantitative data on the one hand (see Figures II.12, II.13 and II.14) and in the qualitative data as well.

One of the nicest results of this internship is my friendship with the students from the Netherlands that I met in Sweden and that I am still in contact with.

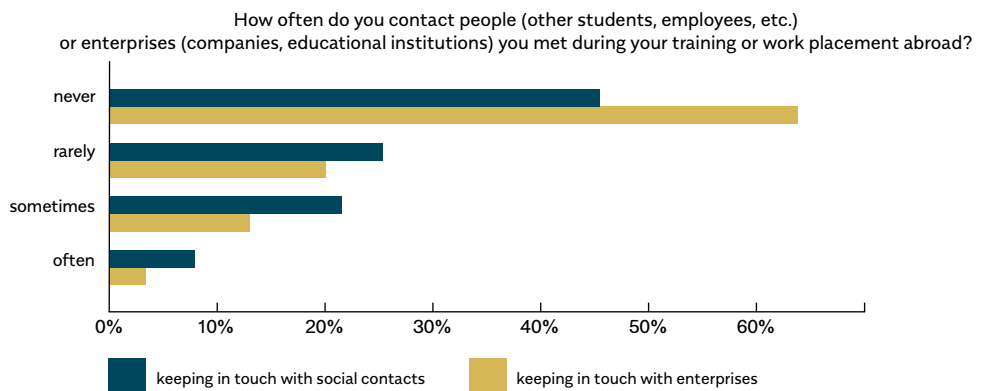
[Belgium-Flanders, FGI]

I did not exchange contact details with the employees, but from time to time I write to my landlady and her son. We are in contact via Facebook.

[Slovakia, IDI]

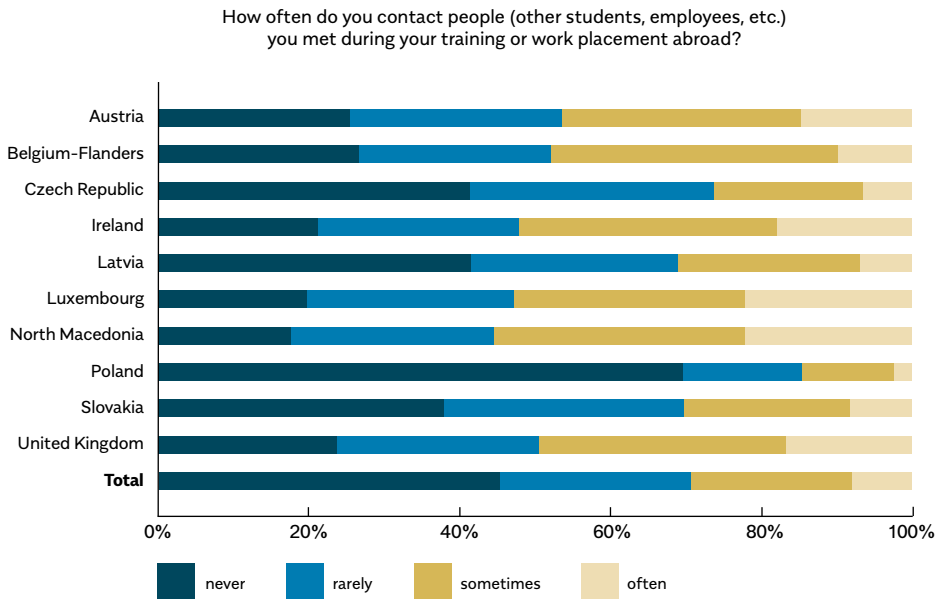
When looking at the entirety of respondents from the online survey, almost half of them (45%) never contact people, e.g. other students, employees, etc., that they met during their training or work placement abroad, and even more, namely almost two thirds (64%), never contact the companies or educational institutions they encountered during their internship (see Figure II.12).

Figure II.12: Respondents who keep in touch with social contacts and enterprises (n=7 992)



Looking at the data of the countries individually, it can be noticed that the participants from North Macedonia (22%) and Luxembourg (22%) claim they stay in touch with the people they met abroad most often. Contrariwise, in Poland, almost seven out of ten respondents never contact people they met abroad.

Figure II.13: Frequency of contacting people the participants met during their training/work placement abroad (n=7 992)¹²

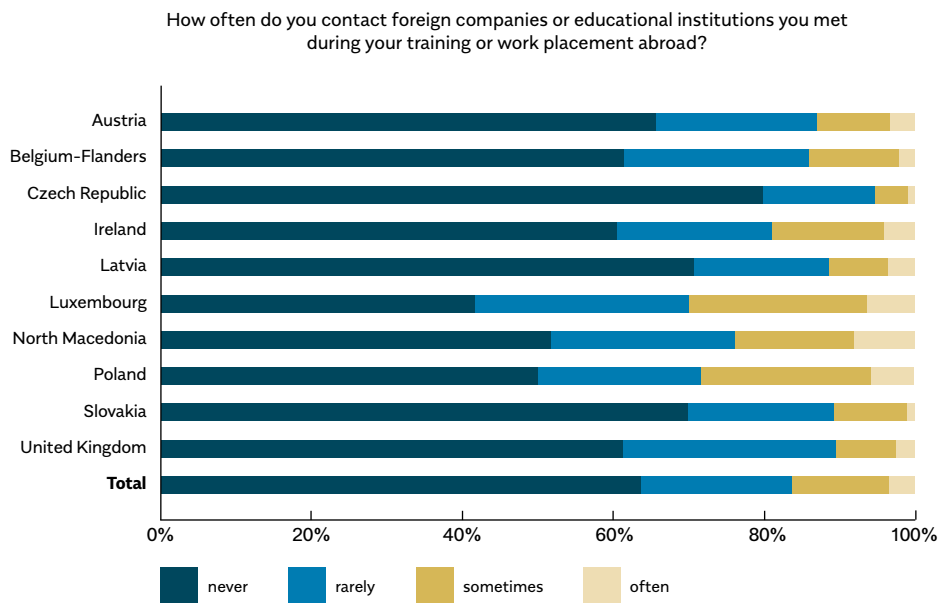


When it comes to keeping in touch with the enterprises, the data read as follows: participants from the Czech Republic, Latvia, Slovakia and Austria are above average when it comes to the low frequency of contact, as many respondents of the survey said they never contact the foreign companies or educational institutions they met during their training or work placement abroad.

Thus, maintaining contacts with the companies and educational institutions visited during internships abroad is significantly less frequent than contacting individuals met during the mobility. The primary reason for this is that the participants would not consider doing so unless it was instigated by the company; they would not – with only a few exceptions – initiate contact themselves. The same can be said about contacts with host institutions as they are primarily the result of initiatives taken by the host institutions.

¹² Values smaller than 5% have been removed for reasons of legibility.

Figure II.14: Frequency of contacting companies/organizations the participants met during their training/work placement abroad (n=7 992)¹³



As Tables II.7 and II.8 show, the frequency of keeping in touch with social contacts and enterprises is higher the longer the work placement lasted. This is true for both scenarios. Respondents who stayed in the host country for more than three months say they often keep in touch with people they met on-site twice as much as respondents who only stayed for two to four weeks.

Table II.7: Duration of placement and keeping in touch with social contacts (in percentage terms, n=5 399)

Duration of placement	Frequency of keeping in touch with social contacts			
	never	rarely	sometimes	often
More than 3 months	16.7	25.8	36.1	21.4
1-3 months	21.9	28.2	34.0	16.0
4 weeks	35.1	34.0	23.3	7.6
3 weeks	37.8	30.1	23.4	8.7
2 weeks	39.5	27.6	23.5	9.3
Total	33.7	29.8	25.9	10.5

¹³ Values smaller than 5% have been removed for reasons of legibility.

The picture concerning keeping in touch with enterprises looks similar, but the factor is even higher as the respondents who stayed in the host country for more than three months are 2-3 times more likely to keep in contact than participants who were abroad for a shorter time.

Table II.8: Duration of placement and keeping in touch with enterprises (in percentage terms, n=5 399)

Duration of placement	Frequency of keeping in touch with enterprises			
	never	rarely	sometimes	often
More than 3 months	48.8	30.6	14.7	6.0
1-3 months	59.6	23.5	14.0	2.8
4 weeks	71.6	19.2	7.2	2.0
3 weeks	77.2	16.2	5.2	1.4
2 weeks	70.3	19.0	8.1	2.5
Total	70.4	19.2	8.2	2.2

The Euro Apprenticeship – the European network to promote, implement and enhance learning mobility for apprentices – was not part of the semi-structured interview guide, but at least three of the Austrian respondents were Euro Apprentices and they brought the topic up by themselves during the interview, which shows the relevance this issue has for them. This network is highly appreciated by the participants as they think a regular international exchange between apprentices is important, including with regard to the continuous improvement of the mobility programme.

I was at the Euro Apprentices meeting in Malta two or three weeks ago. And that was really mega of course. All the apprentices who had just done this type of traineeship abroad came together there. And I had the opportunity of exchanging ideas with them. So this was also a brilliant experience.

[Austria, ID1]

As depicted above, most of the participants would gladly be willing to repeat the (temporary) mobility if given the chance. More than half of the survey respondents say they are not afraid to study (57%) or to take up employment abroad (57%), and 55% of the respondents would like to work abroad in the future.

Mobility strengths and weaknesses

The interviewees stated they acquired both personal and professional benefits while participating in the VET mobility programme. In the following these two

aspects shall not be strictly divided as they are closely intertwined and represent transferable skills for the participants' future professional as well as personal lives.

A result of the mobility is the acquisition of skills, which will be the topic of the next chapter. Most participants mentioned they distinctly improved their language skills – exceptions apply to those participants who went to countries in which the same or a very similar language is spoken (e.g. Slovakia and the Czech Republic). Some students from Flanders who went to the Southern Netherlands regretted that there was hardly any difference in culture. Moreover, Flanders and the Netherlands share the same language. Nevertheless, the experiences they had abroad had an influence on their manner of expression in their mother tongue for some respondents.

It is a good thing in general, also for cultural exchange, everybody should do it.

In Luxembourg, we also have enough opportunities to do so, and I think this is really good.

It also helps to learn languages [...], only speaking another language during classes is a different type of learning. If you go to a country where people mostly speak the same language, you will really learn it.

[Luxembourg, FGI]

To learn a language or try to talk the language... They just need to go on a mobility because through conversation, communication with foreigners, you get to do just that.

[North Macedonia, IDI]

Improving your linguistic abilities. You can learn something everywhere, even if you go to a German-speaking country. You learn to articulate yourself more and more effectively.

[Austria, IDI]

However, language skills were not the only competence the interviewees improved. Acquiring and strengthening personal characteristics such as independence, autonomy, self-confidence, maturity and flexibility was one of the main mobility strengths identified by the participants themselves.

The benefits that you just have personally – you become more open, you gain more self-confidence and also become more independent. Then this will also do a lot for you professionally, as I said, with certificates, language schools, etc. You also somehow learn lots of professional skills that you can implement and use later in your work, just like I do now, where the company is also very happy. [...] It is just such a good funding opportunity, and you will never go abroad so cheaply again. [...] Then there is the fact that there organizations, which simply plan everything in advance for you, even if you don't do it through these types of institutions. You learn to look for flights and to check for hotels

yourself. You learn how to handle your money more effectively. I think these are all such positive aspects that are just a benefit to you.

[Austria, IDI]

The interviewees had to leave their comfort zone and obtained a different view as a quid pro quo, enabling them to compare what they knew before to their new experiences. This sometimes even resulted in increased motivation to study, work and take internships abroad.

The experiences you have. I don't think you can have those in the same way here in Austria. Just simply because you're flying to another country. You learn another language. You get to know different ways of thinking. It's also just a completely different feeling, I say now, when you work abroad, you feel a kind of independence.

[Austria, IDI]

Why it was worth doing – the language, and I came across other people's ways of thinking, thanks to which I somewhat changed my approach to people as well.

[Czech Republic, IDI]

We got acquainted with another culture, different people.

[North Macedonia, FGI]

The respondents made new experiences and developed their knowledge in different areas – vocational, technical, linguistic, (inter-)cultural, etc. However, they did not rank these different aspects, and not all participants experienced change in all these areas. They described getting to know foreign countries, cultures and people.

I got to know more about culture because we visited museums a lot. It was more for me. Also it was possible to see the other teaching method they have access to. This allowed me to understand that I can study differently.

[Latvia, FGI]

All things considered, they were very happy with what they achieved in a short period of time. They broadened their horizons and were very glad about it. In particular, the different kind of learning to that which they were used to at school (usually having more time to explain tasks individually, one-on-one training and the possibility to reach out to co-workers), having more concrete tasks than at school, generally acquiring work experience and the real-world context deeply impressed them.

We didn't really know what to expect. It was a different environment to a classroom, and I found it was way more enjoyable than being stuck in a classroom for nine hours. You get to put it into practice, and it's so worthwhile doing it for real. I learnt skills both inside and outside the classroom, everyday skills. The whole trip in general was life-changing and I'm still using those skills today, and will do in the future.

[Ireland, FGI]

I was really integrated into the team and was regularly asked for advice on how I would do something. Feeling integrated and accepted is very rewarding and has a strong impact on my self-confidence.

[Belgium-Flanders, IDI]

The interviewees benefitted from the creation of a network due to making new contacts and friends abroad. Professionally they believed their participation in the VET mobility programme looks good on their curriculum vitae and applications and will therefore enhance their chances in the labour market. The interviewees were thankful that the organization and planning were mostly done for them and that the programme was funded. This was perceived as a strength of the programme.

You see something, basically you see more. You experience more and learn new things. You learn new cultures, you get to know new food. [...] Plus, there are all the experiences you have. You'll never forget you were there for the rest of your life. And it's also great for your CV.

[Austria, FGI]

As soon as I put all this information that I'd gathered, and all the skills I'd acquired, once I put that on my LinkedIn, suddenly it became a hell of a lot more active. There were all these buzz words that were obviously crucial. And that helped me convince two other people to go as well. Being able to build up your skillset and to give yourself three months working in a biological research station gets you in that mindset again. Then when you're applying for jobs in the evenings or on the weekend it just makes it [easier] – it helps, it inspires or pushes you on, I guess. That, and three months in Spain – it's an easy sell! And the fact that it's funded – I thought that was a scam when I first saw it. I was like, 'Not a chance'. When I told everybody else it was funded they couldn't believe it either. That's just the icing on the cake.

[Ireland, IDI]

The data show that the placement's duration is a rather ambivalent issue. Interestingly, a relatively short duration was seen on the one hand as a strength in the Czech Republic as the mobility therefore did not interfere with the participants' studies or school at home. On the other hand, the short duration

of the mobility was also rated as weakness, as some participants could not integrate themselves sufficiently and had problems connecting with their colleagues. Several interviewees remarked they had thought five weeks to be a long time to be abroad. At the end of their traineeship, they felt as if time had flown by and would have liked to have stayed longer.

At first I thought, five weeks is pretty long. But after the first three weeks I thought, now I'm already in the middle and it could have been longer.

[Austria, FGI]

I left my home in Belgium with tears as I had never been away so long. At the end of the placement I left Finland and the care centre also in tears.

[Belgium-Flanders, IDI]

Another strength of this programme is that many interviewees realized, thanks to their VET mobility participation, that they are able to (at least temporarily) live and work in another country than their own. This broadens their possibilities for the future as the world opens up for them.

I spent some time in a new country and I realized I want to go on Erasmus at university. I realized I want to travel, and maybe later work abroad. I realized that foreign languages are important and also that I cannot stay in one place all the time.

[Slovakia, IDI]

The participants considered that the mobility programme and the chance to work in a chosen field had a clarifying effect for them as some became aware of what they wanted or did not want to do in the future without having to fully commit to it.

This is going to sound bad, but it helped me to figure out what I didn't want to do. Obviously, I didn't keep doing Film and Documentary. I loved it. I just wanted to do something else as well. Because Erasmus was so practical it gave me a chance to figure out that that's not really what I wanted in life right now. I wanted to keep doing something more academic. I didn't want to continue to keep doing the more practical side of it. I really liked Media Studies, which we didn't do so much of in Finland. So those are the kinds of things that I missed, and I have those kinds of subjects in my course now. So even if you're not sure about it, that that's absolutely what you want to do for the rest of your life, it's still a really good experience. It still shows you one side of things or one option and what it could be. It gave me clarity and choice.

[Ireland, FGI]

The interviewees identified a lot fewer weaknesses than strengths. Most frequently, the learners complained about the mismatch between the work placement and their level of vocational skill or field of study. Traineeships should ideally be aligned with the field of study in order to make the most of the work placement.

I haven't learnt anything in relation to my specific profession as a roofer. However, I learnt to appreciate the youngsters with Down syndrome and work with them. Notwithstanding the negative professional experience, I tried to make the best of it.

[Belgium-Flanders, IDI]

Nevertheless, finding the right level of difficulty for each and every participant is complicated as the host companies do not know for sure which competences the VET placement participants actually have and which skills they have already obtained at school.

They gave us garden shed designs and told us to make doors. [...] We built all the doors there within two days, and they were astounded and said to us that there was a problem, because this was supposed to be work for each of us for the two weeks [...] so what did we want to do there then. [...] In England, it was more us who taught them stuff, not the other way round.

[Czech Republic, FGI]

As discussed above, the relatively short duration of the internship is surely a big challenge when organizing the individual mobilities (see Mentoring and support). Sometimes the interviewees criticized the fact that their courses and subjects did not exist on the syllabus of the VET sending institutions.

Several respondents were upset about their host companies not being prepared enough for them and not having enough or suitable work for them.

That maybe the places you go are a little more prepared. So that they really have work for you as well.

[Austria, IDI]

This shows how motivated the interviewees are/were and that they saw their internship abroad as a possibility to see and learn something new. Unfortunately, this was not always realized. Some participants also had the feeling that their host companies were not really interested in working with the foreign students and were therefore confused about why these had been chosen as host companies. The interviewees remarked that the selection of jobs should be done more carefully. Another weakness of the mobility programme was identified

by participants who were staying and working with people who spoke the same language as it limited the opportunities to develop language and cultural competences. This also applies for mobilities to countries with the same or a very similar language (e.g. Slovakia and the Czech Republic).

I might have wanted to see the inner workings of the hotel more, but they didn't allow it. We learnt very little about the work itself, everything we saw was dirty dishes. I can also look at dirty dishes here in Latvia. I would like them to get more involved and give me some information about what and how. [...] We couldn't really go into the bar or the reception to see how the reservation system works, what companies they work with. The marketing side interested us more. We wanted more.

[Latvia, IDI]

Everyone in our group either stayed in the hotel or went shopping [during their free time]. And yes, we did stick together as a Czech group most of the time. In our group, there were about two of us who could string a few sentences in English together so that we could get by. So, everyone always went out with one of us. In any case, some of the other people there never even said a word.

[Czech Republic, FGI]

When it comes to organization, you should definitely make sure that you get into good companies if you are planning to organize a traineeship. [...] The focus was not on the job in my case but on everything else that goes with it, i.e. basically on the host family and the other people with whom I was in contact. That was with the institute that organized it, but although the job should have been the priority it actually remained somewhat secondary, and yes, I found that to be rather a shame. I spent just two weeks in this area and unfortunately I could not learn much. That wasn't supposed to be the purpose. But I'd definitely like to do it again, just next time with a good job. Where I can really benefit.

[Austria, FGI]

On the other hand, some interviewees criticized the language barrier which, in a few cases, made communication at work or school very hard and therefore was not conducive for their studies abroad. Those who had negative experiences with their host companies or families and accommodation emphasized the importance of thorough scrutiny and careful selection of these factors. Some interviewees criticized the insufficient preparation they received from their schools or sending organizations and the lack of detailed information about work duties prior to the mobility. Some reported they had minimal ability to choose a company.

That school was not prepared for our reception. [...] We had the most insignificant tasks in group work, they did not really know how to involve us in group work and people did not speak English. It was quite difficult to communicate and to use an instrument because they didn't really know whether we were able to use it or not. They didn't really know how to explain it. [...] We were not the first group to be sent to them. The director didn't consider it necessary to warn them. They said that if they had known about it [our arrival] in time, they would have prepared for it in time, would have prepared their lectures in English as well.

[Latvia, FGI]

The one negative thing I could say, prior to going out there, is that there was just that one paragraph essentially describing the work placements. That was enough to intrigue me and get me excited, but it was still at least I think five days until we actually met our supervisors. We were already in Spain before we knew exactly what we were going to do for the three months. There was a bit of apprehension amongst some people in my group as they had just a one-line description explaining what they were going to be doing for three months. And they were only going to find out what they were actually doing when it was too late – when they were already in Spain, standing in front of their employer.

[Ireland, IDI]

The differences in the selection process were seen as problematic by some participants, especially from the Czech Republic, Ireland, Latvia and Slovakia. These were dependent on the different levels of demand, but it was a question of fairness for the interviewees, especially if they had put effort in and saw that some of their colleagues who allegedly had not done so could participate in the VET mobility as well. The respondents believed that those who intend to make the most of it should be chosen to participate.

I'd definitely be more specific about who they let go on it. Without being rude, there were people that just were not motivated to do it and it ruined – not ruined, I wouldn't change the way I did it – but affected our experience. Some people just weren't motivated enough. You have to keep a good reputation [with host companies] and unfortunately the place we were in probably won't take half as many people on next year because of how some people in our group were.

[Ireland, FGI]

I would have changed the selections of pupils to be more transparent. I would have introduced interviews with the pupils and asked them why they wanted to go on the traineeship and what they wanted to learn there and bring back from it.

[Slovakia, IDI]

Although the participants received financial funding for their mobility and most of them were very satisfied with the amount they got, a few needed more financial support and had to rely on their parents providing them with additional sponsorship.

More money is always a good thing. I remember that my parents had to pay a lot in addition so that I could do this.

[Austria, IDI]

The budget of 75% doesn't allow young people to be completely independent of their family, yet you go abroad to become more responsible and independent. Going abroad is essentially a personal discovery of what you can and will do in life.

[Luxembourg, FGI]

Overall, the majority of interviewees rated their stay abroad as positive and instructive and as something they would not want to have missed. The success and impact of the mobility depended e.g. on the form of their accommodation, the type of the host institution where the traineeship took place and the organization of their work itself. The respondents noticed changes primarily with regard to their independence. The transnational mobility programme is seen as a unique opportunity to get to know foreign countries, new people, new cultures and companies at which they would have otherwise not had the chance to work.

I know no one who could offer me a job in a Michelin star restaurant. This was an opportunity of a lifetime, so if you were lucky enough to get it, you had to make the most of it.

[Poland, IDI]

These new experiences are also mentioned as reasons for becoming more open and independent. The linguistic skills acquired or consolidated are also highlighted as a positive outcome of the training abroad. However, participation in VET placements also led to lasting memories, as already discussed at the beginning of the chapter. To sum up, the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses in the interviewees' views. The overall assessment is obviously positive. Still, naming and tackling the weaknesses offers chances to improve the mobility programme.

Participants' suggestions for improvement

The interviewees were asked to communicate improvements in order to enhance and develop the VET mobility programme even further. These mainly tackle those issues that have been identified as the weaknesses described above.

Most suggestions for improvement concerned the work done during the traineeship and the host companies. The participants recommend focusing on a better match between the internship activities and their field of study as well as their level to meet the participants' competences and skills. In their opinion, making more detailed arrangements with host companies could help to make the internship more effective, since several interviewees felt they could have done or learnt more while being abroad.

Here, they keep drumming into us that we should seek work experience in our field, but then they often pick an organization which doesn't have much to do with the subjects we learn.

[Czech Republic, FGI]

I think it would be more appropriate to evaluate the suitability of the internships, the places to which the students are sent, the degree to which they fit the programme they are studying and the degree to which we are knowledgeable about the place.

[Latvia, IDI]

In order to be well-prepared for their VET mobility, the respondents would appreciate being more involved in the preparation of the internship and the choice of internship activities. This also includes providing a detailed job description to the participants prior to their departure.

There should be more talk during the preparation phase about where interns would be sent to and the specific activities they would do there.

[Czech Republic, IDI]

The one thing we didn't really know was what we would actually be doing at work.

[United Kingdom, IDI]

The interviewees not only want to choose the country they will visit during their internship but also the character of the work and the organization in which the placement takes place. One suggestion they made, for example, is to provide the participants with the chance of choosing from three job offers.

Preparatory language training, especially if English is not commonly spoken in the host country or host company, is seen as potentially helpful. English is more or less common knowledge for all participants – not only for those coming from

English-speaking countries – but the interviewees complained that in some host companies they could not or could hardly communicate with their colleagues, as the participants did not speak the local language and the people on-site did not understand English or the language(s) spoken by the participant.

Respondents who had bad experiences with their host families or host companies particularly emphasized the importance of the careful selection of jobs and host families as this represents a big portion of the success or failure of the mobility programme. Accommodation was meaningful in another manner as well: living with other people speaking the same language was seen as a hindrance to gaining or improving communication skills. Staying with host families was therefore preferred.

So it was a bit stupid that there were actually 15 Austrians in one apartment because we just spoke German again afterwards in the apartment. So I would have hoped that I would have had a host family because I would have spoken much more English there; this way we actually just spoke German all the time.

[Austria, FGI]

For the participants, it was important not to live somewhere far away from cities without means of transport to get there as their mobility is limited, especially at such a (typically) young age.

In order to have time to acclimatize to the unfamiliar surroundings and learn as much as possible, the interviewees suggested extending the length of the stay abroad and opening the possibility to go abroad more often. Some of them recommended increasing the financial support available to them and the time which can be spent on leisure activities.

The combination of theory and practice – school and work – was considered as desirable for a few interviewees. Others thought the emphasis should lie on the practical side of working.

Work and school would be, in my opinion, the most ideal anyway.

[Austria, IDI]

More attention should be paid to practical work. That was not the case in our school. We learnt more theory instead of practice. I think practice is the crucial part of the work.

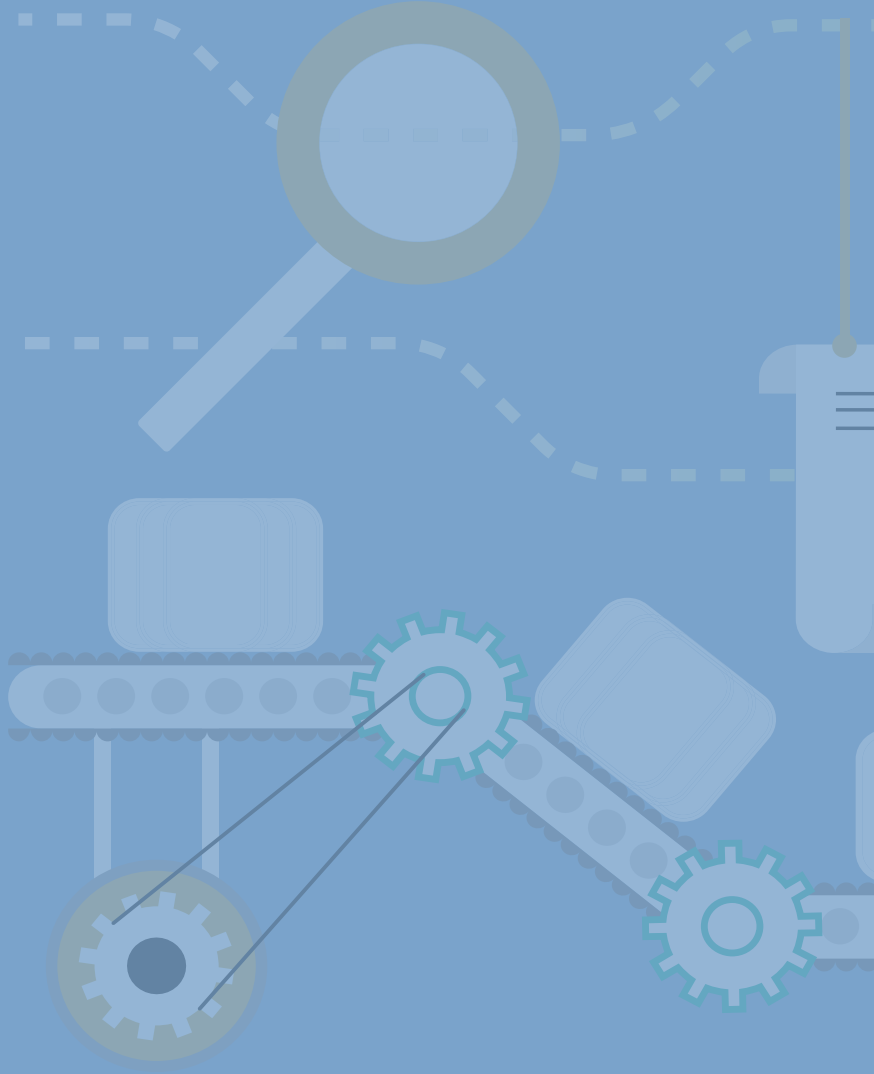
[North Macedonia, FGI]

It was really nice to be able to practice what I had learnt at school in real-life conditions and see the result of my work: a staircase for a boat.

[Belgium-Flanders, FGI]

Some interviewees emphasized the need for more awareness of the opportunities to go abroad in general and the need for more information on specific offers. The need for improvement here is also reflected in the fact that hardly any interviewees knew, when deciding which school to attend, whether or not the school they had chosen offered participation in VET placements abroad. Most of the time, it was sheer luck that they heard about the offer. The interviewees recommended implementing a strict application process and clear communication of the selection criteria from the first year of study. Some were disappointed by the behaviour of their colleagues and thought the image of VET mobility programmes could suffer from their misbehaviour. Therefore, these respondents would change the attitude of their fellow participants, who complained excessively or did not take their work placements seriously.

III. Development of competences



The main objective of this chapter is to look at the vocational, language, intercultural and soft skills learners gained or developed during their mobility placement. As was already mentioned in the *New Skills Agenda for Europe* (2016)¹⁴, employers are increasingly demanding transferable skills, such as the ability to work in a team, creative thinking and problem solving, beyond looking for the right occupation-specific skills.

The aim is to ensure that people develop a broad set of skills from early on in life and to make the most of Europe's human capital, which will ultimately boost employability, competitiveness and growth in Europe. Critical thinking, entrepreneurship, problem solving or digital competences are just some of the competences enshrined by the *New Skills Agenda*. These skills emerge today as key to allowing people to develop good-quality jobs and fulfil their potential as confident, active citizens¹⁵. This means that the learners were not only asked to indicate the impact of the placement on occupation-specific skills but also on their so-called soft and 21st-century skills.

For this chapter, the aggregated data were analyzed to assess the overall impact of the VET mobility on the participants across all countries and, where relevant, the impact will be analyzed according to the country, the duration of the mobility, the field of study or sector, the organization where the VET mobility took place and when it took place.

Overall assessment of skill acquisition

There were three questions in the questionnaire where respondents were asked to what extent they had acquired certain competences and to what extent they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements referring to their competences or learning.

In the first question the respondents were asked to what extent the work placement allowed them to acquire, develop or improve certain competences. 72% of the respondents stated that they had improved their communication and team-working skills a lot or completely (weighted average¹⁶ 3.95), and 72% said that they had enhanced their ability to work in an international environment (WA 3.94).

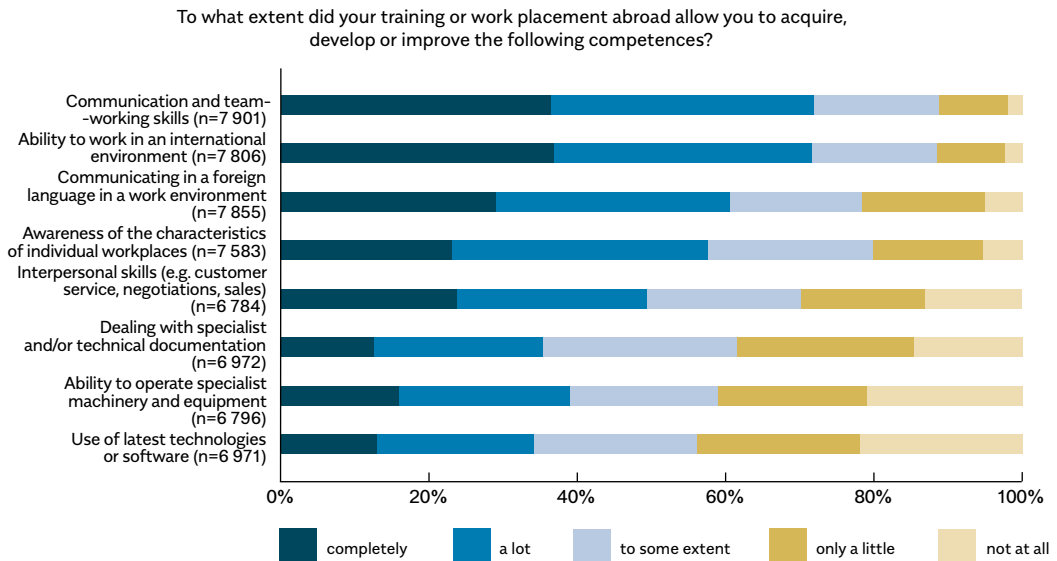
14 European Commission (2016). *A New Skills Agenda For Europe: Working together to strengthen human capital, employability and competitiveness*. Brussels: European Commission.

15 OECD (2012). *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)*. Retrieved from oecd.org/site/piaac. This programme measures the key cognitive and workplace skills needed for individuals to participate in society and for economies to prosper.

16 Weighted arithmetic mean.

As can be seen (Figure III.1), 61% also improved their communication in a foreign language in a work environment. However, this percentage varies widely across countries, as participants in some countries carried out their transnational mobility in a country with the same or a similar language (WA 3.62).

Figure III.1: Extent to which the learners have gained or improved competences



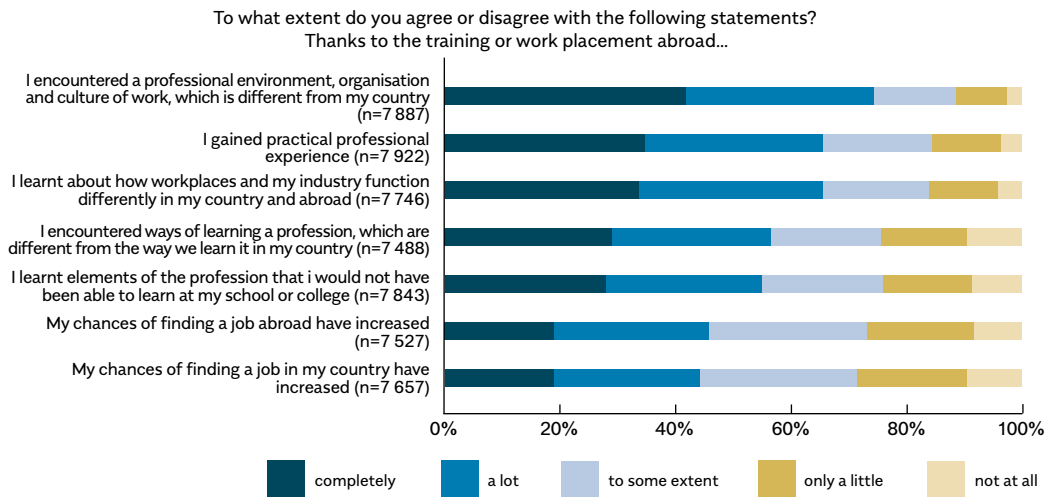
58% have also become aware of the characteristics of individual workplaces (WA 3.55) while just under half (49%) of the respondents strongly agreed that they had enhanced their interpersonal skills (WA 3.30). This rather low percentage could be explained by the narrow interpretation that was given in parentheses ("e.g. customer service, negotiations, sales").

It is not surprising that less than half (39%) of the respondents improved their ability to operate specialist machinery and equipment (WA 2.93) or their competence in dealing with specialist and/or technical documentation (35%, WA 2.95) as not all participants had to deal with specialist equipment or technical documentation.

Even fewer participants (34%) improved their competence in using the latest technologies or software (WA 2.81). It became obvious during the interviews that many participants did not have to use the latest technologies or software and no less than 22% of the respondents stated that they did not improve this competence at all; a further 22% only improved it a little.

In the second question, the respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (completely).

Figure III.2: (Dis)agreement with the general impact of the mobility



Awareness of a professional environment, organization or culture of work that is different from their own country received the highest score, with 74% of respondents strongly agreeing (WA 4.02). 66% also agreed a lot or completely that they had gained practical professional competences (WA 3.81) and 65% that they had learnt about how workplaces and their industry function differently to those in their own country (WA 3.78).

56% completely agreed or agreed a lot that they had encountered ways of learning a profession that are different from the way they learn it in their country (WA 3.51). 55% also strongly agreed that they had learnt elements of the profession that they would not have been able to learn at their own school or college (WA 3.50).

Less than half of the respondents (46%) agreed completely or a lot that their chances of finding a job abroad had increased (WA 3.30) and even fewer (44%) that their chances of finding a job in their own country had increased (WA 3.25). We should, however, remind ourselves that in most countries concerned there was a (very) low unemployment rate at the moment they were being surveyed.

In the third question, they were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements referring to their development of 21st-century skills such as time management, analytical skills, etc.

As we can see (Figure III.3), establishing a rapport with other people is the only skill that more than half of the learners (56%) agreed with completely or a lot, and more than three quarters (80%) agreed that they had enhanced this skill to at least some extent. This was confirmed by the learners when they were talking about their communication skills. During the interviews (focus groups and individual interviews), learners had already mentioned that they could more easily establish rapport with other people. Especially learners who described themselves as shy seem to have benefited from the traineeship abroad in this respect.

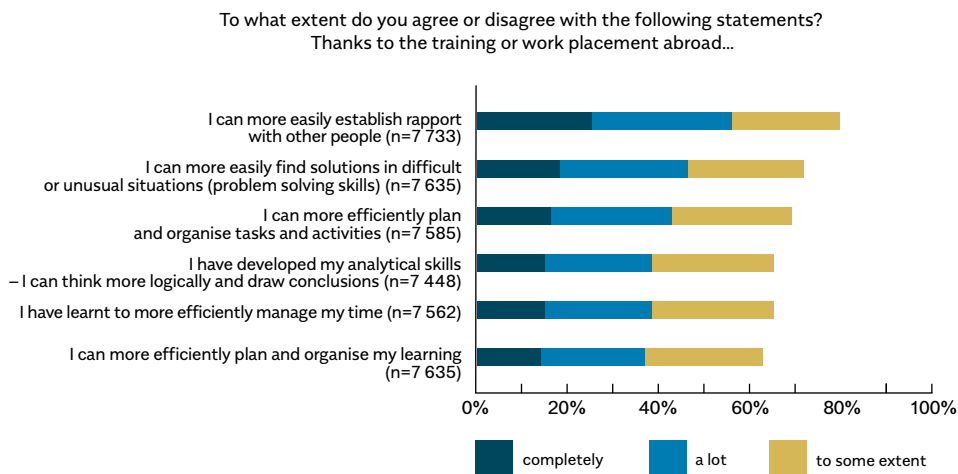
18% also completely agreed, and 28% agreed a lot, that they can now find solutions in difficult or unusual situations more easily. 26% say that they can do this to some extent. Slightly lower percentages can be found when it comes to developing analytical skills: 15% agree completely, 24% a lot and 27% to some extent that they can think more logically and draw conclusions.

The same percentages are found where time management is concerned: 15% completely agree, 24% a lot and 27% to some extent that they are able to more efficiently plan and organize tasks and activities. Only 12% completely agree, 27% a lot and 30% to some extent that they have learnt to efficiently manage their time. It is quite striking that 10% say that they have not enhanced these skills at all. It should be mentioned, however, that during the interviews, the participants also mentioned that they learnt to work with deadlines.

The lowest percentages occur when it comes to planning and organizing their learning more efficiently: 14% agree completely and 23% a lot that they are more efficient in planning and organizing their learning thanks to the traineeship. In fact, 13% even totally disagree. This might be due to the fact that most learners spent their placement in a company and not in a school.

It is also interesting to find out which variables impacted the acquisition of competences and in which circumstances learners acquired their competences to a greater or lesser degree. This might be important when drawing conclusions on the effectiveness of certain kinds of mobility. It should be mentioned, therefore, that the overall results vary, to some extent, according to certain variables: sending country, duration of the mobility, occupational area or field of study, setting in which the mobility took place and gender.

Figure III.3: Impact of the mobility on 21st-century skills



As already shown (Table II.6), 89% of the learners from Luxembourg and 67% of the learners from Austria stayed abroad for one month or more compared to only 4% from Slovakia and 6% from North Macedonia. In these countries, none of the respondents was mobile for more than three months. 86% of respondents in Slovakia, 85% in North Macedonia and 84% in Ireland were mobile for two or three weeks. In Slovakia, more than half of the respondents (57%) participated in a short-term mobility of 2 weeks.

The data show (Table II.4) that learners of tourism were most represented in the group of respondents (28%), but the percentages vary considerably across countries – half of the respondents from Austria and nearly half (47%) from Luxembourg come from the tourism sector compared to only 14% from Ireland. It is also important to notice that two-thirds (66%) of the tourism learners were abroad for more than one month and 9% of them even stayed in the host country for more than three months. This may explain the high percentage (67%) of Austrian learners who were in the host country for more than one month (14% more than three months).

Conversely, there are no respondents from Luxembourg who did their placement in electronics, IT, manufacturing, mining and quarrying whereas 27% of the respondents from Slovakia and Poland performed their placement in these industries (average 20%).

There are also important differences as far as the occupational area of agriculture, forestry, fishing and environment is concerned. 33% of the

respondents from Luxembourg were trained for this industry compared to only 4% from Slovakia (average 9%).

There are also important differences as far as administration and other services are concerned (average 15%), with no respondents from Luxembourg and 22% from Poland.

As shown already (Table II.3), the majority of participants from virtually all countries spent their placement in a small business (average 40%), with nearly half of the Polish learners performing their placement in a small business (49%). Conversely, only 21% of the North Macedonian learners did their placement in a small business and more than half in a school (57%). Also, 30% of the Slovak, 28% of the UK, 29% of the Polish and 27% of the Latvian learners did their placement in a school (average 27%)

As far as other settings are concerned (average 27%), a number of learners indicated hotels and restaurants as well as wellness centres, hairdressers and shops as 'other'. This might explain why one-third (32%) of Luxembourg but also 28% of the Flemish, 27% of the UK and 26% of the Irish learners indicated 'other'. On average, 10% of the learners did their traineeship in a medium-sized company and only 6% in a large company.

Impact on professional competences

As mentioned before, 35% of respondents agree completely, 31% a lot and 19% to some extent that they have gained professional competences. This means that two-thirds of the learners strongly agree that their transnational mobility was beneficial to the development of their professional competences.

It is important to stress that although very few learners – both in the individual and focus group interviews and in the survey – thought that they had not gained any professional competences, some learners were disappointed because the internship was not in line with what they had studied or were trained for or was too short.

During the interviews in the UK, it appeared that in a minority of cases, the extent to which participants were able to develop relevant technical skills was limited by undertaking placements they perceived to be irrelevant to their current studies/employment. For example, one respondent indicated that although the placement provided the opportunity to learn some new technical skills regarding air conditioning, the placement's timeframe was too short for the knowledge gained to be useful to their workplace environment at home. Furthermore, this individual believed that the placement would have been more effective if its learning content had focused on developing pre-existing technical skills related to the electrical work they undertake at home. Therefore,

it is important that good agreements are made with the host organization and that, in the event of problems, a new placement can be offered.

I would have enjoyed doing electrics as that was the reason why I went out there. I wouldn't say 'disappointing', but I think it could have been a bit more [useful]. [...] I learnt something new but I don't think I learnt enough about air conditioning to actually do something with it, especially with it being from people that spoke Spanish – they couldn't really teach me a lot, I was just looking [at what they did].

[United Kingdom, IDI]

The chosen workplaces must better meet the objectives that must be achieved for the internship. For example, I worked in clothing store of a well-known chain for the first two weeks. I didn't learn anything at the time, so I reported that to the supervisor, and I was allowed to work in a PR/marketing agency where I did acquire new competences.

[Belgium-Flanders, IDI]

Interviewees also stressed the importance of good mentoring. A Slovak focus group participant from the field of computer and network technology was satisfied with the opportunity to try new technology and software in the company; however, he would have liked the organization of the placement to have been more thoroughly designed, particularly in terms of professional supervision. Conversely, a Slovak graduate from the study field of electronics – multimedia technology – who was on a placement in the Czech Republic had an opportunity to work with new technology and had significant professional support from his vocational mentor, who passed a lot of new information onto him and his classmates.

Me and my classmates were in a company specializing in camera systems. They put us into the showroom and told us that we could try cameras, disassemble them and test their functionality. When a new camera that they wanted to try arrived, we tested and installed it. Once, we participated in a professional presentation for clients. We were also given random ad hoc tasks; for example, translation from Czech to English or testing systems before presentations. The company's employees were busy and spent a very limited amount of time with us.

[Slovakia, FGI]

The placement gave me a lot because we did things we did not do at our school. Our school does not have equipment like the Czech school. I had a great mentor as far as vocational skills are concerned; he had a human approach.

[Slovakia, IDI]

The job-related skills also changed as a result of participation in the transnational mobility programme, and most of the respondents and interviewees refer to its positive impact on the professional competences of the learners.

I never knew, for example, that I had a talent for writing. [...] And that's what my boss taught me.

[Austria, IDI]

I always knew that I loved animals but it was only during my placement that I realized I had a passion for reptiles.

[Belgium-Flanders, FGI]

I enjoyed every moment of this transnational placement in the Netherlands. It was a truly great professional and personal experience as a child care worker. The combination of placement in a childcare centre and a few days attending lessons in a VET school was very useful and inspiring. I especially appreciated the mentoring both by the Dutch colleague in the childcare centre and by the teacher of our VET school. It became a truly reflective transnational placement which has really had an impact on my decision to go on in higher education in the same field.

[Belgium-Flanders, IDI]

As shown in Figure III.4, the impact differs considerably by country. 80% of the respondents from Luxembourg strongly agree that they have gained practical professional experience and another 11% that they have gained professional competences to some extent (WA 4.22). More than half of the respondents (52%) completely agree that they gained these competences. This is also the case for the respondents from Latvia and Austria (51%), where 77% strongly agree (WA 4.11 and 4.19, respectively). In addition, 77% of the participants from North Macedonia strongly agree that they gained practical professional experience, but here far fewer (15%) agree completely (WA 3.81). Only 50% of the respondents from the Czech Republic agreed completely or a lot with this statement (WA 3.49).

Thanks to their experience of foreign internships, the Polish respondents indicated that they could not only test themselves in a particular position but also see what work and on-the-job training look like in other European countries. Some of the respondents emphasized that the mere fact of receiving everyday tasks from the employers and performing interesting, varied activities had a significant impact on their getting to know the specifics of work in a given profession.

We were able to observe how a particular company works. I saw different types of relationships within the company, how specific departments cooperated, how they were connected and how they performed their activities. This is useful knowledge, especially for those who would like to set up their own business in Poland.

[Poland, FGI]

Figure III.4: Acquisition of practical professional experience by sending country (n=7 922)

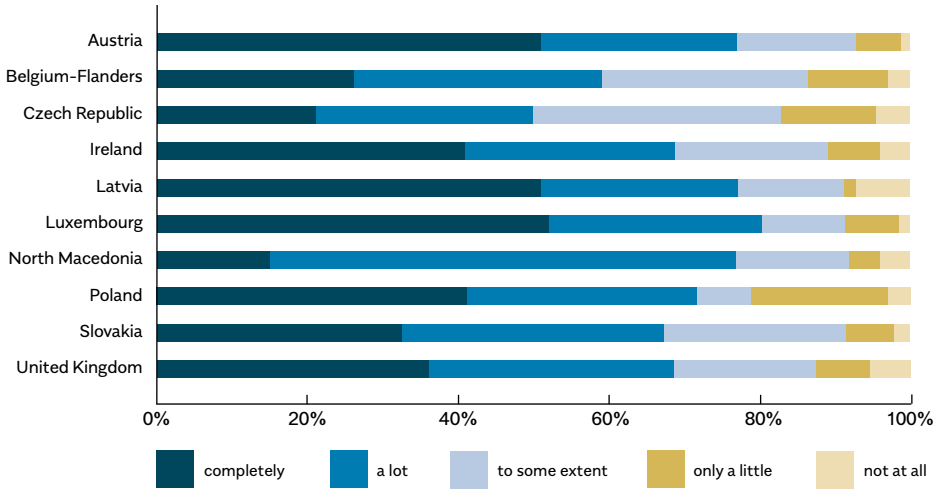
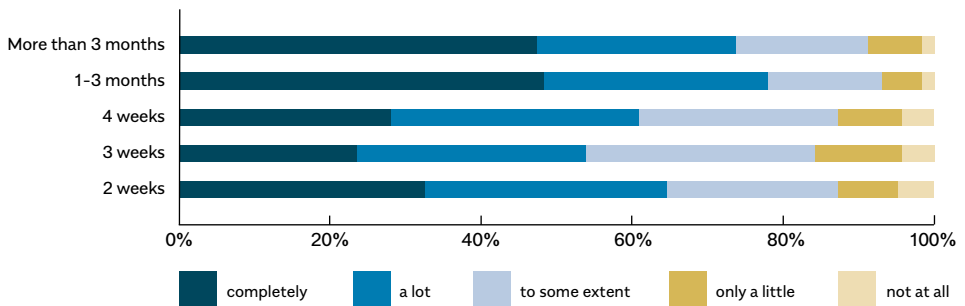


Figure III.5: Acquisition of practical professional experience by duration of the mobility (n=7 922)



As mentioned earlier, 35% of all learners completely agreed that the mobility had a positive impact on their practical professional competences, 31% agreed a lot and 19% to some extent. However, significant differences can be noticed when comparing their responses by the duration of the placement.

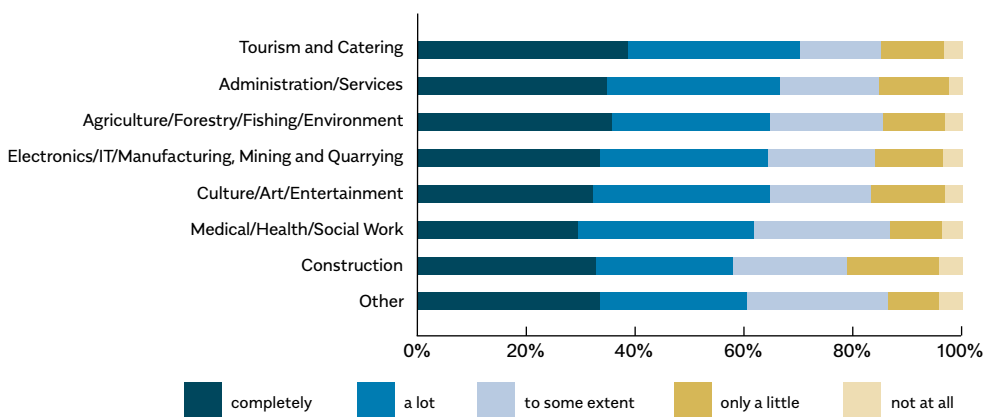
As can be seen in Figure III.5, 78% of the learners who stayed between one and three months and 74% of those who stayed for more than three months strongly agree that they gained practical professional experience and only 2% of those learners state that they gained no practical professional experience at all. The latter are probably the learners who had a placement that did not match their studies.

It needs to be pointed out that 95% of the learners from Luxembourg, 84% from Austria and 68% of the Latvian respondents stayed abroad for at least four weeks. These are the learners who stated that they gained more professional skills than learners from other countries.

On the other hand, only 54% of the learners who were abroad for three weeks agree completely or a lot that the mobility had a positive impact on their practical professional skills, less than those who only stayed for two weeks (65%) or four weeks (61%). In the group of learners who were mobile for two weeks, 5% stated that they gained no practical professional experience at all.

As far as occupational areas are concerned, the learners from the Tourism and Catering sectors in particular gained practical experience during their mobility abroad. 71% of them strongly agree (completely or a lot) that this was the case. On average, these learners stayed abroad for between one and three months, which might have had an impact on their skills.

Figure III.6: Acquisition of practical experience by occupational area or field of study (n=7 922)



Also, the majority (66%) of Administration and Services learners strongly agree that they enhanced their practical professional skills. Conversely, only 58% of the students from the study field of Construction industry agreed completely or a lot that they gained practical professional competences.

This was confirmed during the interviews, as shown in the following quotes:

I use some of the skills I learnt in my job now, basically the administration part of it. When I was over there – and it was a good few years ago – they wanted us to interview the employees, and then after that it was just admin and I've always used that in any job that I've had. I'd say I've taken that skill away.

[Ireland, FGI]

The more farms you see, the more diversity you see. You can start thinking about the best way to proceed so as to optimize processes. For this, you also need to see things that should not be done.

[Luxembourg, FGI]

As far as the setting of the placement is concerned, it can be noticed that learners who spent their placement in a large company gained most practical professional competences (WA 4.02) and 73% of the respondents strongly agree with the statement. 71% of those who did their placement in a medium-sized company also agree completely or a lot that they gained practical professional competences (WA 3.98). 64% of the learners who did their placement in a school or a small company strongly agreed (WA 3.74 and 3.75, respectively), and 65% of those who learnt and worked in other settings (WA 3.83) stated that they had acquired practical professional competences.

There is hardly any difference between men (WA 3.63) and women (WA 3.66) as far as gaining professional competences are concerned.

Learners who were mobile to a country with the same or a similar language gained slightly more professional competences (WA 3.95) than those who spent their mobility in a country with a different language (WA 3.80), but the difference is not significant.

Impact on occupation-specific competences

This section concerns the occupation-specific competences such as dealing with specialist and/or technical documentation, the use of the latest technologies or software, the ability to operate specialist machinery and equipment and awareness of the characteristics of individual workplaces. Many of the other competences acquired during the mobility can be seen as

transferable skills that can also be used in other situations (i.e. linguistic and communication competences).

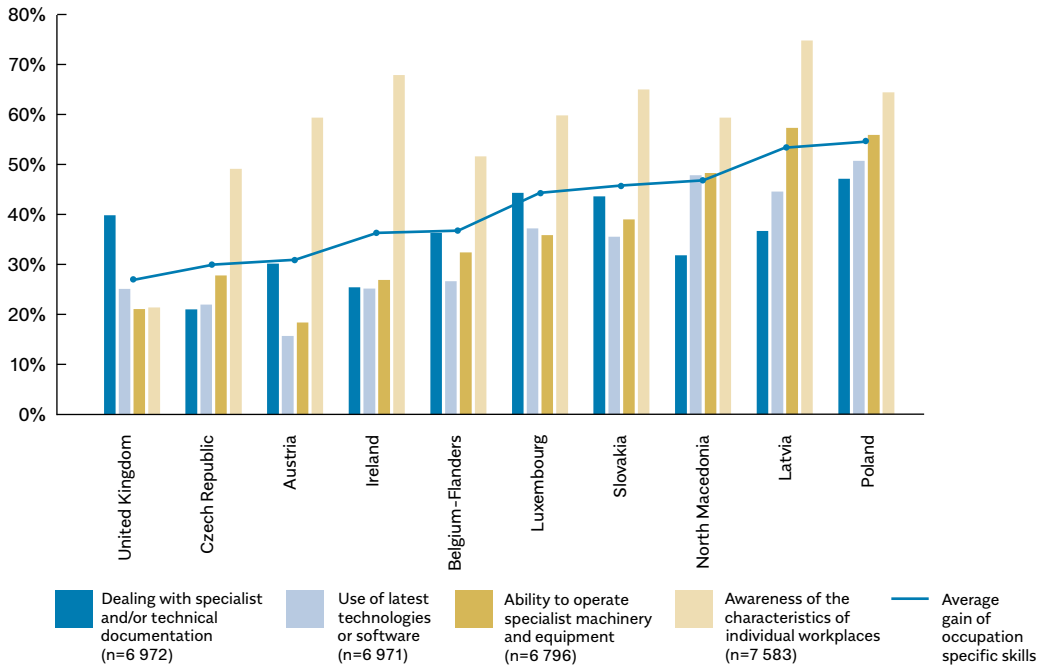
As mentioned before, 72% of the respondents strongly agree that they enhanced their ability to work in an international environment and their communication and team-working skills (WA 3.94 and 3.95, respectively). 61% of the respondents agree completely or a lot that they developed their ability to communicate in a foreign language in a work environment, 58% became aware of the characteristics of individual workplaces, and nearly half of the respondents (49%) improved their interpersonal skills (e.g. customer service, negotiations, sales). 39% developed their ability to operate specialist machinery and equipment (WA 2.93) and 35% learnt to deal with specialist and/or technical documentation (WA 2.95). Only one third (34%) enhanced their ability to use the latest technologies or software (WA 2.81). It should be noticed that the three latter competences are not used in all occupations and therefore this may explain why these percentages are rather low.

Despite the general trends across all countries on which occupation-specific competences were acquired to a greater or to a lesser degree, there are significant differences between the national data. The most significant difference can be seen in communicating in a foreign language in a work environment, whereas only 11% of the UK respondents (WA 2.12) but 82% of Latvian respondents (WA 4.32) agreed that they acquired this competence completely or a lot. Conversely, there are far smaller differences when it comes to acquiring the ability to work in an international environment (this might also be considered as a transferable skill): 78% of the Flemish respondents agree completely or a lot that they acquired this competence (WA 4.07) compared to 65% of the respondents from the Czech Republic and Luxembourg (WA 3.82 and 3.78, respectively). This might stem from the fact that 10% of the Czech learners went to neighbouring Slovakia and one third to any neighbouring country, and in the case of the respondents from Luxembourg, as many as 76% of the learners went to neighbouring countries.

As shown in Figure III.7, the impact of the transnational mobility differs considerably according to the sending country. The highest impact of the mobility on occupation-specific competences can be noticed in Poland, where 65% of all respondents completely or strongly agree that they became aware of the characteristics of individual workplaces and 56% improved their ability to operate specialist machinery. Moreover, 51% of them improved their use of the latest technologies or software and 47% developed the competence to deal with specialist and/or technical documentation. Also, the learners from Latvia gained a lot of occupation-specific competences with 75% strongly agreeing that they became aware of the characteristics of individual workplaces and

57% stating that they improved their ability to operate specialist machinery. 45% of them also strongly agreed that they improved their use of the latest technologies or software and 37% developed the competence to deal with specialist and/or technical documentation.

Figure III.7: Extent to which the learners gained or improved occupation-specific competences by country (percentage of learners who agree completely or a lot)



Conversely, only 21% of the UK students agreed completely or a lot that they became aware of the characteristics of individual workplaces and that they improved their ability to operate specialist machinery. Only one quarter enhanced their use of the latest technologies or software, but 40% enhanced their competence to deal with specialist and/or technical documentation.

During the Irish focus groups, some participants identified some key areas such as using new equipment, new software and making contact with suppliers. The North Macedonian learners also pointed out that the workshops in Slovenia were well equipped.

I feel like because they have a lot more equipment over there, because they're a school funded specifically for film, I feel like we learnt how to use a lot more equipment and learn that there's a lot more structure to how you work. We had to be specific about the shots, about the management, and all the logistics.

[Ireland, FGI]

First they explained and the next day we started working together with the deaf students in Slovenia. They sewed by hand, with a machine... they learn very nicely... Means we liked it. The workshop was well equipped and the teachers taught well. So, everything was excellent. It is safe to say that every day was like that.

[North Macedonia, IDI]

Conversely, neither Irish survey respondents nor the in-person group identified ICT skills as a strong area of development. Also, the learners from the Czech Republic and Latvia seem to have gained few ICT-specific skills. The only skill that nearly half of the learners strongly agree that they developed is their awareness of the characteristics of individual workplaces.

I don't think I experienced new technologies. Being from a multimedia background, I would have had the exposure to that beforehand. New strategies? I don't think so. I think maybe just because it was a new environment for me, everything was kind of new there.

[Ireland, IDI]

I don't think we had anything specifically new [in ICT].

[Latvia, IDI]

However, the Austrian interviewees saw new or different technologies in practice that they had only heard about in theory up until then. Some Austrian interviewees reported that they became acquainted with new areas of work and learnt new technologies. This was particularly relevant with regard to their final apprenticeship examination because they were able to see in practice what they had previously only learnt in theory, even though their respective training enterprise was not (yet) making use of these technologies.

They were even technically more advanced than at [the company I worked for] in Graz. I got to know a lot of things about electrical components there which I didn't see at our company in Austria until five years later. That really fascinated me, so this is what I learnt there.

[Austria, IDI]

And from the beginning I was like, 'OK, sure, give me something. I want to get to know it because I have so little time.' And especially for the final apprenticeship examination, when I was able to say 'True, I didn't work in a shipping company, but I did have the opportunity to get to know maritime transport', that was of course a huge advantage for me.

[Austria, IDI]

During the interviews, some UK interviewees mentioned receiving instructions on how to use specialist equipment. For example, some participants talked about one-to-one conversations with professionals who took the time to explain how to operate machinery.

The guy that was working there, he did give us a lot of information to do with the powder coating machine. He gave us a lot of technical information about that. They did actually give us learning about certain things in the workplace, so that was good.

[United Kingdom, IDI]

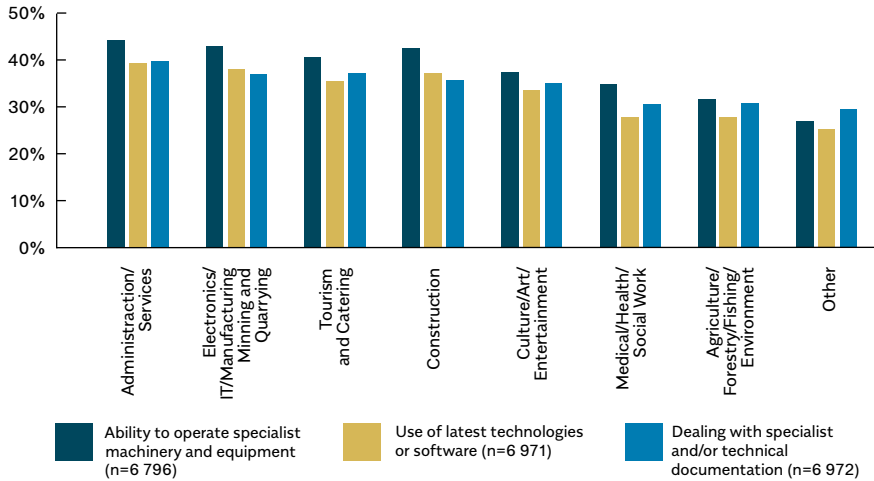
It is clear that the impact on occupation-specific skills (with the exception of the awareness of the characteristics of individual workplaces) depends on the occupational area or the study field of the learners. However, it is important to point out that the percentage of learners in a certain study field differs from country to country. Thus, 20% of the learners from the UK were working in the Tourism and Catering sector whereas 27% of the Polish learners worked or studied in Electronics/IT/Manufacturing, Mining and Quarrying.

As there are virtually no significant differences as far as the learners' awareness of the characteristics of different workplaces is concerned, this item was left out of Figure III.8.

The learners from the Administration and Services sector seem to have been impacted most as far as their occupation-specific competences are concerned: 44% agree completely or a lot that they improved their ability to operate specialist machinery, 39% enhanced their use of the latest technologies or software and 40% enhanced their competence to deal with specialist and/or technical documentation. Slightly lower percentages can be found for the learners from Electronics/IT/Manufacturing, Mining and Quarrying, with 43% strongly agreeing that they developed the ability to operate specialist machinery, 38% that they enhanced their use of the latest technologies

or software and 37% that they enhanced their competence to deal with specialist and/or technical documentation.

Figure III.8: Acquisition of occupation-specific competences by occupational area (percentage of learners who agree completely or a lot)



40% of the respondents from the Tourism and Catering sector enhanced their ability to operate specialist equipment, 35% learnt to use the latest technologies or software and 37% learnt to deal with specialist or technical documentation.

The data collected in Slovakia confirmed that the opportunities to work with specialist and/or technical documentation, use the latest technology and equipment and operate specialist machinery and equipment were mostly presented to pupils in technical study fields such as those training to become technicians (machinery and equipment, computer networks, setters, fixtures and fittings, service engineers), mechatronic engineers, electricians, mechanical engineers and information technology and network technicians, proportionally to the total number of respondents from these study fields. Slovak pupils of hotel academies, business academies, tourism, business and services had fewer possibilities for development in this area.

Conversely, in Austria, it was particularly interviewees who did their stay abroad in a hotel who had the chance to put educational content into practice during this time that they had previously only known about in theory.

In the Czech Republic, it was also noticed that the perceived development of these professional competences varies widely across the different groups or categories of fields. For traineeships focusing on electrical engineering, mechanical engineering, manufacturing, mining and quarrying, the development of competences is perceived more strongly in the areas of the use of specialist and/or technical documentation and the ability to operate specialist machinery and equipment. By contrast, the development of these competences is perceived the least by the Czech trainees in the fields of education, services, administration and trade. Quite naturally, in the case of traineeships in the ICT and IT fields, greater development is perceived in the use of the latest technologies and software. Yet again, the least development is in education and health and social care. Across most fields, the development of an understanding of the characteristics of individual workplaces where the traineeships took place is perceived similarly.

In the Polish data, significant differences were noticed in the perceptions of the benefits from participation in a transnational mobility relating to its impact on increasing knowledge of modern technologies and software. This factor proved to be much more important for graduates of courses related to the mechanical engineering industry (over 60%), the electrical and electronic sector (more than 55%) and construction (over 50%) than for people participating in internships within the administration and services industry (over 37%) or in tourism (more than 32%).

Overall, the lowest percentages were noticed for 'other occupational areas', Agriculture/Forestry/Fishing and Environment and Medical/Health and Social Work.

During the traineeship, I learnt how to do intake of medicines. I hadn't done that in Slovakia. I also learnt to do glucose and cholesterol measurements.

[Slovakia, IDI]

They didn't really let us do anything else [other than weeding]. There are few people there, and no one does this work. So, we were simply there as some kind of helpers, cheap labour.

[Czech Republic, FGI]

We were in the hotel and event management sector and we had to work at the reception. And that was useful because we had all the tools, so we could help with the check-in and check-out and run all the systems. So now we are good at using the computer and stuff.

[Austria, FGI]

While working at the reception, I learnt how to use the hotel's booking software. I was shown how to store important documents, I learnt how to check guests in and check them out.

[Poland, FGI]

One of the Irish interviewees emphasized the vocational skills he had learnt above all else. These concerned working with bees. He had a longer placement period, working for three months rather than two weeks. A Flemish interviewee who spent five months abroad also acquired specific catering skills.

The main thing I learnt is a greater appreciation and understanding of the world of bees and of pollinators in general. It really opened my eyes as to how to identify species 100% accurately. [...] But also just some practical things, in terms of carrying out field studies, just simple little things that can help you along. Like, just being very precise with your notes and the likes of that. They're the kind of things I brought back. Another technical skill that I didn't think I'd get to work on was the preservation of specimens – pinning pollinator specimens. That's a very technical skill and I didn't realize how difficult it was going to be until we got taught how to do it.

[Ireland, IDI]

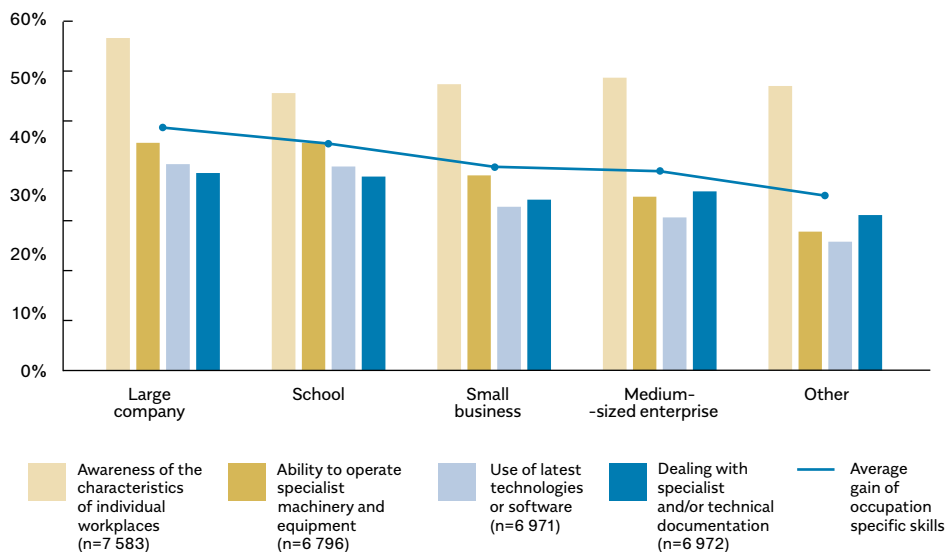
I learnt a lot as I had never worked with reindeer meat before. Moreover, there were the different mushrooms and berries that are used in the Finnish kitchen.

[Belgium-Flanders, FGI]

As can be seen in Figure III.9, learners who spent their placement in a large company or a school perceived a bigger impact on their vocational skills. Learners who spent their placement in a large company became more aware of the characteristics of individual workplaces than those who spent their placement in other settings. These learners are also those who improved their other occupation-specific competences most. Indeed, 46% of them improved their ability to operate specialist machinery, 41% enhanced their use of the latest technologies or software and 40% enhanced their competence to deal with specialist and/or technical documentation. However, it is remarkable that virtually as many learners who did their traineeship in a school also acquired or developed these competences. This might indicate that large companies and schools are better equipped than other settings.

Figure III.9: Acquisition of occupation-specific competences by setting (percentage of learners who agree completely or a lot)

Thanks to my mobility I enhanced the following competences:



This is confirmed by a Slovak participant in the study field of electronics who was placed in a vocational education school in the Czech Republic and evaluated the quality of vocational training as well as the school's technology very positively.

Every day was different at school, including the teaching methods. Although we knew the technology they had, we had never worked with it at our school, e.g. during the placement, we worked with 3D printers in a 3D studio.

[Slovakia, FGI]

Another Slovak respondent worked in a small real estate agency where he did market research, searching for information on the internet, inspecting properties with another colleague, and publishing listings on the company's website. As he stated, "it was good that it wasn't work like 'go to the post office', but real work". However, he admitted that "the extent of activities was limited and I'd have preferred to work in a larger institution where I could get a bigger picture of its functioning and got acquainted with more activities".

It is also noticed in the UK data that the large variations in the organizations hosting placements and the approaches they adopted to teaching and training

are likely to affect the extent to which participants develop technical skills and the impact of these on their future career paths.

In the Czech Republic, the enhanced use of the latest technologies and software and the use of specialist and/or technical documentation were always perceived in favour of schools compared to workplaces, although the difference was not significant.

In North Macedonia, participants of courses and training in VET providers stated that the latter often paid attention to the development of specific skills related to the performance of duties at a given workplace (for example, practical knowledge of technology and software, awareness of the characteristics of individual workplaces, handling machines and tools, preparation of documentation).

What I liked the most was working with new machines and equipment, spraying the product and the system of work. [...] The workshop was enormous and equipped with everything. I worked in shifts. They were tough and orderly. I worked from 7-12, then had a break from 12-12.45 when all employees ate lunch together and then we went back to work until 17.30.

[North Macedonia, IDI]

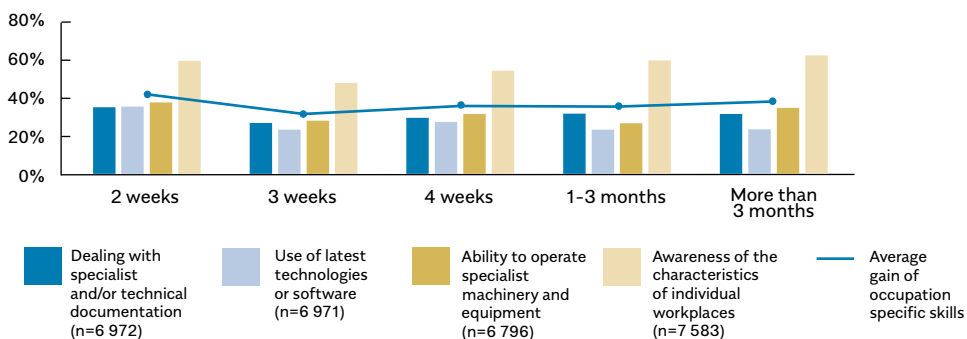
The learners who spent their placement in 'other' settings are the ones who developed these occupation-specific competences least.

It is remarkable that there is no correlation between the duration of the placement and the acquisition of certain occupation-specific competences (see Figure III.10). However, learners who spent more than three months abroad became more aware of the characteristics of individual workplaces than those who did not spend that long.

The differences by gender can be noticed as to the use of the latest technologies or software and dealing with specialist and/or technical documentation: men were significantly more impacted than women. This might have to do with occupational areas such as electronics (F: 15%, M: 85%), IT (F: 7%, M: 93%) or construction (F: 21%, M: 79%) where men are overrepresented compared to women. There are no significant differences as far as the other occupation-specific competences are concerned.

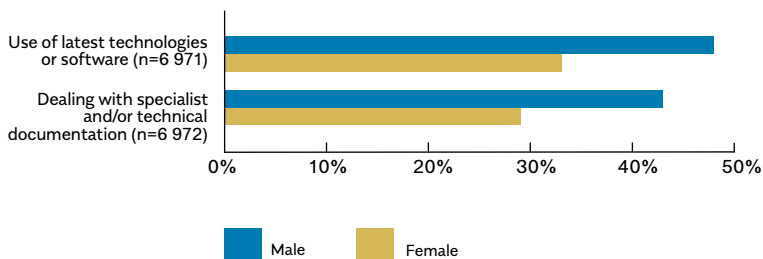
**Figure III.10: Impact on the occupation-specific competences by duration
(percentage of learners who agree completely or a lot)**

Thanks to my mobility I enhanced the following competences:



**Figure III.11: Enhancing occupation-specific competences by gender
(percentage of learners who agree completely or a lot)**

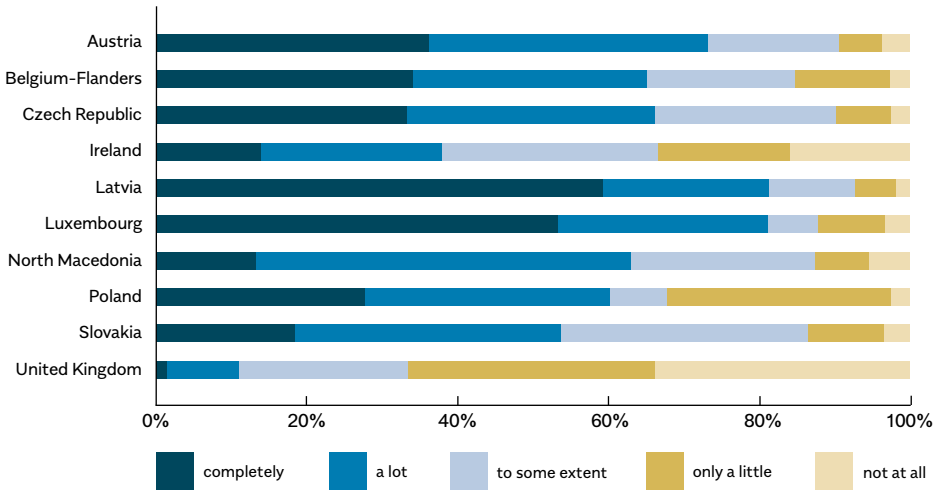
Thanks to my mobility I enhanced the following competences:



Impact on linguistic competences in a work environment

When asked to what extent the trainee placement abroad allowed the learners to acquire, develop or improve their competences to communicate in a foreign language in a work environment, 29% of all respondents stated that they completely agreed that they had enhanced these skills, 32% stated that they had enhanced them a lot and 18% to some extent. This means that 61% of the respondents completely or largely agreed that they had enhanced their linguistic competences.

Figure III.12: Linguistic competences acquired by sending country (n=7 855)



When comparing the impact on the linguistic skills of students from different countries, it can be seen that especially the learners from Latvia and Luxembourg acquired linguistic competences in a work environment (see Figure III.12). No less than 59% of the Latvians and 53% of the respondents from Luxembourg completely agreed that they acquired these competences, and 22% and 28%, respectively, agreed a lot. Both the Latvian and Luxembourg learners live in a multilingual society. This might have enhanced their ability to pick up new languages.

Most respondents from Luxembourg felt that they had improved their communication in a foreign language on the job. This opinion is also clearly evident in the interviews with former trainees who listed the development of language skills among the expected – and achieved – outcomes of their mobility.

[Once] abroad, there is no going back. You are far away from your family and you cannot go back home. In order to learn another language, such as French, it is better to stay [there]. You have to speak French and thus you make progress.

[Luxembourg, FGI]

A very high percentage of the Austrian respondents (73%) also agreed completely or a lot that they had enhanced their language skills. The Austrian data shows that as English-speaking countries were destinations for most of the transnational mobility participants, the focus was on enhancing or improving language skills, which in several cases resulted in better school grades.

87% of the respondents from North Macedonia confirmed that their participation in a learning mobility had an impact on their language competences to at least some degree, and roughly two-thirds recognized that the transnational mobility improved their ability to communicate in a foreign language in the work environment to a high degree. However, some complained that their colleagues did not speak English.

I don't really know... Either they did not want to speak English or they don't know the language. They only spoke bits and pieces and only with the chef.

[North Macedonia, FGI]

Conversely, there is the case of the British learners, only 1% of whom agreed completely and 9% a lot that they had improved their foreign language skills, irrespective of where they had spent their mobility. More than one third even stated that they did not acquire any linguistic skills at all. This can be explained by the fact that English is generally considered to be the lingua franca in international communication and business. Contrariwise, some of the UK interviewees who declared they had developed their language skills reported undertaking more formal language learning as part of their placement.

We did an online Italian course. [...] With the Italian course, the more tests we did on the Italian course, the more certificates we got and [this demonstrated] how far our Italian had progressed.

[United Kingdom, IDI]

In most instances, interviewees from the UK indicated that a basic level of language acquisition was sufficient for them to interact effectively in the host country as, in the vast majority of cases, English was also spoken by their foreign peers and many local residents. Furthermore, some participants suggested that it would not have been worthwhile to have attended an extensive language course prior to commencing their placement as their time away was relatively short and basic language skills were sufficient for their needs.

When you went to the shop and you bought something or to the restaurant... the waitresses would know English anyway, but if it's a supermarket you could be like, 'Danke schön', you know, the little phrases. I think it would've been a lot more difficult if we were expected to learn more German, because I think we probably [needed] lessons for about a month or two months, [and the placement] wasn't really that long.

[United Kingdom, IDI]

This was confirmed in the Irish data that all of the participants carried out their work in English – even though three quarters of them had been on placements in countries where English is not a national language. None of the participants reported any language barrier in their work and had been impressed by the English fluency of those around them.

At work I heard no-one speak Icelandic. Because we worked in a tourism place, most of them just spoke in English, even to each other.

[Ireland, IDI]

It was not only learners from English-speaking countries who spoke English at work, even in countries where the native language was not English, but also learners from other countries, especially when the language of the host country was a language not taught at school.

Most learners who participated in the individual interviews in Flanders acquired linguistic competences. In all cases, they had improved their English language skills if and when they had to use them. Most of the learners acquired some of the native language in the country they visited. Those who were given a crash course in advance appreciated this. Those who did not get such a course regretted that it was not organized.

In the Slovak interviews, it was mentioned that placements in Spain, Italy or Portugal are usually implemented in the English language, which is not the countries' official language, and usually only some employees from the receiving institution can communicate in English fluently.

According to Irish data, only three interview participants spoke about wishing to improve their own foreign language skills because of the placement. There were no discernible differences in attitudes to improving language skills between native English speakers and those who spoke English as an additional language. One participant stated that there being no requirement for knowledge of the host country's language was an attraction of the placement. Others felt that it was very 'lucky' that they could get by using English alone.

Nevertheless, 14% of the Irish learners agreed completely and 24% a lot that they enhanced their communication in a foreign language. Although these are much lower percentages than the averages for all countries (29% completely agree and 32% a lot), they are still far above the percentages of the UK.

This might be because, outside the workplace, the participants used the local language to some degree for shopping, navigating public transport and socializing. They occasionally had language difficulties in these situations but used technology such as Google Translate to help them.

Nobody spoke a word of English. We communicated through Google, or generally with arm and leg gestures.

[Czech Republic, FGI]

If we went to the shop or to a restaurant, it was an absolute disaster. Google and Polish don't really mix. But we managed slowly but surely. By the third week we had a few sayings.

[Ireland, FGI]

Some of the learners had hardly any language skills when they went abroad. The data from Poland shows that the international nature of projects related to the learning mobility resulted in a significant increase in the language competence of their participants, making it one of the most visible effects of the vocational training. More than two thirds (68%) of the respondents confirmed that their participation in the learning mobility had at least some positive impact on their language competences and 60% recognized that the transnational mobility had improved their ability to communicate in a foreign language in the work environment to a high degree.

The only major flaw was the language. My English was not great and my German was certainly terrible, but because I was thrown in like that and people took good care of me, I did my very best and my German and English improved as a result.

[Belgium-Flanders, survey]

But the placements were also beneficial for those who already had good linguistic skills, especially as far as professional vocabulary and getting used to the local accent are concerned. Slovak and Austrian interviewees stated that although they could speak the main foreign language at a good level even before their departure, during the placement they had an opportunity to try working with texts in a foreign language when creating marketing materials or presenting the solution to a task to the company's employees. Some participants even indicated that, towards the end of their stay, they started thinking in a foreign language (English).

I could speak English but I needed to get used to the accent, their accent is weird. I didn't understand the Scots at all.

[Slovakia, survey]

Theoretically, I knew the language, but in practice I was afraid to say something which was grammatically incorrect. For our coordinator, this was not a problem. She was glad that someone from the group was trying to have a chat with her, and towards the end she thanked me for making the effort and trying to communicate with her.

[Poland, IDI]

So after a few days I started thinking in English. Often I couldn't think of the German words when phoning my mum and such things.

[Austria, FGI]

My English language proficiency was quite good before I went there, but nevertheless I learnt a lot of professional terminology in English.

[Slovakia, FGI]

And above all, I learnt the specialized vocabulary from the office.

[Austria, IDI]

The Polish respondents also indicated a significant added value stemming from the difference between participation in a language course and practical learning while performing professional duties abroad. Upon arriving in the country where the internship was to be carried out, it often transpired that knowledge of the language learnt at school was purely theoretical. Some emphasized that classes would be much more effective if they were held abroad, which would allow intensive contact with the language. Also, several learners who participated in the Flemish focus groups regretted not having received language preparation, especially for languages that were not taught at school. Even those who had received language preparation for languages such as Finnish would have liked these courses to have been more in-depth or longer and preferably in the host country.

It would have been much better to have had the Finnish language course taught in the country rather than online.

[Belgium-Flanders, FGI]

It would be useful to introduce some form of practical linguistic classes because we were thrown into the deep end without knowing how to swim. During our stay abroad, we stumbled when we encountered the language barrier. As a result, no one could fully explain to us how to do our job and we had to work it out ourselves.

[Poland, IDI]

I learnt a little bit of the Hungarian language which I still use, like some greeting phrases, because I feel they sound much better than in Latvian.

[Latvia, FGI]

The percentages on participants' linguistic competences by country are only partly confirmed by a question on improving their ability to read materials in a foreign language: 60% of the Latvian, 58% of the Austrian and 55% of the Flemish learners agree completely or a lot that they can read materials in a foreign language more easily thanks to their internship/trainee placement abroad.

In addition, 50% of the learners from Luxembourg confirmed that they can read materials in a foreign language more easily, whereas 81% of them agreed completely or a lot that they had acquired linguistic competences in a work environment.

Furthermore, 20% of the Irish and 26% of the UK learners strongly agreed that they can read materials in a foreign language more easily, whereas only 11% of the British students and 38% of the Irish confirmed that they had improved their linguistic skills in a work environment.

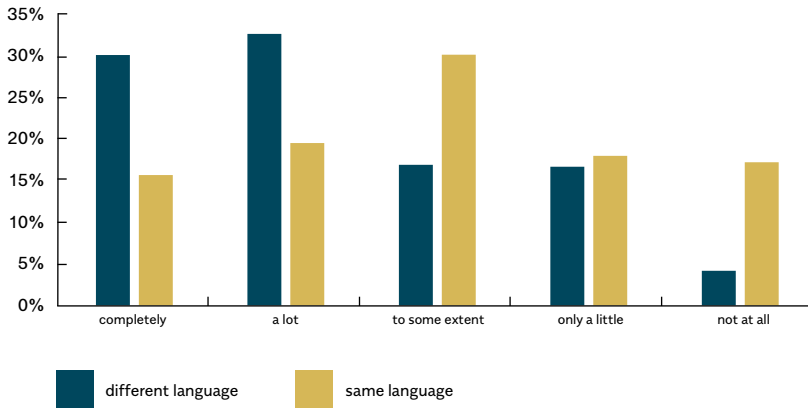
However, important differences can be noticed according to whether the learners did their placement in a country with the same or a similar language or in a country with a different language. Once again, the learners from the UK and Ireland are an exception.

As shown in Figure III.13, 62% of the learners who spent their mobility in a host country with a language that is different from their mother tongue acquired, developed or improved their competences to communicate in a foreign language completely or a lot, compared to only 35% of the learners who did their placement in a country with the same or a similar language. This was especially evident in Slovak and Flemish data.

In this regard, it must be said that the key target of Slovak participants doing their placement in the Czech Republic, which is a language-related country, was the development of their vocational skills; the participants intended to develop their language competences only minimally. This was also the case for Flemish learners doing their placement in the Netherlands.

The placements of Slovak learners in Hungary are also dominated by pupils who, due to the region of their residence in Slovakia, could communicate in Hungarian fluently in day-to-day situations before departure; therefore, their main goal was to extend their professional vocabulary/terminology.

Figure III.13: Linguistic competences acquired according to the language of the host country (n=7 855)



During the focus groups and personal interviews in Flanders, it was also confirmed that learners who went to the Netherlands did not acquire many linguistic competences as they only met Dutch colleagues or only had to use English during lessons that they had together with Swedish learners. That is one of the reasons why some of them would have liked to have gone to a non-Dutch speaking country.

We would like the school to organize placements in other countries than the Netherlands as we didn't have the impression that we were doing a placement abroad.

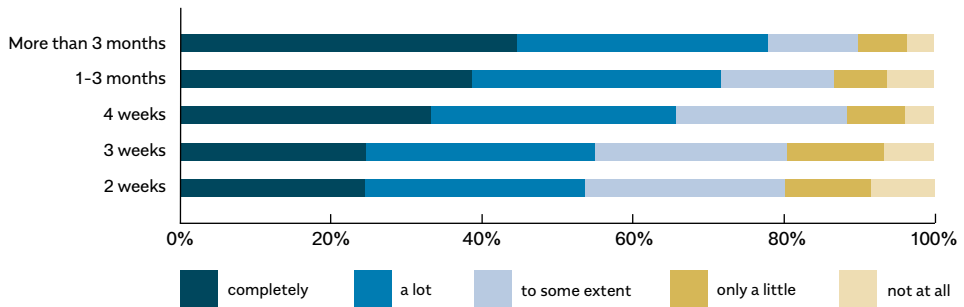
[Belgium-Flanders, FGI]

As far as the host countries are concerned, 43% of the learners who went to the UK completely agreed with this statement, 36% a lot and 12% to some extent. This means that 91% of the learners who went to the UK agreed that they had enhanced their linguistic competences to at least some extent. This can probably be explained by the fact that most of the learners had at least a basic knowledge of English and could therefore improve their knowledge.

It is not surprising that the duration of the mobility had a significant impact on the acquisition of linguistic competences as a language requires time to master. As can be seen in Figure III.14, 44% of the learners who spent more than three months abroad completely agree and 33% agree a lot that they acquired, developed or improved their competence to communicate in a foreign language in a work environment. This means that more than three-quarters of the respondents strongly agree with this statement. This is in contrast with those learners who only spent 2 or 3 weeks abroad, as only 24% of the learners

completely agree and 29% and 30% respectively agree a lot (altogether, slightly more than half strongly agree). It is clear from Figure III.14 that the longer the stay, the greater the impact on the linguistic skills of the learners.

Figure III.14: Linguistic competences acquired according to the duration of the mobility (communicating in a foreign language in a work environment, n=7 855)



The fact that the duration of the placement was a key variable in the development of language skills was also confirmed in the Irish and Austrian data. This can be illustrated by testimonies provided by the Irish graduate who had a 22-week placement in Germany and the Austrian learner who completed a 5-week placement in Spain.



I learnt German to fluency, which was a huge achievement for me.

[Ireland, survey]



So after five weeks of Spain and speaking Spanish, I definitely improved my active language usage. And I learnt new words. Above all, industry-specific vocabulary.

[Austria, IDI]

Some respondents who had 3-month placements remarked that an even longer duration would have helped them develop their language skills further.

During the UK interviews, the timeframe of the placements was perceived to be too short to necessitate the learning of the host country’s language, particularly where participants worked full-time during their placement so had little availability to acquire this additional skill.

It was much too short a time to really be bothered with [learning Spanish].

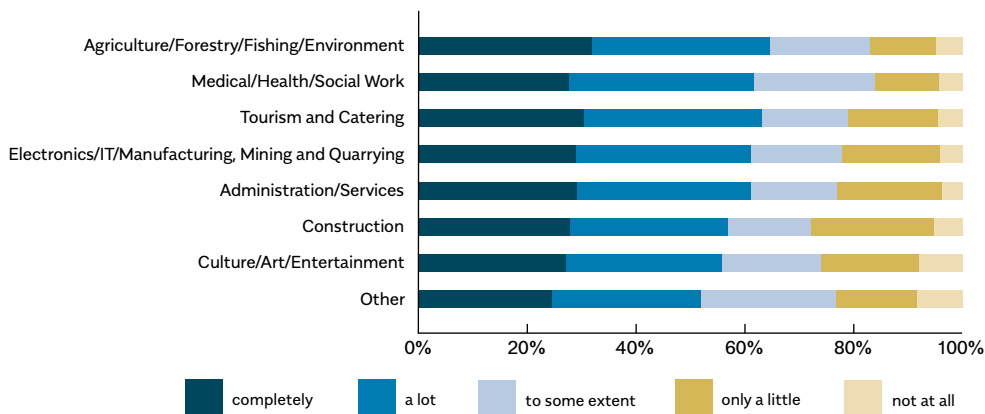
[United Kingdom, IDI]

I really enjoyed my time abroad and feel really lucky to have been selected for the programme. I only wish it had been a longer placement so that I could have had more time to develop the language!

[Ireland, survey]

There are also differences when taking into account the occupational area or field of study of the learners. However, these are not as significant. Learners in the areas of Agriculture (65%), Health Care (62%) and Tourism (63%) seem to have enhanced their linguistic competences more than those who studied in 'other' study fields (52%). This might be linked to the average duration of the learners in these study fields. Indeed, on average, learners in the Tourism sector stayed for more than 4 weeks, learners in the Agriculture sector stayed on average for nearly 4 weeks and those in Health Care between 3 and 4 weeks.

Figure III.15: Linguistic competences acquired according to occupational area or field of study (communicating in a foreign language in a work environment, n=7 855)



In terms of the setting, the differences are even less important than those concerning the occupational area or study field. Only 56% of the learners who spent their mobility in a school strongly agree that they enhanced their linguistic competences in a work environment compared to 64% who spent their mobility in a medium-sized enterprise and 63% in a small business.

There is hardly any difference in the acquisition of a foreign language by gender: 61% of both men and women agree completely or a lot that they acquired, developed or improved their competence to communicate in a foreign language, and the weighted average is also virtually the same (F: 3.66, M: 3.63).

Soft skills development

In many countries, the interviewees indicated that they had especially developed their soft skills and basic life skills, although this was not always visible in the results of the survey as some of the most frequently mentioned soft skills such as independence, self-confidence, assertiveness and resilience were not surveyed quantitatively. Their responses regarding the development of their interpersonal skills are mostly very positive.

I learnt to make sure that I am heard – at the company, I often needed to tell them that I was already familiar with certain activities. I learnt to 'sell' my abilities, I became more assertive.

[Czech Republic, IDI]

Perhaps that I am not afraid of everything so much... I have proven something to myself... I was alone somewhere for 14 days, I worked and there was no one else to do my work for me, it was all me.

[Czech Republic, FGI]

Respondents from Luxembourg generally view their mobility experience as having provided an added value to acquire additional soft skills abroad.

I have learnt to work alone, independently, and also to work in a team. I think that I am more open.

[Luxembourg, FGI]

During both the individual interviews and the focus groups as well as in the open response sections in Flanders, learners stressed that they had become much more independent during the internship. They had to live on their own for the first time in their life. During the focus group interviews, the learners also mentioned that they learnt to work to deadlines. The Flemish interviewees also mentioned that work abroad was more relaxed than in Flanders.

I found it a unique experience in which I learnt to become independent and social.

[Belgium-Flanders, FGI]

The overwhelming impression from survey responses and interviews in Ireland is also that soft skills are the area most universally developed by mobility placements. This proportion of soft skills development was also reflected by the Irish in-person research group. Three of the four interview subjects focused heavily on the self-confidence they had developed and what they had learnt from the international aspects of their placement. Participants in the Irish focus groups also tended to highlight the soft skills they had developed over specific vocational skills.

In the UK as well, the majority of participants noted how their social skills had developed as a result of undertaking their placement. The placements necessitated meeting with and speaking to new and different types of people. Participants talked about the progress they had made in their social skills as a result of being surrounded by people they had not met before in a location they had not previously visited. Several participants referenced how they moved from feeling shy, unsure and/or uncomfortable around new people to feeling confident, comfortable and open. The successful undertaking of some activities on their own, without their parents or carers, also resulted in an increase in self-confidence for some UK participants. Many participants were left with a lasting impression from the placement that they are more capable of living independently than they had previously thought.

I liked the fact that we were paired up with a Dutch person, it actually got us to talk. Because on the first day, [when] we had a tour of the city... it was English on one side and Dutch on the other side. But by the end of the second week, everyone was talking to each other. It helped us to get to know each other, which was good.

[United Kingdom, IDI]

My confidence improved. I have never lived without my parents. To have that kind of independent living for two months, that felt incredible. It felt amazing. I learnt to take care of myself. I learnt more confidence. It made me feel happier. It made me feel that, at the end of my experience, I had done something worthwhile.

[United Kingdom, IDI]

As a likely outcome of increased confidence and feeling self-reliant and independent, several UK participants also spoke about how the experience had helped them become more resilient. Respondents felt that meeting new people, working in and exploring a new place and living independently enabled them to become more resilient. A key factor in this appears to be the safe and supportive environment in which the placements took place. Participants talked about the importance of the support available to them if they experienced any difficulties.

Almost all Slovak respondents cited significant benefits from the placements for their personal development: an increase in self-confidence, self-respect, a realization of being responsible for oneself, more independence in decision-making, the ability to react to changes and overcome obstacles, a need for proactiveness and a realization of the need for a positive approach at work and in life. Several Slovak participants, regardless of the industry of their placement, were concerned about failing at work and making mistakes. The placement abroad helped them overcome these concerns, mostly thanks to team leaders, mentors and other employees.

It was actually a test of adulthood; we had to go to work, clean our stuff, wash our clothes, and do the shopping. We didn't have to report to anyone.

[Slovakia, survey]

Apart from their language skills, the Austrian interviewees also stressed that they particularly improved their soft skills during the transnational mobility programme. Working in a new team and in a completely new environment made the respondents more open, confident and independent. They had to independently organize and manage their commute to work and partly also their shared flats, and they grew with the challenges. Their self-confidence increased during their stay abroad and they benefited from the new experiences. They now have more confidence in themselves, and it is also easier for them to make new contacts and to talk to people they do not know. According to their own statements, they have become more open to the unknown and to new things.

You become much more independent when you are abroad because you don't really have the chance to speak German.

[Austria, IDI]

I was still relatively young when I was abroad and in those five weeks I became quite self-confident.

[Austria, FGI]

Most of the respondents from North Macedonia emphasized that their participation in the project had a significant influence on changing their views and attitudes as well as contributing to the development of their soft skills. Often it was a real-life lesson for them – their first experience of actual professional work – and, often, it was also their first independent, long stay away from their families. More than half of the respondents of the survey admitted that their participation in educational mobility projects helped them later

on in their life to find appropriate solutions in difficult and unusual situations. Moreover, the interviewed participants often stressed that the very fact of their having coped with new conditions had strengthened their self-confidence and became an impulse to undertake further action.

Communication and team-working skills

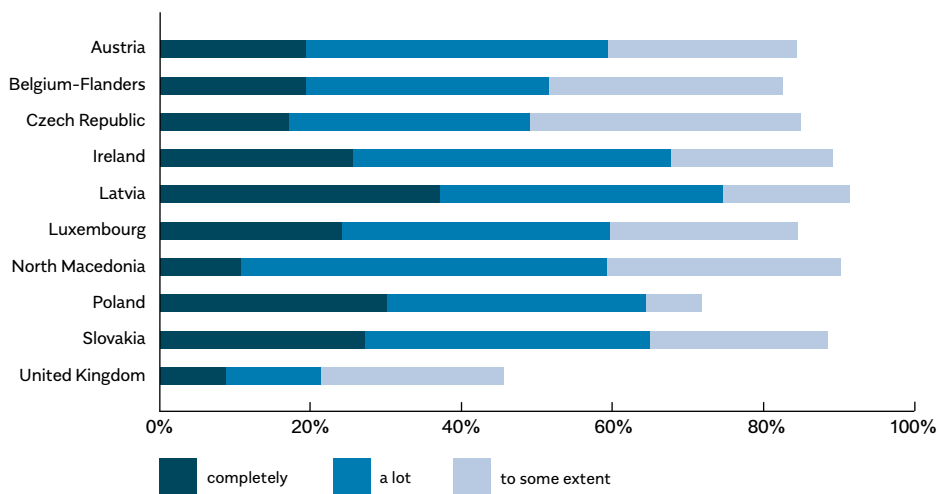
When looking at the extent to which the learners from different sending countries acquired communication and team-working skills, some significant differences can be noticed.

The Latvian students in particular seem to have enhanced their communication and team-working skills as 37% of them agree that they acquired or enhanced these skills completely and 38% a lot (see Figure III.16). As far as the Polish students are concerned, there are on the one hand 30% who say that they acquired communication and team-working skills completely and 34% a lot but, on the other hand, 24% state they acquired these competences only a little and 4% not at all.

39% of the learners from the UK say that they did not acquire these competences at all and 16 % only a little. This is a very significant difference from all other countries where the percentages of learners who indicate that they did not acquire these competences at all range between 2% and 6%. Only 9% agree that they acquired these competences completely and 13% a lot. It would be interesting to find out what the reasons are for these percentages that are not at all in line with other countries.

In connection with soft skills development, the Slovak respondents also pointed out the opportunities in this area offered to them by the host families with whom they stayed and by other accommodation facilities. In addition to overcoming cultural differences, they had the opportunity to communicate with different types of people in the host families as well as to cope with minor conflict situations, be assertive and take care of themselves. If they stayed with students from different countries, they stated they had an opportunity to make new friends and establish new relationships. A smaller number of the Slovak participants in focus groups and individual interviews concluded that they had also developed skills in presenting partial projects on which they cooperated with other placement participants and in searching for and analyzing supporting information, necessary mainly in sales or marketing.

Figure III.16: Acquisition of communication and team-working skills by country (n=7 901)



During the interviews, a number of UK participants reported how the Erasmus+ placement provided them with the opportunity to develop public speaking skills. As part of their placement, whether during or following it, some respondents were expected to deliver a presentation or give a talk to their peers. Several of these individuals noted how they previously would have tried to avoid such a situation due to a lack of confidence. However, the fact that their involvement in the placement necessitated the delivery of a presentation or speech challenged them to move out of their comfort zone. One participant recognized how having to speak about their home country to a group of students from the host college due to visit the UK resulted in them becoming more confident in public speaking.

We had some Danish students that were going to come to our college... they wanted to know a bit of information about England so we had to do a presentation and tell them bits about England and what was good about England and what they should expect when they arrived in England... it went quite well, because normally I'm not confident with [public] speaking.

[United Kingdom, IDI]

Teamwork. I was ill once and then I asked if I could switch shifts with somebody. And then you learnt how to deal with other people who worked there.

[Austria, IDI]

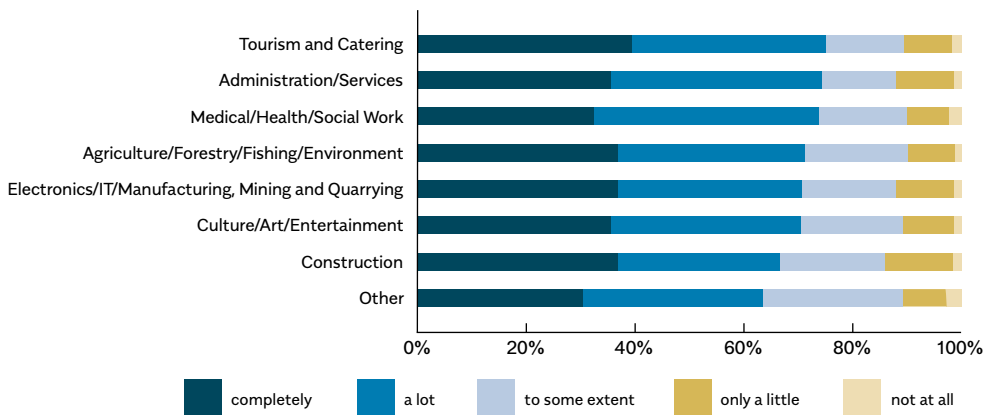
[I acquired] [m]any new skills – interpersonal communication, professional communication, international experience and greater independence.

[North Macedonia, FGI]

Tourism learners increased their communication and team-working skills the most (39% completely and 36% a lot). As mentioned before, the Tourism and Catering learners were also the ones who, on average, went abroad for a longer time than other learners. It is not surprising that the learners in Tourism, hospitality and catering enhanced their communication and team-working skills the most as they virtually always have to work in a team and have to communicate with colleagues and customers.

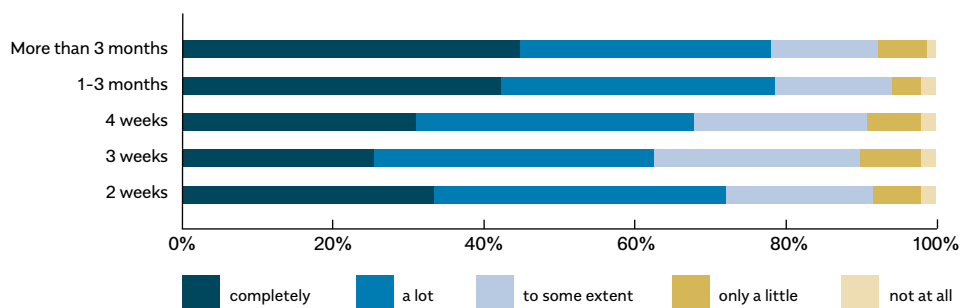
There are only significant differences concerning the learners from Construction and 'Other occupational areas', where respectively only 67% and 63% of the respondents strongly agreed that they had enhanced their communication and team-working skills.

Figure III.17: Acquisition of communication and team-working skills by occupational area or field of study (n=7 901)



Learners who were abroad for more than three months and those who went abroad for more than one month enhanced their communication and team-working skills considerably. This is not surprising as creating a team and team spirit takes time. Respectively, 45% and 42% completely agree and 33% and 36% agree a lot that they enhanced their communication and team-working skills. Also, those who went abroad for only two weeks enhanced these skills more than learners who did a placement of three or even four weeks.

Figure III.18: Acquisition of communication and team-working skills by duration of the placement (n=7 901)



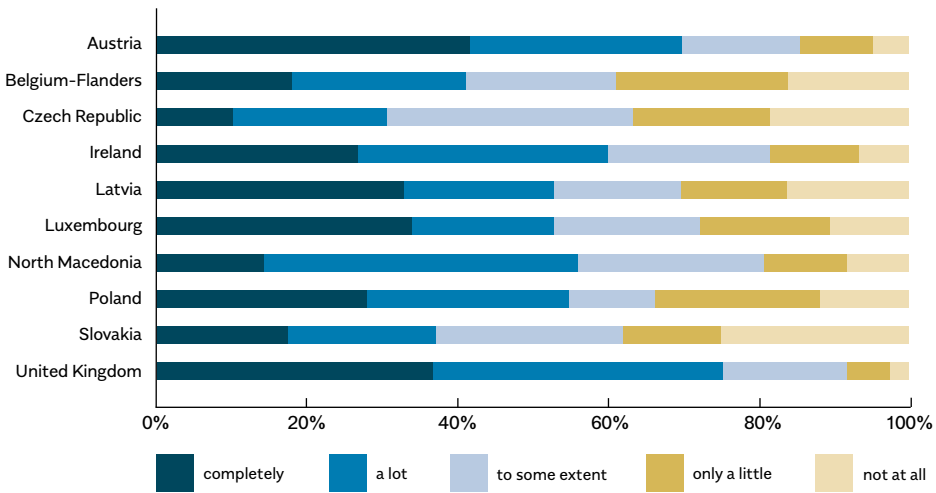
Hardly any significant differences can be noticed when the settings of the placement are concerned, although more learners who spent their placement in a large (77%) or a medium-sized enterprise (76%) strongly agree that they acquired better communication and team-working skills than those who spent it in a school or other company (72%) or in a small company (70%). No significant differences are noted as far as gender is concerned.

Interpersonal skills

Lower scores were obtained for interpersonal skills, possibly because they were defined in a restricted way (customer service, negotiations and sales). Only 24% of the respondents completely agree and 26% agree a lot with the statement that they acquired interpersonal skills during their placements, indicating that less than half (49%) of the respondents completely or largely agree that they developed their interpersonal skills.

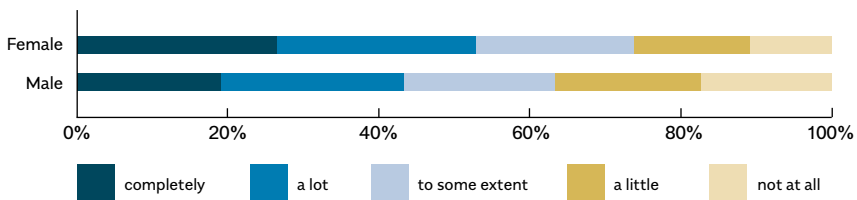
As shown in Figure III.19, there are significant differences as far as the sending countries are concerned. Learners from the UK and Austria in particular enhanced their interpersonal skills. This might have to do with the occupational areas the respondents worked in. Austria (55%) and the UK (53%) sent more than half of their participants to the Culture/Art/Entertainment, Tourism and Catering and Administration/Services sectors where customer service is very important. In three countries – the Czech Republic (31%), Slovakia (37%) and Belgium (41%) – less than half of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement. In these countries, respectively 14%, 12% and 17% of the learners worked in the Health and Social Care sector.

Figure III.19: Interpersonal skills acquired by sending country (n=6 784)



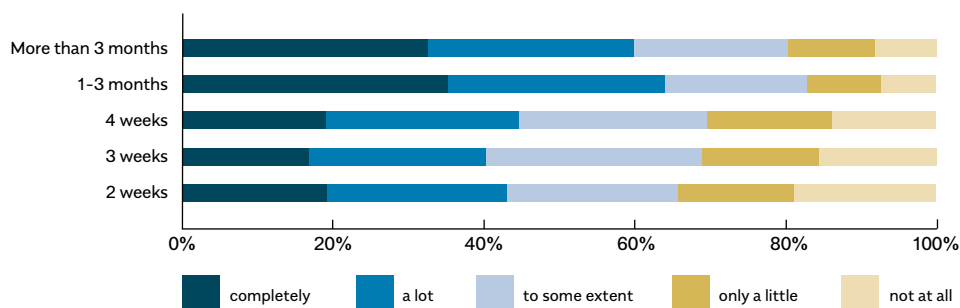
As far as gaining interpersonal skills are concerned, there is a significant difference between men and women; 53% of the women completely agree or agree a lot (WA 3.42) that they enhanced their interpersonal skills compared to only 43% of the men (WA 3.08), of whom 17% indicated that they had not gained these competences at all and 19% that they had gained them only a little.

Figure III.20: Acquiring interpersonal skills by gender (n=6 784)



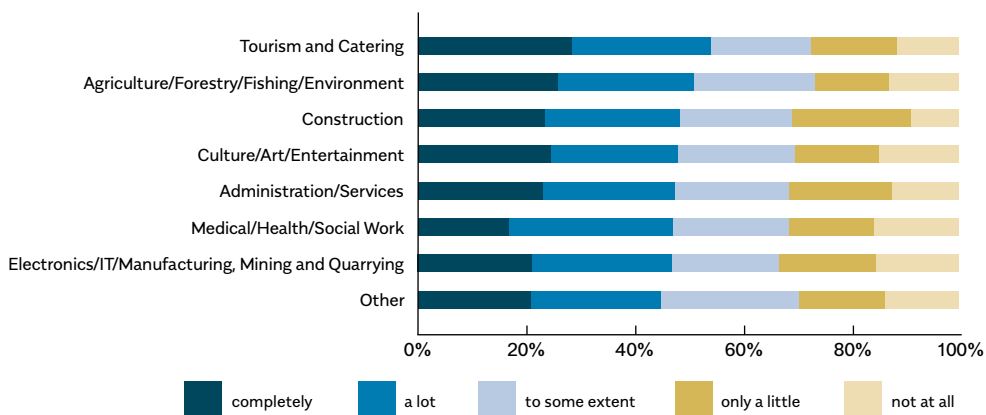
There are significant differences when taking into account the duration of the internship. 64% of the learners who went abroad for more than a month and 59% of those who went abroad for more than three months agree completely or a lot that they enhanced their interpersonal skills compared to only 40% of those who went abroad for three weeks and 43% of those who went abroad for two weeks.

Figure III.21: Interpersonal skills acquired by duration (n=6 784)



As far as occupational area or fields of study are concerned, there are only two occupational areas where more than half of the learners agree completely or a lot that they gained interpersonal competences.

Figure III.22: Interpersonal competences acquired by occupational area or field of study (n=6 784)



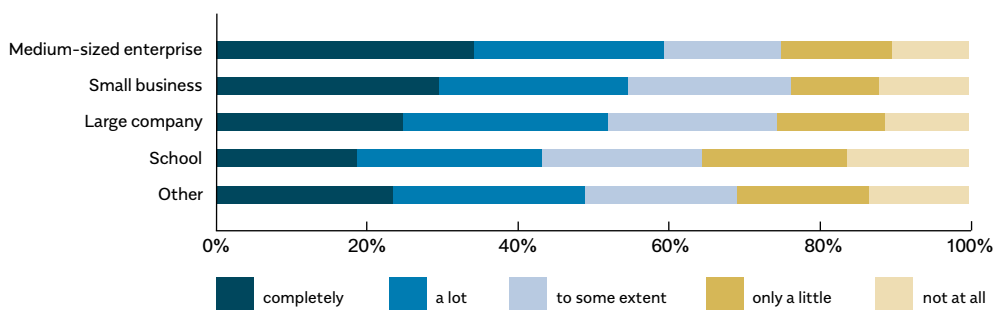
54% of the Tourism learners and 51% of the learners from the Agriculture sector completely agree or agree a lot that they enhanced their interpersonal skills compared to only 45% of learners from 'Other occupational areas', 46% from Electronics and IT and 47% from Health and Social Care and from Administration and Services. This might indeed point at a restricted understanding of interpersonal skills (e.g. customer service, negotiations, sales, etc.). Tourism learners are probably those who were most involved in customer services.

As far as the setting is concerned, it is not surprising that learners who spent their placement in a school gained less interpersonal skills than those who spent it in a company. This is confirmed by the participants from North Macedonia, where individuals who carried out internships in companies abroad more frequently indicated the impact of the trip on the increase of their competences related to establishing contacts and communication (for example, using a foreign language in the working environment, customer service, negotiations, sales).

59% of the respondents who did their placement in a medium-sized enterprise and 54% of those who were working in a small business strongly agree that they gained interpersonal competences, which is more than those who worked in a large company (52%). Maybe there are fewer opportunities in large companies for interpersonal contacts.

Less than half (49%) of the learners who did their mobility in 'other' settings strongly agree that they enhanced their interpersonal skills and even less (44%) of those who spent their internship in a school strongly agree with the statement.

Figure III.23: Interpersonal skills gained according to setting (n=6 784)



Other 21st-century skills

As mentioned above, the learners were also asked whether they had enhanced or developed other soft skills (21st-century skills) thanks to their traineeship abroad. More than half of the learners (56%) agreed completely or a lot that they can now more easily establish a rapport with other people and more than three quarters (80%) that they enhanced this skill to at least some extent.

This had already been confirmed by the learners when they were talking about their communication skills: 46% agree completely or a lot that they can more easily find solutions in difficult or unusual situations, and 72% say that they can do this to at least some extent.

In addition, 43% strongly agree that they can more efficiently plan and organize tasks and activities and another 26% that they can do so to some extent.

Table III.1: Transferable skills acquired by sending country (weighted average, scale: 1-5)

	I have learnt to more efficiently manage my time (n=7 562)	I have developed my analytical skills. I can think more logically and draw conclusions (n=7 448)	I can more efficiently plan and organise my learning (n=7 635)	I can more easily find solutions in difficult or unusual situations (problem solving skills) (n=7 635)	I can more efficiently plan and organise tasks and activities (n=7 585)	I can more easily establish rapport with other people (n=7 733)
Austria	3.07	2.74	2.65	3.52	3.1	3.68
Belgium-Flanders	3.11	3.14	3.0	3.23	3.15	3.52
Czech Republic	2.57	2.68	2.5	2.81	2.7	3.17
Ireland	3.47	3.34	3.41	3.48	3.53	3.78
Latvia	3.59	3.72	3.5	3.77	3.69	3.91
Luxembourg	3.21	3.28	3.09	3.45	3.47	3.71
North Macedonia	3.54	3.5	3.35	3.35	3.43	3.49
Poland	3.32	3.41	3.35	3.55	3.48	3.83
Slovakia	3.03	3.16	3.1	3.21	3.19	3.54
United Kingdom	3.07	3.02	3.13	3.23	3.21	3.44

40% agree completely or a lot and another 27% to some extent that they can now think more logically and draw conclusions. Virtually the same percentages can be found when it comes to time management: 15% agree completely, 24% a lot and 27% to some extent that they have learnt to efficiently manage their time. It is quite striking that 12% say that they have not learnt this at all.

The lowest score is for more efficiently planning and organizing learning: 14% completely agree, 23% a lot (together around one third) and 26% that they are somewhat more efficient in their learning thanks to the traineeship. 13% totally disagree. It needs to be stressed that the majority of learners spent their placement in a company and not a school and that they probably did not have the impression that they were actually learning and having to plan their learning.

Latvian students (WA 3.70 across all skills) in particular seem to have gained 21st-century skills, but Polish (WA 3.49), Irish (WA 3.50) and North Macedonian learners (WA 3.45) also state that they gained transferable skills. Indeed, 60% of the Latvian, 59% of the Polish, 53.5% of the Irish and 53% of the North Macedonian learners strongly agree that they gained transferable skills. Conversely, the Czech respondents saw the least impact on those skills (WA 2.74). Only 23.5% of those learners strongly agree that they gained transferable skills. The Austrian (WA 3.13), UK (WA 3.18), Flemish (WA 3.19) and Slovak (WA 3.21) learners also seem to have improved those skills to a lesser degree. On average, only 39% of the Slovak and Austrian learners and 41% of the UK and Flemish learners agreed completely or a lot that they developed their transferable skills during their placement abroad.

Over half of Polish respondents of the survey admitted that their participation in educational mobility projects helped them later on in life to find appropriate solutions in difficult and unusual situations (over 60%) or cope with stress (more than 56%). The soft skills acquired by the trainees concerned, among other things, taking the initiative, teamwork skills and increasing their openness to change. Participants in the interviews often also stressed that the very fact of coping with new conditions definitely strengthened their self-confidence and became an impulse to undertake further action. Polish respondents also highly appreciated the impact of the mobility on the development of their interpersonal skills. Over 70% of the internship graduates admitted that the experience of working abroad allowed them to establish a rapport with other people more easily.

I was still a 'quiet mouse' type of person during the internship, but when I discovered that I was able to communicate with foreigners in their language, I began to believe in myself. An internship offers many different benefits and we have the opportunity to reinvent ourselves.

[Poland, ID1]

Since returning from the internship I have been the class president for two years in a row. Thanks to the mobility, I acquired the ability to manage a team and I used it practically.

[Poland, ID1]

The interviewees from Luxembourg largely agreed with the fact that their stay abroad contributed to the development of their analytical skills and improved their aptitude both for work planning and problem solving. However, they tended to be less assertive when asked about their ability either to manage their time or to plan and organize their own learning more efficiently.

During the interviews in Flanders, learners mentioned that they can now more easily establish rapport with other people. Especially learners who described themselves as shy seem to have benefited from the traineeship abroad in this respect. It is also not surprising that they can now more easily find solutions in difficult or unusual situations as some of the Flemish learners were faced with unexpected situations such as an accident on the work floor, an unusual request from a customer or a job they were not prepared or trained for.

I cut myself with a butcher's knife and had to go to hospital. The most difficult thing was to find out how and where I could have the stitches removed. It was not obvious as I was not covered by the Finnish social security system. But I managed to do it.

[Belgium-Flanders, FGI]

As a butler, I had to look for a particular brand of port for one of the important guests staying in a riverside suite of the hotel. It took me a whole day but eventually I found it.

[Belgium-Flanders, IDI]

In addition, some of the Latvian participants indicate that by improving their professional skills, they learnt to do their job faster, i.e. to be more productive. One of the Latvian interviewees also pointed out that she was really given responsibility and that this way she learnt a lot.

The first internship took place in a medium-sized car service where we did all the work. There were a lot of repairs to do from morning to evening. It was like a conveyor belt, one car out and the next one in. We did all the work – maintenance, repair, dismantling, welding, cutting, all that was needed.

[Latvia, FGI]

I was a veterinary assistant. My manager also entrusted me with all the duties of an assistant. As the veterinary clinic was specialized in rehabilitation, there was a lot of rehabilitation, and I had the opportunity to learn a lot. I was able to rehabilitate the animals myself, assemble all the tools... I really did everything an assistant had to do.

[Latvia, FGI]

It is clear that the learners who went abroad for more than three months are the ones who enhanced all their transferable skills the most (see Figure III.24). Those who were abroad for more than a month gained more transferable skills than those who were abroad for less than one month. The significant differences can be observed as far as problem solving skills and time management are

concerned. However, it is striking that learners who participated in a two-week placement acquired more transferable skills than those who were abroad for three or even four weeks.

Figure III.24: Acquisition of transferable skills by duration
(percentage of learners who agree completely or a lot with the statement)

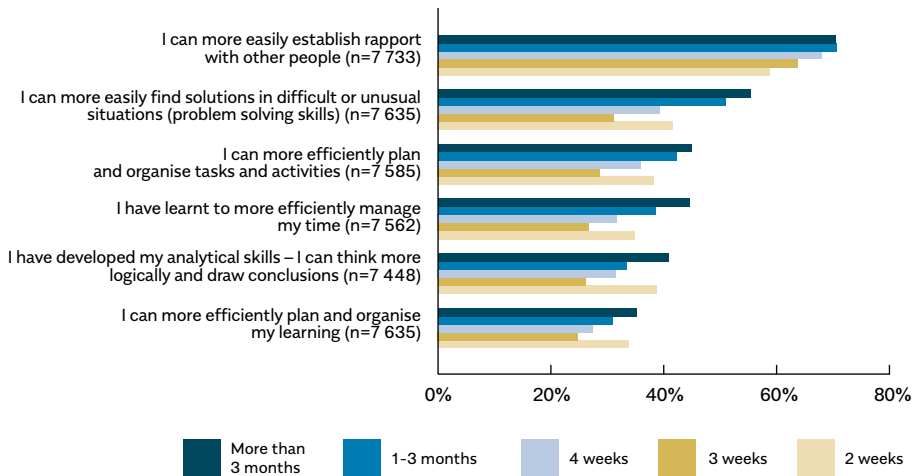
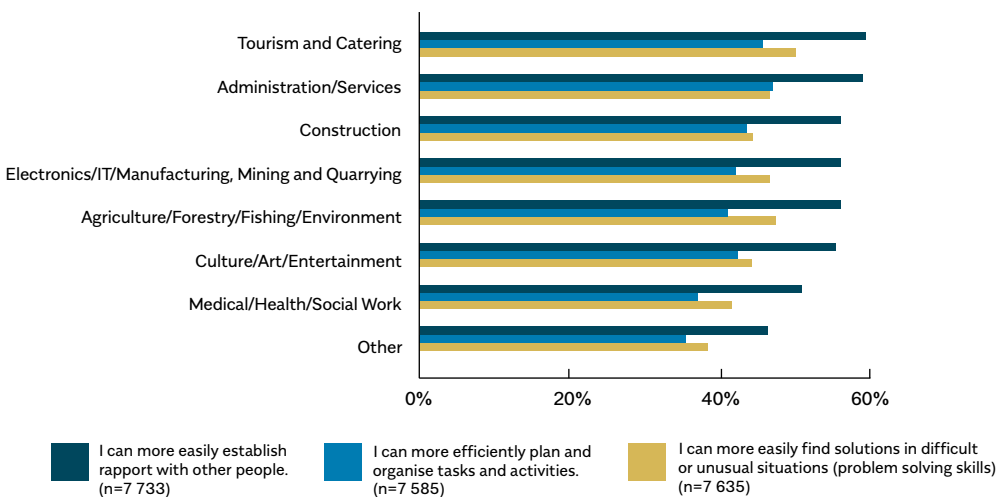


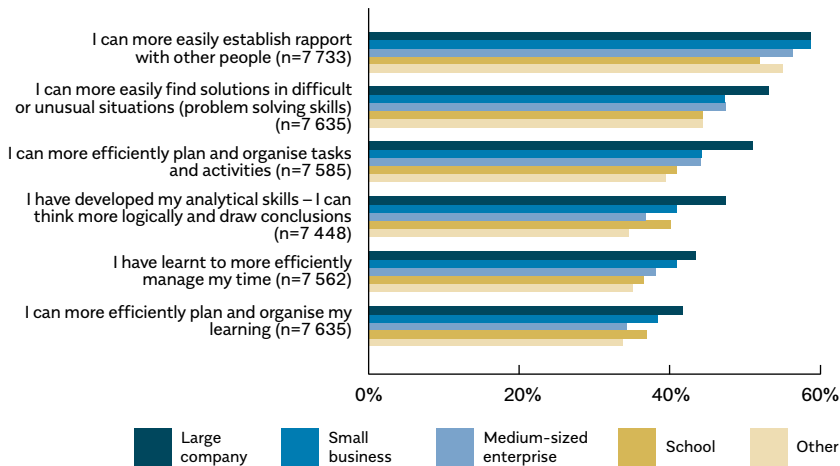
Figure III.25: 21st-century skills by occupational area or field of study
(percentage of learners who agree completely or a lot with a statement)



As far as more easily establishing a rapport with other people, more efficiently planning and organizing tasks and activities as well as finding solutions in difficult or unusual situations (problem solving skills) are concerned, there are significant differences between learners from different occupational areas.

It can be seen that especially Tourism and Catering learners but also Administration and Services learners acquired these skills. Conversely, those who were working in 'other' occupational areas and in Health and Social Care developed these skills to a far lesser degree. It should also be noted that two-thirds of the learners in Tourism and Catering stayed abroad for more than one month. It is therefore not possible to determine which variable is the most influential: duration or occupational area.

Figure III.26: Transferable skills acquired according to setting (percentage of learners who agree completely or a lot with a statement)



Those learners who did their placement in a large company acquired 21st-century skills, but so did those who worked in a medium-sized company. Significant differences can be noticed when looking at such aspects as planning and organizing tasks and activities, developing analytical skills and time management. Generally speaking, those who spent their training in a school or 'other' setting acquired fewer transferable skills than the learners who worked in companies. However, those who did their training in a school developed more analytical skills and can now organize their learning better than those who worked in a small business.

The Polish data confirmed that the trainees who worked in companies acquired more and better 21st-century skills than those who did their placement in a school or another VET provider. In the case of those individuals who participated in internships organized in enterprises, contact with foreign mentors was very important. Their authority often influenced a change of attitudes amongst the interns. However, it should be noted that the achievement of positive effects depended primarily on the degree of mutual understanding that the trainee and his/her mentor had managed to establish and on the level of involvement of the representatives of the host institutions.

We had to learn independent thinking. We could not constantly ask about everything – it was necessary to act intuitively.

[Poland, IDI]

Impact on intercultural competences

During the individual and focus group interviews, many learners stressed that they had definitely acquired or enhanced their intercultural competences. Working with people with different nationalities, cultures and religion(s) and getting used to local cuisine and even enjoying nature or doing sports with the nationals were all things that enhanced their understanding of other cultures and were deeply appreciated by the learners.

The UK data shows that the context in which placements were organized contributed to the number of cultural activities in which participants were able to partake in their spare time. Participants undertaking a placement via their training provider were more likely to have the opportunity to join in more formal cultural activities compared to those who applied individually, primarily since they were pre-organized on their behalf for them and their peers.

We did learn a lot about the culture and the history. Every town and city that we went to, we visited all the museums and cathedrals and spoke to a couple of locals here and there.

[United Kingdom, IDI]

We went to Hungary, we were immersed in the culture. We were able to meet lots of residents there and they were so kind and open. Actually, this course has allowed me to travel to different countries, to different places. I've been able to work full-time for an academic year in Italy. I was able to live in Spain. Because of this course I am more open to different cultures, definitely.

[United Kingdom, IDI]

The cultural activities participants mentioned doing in their free time on the placement included sightseeing trips, visiting shops and museums, learning about local history and customs, and typical sports and hiking trips. They not only paid visits to places but some even went on a short holiday (especially those who stayed in the host country for a rather long time). Participants valued the personal development that resulted from the opportunities to experience the host country's culture. Especially those learners who stayed with families or landladies/landlords typically experienced the host country's customs and way of living.

It was a very instructive period with a family that was very hospitable, new experiences and the different customs of people in the Netherlands.

[Belgium-Flanders, FGI]

Bulgarians are a bit different, very, very kind. You walk into the store and they start talking to you right away. It was very interesting.

[Latvia, IDI]

Because we were also in a shared flat, it was the first time for me with more people in one flat. Of course, you learn a lot there too, like taking the garbage out. It got a bit touchy with two girls, but it all worked out in the end. So you learn how to solve problems, I think.

[Austria, IDI]

As a result of this increased awareness of different cultures, many participants became more open and motivated to the idea of travelling to and visiting other countries, and a minority to considering working abroad. Several interviewees also mentioned that since their transnational placement they have already participated in other learning or working mobilities, especially those who continued their studies in higher education.

During the interviews in Luxembourg, former trainees also highlighted the cultural appeal of a traineeship abroad. In their opinion, the mobility experience allowed them not only to discover new cultures and visit new places, but also to meet and talk with people from other countries. Thus, intercultural competences must be considered in relation to communicative competences. Especially in the hospitality sector, interviewees set the highest priority on these competences, knowing that they had to work with both colleagues and customers from different backgrounds.

It is important to learn and know for later how to behave with people from different countries.

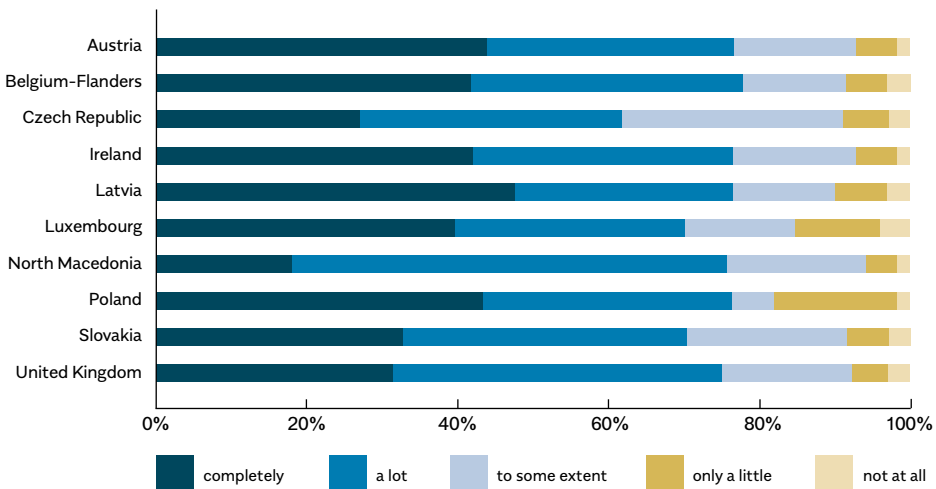
[Luxembourg, IDI]

In Luxembourg, the respondents were also invited to reflect on the idea of national and European identity. Most of the respondents associate the idea of European citizenship with the right of free movement within the EU area, followed by the choice of residence in Europe. Less than 50% think that the feeling of European citizenship is defined by one's place of birth. The results of the study also show that 62% of the respondents consider themselves first and foremost as citizens of their own country. But at the same time, 46% think of themselves as European citizens. It is thus not easy to assess whether the mobility experience changed the trainees' perceptions and mentalities with regard to identities.

When asked to what extent the trainee placement abroad allowed the learners to acquire, develop or improve their ability to work in an international environment, 37% agreed completely, 35% a lot and 17% to some extent. Just 9% increased this competence only a little and 2% not at all.

In most countries concerned, more than three-quarters of the respondents agreed completely or a lot that they developed their ability to work in an international environment. Only in the Czech Republic were there significantly fewer respondents (62%) who strongly agreed with this statement. This could be because one-third of them did their placement in a neighbouring country and another third did their placement in a school.

Figure III.27: Ability to work in an international environment by country (n=7 901)



As regards the development of intercultural competences in a work environment, the Slovak placement participants experienced predominantly positive, friendly and open communication in the workplace, an acceptance of differences, helpfulness and employees' efforts (regardless of the hierarchy) to create a positive work environment. Several respondents tended to compare this atmosphere with their personal experience from their practical training in Slovakia.

The placement in Germany was basically the same as or similar to what we did during the vocational placement in Slovakia. However, there is a different mentality in Germany. The health-care system is conservative in Slovakia. When we saw German nurses, who had colourful hair or shaved heads or tattoos, we were really shocked. It was clear that in Germany people saw that differently; when you have a tattoo done in Slovakia people consider you a criminal [...].

[Slovakia, survey]

As mentioned by participants from Poland and North Macedonia, a better understanding of cultural contexts was facilitated by a series of trips that combined entertainment with expanding knowledge regarding the culture, history and traditions of a given country. Such activities were often – to a greater or lesser extent – related to the topic of the internship, which allowed for a better understanding of the functioning of various industries, such as tourism (thanks to visiting monuments) and gastronomy (due to getting to know the impact of culture and history on local cuisine). Due to the nature of those trips, many cultural similarities and differences were observed by the participants of the mobility.

It's not only about learning the history of Spain, but also about getting to know the local cuisine, understanding what kind of dishes the guests like, what customs prevail in the restaurant, whether the tip is included in the price of the meal or if it is specified on the receipt which is not usually done in Poland. We had an opportunity go to a café and order what we wanted, get to know the local dishes, talk to the waiters and see how they settled the bill.

[Poland, IDI]

It was notable that in the Irish focus groups, the participants' discussion of cultural differences focused on differences in work culture and attitudes to work more than on differences in cultural customs or practices. All participants emphasized that learning to work in a different country and being exposed to different ways of doing things had been beneficial for them. Several Irish

participants noted that their experience had given them a greater understanding of and respect for international workers in their own workplaces because of their similar experience on Erasmus+.

I work with students now who are from, say, Germany or France, and they are coming here for the same reasons I was. And so I get where they are, and how nervous it is going in somewhere new – especially because they're trying to work on their English too. But it's amazing to be able to do that and to see other people do it.

[Ireland, FGI]

The North Macedonian participants mentioned that observing everyday life in other countries also allowed participants to learn about the local working conditions within the given industry. Intriguingly, for the majority of respondents, this aspect turned out to be much more important than learning about the culture and history of the country in which the internship took place. This was noticed especially by interns working in the hotel industry, tourism and gastronomy, although it should be added that people studying in other industries also noted the relationship between the culture and lifestyle in a given country and how this relates to professional work. The opportunity to learn about a different cultural model turned out to be very important when working in restaurants – thanks to this, trainees could get to know the secrets of the national cuisine, learn how to prepare local dishes and gain an understanding of how to serve other types of customers, different from those they were accustomed to back home in North Macedonia.

They have better equipment and their manner of working is different compared to ours. They have a different point of view and decisions are made by more than one person.

[North Macedonia, FGI]

As I worked in London at a childcare centre in an area where many different nationalities and religions live together, my transnational placement really became an intercultural experience. I saw that England was further on its way to being an intercultural society with respect for different cultures and religions.

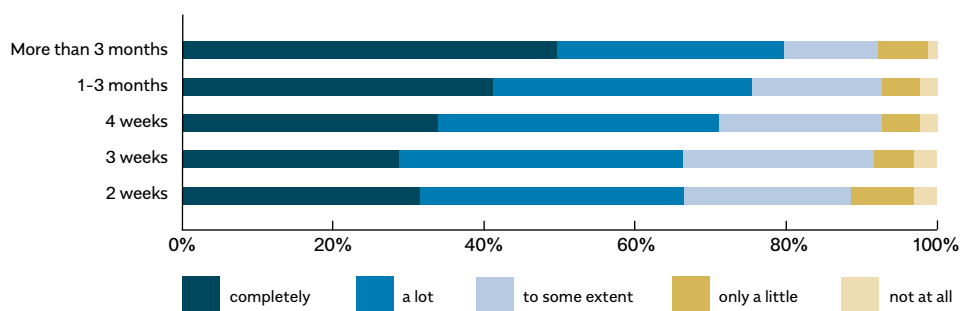
[Belgium-Flanders, FGI]

We all had to work in an international environment not only with people from the host country but also with people from other countries and even other continents.

[Belgium-Flanders, FGI]

The learners who went abroad for more than one month and especially those who spent more than three months in the host country enhanced their ability to work in an international environment significantly more than those who went for less than one month. 80% of the latter learners strongly agree with the statement that the mobility helped them to gain those skills. Even two-thirds (66%) of those who only did a short-term mobility of two weeks increased their ability to work in an international environment, but it is clear that the longer the mobility lasted, the more they developed this competence.

Figure III.28: Ability to work in an international environment by duration (n=7 901)



The Polish data also confirms that a longer stay abroad and working in an international environment gave the young interns more opportunities to interact with representatives of other cultures and nationalities and thus experience different cultural contexts. Contact with new situations that they had not dealt with in Poland was a factor in opening them up to the world. As one of them stated:

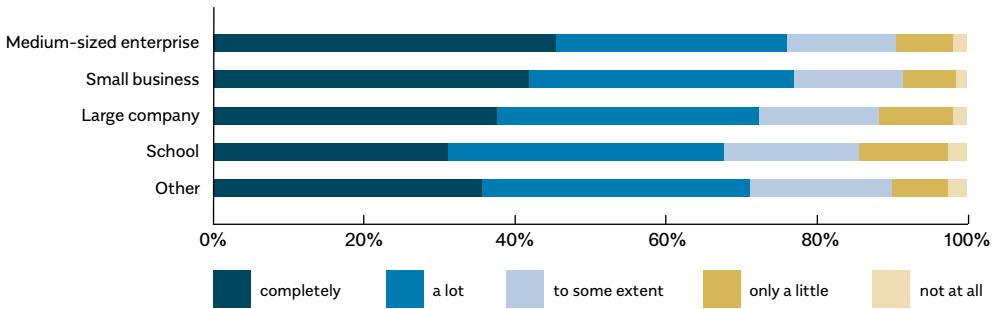


I became fascinated with Spanish culture and I feel more open to meeting new people.

[Poland, FGI]

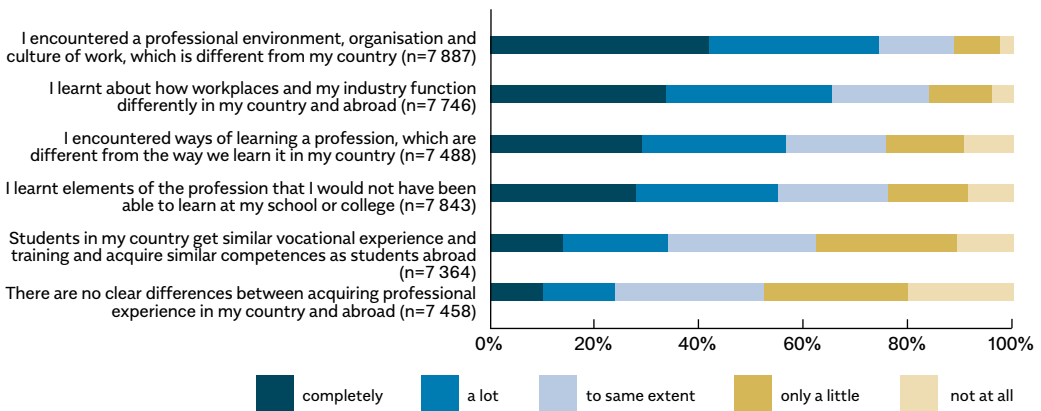
It is clear from Figure III.29 that the larger the company, the more the ability to work in an international environment increases. Larger companies usually have more international staff than smaller companies. It is also not surprising that the learners who did their placement in a school had less of an impression that they had enhanced their ability to work in an international environment compared to those working in a large or medium-sized company.

Figure III.29: Ability to work in an international environment by setting (n=7 901)



The learners not only encountered differences as to traditions, food, religion, etc. but they also encountered differences as to ways of learning and training for a profession compared to the way they learn it in their country, gaining practical professional experience and learning elements of the profession that they would not have been able to learn at their school or college.

Figure III.30: Intercultural differences in working and learning (percentage of learners who agree with the statement)



Three-quarters of the learners agreed completely or a lot that they encountered a professional environment, organization or culture of work that was different from those in their country, and two-thirds strongly agreed that they learnt about how workplaces and their industry function differently from those in their country. 56% encountered ways of learning a profession that are different from the way they learn it in their country and virtually as many (55%) learnt elements of the profession they would not have been able to learn at their school or college. These statements and differences are confirmed by the fact that only 34% strongly agreed that students in their country get similar vocational experience and training and acquire similar competences as students abroad, and even fewer agreed (24%) that there are no clear differences between acquiring professional experience in their country and abroad.

I have seen new ways of work organization in the Netherlands in relation to doing activities with toddlers in a childcare centre. They focus much more on the acquisition of intellectual skills with the small children.

[Belgium-Flanders, IDI]

As for my business activities, there have been countless times in my life when I reminded myself that in England I was also thrown into the water and I started swimming. What also helped me was seeing how people work in Britain – for example, that the organization of work and people is good. It impacts on productivity. This realization helped me quite a bit in my business. Thanks to my newly-found self-confidence, I often applied for positions where others did not think I had a chance, but most of the time I got the job.

[Czech Republic, IDI]

We were able to observe how a particular company works. I saw different types of relationships within the company, how specific departments cooperated, how they were connected and how they performed their activities. This is useful knowledge, especially for those who would like to set up their own business in Poland.

[Poland, IDI]

In terms of how this was viewed by country, 84% of the learners from North Macedonia agreed completely or a lot that they encountered ways of learning a profession that are different from the way they learn it in their country, whereas this was the case for only 43% of the Austrian and 45% of the Czech participants.

Table III.2: Learning and working differences by country (weighted average, scale: 1-5)

	I encountered ways of learning a profession, which are different from the way we learn it in my country (n=7 488)	I learnt elements of the profession that I would not have been able to learn at my school or college (n=7 843)	I encountered a professional environment, organisation and culture of work, which is different from my country (n=7 887)	I learnt about how workplaces and my industry function differently in my country and abroad (n=7 746)
Austria	3.24	3.53	4.16	3.79
Belgium-Flanders	3.79	3.49	3.81	3.75
Czech Republic	3.19	3.23	3.94	3.68
Ireland	3.59	3.83	3.94	3.78
Latvia	3.68	3.52	3.99	3.79
Luxembourg	3.83	3.58	3.79	3.69
North Macedonia	4.03	3.79	3.89	3.97
Poland	3.74	3.62	4.17	3.89
Slovakia	3.43	3.55	3.92	3.68
United Kingdom	3.52	3.63	3.83	3.75

Only 43% of the Czech respondents strongly agreed with the statement that they learnt elements of the profession that would not have been learnt at their school or college, whereas this was the case for 70% of the respondents from North Macedonia and 66% of the Irish respondents.

It is pretty clear that especially the Czech learners did not notice a lot of differences between the way they learnt a profession in their own country and abroad, whereas the most noticeable differences were for the learners from North Macedonia. As already mentioned, 10% of the Czech respondents did their placement in neighbouring Slovakia with a similar language and culture and another 23% in other neighbouring countries (Austria, Germany and Poland).

The overall majority (74%) of the learners agreed that they encountered a professional environment, organization or culture of work that is different from those in their own country (WA 4.02). However, in Flanders (64%), the UK and Luxembourg (66%), fewer learners noticed differences in organizational culture between their own country and the host country.

Two-thirds (65%) of the respondents strongly agreed that they learnt about how workplaces and their industry function differently to those in their country (WA 3.78). However, 79% of the North Macedonian learners stated that this is the case (WA 3.97) whereas only 57% of the Slovak and 58% of the Czech learners agreed completely or a lot (WA 3.68).

The way of work is different.

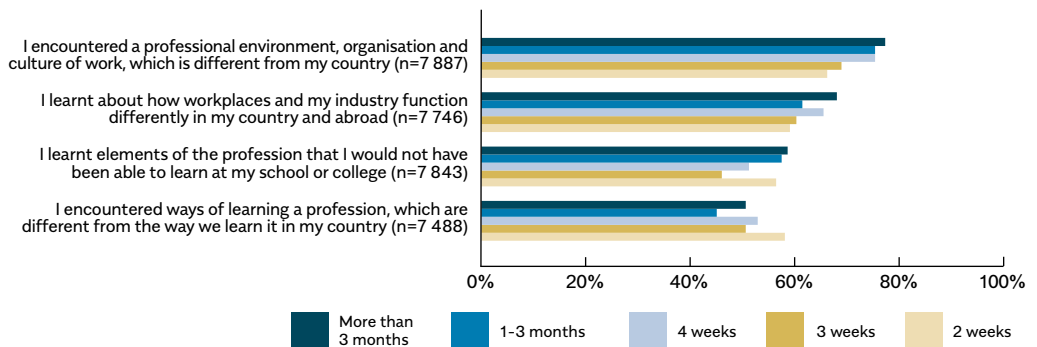
[North Macedonia, IDI]

During the focus groups and individual interviews, all Flemish participants stressed that work in Flanders was much more stressful than abroad:

Work in Belgium is much more stressful than abroad. Here in Belgium we are treated as cheap labour, and during our placement abroad we were treated as extra staff who were treated with respect and had to work an agreed number of hours.

[Belgium-Flanders, FGI]

Figure III.31: Differences noticed in learning and working by duration (percentage of learners who agree completely or a lot with the statement)



Although the majority of learners agreed that they encountered a professional environment, organization or culture of work that is different from those in their own country, it turns out that the longer they are abroad, the more they notice these differences.

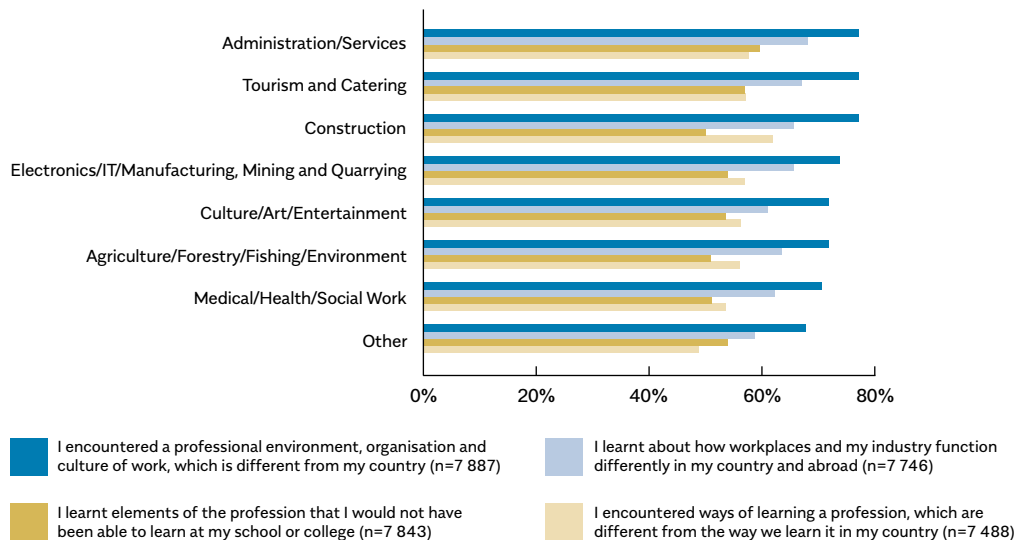
Thus, 77% of those who had a mobility of more than three months and 75% of those who were abroad for four weeks or for between one and three months agree completely or a lot with this statement compared to only 66% of those who had a training period of two weeks.

More than two-thirds (68%) of the respondents who stayed abroad for more than three months strongly agreed that they learnt about how workplaces and their industry function differently to those in their country (WA 3.88) compared to only 59% of those who were abroad for only two weeks (WA 3.65).

The differences are far less significant as far as the ways of learning a profession or elements of the profession are concerned. 58% of those who went abroad for more than three months encountered elements of the profession they would not have been able to learn at their school or college compared to 56% who went on a mobility for two weeks. Those who encountered these different elements least were the students who were on a three-week mobility (46%), indicating that the duration of the mobility was not a determining factor for this variable.

Regarding encountering ways of learning a profession that were different from those in their country, 58% of the learners who did a two-week mobility agreed completely or a lot with the statement compared to only 50% of those who were abroad for more than three months and even fewer (45%) of those who did a placement of between one and three months.

Figure III.32: Differences in working and learning by occupational area or field of study (percentage of learners who agree completely or a lot with the statement)



It was especially students from Administration, Tourism and Catering and Construction who strongly agreed (77%) that they encountered a professional environment, organization or culture of work that is different from their own country. This was not the case so much for learners from 'other' occupational areas (68%) or from Health and Social Care (71%).

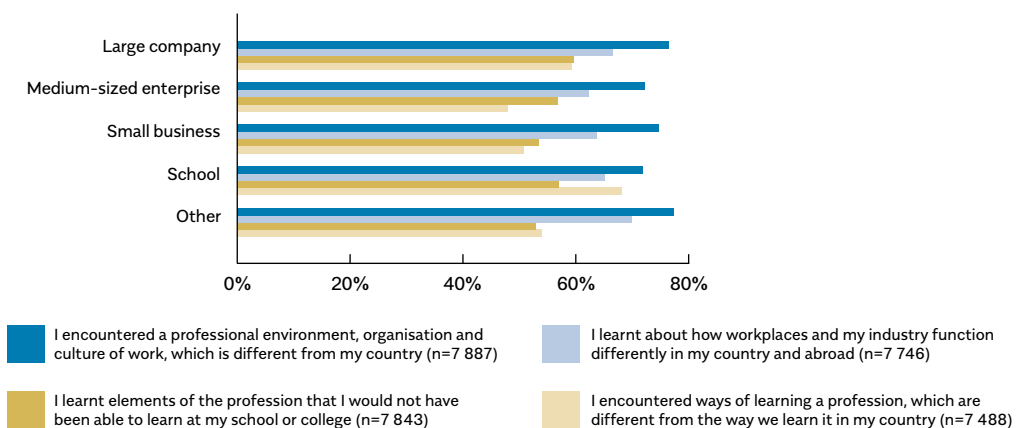
Respectively 68%, 67% and 66% of students from Administration, Tourism and Catering, Construction and Electronics and IT agreed completely or a lot that they learnt about how workplaces and their industry function differently to those in their country. This was only the case for 61% of respondents from Art and Culture and 59% from other occupational areas.

60% of learners from Administration and Services also learnt elements of the profession that they would not have been able to learn at their school or college compared to only 50% from Construction and 51% from Health and Social Care and as many from Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Environment.

Although only 49% of learners from 'other' occupational areas stated that they encountered ways of learning a profession that are different from the way they learn it in their country, 60% of Construction learners confirmed that this was the case.

77% of the learners who worked in other organizations and as many who worked in large companies agreed completely or a lot that they encountered a professional environment, organization or culture of work that is different from their country compared to 72% of those who were trained in a school or a medium-sized company.

Figure III.33: Differences noticed in working and learning by setting (percentage of learners who agree completely or a lot with the statement)



More learners who did their placement in a large company (67%) also learnt about how workplaces and their industry function differently to the workplaces and industry in their country than those who spent their internship in a medium-sized company (62%).

There were virtually no significant differences as far as settings are concerned as to learning elements of the profession that the students would not have been able to learn at their school or college. However, more respondents who worked in a large company (60%) strongly agreed with the statement than those who worked in a small business (53%).

The most significant differences can be found in terms of encountering ways of learning a profession that are different from the way students learn it in their country: 68% of the respondents who did their placement in a school agreed completely or a lot that they obtained those skills. In response to the same statement, 48% of those who undertook training in a medium-sized enterprise and 51% who undertook training in a small business agreed.

It can be therefore concluded that learning a profession is clearly associated with a school whereas respondents mainly encountered differences in professional organization and culture as well as workplaces that function differently in 'other' settings and large companies. No significant differences as far as gender is concerned were observed among the data.

Competences passed on to others

According to data, a significant number of students shared their knowledge, experiences and competences acquired during their mobility after returning home. Overall, 75% of the learners agreed completely or a lot that they shared their knowledge and experience with others (see Figure III.34).

However, significant differences can be seen by countries, as 88% of the Latvian and 80% of the Austrian learners strongly agree that they have shared their knowledge and experience with others. This is not surprising as 77% of the Latvian and 76% of the Austrian respondents strongly confirmed that they had gained practical professional competences. On the other hand, it is quite surprising that only 71% of the learners from Luxembourg (least of all countries) state that they have shared their knowledge and experience with others whereas 80% of them declared that they had acquired practical professional competences. According to the survey data, more female participants shared their knowledge and experience with others than male participants.

Figure III.34: Sharing knowledge and experience with others by country (n=7 880)

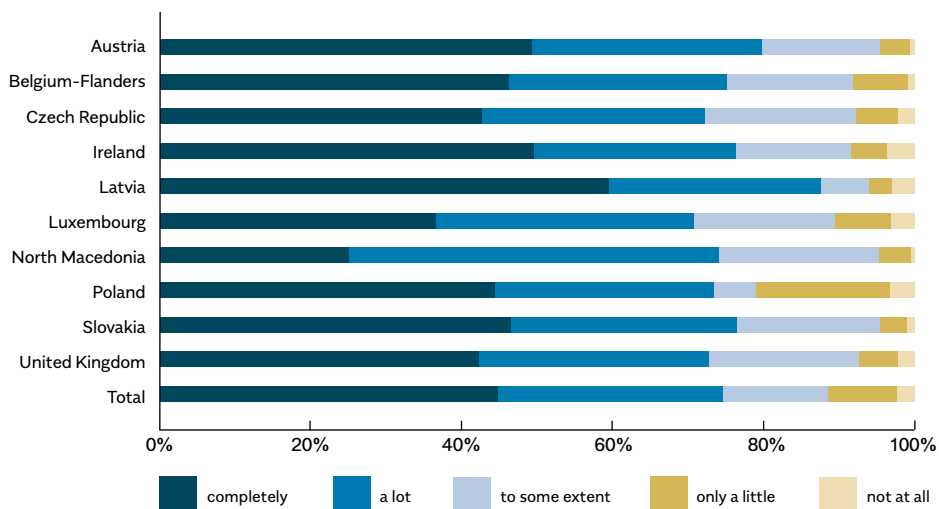
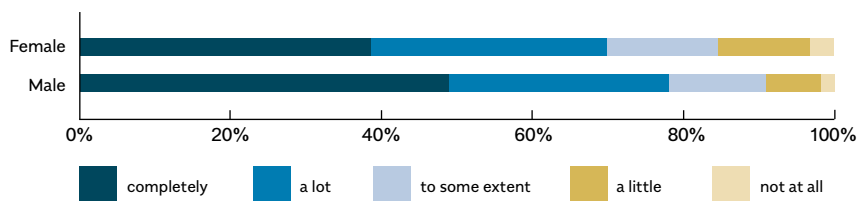


Figure III.35: Sharing knowledge and experience with others by gender (n=7 880)



Although the learners who went abroad for only two weeks are the ones who shared their experience with others to a lesser degree (72% strongly agree), there is no clear relation with the duration of the stay as more learners who went abroad for four weeks (79%) shared their knowledge and experience with others than those who went abroad for more than three months (75%).

No significant differences are noticed between the occupational area or field of study of the learners or the setting where they did their placement and sharing the knowledge and experience gained during the transnational mobility.

Considering the fact that three-quarters of the learners shared their knowledge and experience with others, it can be concluded that it was not only the learners who participated in the mobility who acquired competences.

This was not only obvious in the questionnaires but also became clear in the focus groups and individual interviews, during which it transpired that the competences, skills or knowledge acquired abroad were passed on to others.

Sometimes the learners also shared the skills and competences they had acquired in their own country to colleagues in their host country. Thus, the Flemish Social Care learners who went to Romania had prepared 100 activities to be carried out with the adult handicapped people in a centre in Bucharest. Every day, six activities were carried out and four teachers were present to observe (and support) the implementation of those activities. Together with their tutors, they taught the Romanian personnel what they could do with handicapped adults. The idea was that the placement would also be a kind of training for the Romanian colleagues at a local level who have been badly or little trained in terms of caring for adult handicapped people. This also explains the fact that the local people did not really mentor the learners. The local colleagues would just be used for attending to basic activities such as feeding and washing handicapped people. They did not know how to do interesting and stimulating mental or physical activities with them. Likewise, an Irish interviewee mentioned that she taught English to her Spanish colleagues. In one case, a Flemish learner not only brought home the skills and competences to use new breeding techniques to breed special dairy cattle but also two actual embryos of a special cattle breed in the Netherlands.

I have seen methods to milk cows that are less stressful for farmers (pit milking) as they don't have to bend over when milking. I have also seen sand used for cows to rest on, and this seemed to be more comfortable for the cows than hay. I discussed this with my parents, and they will probably introduce some of the ways of breeding and milking cows I saw there to our farm.

[Belgium-Flanders, FGI]

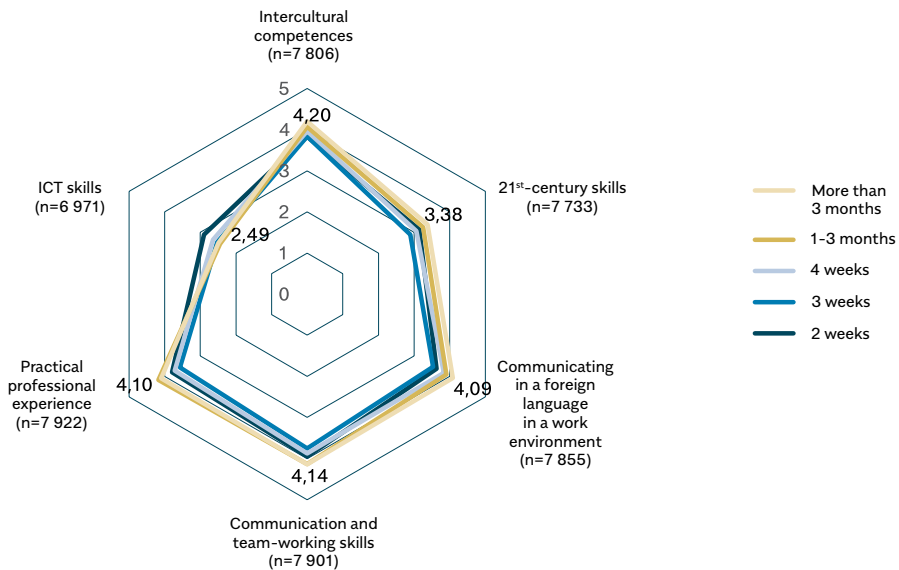
I would have tried to communicate as much as I could in Spanish but they were very much of the hope that I'd teach them English as much as they were going to teach me Spanish. In reality, it was me teaching them English. It's a research station that has an international reach and they give conferences all over Europe, primarily in English. English is kind of the primary language in the sciences. They were very keen to learn English, so the communication was primarily in English with some small amounts of Spanish here and there.

[Ireland, IDI]

I was offered a unique opportunity to have several placements over the past years. These placements represent a key contribution to my professional and personal life and have also increased my interest in further higher education studies in the field of care for adult handicapped people. I think the work I did during my placement in Romania also helped to improve the quality of care for handicapped people in Romania.

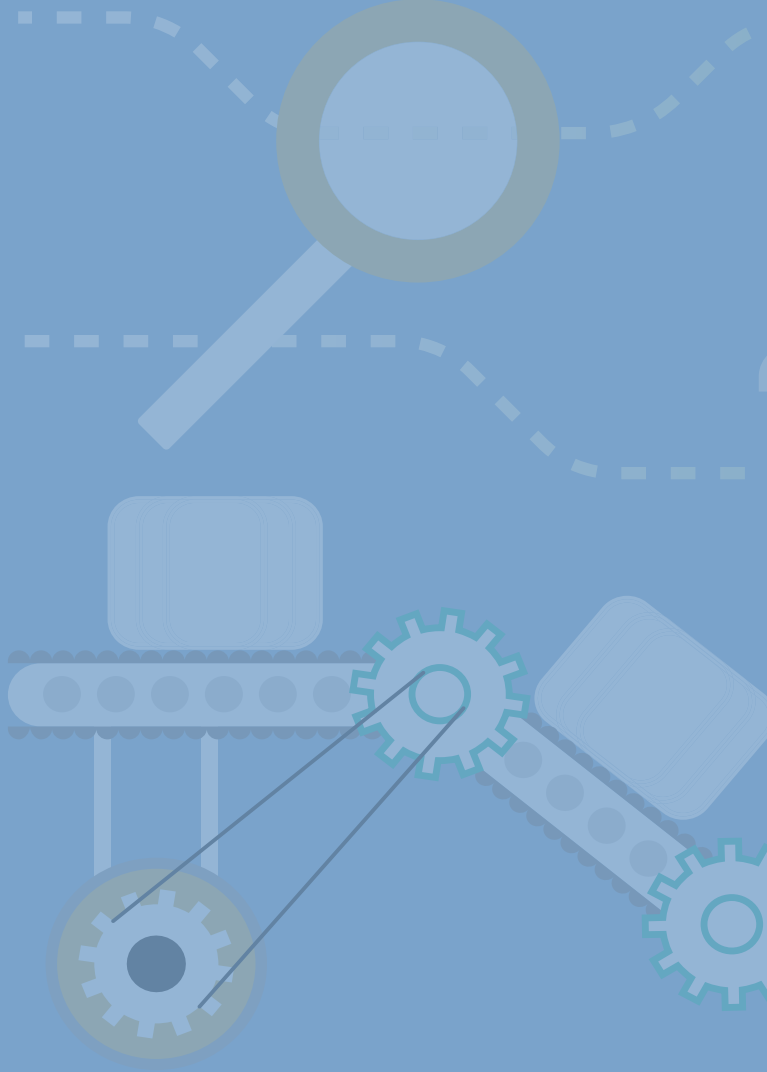
[Belgium-Flanders, IDI]

Figure III.36: Impact of the mobility on different skills by duration



As noticed throughout this chapter, the most crucial variable to determine the acquisition of learners' competences, appears to be the duration of their placements. Except for ICT skills, the most important differences in the perception of gained competences turned out to be between those learners who went for the training abroad that lasted more than a month, and those who undertook placements that lasted shorter periods. Acquiring ICT skills, however, seems to be more linked to the area of studies or to particular industry, rather than to the duration of the learners' mobility experience.

IV. Further education and work experience



This chapter focuses on the further education and career paths of former transnational mobility programme participants in relation to the usefulness of the acquired skills during their further employment or education experience. When looking at these results, it must be taken into account that nowadays it is becoming more difficult to use clearly defined status boundaries and transitions from education to employment as young people may study and work at the same time or continue their education after starting a career. Indeed, some respondents were still continuing their studies at the educational level and institutions from which they went abroad, others had started their studies at the next level, and still others had started their careers. The available data characterize an early impact, as most of the participants covered in this study participated in the mobility programme during the last few years (the majority of them since 2016; see Chapter II), so they are still at the beginning of their careers. However, an evaluation at the early stage of participants' career and education paths allows them to recall more clearly and interlink their mobility experience to future learning or work-related decisions.

Thus, this chapter consists of four parts. The first section looks at those mobility participants who are still in education, and the analysis includes an overview of what the impact of the mobility on the participants' future learning choices has been. The second section focuses on those participants who are currently starting out in work. It examines the satisfaction of mobility participants with their current working conditions and their views on the impact of their foreign mobility on their employability, exploring examples demonstrating these effects. The third section examines job expectations for the working environment and working conditions, location, workload, responsibilities and other characteristics. The final section examines the results of the mobility through another aspect of its evaluation – the readiness of mobility participants to promote the involvement of other young people in the programme, recommending that others also participate in it.

Educational choices

This section looks at those mobility participants who are still in education or have recently finished their studies, investigating ways in which the mobility programme impacted their learning performance and future learning choices. For this reason, first of all, we look at the distribution of the participants in the survey according to their involvement in education and, in particular, how many mobility participants are still studying at the level of compulsory education and VET education and how many have continued to study at a higher education level (see Table IV.1).

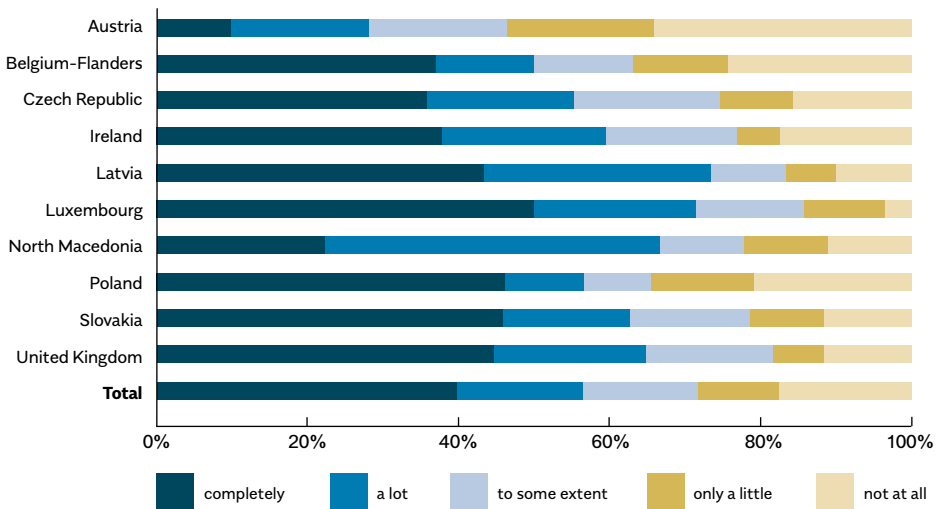
In total, 42% of the participants at the time of the survey were still in their compulsory education or VET at a school or college. Thus, correspondingly, 58% had finished their initial training. Of them, 40% had gone on to a higher or further education institution; 25% at the moment of the survey were still in their studies and 15% had finished them (Table IV.1). Those who had gone on to studies for a degree or equivalent qualification at a higher or further education institution were the subject of further interest in this survey for establishing relationships between their foreign mobility experience and their further education choices. As seen in Table IV.1, the distribution of the respondents who have continued their studies to the next education level varies among the countries. In the case of some countries, the research covered more students who are currently continuing their studies in compulsory education or VET institutions, whereas in other countries more diverse groups of mobility participants got enrolled in the national sample.

Table IV.1: Sample description. Current education level of survey respondents (in percentage terms, n=7 953)

	Currently in compulsory education/studying VET at a school or college	Finished compulsory education/studying VET at a school or college	Currently studying for a degree or equivalent qualification at a higher education institution	Have finished studies for a degree or equivalent qualification at a higher education institution
Austria	64	36	27	2
Belgium-Flanders	15	85	57	4
Czech Republic	32	68	38	21
Ireland	47	53	6	22
Latvia	59	41	10	13
Luxembourg	43	57	3	40
North Macedonia	82	18	8	21
Poland	53	47	13	10
Slovakia	51	49	62	5
United Kingdom	20	80	30	41
Total	42	58	25	15

The impact of the mobility on the participants' current studies (at a higher or further education institution or level) is shown through the five statements formulated for the survey which the respondents agreed or disagreed with, thus showing their perception of the link between the internship abroad and their further education or success in learning. Each of the statements covers a different dimension of the interlink of both areas. So, to demonstrate both the average assessment and the assessment of each country, they are examined separately below, with quotations from qualitative interviews provided as evidence of the participants' experience.

Figure IV.1: Agreement with the statement: "The subject I am studying or studied is related to the profession I learnt about in my vocational training" (n=2 417)



The first two statements demonstrate the link between the previous and current subject of studies. The first statement describes the continuity or progression of studies chosen by mobility participants in different countries: "The subject I am studying or studied is related to the profession I learnt about in my vocational training". As shown in Figure IV.1, on average, about half of the mobility participants covered within the study recognized a relation between the subject of their current studies and the profession learnt in their vocational training (40% of participants indicated that both subjects are related 'completely' and 17% 'a lot'). Although there are similarities in the assessments of the current situation of mobility participants in most of the countries covered by the study, the results obtained in Austria appear to have a lower degree of

agreement. There are also differences in the frequency with which respondents from other countries chose 'completely' and 'a lot'.

When looking at these data, it should be taken into account that youth attitudes towards studies and the need to continue studies, and thus the transition from school to work, vary among economic sectors and from one EU country to another. Firstly, it should be noted that the graduation of a vocational/technical secondary school means that former mobility participants are prepared to start working in the profession/occupation they have been trained in, and any decisions on their continuing education should be considered as voluntary rather than obligatory. So, to some extent, continuing studies at a higher level is not considered a precondition for participation in the labour market.

Secondly, the opportunities for progression to a higher level also depend on the economic sector of the vocational education. While higher education is a natural progression of the education path in some areas of vocational education, there are a range of industries in which possession of a professional title is sufficient to achieve success in the labour market. In addition, young people may have a number of areas of interest which they want to try, so they may have uncertain or several concurrent career aspirations. All these circumstances create preconditions that affect the involvement of mobility participants in further or higher education. Several quotations clearly show the aspects that constitute the motivation of the participants to choose one subject or another for further education as well as show that their chosen current studies may also differ from their expected future profession or occupation.

I am in higher education only to get a diploma. I would like to go back to what I studied at secondary school and open my own beauty salon.

[Slovakia, IDI]

I like working at the chemist's, but I would like to go on to study in higher education. I applied for a course in medicine. If I don't get a place I will stay at the chemist's.

[Slovakia, IDI]

So, I would like to either study pharmacy or do something with languages. So, for example, be an interpreter. I'm not quite sure what it will be, but those would be my two ideas.

[Austria, FGI]

I am undertaking a dual study programme. It is a combination of studying and doing an internship in a company. The subject of my study differs from the professional profile of the school which I graduated from. Earlier, I wanted to study mechatronics, but after

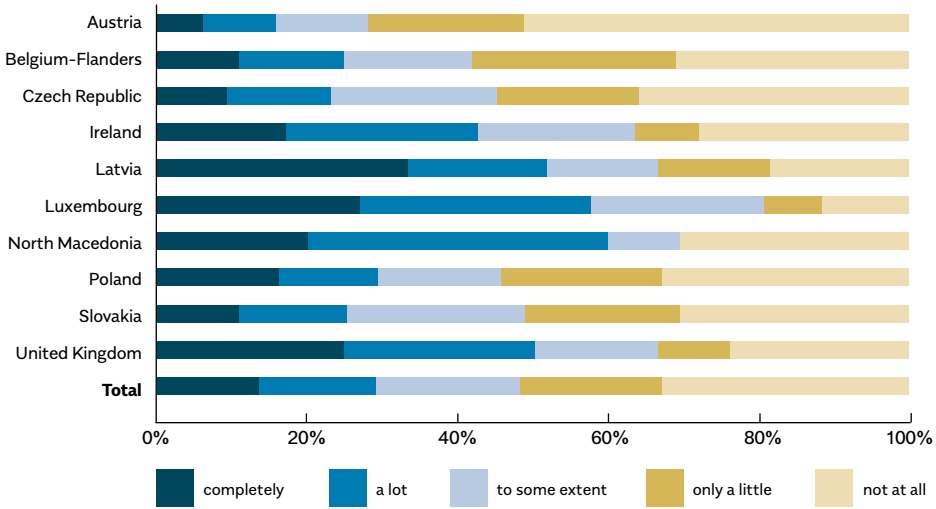
the professional exam I found that this was not what I was after. I therefore chose mechanics and the construction of machines.

[Poland, IDI]

Therefore, a more accurate description of the impact of the mobility on further studies is given in the next statement shown in Figure IV.2: "My internship/trainee placement abroad influenced my choice of subject to study". On average, 30% of mobility participants recognize an impact of their internship abroad on their choice of subject for their current studies (14% 'completely' and 16% 'a lot'); additionally, 19% of respondents indicated an impact 'to some extent'. This result can be considered a positive assessment of the mobility experience as, in general, the qualitative interviews show that future study choices are influenced by various factors (personal interests, parents' opinion, opportunities, offered programmes, etc.). In addition, the duration of the mobility is too short to gain much importance in the individual's future choices. Indeed, according to the survey, the length of the stay abroad (even if it lasted three months or more) does not result in an increase in the participants' positive assessment of the impact of the mobility on their choice of subject for their studies.

The scale of the impact varies considerably by country and should be seen in the light of the benefits for mobility participants discussed in the previous chapters. Counting together all the answers that indicate a greater or lesser impact of the mobility programme on the choice of subject for further studies, it appears that this is most frequently noted by participants from Northern Macedonia, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Luxembourg and Latvia. Additional valuable insight into the way that the mobility programme affected the future studies of participants from these countries is given in the qualitative part of the study. The mobility's impact in this respect is most rarely recognized by participants from Austria (see Figure IV.2).

Figure IV.2: Agreement with the statement: “My internship/trainee placement abroad influenced my choice of subject to study” (n=2 317)



Looking at how the foreign mobility affected the participants’ choice of further studies, it can be seen that the effect appears in two mutually exclusive directions – as choice-reinforcing or choice-strengthening to continue their education obtained at the vocational level to a higher degree and as choice-changing whereby it led to another subject or field. The contributing effect is less well-revealed by qualitative research, but it can be seen through the following examples:

[The placement] was a life-changing experience for me. I am now in year two of a degree in horticulture, having been inspired to do so through the confidence I got from Erasmus+.

[Ireland, survey]

It became a truly reflective transnational placement which really had an impact on my decision to go on in higher education in the same field. I hope to do another placement during my bachelor’s studies.

[Belgium-Flanders, IDI]

My placement abroad helped me realize what I wanted to do as a career and helped me make choices about my academic career that I would not have been able to do had I not done the placement.

[Ireland, survey]

Subsequent to my placements in hospitality management in London, I decided to go on a bachelor's course in this area, where I am studying now. I also hope to do a Master's in that same area later on.

[Belgium-Flanders, IDI]

The choice-changing effect emerges either through the discovery of new, attractive areas of interest or through the understanding that came during the mobility abroad that a participant did not want to or could not work in the profession/occupation they originally learnt about at the vocational level. Depending on the country, the study of the participants' experiences also shows at a more or less detailed level how changes in the direction of studies occurred when their further education path is partly related to the previous one.

For example, one participant from the United Kingdom who undertook a placement in a school, assisting with the teaching of art lessons that included visiting galleries, specified how these activities enabled them to realize how to change the direction of their studies in a way that was more suitable to their true interests.

I'm a designer and I wanted to make stuff that improves people's lives rather than stuff that people see in a gallery, look at, nod their head at or whatever, and then two minutes later just walk away from. I just want to impact people lives.

[United Kingdom, IDI]

A similar example is given by a mobility participant from Poland, who also perceived how to connect their complementary areas of interest:

I think that we have more opportunities to find and keep a job after graduating from a technical upper secondary school. I am in the third year of my studies related to construction. It is exactly what I was hoping for: first I studied landscape architecture at a construction and building trade school, and now construction at university. At some point, I would also like to gain some knowledge related to interior design.

[Poland, IDI]

Several other examples show that the search for the right field of study and the discovery of their talents are generally typical features for the mobility participants from various countries.

I have discovered that I am good at artistic painting and therefore I would like to study scenic arts.

[Belgium-Flanders, IDI]

I know that I want to take on a bachelor's degree in animal care, but during the placement I really discovered my passion for reptiles.

[Belgium-Flanders, FGI]

I have always wanted to work with people. At secondary school, I realized that I didn't want to work as an accountant. Now I am studying what I am interested in. I would like to become a paediatric psychologist.

[Slovakia, IDI]

Another example highlights the importance of the participants obtaining confidence in their capabilities, which is usually boosted by their participation in the mobility programme.

I went on this placement with nearly no French speaking skills, which improved significantly because I was thrown into a situation where I had to speak. The place I worked in was not the best in terms of being warm or welcoming, but it was still an extremely good experience which gave me the confidence to go on to study French at university level and gelled me really close to my classmates in my QQI course. This was one of the best experiences I had and allowed me to really experience another culture.

[Ireland, survey]

I used to be more reserved. Because I overcame myself and went on this placement, I became braver and applied to a law school – this seemed to me like a fairly unobtainable goal, especially for a business academy student. This experience 'nudged me'.

[Czech Republic, IDI]

The result of the mobility or internship abroad may be both doubts about the direction of the studies selected and a complete change of the field of study. In this case, there is also a possibility that the person needs more time to understand their true interests.

At the time [of the placement], I did want to work in tourism. And I did do all the tourism jobs. Now I'm tourismed out! So, I work in a bank now, and it's grand.

[Ireland, FGI]

After the traineeship in Latvia, where I went for four months, I realized that this was not what I wanted to do in life. That's why I changed the field.

[Latvia, IDI]

I entered [university]. I chose something completely different; I took customs and taxes.

Everyone laughed at me as I went from hospitality to customs. I started learning, disliked it, maybe it wasn't what I wanted. It wasn't really my decision, I listened to my peers.

For example, I had gone to a hairdresser who is my peer and she advised me to wait, give myself time and work in the area I have been studying. She told me, 'Wait, find yourself!'

That's what I did, and I've been in my profession for two months.

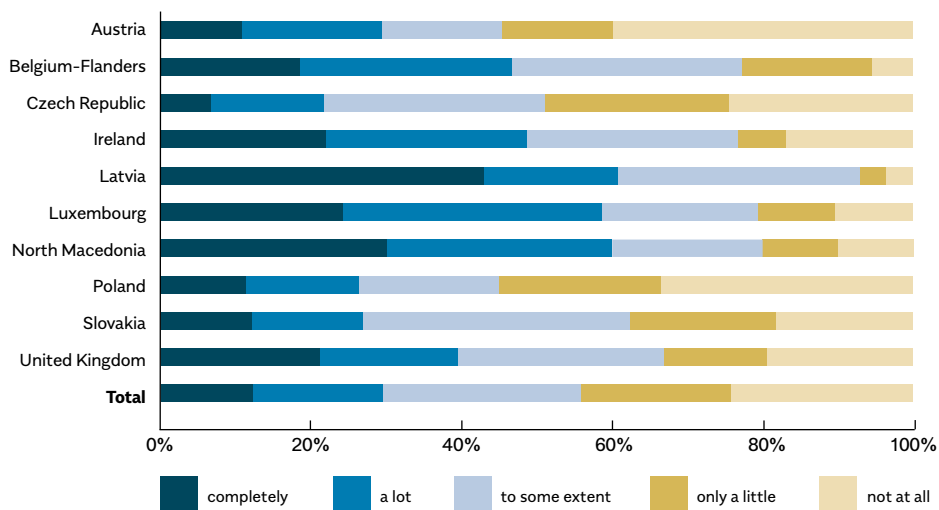
[Latvia, IDI]

Looking at the immediate impact of the mobility on the learning achievements of the participants (Figure IV.3), the survey data show that on average one-third of respondents recognized considerable results (12% 'completely' agreed and 17% agreed 'a lot' that their internship abroad positively influenced the grades received during their vocational studies) and 26% admitted that its influence could be observed 'to some extent'. These results are significantly influenced by the internal arrangements of educational institutions in selecting students to participate in the mobility programme.

In some countries, the most motivated and successful students are selected to participate in the programme, while in other countries the selection criteria applied by sending institutions are different. Thus, the experiences of students in improving their performance may also be different, as is evidenced by the analysis of survey data at the national level.

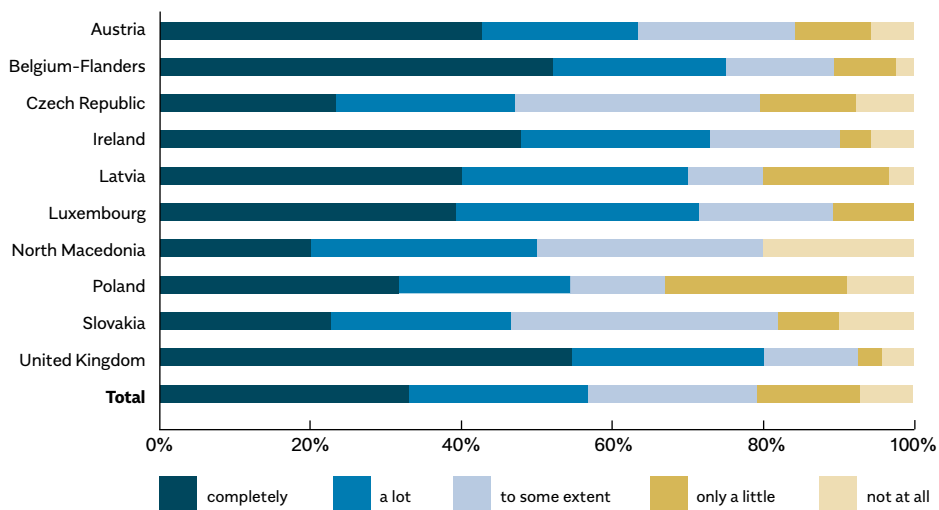
Counting together the answers that indicate a greater or lesser positive impact of the mobility programme on the grades/marks received during vocational studies, this most frequently noted by participants from North Macedonia, Luxembourg and Latvia, as well as from Belgium (Flanders), Ireland and the United Kingdom. Participants from the Czech Republic and Slovakia indicate its impact at a similar and more moderate level. Participants from Austria and Poland were the least likely to be convinced of the positive impact of the mobility on their future learning achievements.

Figure IV.3: Agreement with the statement: “My internship/trainee placement abroad positively influenced the grades/marks I received during my vocational studies” (n=2 306)



As one of the main benefits of a foreign mobility is the improvement of language and intercultural communication skills (see also Chapter III), consequently, 57% of respondents indicate that they are no longer afraid to study abroad (33% completely agree and 24% agree ‘a lot’ with the statement that thanks to their internship/trainee placement abroad, they are not afraid to study abroad). An additional 22% of participants consider that they agree with this statement ‘to some extent’ (see Figure IV.4). The extent to which participants agree with the statement varies from country to country and depends on the host country and the home and foreign languages used. Thus, the greater prudence and inclination of participants from Slovakia, the Czech Republic and North Macedonia in favour of the ‘to some extent’ answer can be explained by their more frequent mobilities to neighbouring countries, which result in fewer cultural differences being experienced and consequently less confidence about the possibility to transfer this experience to studies in any other European country. Contrary to this, participants from the United Kingdom, Belgium (Flanders), Ireland and Austria are the most confident about the impact of their mobility experience on their feelings of being able to study abroad. Participants from Luxembourg, Latvia and Poland are also comparatively more confident.

Figure IV.4: Agreement with the statement: “Thanks to my internship/trainee placement abroad, I am not afraid to study abroad” (n=2 357)



The qualitative study gives a number of examples of how the participants’ experience of a foreign mobility has allayed their fears of studying abroad. This is, first of all, through the development of their cultural and linguistic skills, secondly, through the establishment of contacts in the receiving country, which allows for a transition to an appropriate higher education institution just after the end of their internship, and, thirdly, through a comparison of educational systems that enables a better understanding of the benefits of studies abroad.

The placement was one of my best experiences at secondary school. I became so fond of the Netherlands during my practice that I applied for a place at a university and I am currently studying in the third term there.

[Slovakia, IDI]

But if I found a field of study that really interested me, and if it wasn't possible to go abroad, I'd still want to study this field regardless. I'd rather go somewhere where these placements are not provided than somewhere I'm not interested in and may even drop out from before I finish my studies. But it's surely a big plus. But when I look at universities, or in general, I feel that it's offered almost everywhere these days.

[Czech Republic, FGI]

My time in Sweden opened my eyes; they only teach you what you're supposed to be studying there – so you actually learn. In the end, it was probably the catalyst for me giving up college here, because there really is no point trying to actually learn anything in Ireland. All you really get is a piece of paper which thinly veils an incredibly saturated learning experience, where you learn seemingly everything you'll never need mixed in with just enough of what you actually went to college to learn to justify another year's funding for the college. I now advise everyone to avoid going to college; the education system stinks from top to bottom. I wish I could have learnt in the college I went to in Sweden.

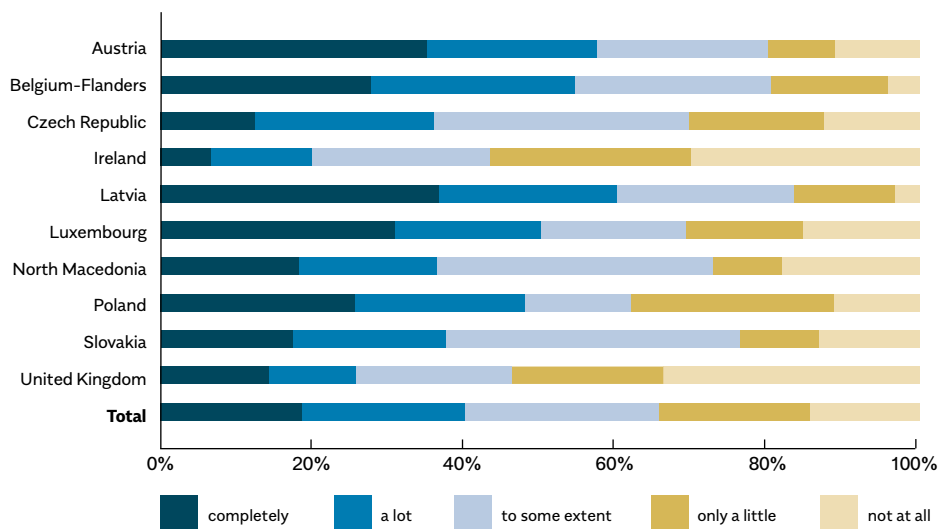
[Ireland, survey]

When I found myself in a French-speaking environment I made a decision to go to university. I overcame my prejudices about other countries because for one month I saw that I could make it even there.

[North Macedonia, IDI]

The last statement evaluated by the participants about the impact of their mobility is also related to the improvement of language skills, i.e. the respondents expressed their attitude towards the statement “thanks to my internship/trainee placement abroad, I can read materials in a foreign language more easily”. On average, respondents’ assessments appear to have a high degree of dispersion and also vary among countries (see Figure IV.5). The qualitative study shows that these variations can be explained by several factors, the impact of which on each individual’s situation also differs. First, an essential condition is the language in which a person spoke abroad and skills in which were improved during the mobility placement. In many cases, participants from different countries talk about improving their English, and the development of German or French skills is also mentioned, albeit less often. However, if a person has been in an internship or placement in a country whose residents have weak foreign language skills, the benefits are lower. Also, the impact depends on whether the participant had the opportunity to improve only their everyday communication skills or their reading literacy, which is exactly what the question is about. Thus, on average, 40% of mobility participants agree ‘completely’ or ‘a lot’ that their internship abroad contributed to the fact that they can read materials in a foreign language more easily. An additional 26% agree with this statement ‘to some extent’. It should be noted that participants from the United Kingdom and Ireland are the least convinced about their mobility’s impact on their language skills which – most likely – stems from the fact that instructions during placements are often given in English.

Figure IV.5: Agreement with the statement: “Thanks to my internship/trainee placement abroad, I can read materials in a foreign language more easily” (n=2 355)



The qualitative interviews also show that the impact of other soft skills on participants’ future studies – mainly personal independence and confidence, problem solving skills, communication with foreign people and other soft skills gained and described in Chapter III – is also relevant to the study process.

Initial employment experience

This section focuses on those participants who are currently beginning to work or run their own business. It examines the satisfaction of mobility participants with their current working conditions and their views on the impact of their foreign mobility on their employability, exploring examples demonstrating the observed potentials and effects. This section also deals with the potential impact of the mobility on the ability of participants to build their own business, but it should be noted that due to the small number of participants, it is difficult to obtain a comprehensive overview of the nature of such effects. For these reasons, first of all, the survey participants are examined by the length of their current employment status.

When looking at their employment status, it appears that 56% of the respondents have a full-time or part-time job (Table IV.2). Half of them have a permanent employment contract (more often in the cases of Luxembourg, Latvia, Czech Republic, North Macedonia and the United Kingdom). Poland appears to have the lowest share of permanent employment contracts for

the participants, which could be explained by the sector of economic activity of their workplaces, i.e. most of those who have an 'Other' type of employment work in Administration/Services, which may lay down specific conditions for their employment. A similar situation is observed when looking at the employment of the participants from Austria. Their share of permanent working contracts is one of the lowest among all countries, however a big proportion of the participants indicated the 'Other' employment situation (marginal employment and apprenticeships).

Table IV.2: Employment status of non-educational respondents
(in percentage terms, category "other" was excluded from the analysis, n=3 389)

Country	Full-time or part-time job	Self-employed/own company	A permanent employment contract	A fixed-term employment contract	Employed via an employment agency
Austria	67	2	38	11	1
Belgium Flanders	46	8	48	18	11
Czech Republic	70	7	54	32	2
Ireland	79	7	49	36	4
Latvia	72	7	61	29	3
Luxembourg	88	8	75	13	0
North Macedonia	72	21	52	24	3
Poland	40	5	22	37	1
Slovakia	58	8	31	33	6
United Kingdom	75	10	50	29	5
Total	56	7	50	27	3

The qualitative study shows that the selection of the current occupation of former mobility participants has been influenced by a variety of factors, the main ones being job supply or, on the contrary, a lack of free working places in their industry, experience gained during the mobility, financial and practical considerations, as well as uncertain career aspirations. The selection of their current occupation has also been influenced by short-term goals, for example, to meet financial needs while they consider their long-term career plans.

Well, as I said, it's a nice student job, but it doesn't have any prospects for the future. That would be more likely after my studies in Cross Media, some kind of job in marketing or in an advertising agency or something.

[Austria, IDI]

Mainly it was a financial issue. I just had to get a job to make ends meet at home. It's not a job that I particularly want to continue doing. [...] It's just a case of trying to get money.

[United Kingdom, IDI]

Honestly, during those four years, I didn't even understand if I wanted to work in hospitality... My friend, with whom I was an intern abroad, said that her workplace was looking for a new employee. It turned out that... she recommended me to her boss.

[Latvia, IDI]

Hairdressing is still important to me, but I treat it as a hobby, an occasional source of extra income, not a full-time job.

[Poland, IDI]

Similar to the process of making a decision on future studies, the experience gained during their mobility abroad also played a critical role in helping former participants to make informed decisions about which careers they do not wish to pursue or exactly the opposite, i.e. which career path is more valuable.

It had an impact on my decisions of how to look at my career progression. [...] I realized after doing it... it wasn't really the kind of job I wanted to do.

[United Kingdom, IDI]

I left the company two years ago because of this, because this issue of Erasmus+ was even more important to me. So now I work at an educational institution at the interface of education and business and we organize internships abroad for apprentices and students, so for all Styrian youngsters actually. Because I believe that this project is something valuable and very important for young people to do.

[Austria, IDI]

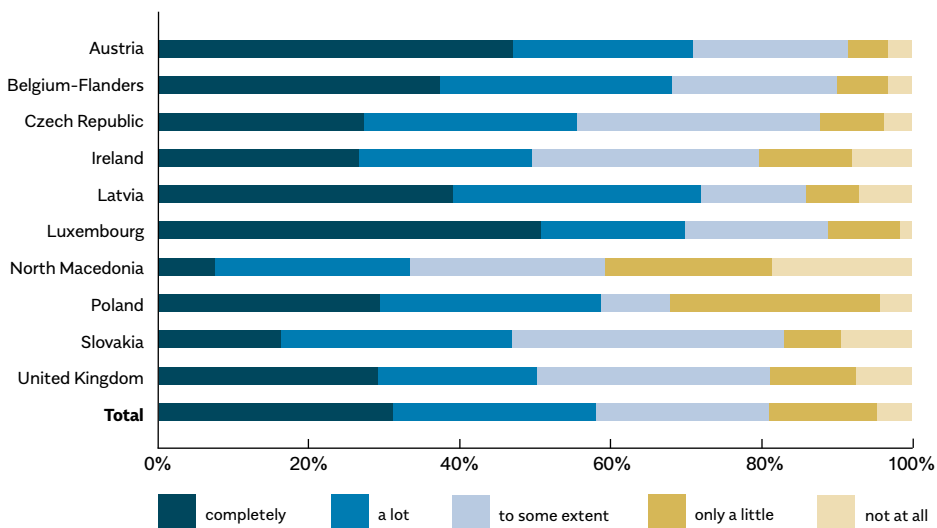
I work in the production of household appliances, and although I graduated from a food technical school, I came to the conclusion that this was not my forte. I was more interested in the industrial sector.

[Poland, IDI]

A series of interrelated statements measured the satisfaction of mobility participants with their current working conditions and pay and their views on the impact of their foreign mobility on their current employment situation and their attitudes towards future intra-European mobility for work. The first of them investigates their overall satisfaction with the current professional situation (Figure IV.6). On average, just over half of the participants surveyed are largely satisfied with their current position – 31% are completely satisfied and 27% 'a lot'. An additional 23% of respondents are satisfied 'to some extent'. When looking at the country background of those who are satisfied with their current position to a small or very small extent, they are mainly participants from North Macedonia and Poland. However, looking at the nationality of those who are more or less satisfied with their current position, there are also differences in how respondents assess their professional situation – some countries are characterized by a higher proportion of 'completely' satisfied responses (e.g. Austria, Luxembourg, Latvia, Belgium (Flanders) and the United Kingdom), while others are more reserved in their satisfaction assessment (Slovakia, Ireland and the Czech Republic).

These variations may be explained by differences in the employment sector of the survey participants as it appears that workers in certain sectors are more satisfied with their situation than others. Since the representation of different economic sectors in the national samples varies, this is also reflected in the average results of each country. On average, for all countries, the most satisfied are those who work in Agriculture/Forestry/Fishing/Environment and Medical/Health Care or Social Work.

Figure IV.6: Agreement with the statement: "I am content with my current professional situation" (n=3 412)



When looking at the results, it should be noted that this is one of the first working experiences of mobility participants, and in particular the qualitative study shows that participants note both job benefits and risks (weaknesses). Remarks received from the participants show that most of them are aware that their first job is more or less temporary as it is consistent with other priorities in their lives, such as the possibility of reconciling work with studies, the chance to try something new, to gain experience of their first permanent job, etc. Some of the working participants simultaneously study at a higher level, thus their job is an opportunity for them to earn money to fulfil their needs. However, some of those who see their studies as their main activity and their professional work as a secondary activity do not wish to work in the field in which they are currently working after completing their studies.

I mean... I didn't take this job because I thought wow, working in a coffee house would be so cool. Well, simply, I just needed the money for my studies.

[Austria, IDI]

I am very happy in my present job as I am employed by my parents who have a small company specializing in putting roofs on houses. My transnational placement was not in line with my training, but I enjoyed it anyway.

[Belgium-Flanders, IDI]

I wouldn't change it. I was even offered a managerial position, but I enjoy my current job, so I don't want to change it.

[Czech Republic, IDI]

It is the work environment, the attitude of the management I do not like. It is nothing like what I was promised it would be. Therefore, I am now looking for another alternative. The salary is very different because we have aggregate working hours. One month we have a very good salary, the next month only a minimum. Very high salary volatility, we can never trust our income.

[Latvia, IDI]

I am satisfied, but I want to learn new things, to acquire experience, to work abroad, to have contacts.

[North Macedonia, IDI]

During my secondary school I went on an internship to various companies. I realized that I didn't want to do it. Now my job is my hobby because I like sports.

[Slovakia, IDI]

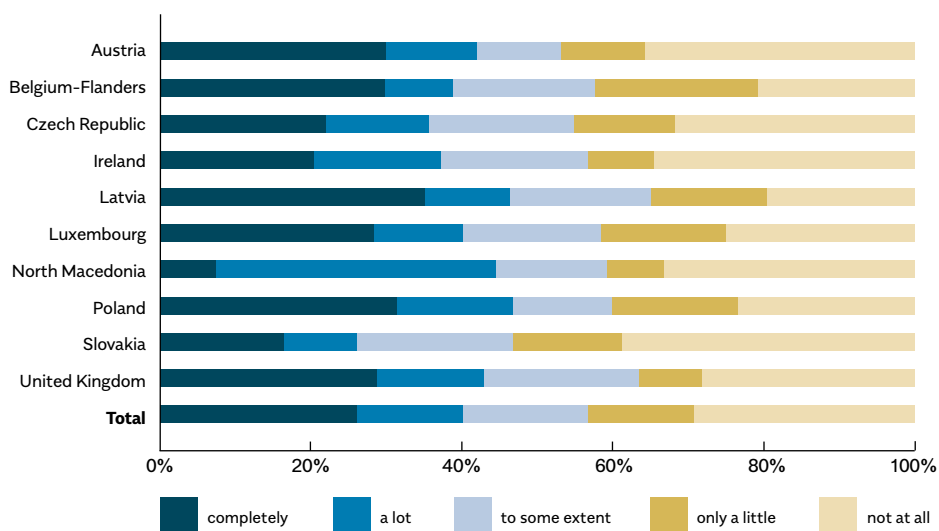
I am very happy with my job. Friends my age who are looking for employment often work somewhere for a while and then move on because they do not enjoy working there. Compared to them, I feel I found the right company to work for.

[Poland, ID1]

You could say my professional situation is satisfactory. I have a permanent job, and because I am single and live in the family home, my pay is currently adequate to my needs. I know, however, that this will change at some point, and I will strive to change my job to one that is related to my field of study.

[Poland, ID1]

Figure IV.7: Agreement with the statement: "My current employment or education is related to the field of my internship/trainee placement abroad" (n=3 368)

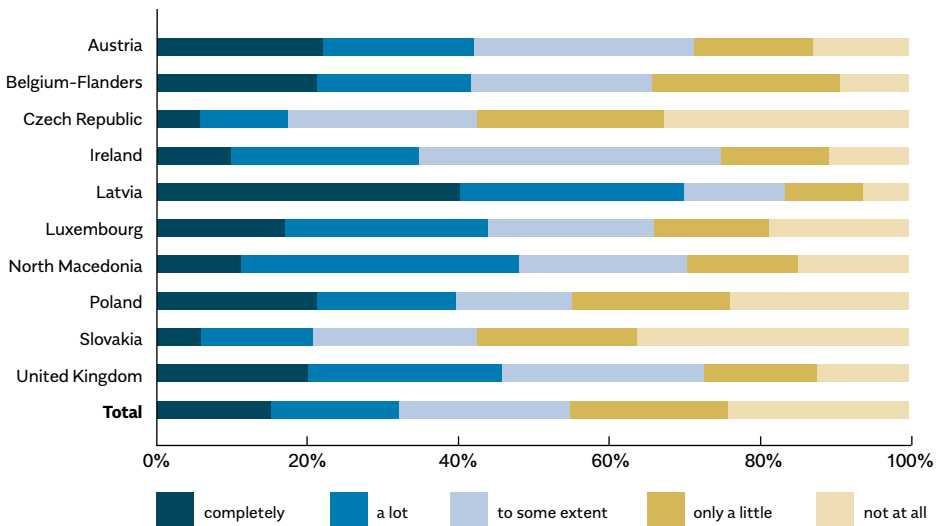


There are also significant variations among countries concerning whether former mobility participants are working in a profession related to the field of their trainee placement abroad or in a completely different field (Figure IV.7). On average, 26% agreed 'completely' and 14% 'a lot' with the statement that "My current employment or education is related to the field of my internship/trainee placement abroad". Another 17% admitted that they agree 'to some extent' with the statement. The examples from the qualitative interviews given above also partly explain the differences in participants' views on the relationship between their current job with their foreign internship experience.

At the same time, the current jobs of 29% of participants are not entirely linked to the field of their foreign mobility placement, which could be considered as an indicator of several phenomena – obstacles to entering the labour market, the need to combine studies with work and uncertain career aspirations.

Despite the fact that some mobility participants are working within a field that is not linked with the sector of their trainee placement abroad, they are nevertheless able to find a way to exploit their skills gained during their internship abroad in their future work and, conversely, those who work in mobility-related areas can apply these skills to a limited extent. This conclusion is based on the replies of the participants to the next question – the extent to which they agree with the statement “I use the knowledge and competences gained during my internship/trainee placement abroad in my workplace” (Figure IV.8) – and on a comparison of the results with the previous statement regarding the interlink between the fields of their current employment and their internship abroad. Thus, on average, 15% of respondents ‘completely’ agree and 17% ‘a lot’ that they use the knowledge and competences gained during their mobility abroad; in addition, 23% noted that they agree with the statement ‘to some extent’.

Figure IV.8: Agreement with the statement: “I use the knowledge and competences gained during my internship/trainee placement abroad in my workplace” (n=3 313)



The main variable explaining the variation in answers regarding the usage of knowledge and competences obtained during the placement is the length of the mobility period. If the duration of a stay abroad is two or three weeks, then participants less rarely believe that they use knowledge and competences gained during their internship in their current workplace. On average, if the length of stay is 2-3 weeks, 48-50% of respondents indicated 'completely', 'a lot' or 'to some extent' that they use knowledge and competences gained during their internship in their current job. If the length of their stay was at least one month, 65-68% of respondents recognize that they use knowledge obtained during their internship.

As the duration of the internship of the mobility participants surveyed varies from country to country, there are also differences in responses across the countries. The most significant differences among countries can be attributed to Latvia, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Participants from Latvia indicated significantly more often that they use the knowledge acquired abroad at work. In their turn, participants from Slovakia and the Czech Republic are the least enthusiastic about their use of the acquired knowledge in their current job. So, the degree of agreement with the statement expressed by the participants from other countries varies between 'a lot' and 'to some extent' and partly depends on the person's current employment sector. Those who work in Electronics/IT/Manufacturing, Mining and Quarrying and Construction are those who most rarely agree with this statement.

The data examined in the previous chapters show that limitations to using knowledge obtained abroad in the participants' own country result from differences in working culture and applied technologies in various European countries. However, as significant gains from the mobility were attributable directly to the development of soft skills, the results of the qualitative research show that participants are relatively confident about the possibility of using these skills in different contexts. There are also examples where participants have used the knowledge gained abroad directly in their current job.

I am presently working as a cook in a restaurant in Wevelgem. I can use some of the recipes I learnt to make during my placement in the restaurant in Italy. Clients congratulate me on these Italian specialties.

[Belgium-Flanders, IDI]

I see the value of the traineeship in the fact that one learns new skills related to their field of study, one learns to take care of themselves because they are abroad without parents and family.

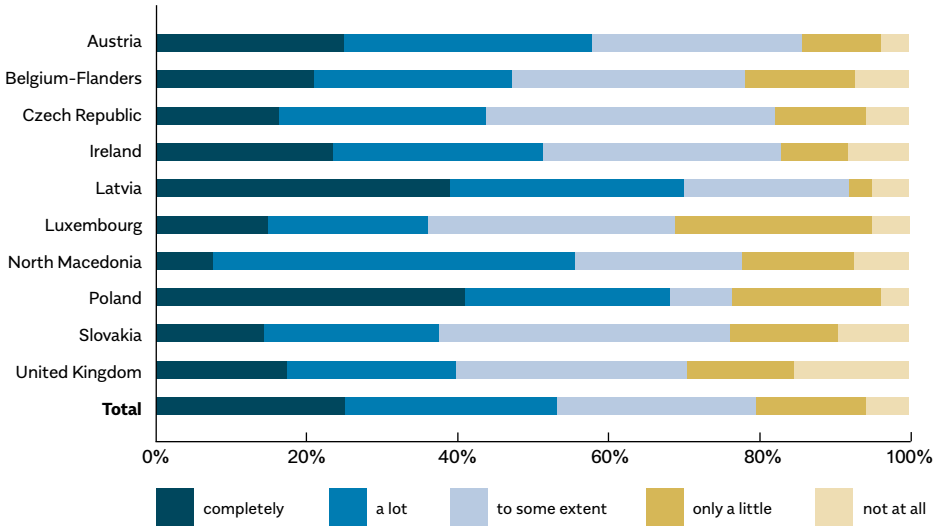
[Slovakia, IDI]

Of course they are useful! I think I would not be the person I am now and I would not have gone so far if I had not gone there. Maybe it will be funny, but we learnt to hold five glasses at a time. It was just in the Canary Islands; I had never been taught anything like it before. Now, this is very useful because I can carry several glasses at a time.

[Latvia, IDI]

One of the statements with which participants from different countries agree most, and relatively unanimously, is that “thanks to internships/trainee placements abroad young people have easier access to the labour market” (Figure IV.9). A qualitative study also brings many rich examples of how foreign trainee placements have helped solve the difficulty of finding jobs at home or attracted prospective employers. Again, the degree of agreement varies among countries covered in the study, but the main pattern is clear – on average, 25% of the respondents completely agree with the statement, 28% ‘a lot’ and 26% ‘to some extent’. On average, 20% of the respondents did not acknowledge that a trainee placement abroad helps young people to access to the labour market, a feeling expressed a bit more frequently by the participants from Luxembourg and Poland. In this case too, however, the length of the mobility period has a certain relationship with the positive (agreed) answers of the respondents, which appear as the choice of ‘a lot’ (compared to ‘to some extent’) more often in cases where the length of the stay abroad was longer.

Figure IV.9: Agreement with the statement: “Thanks to internships/trainee placements abroad young people have easier access to the labour market” (n=3 397)



Despite the participants' current employment status in terms of the relevance of their placements to their occupation at present, they highlighted how they reference their placement in their CV and gave examples of employers' interest in this experience. The participants believe that referring to their placement enhances their CV and gives them advantages over their peers. As mentioned below to a more detailed degree, in some sectors, a trainee placement abroad could in itself be seen as a strength of the applicant. Some of the participants provided specific examples of the skills they acquired or developed during their placement to demonstrate the necessary experience in the recruitment processes they undertake for jobs. These were, for instance, teamwork, leadership and adaptability.

When I was in Prague, I sent my CV to an Italian restaurant. To one of the most renowned restaurants. They obviously talked about it. I sent my CV and started the job in three days' time. Maybe, if I didn't have this experience, I wouldn't have got the job.

[Czech Republic, IDI]

When [the employer] saw it, they were like, 'Oh, this is really good, we'll take you on.' Because you have a bit of experience about how to handle different situations."

[United Kingdom, IDI]

I don't know if [my foreign internship] was a plus, but they are definitely interested in where I've been. In general, they paid attention to it during the job interviews: 'Oh, you've been to Portugal! What did you do there? How did you get on there?'

[Latvia, IDI]

I think this is a very valuable experience because it increases your competitiveness in the labour market, you have a better CV and you can get a better job.

[Latvia, FGI]

I included it in my personal statement. I got five offers which is quite nice to have. I think that's what made me stand out from other people who would've got that place. The experience is definitely unique.

[United Kingdom, IDI]

It's a very valuable experience because your diploma is one thing, but if you're not able to work with people, that's a problem in the hospitality sector. If there is a job application from someone without experience abroad and one application from someone with experience abroad, the second one will be taken on.

[Luxembourg, IDI]

In the hospitality sector, it is particularly important to go abroad. It's an asset many employers appreciate. You need to get this diversity and multiplicity of experiences.

[Luxembourg, IDI]

Erasmus+ traineeship is an excellent opportunity because a participant can get acquainted with new things. He or she learns a lot – theoretically or practically, he/she realizes own future job preferences, he/she will be hired more easily. The traineeship is a bridge to a future career.

[Slovakia, IDI]

Many participants acknowledged that they have been able to use the skills gained from their placement, in particular the soft skills they developed (such as increased confidence, the ability to work independently and/or as part of a team and communication skills) both in their current roles and in their personal life.

You will probably be more open to other things and other people. [...] And maybe a bit more confident. If you are like that, well, as I said at the beginning, you will be thrown out of your comfort zone. And then you have to learn how to handle it. And that's exactly how it is in a job, where you start anew; at the beginning it's usually difficult. And you have situations where you are uncertain and do not know what to say.

[Austria, IDI]

I was back in Hungary as a chaperone. And because of my experience, I was comfortable in Budapest. And being able to support all those people from Italy, Albania, Switzerland... and obviously the film crew were all Hungarian. And I was really confident and happy to be a sort of bridge between the cultures and supporting people and helping out and that sort of thing. I don't think I could have done any of that if I hadn't have done this placement in Hungary.

[United Kingdom, IDI]

I learnt so many things during my placement related to my specific vocational training but also more generally such as being more independent and taking more responsibility for myself and others. These will be useful for the rest of my life.

[Belgium-Flanders, IDI]

I definitely found it useful, just working in a new environment and all the teamwork. It was good to have that exposure to the business background. And to see that side of things, because down the line I might want to go into that area, spin off maybe into entrepreneurship or something like that. It was quite good for developing soft skills.

[Ireland, IDI]

In the experience of several participants, gaining practical work experience during an internship abroad helped them to receive a job offer when returning home and starting work, i.e. it made their entrance into the labour market easier. In these cases, foreign trainee placements served as first job experiences, often a significant requirement when employers search for employees.

While I was out there in Spain I was applying and interviewing for positions, and everybody was extremely interested in the placement and the type of work experience I was getting. So, when I came back to Ireland, I actually had three job offers on the table within two to three weeks, in the field I wanted to be in, with companies I had aspirations to work for.

[Ireland, IDI]

One of the companies contacted me because of the traineeship I served in Spain. They were interested in this experience and decided to invite me for an interview because of it.

[Poland, FGI]

Thanks to the placement abroad I got a job offer from the company where I was placed, but in Slovakia.

[Slovakia, IDI]

Despite many examples of the positive role of foreign mobilities in finding a job, some participants point out that, in their view, trainee placements in their own countries played a greater role. However, as the focus of this study is on the importance of foreign mobilities, their contrast with national traineeships has not been systematically reviewed.

The fact that I had taken part in a transnational mobility was not a key element to finding a job. The fact that people saw me at work during a national placement was the basis for a decision to be offered a job.

[Belgium-Flanders, IDI]

My VET training in general at my VET school was the main reason why I got my present job as a carer for elderly people so quickly. My present employer saw me at work during my national placement and proposed to give me a contract when I finished at my VET school.

[Belgium-Flanders, IDI]

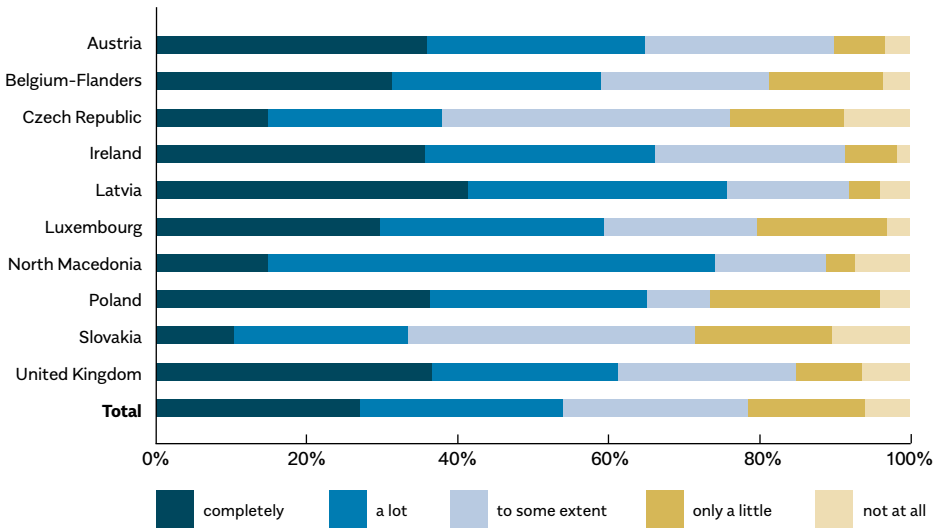
Some participants were disappointed that employers underestimated the benefits of their foreign placements, considering the placement time to be too short. On the other hand, the participants themselves indicated that they saw benefits, even if the placement had lasted only two weeks. Although many mobility participants were able to demonstrate the benefits of their placements through the development of different kinds of skills (technical, soft skills, etc.), a potential recommendation for the organizers of mobility programmes could be to provide some guidance to help VET learners to present their experiences to potential employers.

In two interviews I had after the Erasmus+ experience, there didn't seem to be much value placed on a two-week Erasmus+ placement. Although the short two-week experience may not be 'measured' as equivalent to a long-term task/employment, the gains were intrinsic and real.

[Ireland, survey]

Looking more broadly at the extent to which participants assessed foreign mobilities as having a long-term impact on their competitiveness in the labour market, participants see this as closely related to their ability to enter the labour market, as the proportions of their responses are very similar. This is seen through their agreement with the statement "Internships/trainee placements abroad have a real impact on future career development" (Figure IV.10). On average, 27% of the respondents completely agreed with the statement, 27% 'a lot' and 25% 'to some extent'.

Figure IV.10: Agreement with the statement: “Internships/trainee placements abroad have a real impact on future career development” (n=3 429)



The extent of the agreement of respondents from different countries largely repeats the pattern observed in the previous figure (Figure IV.9). Participants in some countries appear to be more convinced that their mobility will have an impact on their future career development ('completely'), while participants in other countries tend to see it 'to some extent' (Figure IV.10). Thus, participants from Latvia, the United Kingdom, Ireland and Poland are comparatively more convinced. Participants from Austria and North Macedonia tend to choose the agree 'a lot' response. Respondents from the Czech Republic and Slovakia consider that their participation in the foreign mobility programme has an impact on future career development 'to some extent'. Again, a longer length of mobility period abroad led to more frequent choices of the 'a lot' answer (compared to 'to some extent') when evaluating the impact of the internship on future career development.

Despite the similarity of quantitative data in the assessments of the last two statements, the qualitative study shows that the arguments used to support participants' views differ. In the former case, there is more long-term thinking and reflections on the foreign mobility programme as a part of lifelong learning and on the dynamics of the labour market, which require different skills and continuous improvement. Here, instead, the idea that higher professional standards abroad inspired participants to choose a particular profession,

opening up a wide range of professional development opportunities that were observed during their traineeship, appears to a greater extent.

I do think it will have an impact in the future. Because it really is something that not so many people do. And so, if you have that on your CV, it's priceless. [...] So, it's definitely something that will affect my future. Definitely.

[Austria, IDI]

First of all, you always learn something; secondly, you work. And work is work. And nowadays, of course, education is important, but work experience is even more important, and above all international experience is just in high demand. You just stick out. And I believe, as I said, especially when you are now in the foreign language area, you learn so much. You're just getting more mature, I think, and not just linguistically or personally, but also in terms of work. And you can take something everywhere. [...] You still learn something anyway, even if the job is not wonderful. Even if you have not learnt the basics of the job, you always take something with you, I think. And you can always learn from bad experiences. That's why I think it's definitely relevant to the job market.

[Austria, IDI]

My placement abroad opened my eyes completely on what I wanted as my future career and set in stone that I wanted to do nursing for the rest of my career. It taught me a different and more effective approach to working as a nurse; that patients do not forget their time in hospital when they are poorly. My [host company mentor] taught me that caring for a patient is not just about physical and external needs but emotional needs; especially as we often think just because someone is OK externally... but we never know what's going on mentally. The difference between Swedish health care and Irish health care is beyond clear, and it is plain that they are miles ahead of the Irish health care system. For example, they have enough staff so everyone can get not just one break but three within an 8-10-hour shift. I quote from my mentor, 'If you are exhausted and you are not ready to work you must take a break and sleep for 20 minutes. We will cover you, then you come back and no mistakes are made.' The level of care is outstanding!

[Ireland, survey]

Now I have a stronger will than ever... I have an opportunity to acquire new experience... I am not looking at the work post and just asking how much I will earn, but I am interested in the experience that I will gain, even if that means working more hours for less money.

[North Macedonia, IDI]

The survey also indicates that the transnational mobility experience, through lessons learnt, reduces barriers to working abroad. This appears through the assessment of the statement, "Thanks to internships/trainee placements abroad, it is easier for young people to find work abroad" (Figure IV.11). On average, 27% of the respondents completely agreed with the statement, 31% 'a lot' and 25% 'to some extent'. These results are clearly reflected in quotations from some of the participants:

And like, as I said, the thought of working abroad for some time has definitely become much more realistic, I would say, since my traineeship abroad.

[Austria, IDI]

I wouldn't mind going abroad for work at all. These placements have shown me that it isn't anything hugely unachievable.

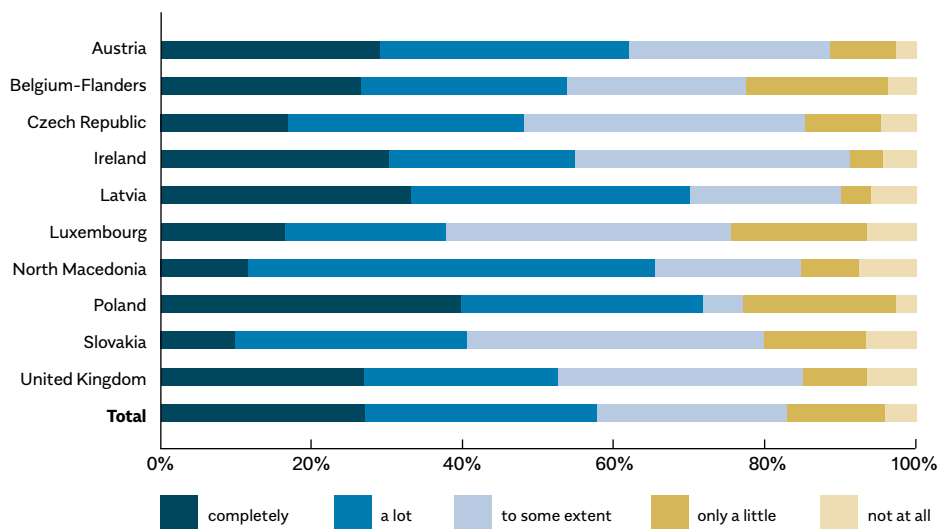
[Czech Republic, FGI]

In order to work in another country, it is important to learn about its language and culture. The foreign internship was a good training ground and it allowed me to overcome many barriers.

[Poland, FGI]

The quotations above show not only the participants' confidence in the existence of such an impact, but also the gratitude that such an opportunity has engendered. At a national level, the participants from Poland, Latvia, Austria, Ireland, Belgium (Flanders) and the United Kingdom are most confident that it is easier for young people to find work abroad resulting from the mobility programme.

Figure IV.11: Agreement with the statement: “Thanks to internships/trainee placements abroad, it is easier for young people to find work abroad” (n=3 355)



Participants from North Macedonia, Slovakia, Czech Republic and Luxembourg are a bit less convinced that trainee placements abroad make it easier for young people to find work overseas. This fact could partly be explained by the duration of the mobility period, which varies among the countries, and the duration of the stay of participants from North Macedonia and Slovakia was shorter on average than the duration of the mobility periods of participants from other countries. However, when looking at responses from the participants from Luxembourg, it can be noticed that their average length of stay abroad was longer compared to participants from other countries.

The length of stay plays a role in shaping the differences in participants' answers – the data show that those mobility participants who stayed abroad for at least a month more often believe that the experience of a foreign internship has made it easier to find a job abroad. An even more significant effect is observed if the duration of the participants' internship abroad exceeded three months.

However, as can be seen from the data, most (on average 94%) of the respondents at the time when the survey took place lived in their home country (in the language of the mobility programme – 'sending country'), but approximately a third of the respondents would like to work abroad (see the section on job expectations below). The experience of some participants shows that they have already received real offers to work abroad, mostly in their previous trainee placements:

The owner of the salon wanted to offer me a permanent position, but I refused because I wanted to work in my mother's salon. If my mother was not a hairdresser, there is a possibility that I would be working abroad now.

[Poland, IDI]

I was also offered a job there. They also said to me, 'If you don't have anything in Latvia, feel free to call, we'll find a place for you!' Their assistant had just left, so I was asked to come to work in the afternoons.

[Latvia, FGI]

Opportunities to work abroad are also linked to feelings of the participants, namely fears or insecurity about going abroad, and in the survey it was shown that participation in the mobility programme removed these limitations (Figure IV.12). Thus, 32% of the participants 'completely' agree, 25% 'a lot' and 21% 'to some extent' with the statement, "Thanks to internships/trainee placements abroad, I am not afraid to take up employment abroad". In general, the duration of an internship abroad affected the respondents' answers similarly to the previous statement. However, we see that the extent of their agreement varies among countries in a different way than previously, i.e. when evaluating opportunities to find work abroad following their participation in the mobility programme. Here, we see that greater confidence has been obtained by the participants from the United Kingdom and Ireland, which can be explained by their awareness of international job opportunities where English is used in communication. This conclusion is also supported by the awareness of an English teacher who appears in the following quotation:

It's opened many, many doors; having this qualification means that I can work in any language school in the UK, or in Europe. In fact, anywhere in the world.

[United Kingdom, IDI]

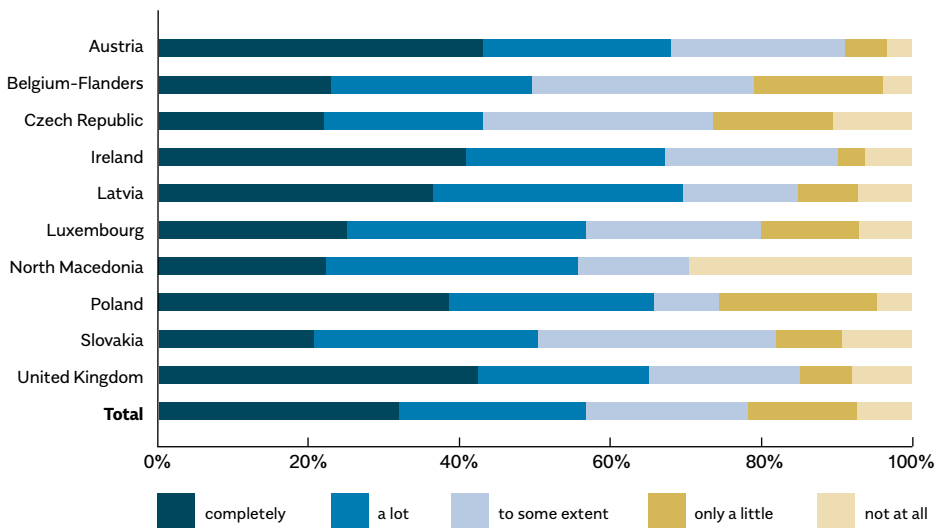
In addition, knowledge of English as a language of international communication is also useful for mobility participants in other countries, and improving their knowledge of this language is one of the ways to reduce the fear of working abroad. This is seen from the responses of participants from Austria, Poland and Latvia, as well as most of the other countries.

So, I'm not afraid of foreign countries or anything. And I am also not afraid anymore that I say now, because of my English level, as far as speaking is concerned, I could work anywhere in Europe if English was the working language.

[Austria, IDI]

However, the participants from North Macedonia seem to be the least convinced that their participation in the mobility programme has alleviated their fears of working abroad – 30% indicated the ‘not at all’ response to the statement that their internship abroad has helped them not to be afraid to take up employment abroad. As mentioned above, this could be partly explained by the length of the mobility period abroad, but other reasons such as the host country of the participants could be important for both language training obtained and transferring the acquired experience to a wider European context.

Figure IV.12: Agreement with the statement: “Thanks to internships/trainee placements abroad, I am not afraid to take up employment abroad” (n=3 373)



Although the participants in the qualitative study all work in their country of origin, they point out that they also feel freer to change their current job and, if needed, to go abroad. In some cases, participants point out that, in this event, they would go directly to the country where they undertook their trainee placement/internship since, as seen in the previous chapters, some of the participants still maintain contacts obtained during their participation in the mobility programme.

If I wanted to go and work with the people that I worked with in Portugal, I am sure that I could contact them and say, do you have anything coming up? And they would do anything they could to accommodate that.

[United Kingdom, IDI]

As one of the research participants explains, the mobility programme not only allows the participants' own fear of working abroad to be reduced but also allows the representatives of the host country (employers) to get to know the workforce that comes from various countries as well as the vocational training systems and availability of different skills around Europe.

It opens up another job market for them. Someone who was on a traineeship, be it for three weeks (it should really be at least three weeks) or three months [...]. They come back and know that, if they wanted to, they could work in Spain, they can work in Italy, they can work wherever. Because they have these opportunities, and also because they have Austrian vocational training, which is generally very good. And they see that this is recognized abroad. Enterprises from abroad actually rave a lot about Austrian trainees [...]. And young people do notice that; if they want to, they can do it. [...] Personally, I think those who have already been out and about are no longer so shy.

[Austria, IDI]

As mentioned above, mobility participants include information about their participation in their CV (or LinkedIn profile). Thus, the majority of respondents agree with the statement "When looking for a job, I told prospective employers about internships/trainee placements abroad" (Figure IV.13). This is proved by one of the participants explaining the rationale behind this activity; it is not just their first work experience – participation in different programmes shows a person's activity and interest in development, thereby giving the employer an incentive to draw attention to this candidate:

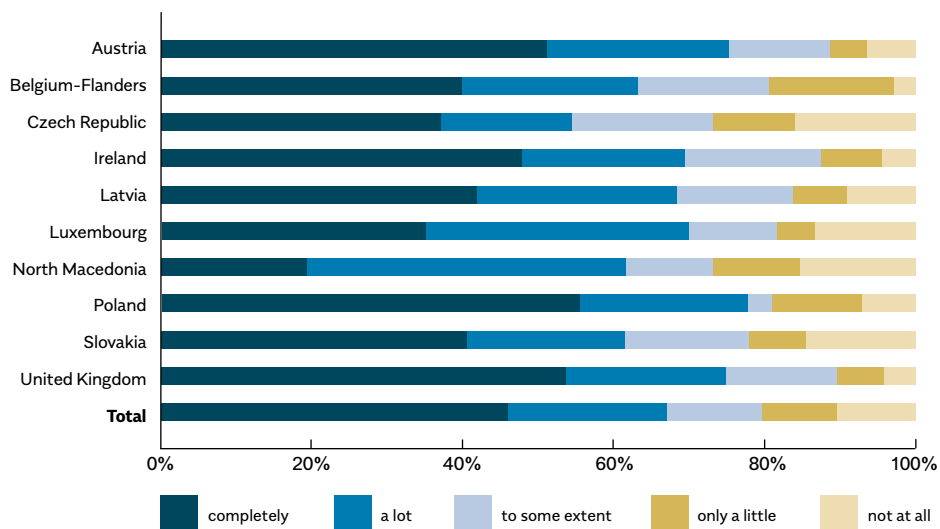
I always put it on my CV. I'll always do it. I actually uploaded my presentation and our report to my LinkedIn profile. It really makes a difference when they scroll down your profile and they see that you attend workshops, attended a work placement, that you are active.

[Ireland, IDI]

Such an experience looks good on your CV. If you can mention something like this during a job interview, then you can impress a potential employer and show that you have gained knowledge and experience despite your young age.

[Poland, IDI]

Figure IV.13: Agreement with the statement: “When I was looking for a job, I made the prospective employers aware of my mobility experience abroad” (n=3 313)

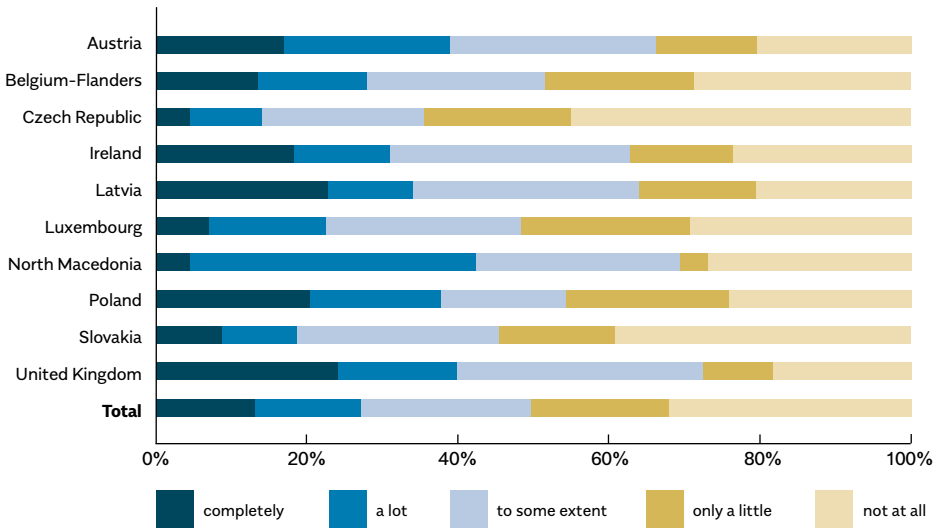


On average, 46% of the participants ‘completely’ agree, 21% ‘a lot’ and 13% ‘to some extent’ that they told prospective employers about their mobility experience abroad when looking for a job. Differences can be noticed between all country data, however, participants from North Macedonia tend to be comparatively more reserved. These variations could be explained by the duration of the mobility period abroad – the average data in a breakdown by length of stay show associations between these two variables. If the duration of a stay abroad was two or three weeks, then participants tended to tell employers about their experience less frequently. On average, if the length of stay was two to three weeks, 74% of respondents indicated that told employers (‘completely’, ‘a lot’ or ‘to some extent’) about this experience. If their length of stay was at least four weeks, 83-88% of respondents told employers about the mobility experience (the highest degree of agreement is seen where the length of stay exceeds three months).

Looking at the participants’ views on the extent to which their foreign placements actually helped them to get a job, it appears that such a relationship has been recognized in some cases. On average, 13% ‘completely’ agree, 14% ‘a lot’ and 22% ‘to some extent’ with the statement, “Participation in an internship/trainee placement abroad helped me to get a job” (Figure IV.14). However, 18% of respondents admitted that participation in an internship abroad helped them to get a job ‘only a little’ and 32% said ‘not at all’.

Figure IV.14: Agreement with the statement:

“Participation in an internship/trainee placement abroad helped me to get a job” (n=3 074)



Participants from the United Kingdom, Latvia, Poland, Ireland, Austria and North Macedonia were more enthusiastic about the impact of their foreign internship on getting their job, but participants from the Czech Republic and Slovakia were most reserved here. In the qualitative study, they pointed out that local trainee placements were also important in finding work, thus explaining the high degree of their ‘not at all’ responses to the statement.

Although the proportion of acceptance responses obtained is lower compared to other statements, it is clear that finding a job depends on various factors, including to a large extent the expectations of the employer, so the result obtained is also evidence of the effectiveness of the mobility programme.

Some evidence from the qualitative interviews shows the potential impact of the mobility programme on job hunting. First, mobility participants noticed that employers are interested in their impressions of their time abroad, the tasks they did and other relevant information. From the point of view of the participants, employers appreciated their willingness to go abroad and the life experiences they gained. Some examples show that employers recognize these mobility participants as potentially valuable employees and therefore offer them attractive positions.

When you apply for a job, you tell people about your Erasmus+ internship as they are curious about it, and when you tell them of your experience, they also become enthusiastic.

[Belgium-Flanders, IDI]

I have not used the Europass Mobility certificate, but when I went to job interviews, I mentioned that I had been abroad for an internship. Employers like to hear that you have done something, that you have not just been sitting on the spot.

[Latvia, IDI]

I believe that the company has seen that I am very committed, including because I have spent a semester abroad. And that's why they gave me a better chance to change department and say: 'We want to keep you. And do that too!' And since my apprenticeship, I've been employed as a permanent employee in marketing. And I think that has brought me a lot.

[Austria, IDI]

The following three statements show the importance and future use of certificates obtained during the mobility programme or traineeship abroad. The first one refers to the importance of certificates obtained directly from employers through the internship abroad to the participants finding their current workplace. The second refers specifically to the Europass Mobility certificate and its role in the participants finding their current workplace. Finally, the third statement refers to the usefulness of both types of certificate in the participants' further professional careers.

As for the first statement, i.e. "The certificates from employers obtained through my internship/trainee placement abroad helped me find a job" (Figure IV.15), on average, 13% of the participants agreed 'completely', 13% 'a lot' and 20% 'to some extent', thus demonstrating that certificates proving the participants' experience obtained from a foreign internship/trainee placement and qualifications (skills) have a certain impact when job hunting. Some examples from the qualitative interviews show the experience of the participants in using these certificates in their job search activities and their attitudes/opinions about their usefulness.

The certificate I acquired allows me to work in any multi-national company in the whole of Europe and I passed with distinction, of which I am very proud.

[Ireland, survey]

Not the certificate itself. But I think it looks good if you have a stay abroad on your CV. Even if it's in English, you can say that you can really speak English.

[Austria, IDI]

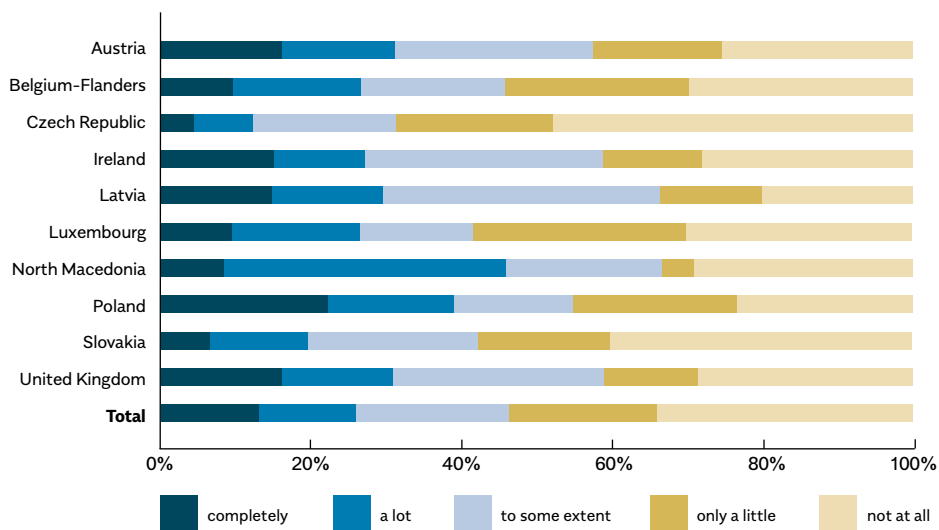
You do not know where your life might take you, anything that you can put on your CV is useful. We were given certificates stating that we were for the internship for two weeks which helped me to find a qualification placement afterwards. I put it on my CV and it helped me a lot.

[Latvia, FGI]

In a country breakdown, it can be seen that participants from Austria, North Macedonia and Poland used the responses 'completely' and 'a lot' when describing the level at which certificates helped them find work more than participants from other countries. In turn, participants from Slovakia and the Czech Republic admitted more often than others that the certificates from employers obtained during their internship did not help at all.

The quantitative survey did not allow us to establish whether all mobility participants received any certificates as proof of their placement (from employers or the Europass Mobility), while the qualitative study shows that some of the participants did not receive them. Accordingly, the replies that these certificates did not help in the participants' search for work may be explained not only by their relatively minor importance but also by the fact that such documents had simply not been received (or that those surveyed do not remember having received them).

Figure IV.15: Agreement with the statement: "The certificates from employers obtained through my internship/trainee placement abroad helped me find a job" (n=3 071)



As for the second statement, i.e. “The Europass Mobility certificate obtained through my internship/trainee placement abroad had a positive impact on my employability” (Figure IV.16), on average, 12% of the respondents ‘completely’ agree, 15% ‘a lot’ and 20% ‘to some extent’ that the Europass Mobility certificate has a positive impact. Looking at the responses at the national level, it appears that participants from Latvia are convinced of the positive effects of the certificate more often (having the highest degree of both ‘completely’ and ‘a lot’ responses). In addition, its positive effects are also comparatively more likely to be observed by participants from Austria, Poland, the United Kingdom, Ireland and North Macedonia. The most critical participants are those from the Czech Republic as well as Slovakia.

The relative importance of certificates is demonstrated by qualitative study participants, one of whom describes the belief that certificates play a role, while others show that the certificates are not used in daily conversations/interviews with the employer. This might stem from the fact that, in general, employers tend to trust the information given by a CV and certificates are required more often when a certain level of qualifications has to be demonstrated or formally proved.

I will say that both internships and certificates obtained have had a significant impact on my work capacity and have improved my CV with a beautiful record. So, very quickly, I got into the work environment where I otherwise wouldn't have been because I don't have an education in that particular field.

[Latvia, FGI]

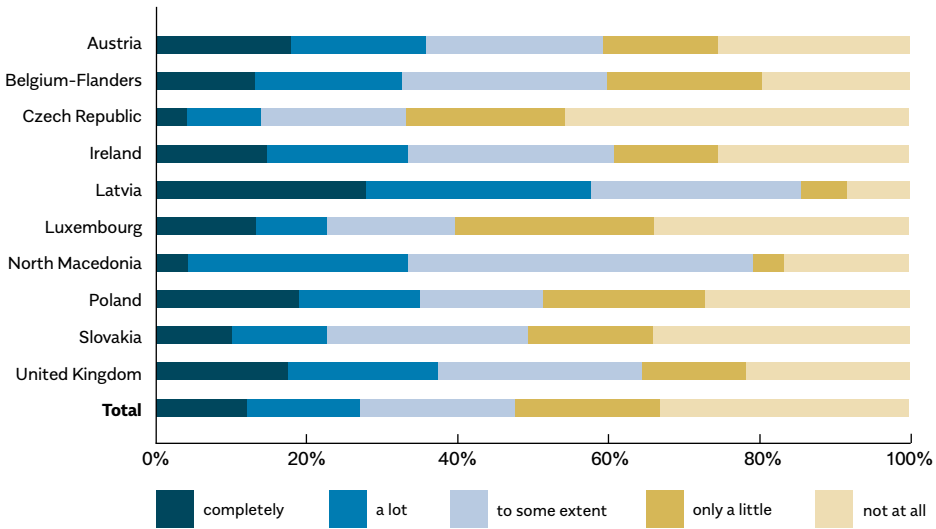
I know the name; I don't necessarily know much about it. I had a kind of a booklet that was Europass I think? I can't remember now because it was three years ago, but it might have been related to Europass. I just can't remember, sorry.

[Ireland, IDI]

They sent another one after a month or two... We received it. It was from Erasmus and I don't remember what the other one was.

[North Macedonia, FGI]

Figure IV.16: Agreement with the statement: “The Europass Mobility certificate obtained through my internship/trainee placement abroad had a positive impact on my employability” (n=3 059)

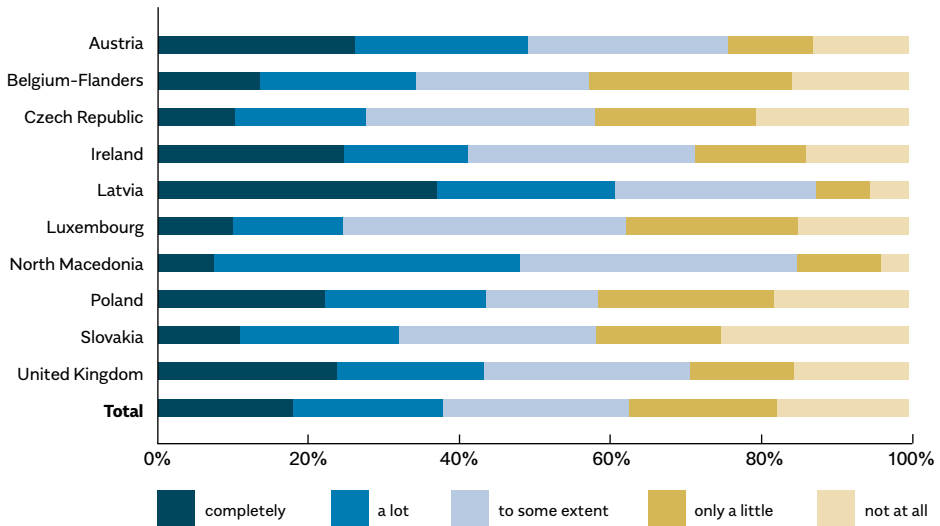


On average, 18% of the respondents agree ‘completely’, 20% ‘a lot’ and 25% ‘to some extent’ that the certificates obtained during their mobility period abroad are useful in their further professional career (Figure IV.17). The country differences show some answering patterns that are similar to previous ones. For example, the participants from Latvia tend to attribute more importance to the certificates received, and a positive attitude towards the potential impact of the certificates is demonstrated by participants from Austria and North Macedonia as well as the United Kingdom and Ireland. Comparatively moderate enthusiasm is demonstrated by participants from other countries.

The survey shows that these differences in the participants’ evaluation of the importance of the certificates obtained are not explained by the length of the mobility period, the trainee placement type (educational establishment or company) or the sector of study. In the case of all three statements examined above, the duration of the internship abroad does not have any significant effect on the participants’ confidence in the positive impact of the obtained certificates on their employability. Thus, the documents obtained have a similar place in the formation of the experience portfolio of each mobility participant. The same conclusion can be attributed to other parameters, such as sector or type of training institution. So, the differences are likely to be explained by other parameters that are not addressed in this survey, such as the legal framework

of each country concerning the need to demonstrate the qualifications obtained or competition in the labour market.

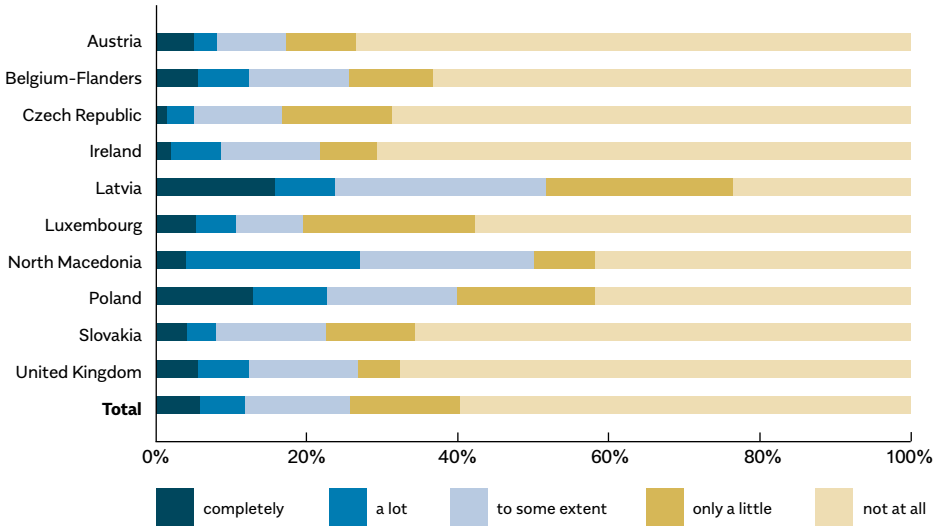
Figure IV.17: Agreement with the statement: “The certificates obtained during my internship/trainee placement abroad are useful in my further professional career” (n=3 267)



The last three statements against which respondents assessed their current labour market situation refer to the potential positive impact of foreign placements on the former participants’ current working conditions and wages. It is important to note that the following issues depend to a large extent on the situation of the labour market in each country, so the potential impact of the mobility experience will be limited.

The first statement concerns the impact of the mobility experience on current wages. On average, more than half of the participants (60%) largely disagree with the statement “Participation in the internship/trainee placement abroad resulted in an increase in my wages” (Figure IV.18), i.e. they chose the response ‘not at all’. An additional 15% of respondents believe ‘only a little’ that their internship abroad resulted in an increase in their wages.

Figure IV.18: Agreement with the statement: “Participation in the internship/trainee placement abroad resulted in an increase in my wages” (n=3 074)



Since there are no differences in opinion in the breakdown by the duration of the mobility period or the field of economic activity of the participants, these results are most likely to be explained by the overall position of students in the labour market. As mentioned above, for the majority of participants, the mobility gave them one of their first working experiences, and therefore their foreign placement may not have affected their wages when starting work in a new job. An increase in wages would be more likely if the company sent its current employees abroad. Thus, the result obtained – namely, that around 12% of mobility participants recognize the impact of their mobility on wage growth ‘completely’ or ‘a lot’ and 14% ‘to some extent’ – is also considered to be relevant.

At a national level, however, there is a more frequent recognition that the mobility has had a positive impact on wage growth. Such examples are Latvia, Poland and North Macedonia (however, in the last case, the sample size is rather small, which makes it difficult to evaluate the significance of the variations in responses). In Latvia, 24% of the respondents noticed ‘completely’ or ‘a lot’ that their internship abroad resulted in an increase in their wage, and an additional 28% noticed this ‘to some extent’ (see Figure IV.18). A similar observation is found in North Macedonia, where 27% of the respondents noticed this impact ‘completely’ or ‘a lot’ and 23% ‘to some extent’. In Poland, 23% of the

respondents gave the impact a high evaluation ('completely' or 'a lot') and 17% 'to some extent'.

As seen from the evaluations of the next statement, former mobility participants are largely satisfied with their wages and current working conditions. On average, 20% of the respondents 'completely' agree, 27% 'a lot' and 28% 'to some extent' with the statement that "I believe that my wages and working conditions are satisfactory" (Figure IV.19). The most satisfied with their wages and working conditions were the participants from Latvia, Luxembourg, Belgium (Flanders) and Austria. The least satisfied were the participants from North Macedonia and Poland. The participants from Slovakia and the Czech Republic most frequently chose the 'to some extent' option.

Figure IV.19: Agreement with the statement: "I believe that my wages and working conditions are satisfactory" (n=3 391)

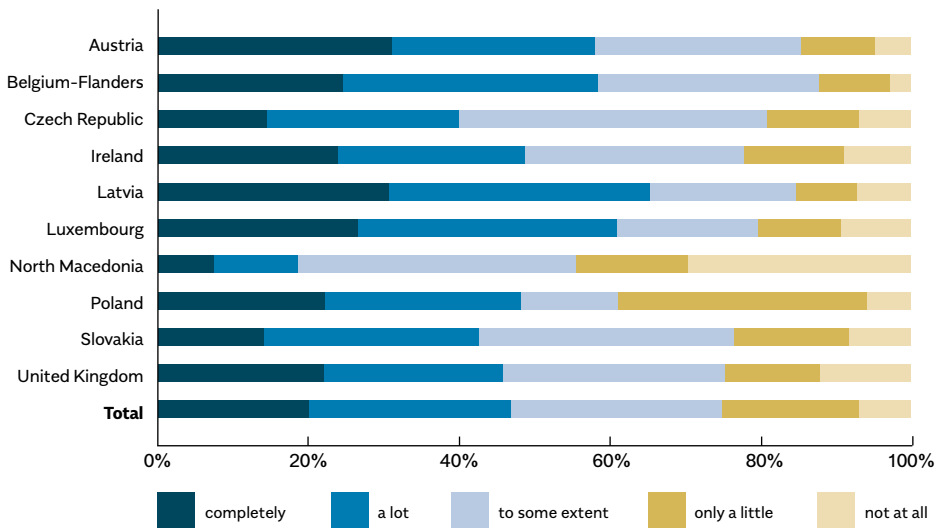
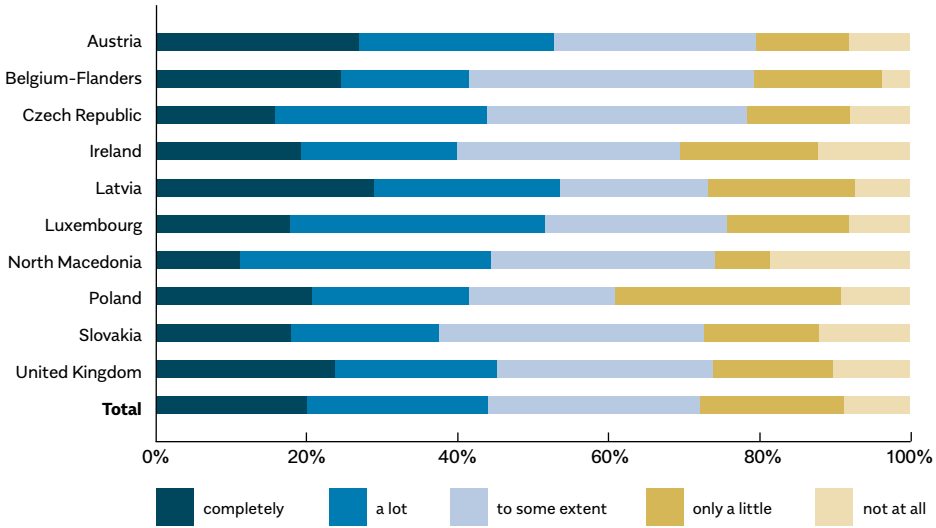


Figure IV.20: Agreement with the statement: “I believe that my wages and working conditions are appropriate to my skills and experience” (n=3 349)



Finally, 20% of the participants ‘completely’ agree, 24% ‘a lot’ and 28% ‘to some extent’ with the statement that “I believe that my wages and working conditions are appropriate to my skills and experience” (Figure IV.20). In total, 28% of the respondents believe that their remuneration and working conditions are not appropriate to their skills and experience. Participants from Latvia, Luxembourg and Austria most often believe that their working conditions and salary correspond to their skill levels. The most critical assessment is given by the participants from Poland and North Macedonia.

The qualitative interviews show that such assessments (seen in Figure IV.19 and IV.20) can be based on a variety of arguments, linked with the desire of former mobility participants to gain experience and grow professionally, anticipating that such behaviour will lead to future salary increases.

I'm doing what I'm interested in. For the level of experience the wage is fair. But it's not enough! That's why I wanted more experience! For now, it's fine. Because I'm still in the process of getting myself into society. It really takes a long time. I know that it will take a long time, a couple of years. But I want more. That's why I keep educating myself and developing my language as much as I can.

[Ireland, IDI]

Not a dream job, of course, but it's something new, I don't know much yet. I'm not in the profession, but I do have training. There are opportunities for growth in terms of salary, so for now, at the beginning, the salary is quite bearable. Workload is good, attitude is good.

[Latvia, IDI]

I am not sure what could convince me to change my job. With regards to pay, after completing a vocational school, as a student, I work on slightly different terms than the others. I have a contract for three years and I know that the next one will be permanent. During this period, I receive the lowest possible rate of pay – I have the same responsibilities as other employees, but they receive twice as much as I do. I am aware of this, but after three years our salaries will be equal. The current situation does not bother me, because I'm constantly learning new things.

[Poland, IDI]

I do not like to stand still. I want to develop, get to know new things. People learn throughout their lives, and I just cannot imagine my life without learning. Work alone does not give me as much joy as the prospect of work with training.

[Poland, IDI]

Summarizing the results on the impact of the mobility experience on the employability of former participants, it can be seen that, in general and on a transnational level, longer mobility periods abroad have a more significant impact on the current employment situation of former participants, and data analysis shows that the critical margin is a stay lasting at least one month. However, an experience of a shorter mobility period also contributes to improving the positions of participants (which follows from a qualitative study comparing those who have not had a foreign mobility experience with those who have).

A survey of mobility participants also assessed its impact on the possible establishment of their business. As seen above, 7% of survey participants who are currently in employment are working in their own company or are self-employed.

The very first impulse was at the traineeship in the Czech Republic. They challenged me, saying that I can do it as well. So, I registered my own business.

[Slovakia, IDI]

Erasmus was brilliant because on the Erasmus+ programme they kind of fed us with knowledge on how to come up with a pitch, how to come up with an idea, where to start. When you can apply that, you know how to actually behave in the business environment.

[Ireland, IDI]

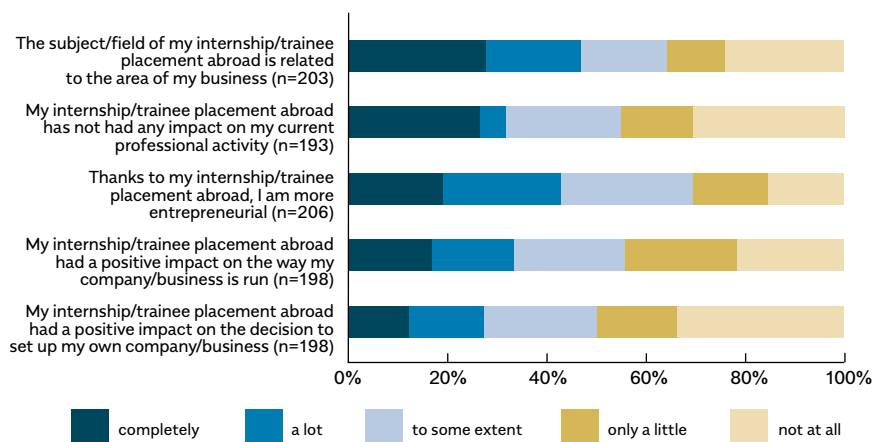
I realized that carpentry wasn't for me, though. I could work for someone else, but I don't like it, I like working for myself. I want it to be that I can define my work. [...] Big finances are needed there.

[Latvia, IDI]

However, the number of respondents who already have their own business or are in self-employment is small at a country breakdown level, so the data cannot be analyzed separately and compared with each other. For this reason, the statements describing the impact of the mobility on the participants' plans for setting up their own businesses should only be considered at a general aggregated level, without national breakdowns.

According to the views of former mobility participants, the field of their internship was relatively related to the area of their own business – 47% of the respondents agreed with this statement 'completely' or 'a lot' and 17% agreed 'to some extent' (see Figure IV.21). They also agreed that the mobility experience helped them to become more entrepreneurial – 43% of the respondents agreed with this statement 'completely' or 'a lot'. However, as mentioned above, the decision or idea to set up their own business mostly came from another source; thus, 34% totally disagreed with the statement that their internship abroad had a positive impact on their decision to start up their own company.

Figure IV.21: Agreement with statements demonstrating the impact of the mobility experience on the development of participants' entrepreneurial skills



This result is considered to be comprehensible in the sense that mobility participants are young and at the early stages of their careers, and more experience, start-up capital and consultative support would be needed for business development. The qualitative study shows that some participants are planning to set up their own business in the future, while others are planning to become involved in their family business and take over its management. However, business examples seen during the participants' mobility period abroad could help them to find ways to improve the efficiency of their own company.

First, I will go and learn something about forests, but then I will start my own business.

[Latvia, FGI]

[I want] to produce my own fabrics originally designed by myself. To have something where we start from scratch and build up to something very wow. So, it's ongoing, but I think I'm on the right track.

[Ireland, FGI]

The more farms you see, the more diversity you see, the faster you are in detecting the problems on your own farm, you will be able to see more. You will be able to think more about the best way to proceed so as to optimize processes. To do so, you also have to see how not to do it.

[Luxembourg, FGI]

Job expectations

This section examines the job expectations for the working environment, working conditions, location, workload, responsibilities and other workplace characteristics described by those respondents who had already finished their compulsory education, are in employment or are looking for a job. To achieve this, 19 aspects of the working environment were formulated, covering both intrinsic (work content and the mental incentives) and extrinsic work values (remuneration, awards, prestige, etc.), as well as job security and stability factors, and the respondents identified which of them were important for job hunting or job selection.

Table IV.3 shows the average results for all countries, as well as the results of each country. The expressions assessed are given on the left side of the table and the following columns give the importance of each factor in a country-by-country breakdown, with the average percentages at the end of each row. Green highlights those aspects which are most important in respondents' searches for work and relatively minor aspects are highlighted in red.

Further analysis of the importance of the various work factors is divided into two parts. In the first part, the data will be analyzed from the perspective of the key factors, looking at what is most important for young people when finding work. The second part, on the other hand, deals with the assessment of the different aspects of work from a country perspective, i.e. what is important for young people in one country or another.

When looking from the perspective of job expectations, on average, the most important aspects when looking for work are that it is a well-paid job (72%), working with the possibility of acquiring new knowledge and skills (67%), achieving a work-life balance (58%) and having declared (legal) work (57%). So, here, a mix of the significance of both intrinsic and extrinsic work values can be seen as well as the need to balance different aspects of one's work and personal life, gaining both sufficient material resources and satisfaction from work. When looking at the results of individual countries, there are disparities to a greater or lesser extent between those employment aspects, which are both the most relevant and arise from the specificities of each national labour market.

The analysis of the most important factors by country shows that having a well-paid job is a comparatively less frequently mentioned factor in Western European countries. Thus, having a well-paid job is most frequently mentioned as an important factor for the participants from Slovakia (83%), the Czech Republic (82%), Latvia (78%), Austria (72%) and Poland (69%). This factor is mentioned less frequently by participants from Luxembourg (48%), North Macedonia (55%), Belgium (Flanders) (56%), Ireland (56%) and the United Kingdom (60%). For North Macedonia, this factor appears as the primary one, although the frequency of referral is lower than in other Central and Eastern European countries.

The importance of the next factor – working with the possibility of acquiring new knowledge and skills – varies among different countries. It appears to be more important for the participants from Austria (80%), Slovakia (75%), Latvia (73%) and the Czech Republic (72%). This factor is of medium importance to the participants from Ireland (64%), the United Kingdom (62%) and Poland (61%). This aspect is less important for the participants from North Macedonia (46%).

Achieving a work-life balance is more important for the participants from Austria (72%), Slovakia (70%), the Czech Republic (69%), Luxembourg (65%) and Latvia (60%). Having declared (legal) work also is more important for the participants from Austria (78%), Latvia (74%) and Slovakia (70%). However, another factor linked with the work-life balance which is expressed as "I do not want work to get in the way of me starting a family" is indicated to be important for 43% of all the former mobility participants. Most frequently, this factor

is important for the participants from Slovakia (69%), Latvia (58%) and Austria (54%). An explanation for the differences in values for this factor could be found in both the cultural traditions and values of each country, as well as in the composition of the sample of respondents because the biggest share of the respondents in Latvia and Austria are female (this is not true for the participants from Slovakia, however).

From the range of relatively less important aspects, the importance of the factors that are expected to be more related to the participants' previous education, current study experience and mobility experience will be discussed below.

On average, it is important for 45% of former mobility participants to be working in the field in which they studied. Most often, this is important for the participants from Ireland (58%), Slovakia (55%), the United Kingdom (51%), the Czech Republic (49%), North Macedonia (48%), Latvia (46%) and Belgium (Flanders) (46%). Participants from Austria gave the least importance to working in the same field as their studies.

Next, 39% of the participants would like their work to allow them to continue their education. The highest proportions of participants expressing this will are observed in the Czech Republic (58%) and Latvia (50%), which might arise from the fact that young people tend to combine work with study, and working in different places can have various effects on these opportunities. The opportunity to connect studies and work was mentioned least frequently by the participants from Luxembourg (12%) and Belgium-Flanders (15%).

Among a number of statements that describe the place where a young person would want to work (close to home, own country, abroad, etc.), working abroad is judged to be the most important aspect since, as seen in the previous chapter, their mobility experience has raised participants' confidence in the possibility of working not only in their own country but also abroad, making the European labour market more accessible. It appears that the European labour market was attractive to an average of 27% of respondents at the time of this survey. However, the highest interest in working abroad was expressed by the participants from Slovakia (51%), Ireland (46%) and the United Kingdom (42%). As regards the high willingness of youths from Slovakia to work abroad, it should be mentioned that in the qualitative study, some of the participants expressed a desire to work in nearby foreign countries, such as the Czech Republic.

The last aspect, which is worth looking at separately, is the willingness of mobility participants to work for themselves, preferably in their own company. On average, 24% of the participants expressed an interest to work in this direction. Most often, they are participants from Latvia (42%) and Slovakia (40%).

In general, for all mobility participants, two factors characterizing the job and its job search process seemed insignificant: having a low level of responsibility in the workplace (important for 4%) and the speed at which a job is found (important for 7%).

Table IV.3: The importance of various factors in searching for a job by country (in percentage terms, n=8 008)

	Austria	Belgium-Flanders	Czech Republic	Ireland	Latvia	Luxembourg	North Macedonia	Poland	Slovakia	United Kingdom	Total
I would like to have a well-paid job	72	56	82	56	78	48	55	69	83	60	72
I would like to work close to where I live	44	45	47	35	59	42	24	32	46	26	40
I would like to work close to where my family lives	16	14	30	16	19	12	14	14	26	18	20
I would like to work in my country	34	38	34	35	55	64	16	30	40	34	34
I would like to work abroad	25	22	31	46	36	22	33	14	51	42	27
I would like to work full time	55	64	49	53	44	57	21	36	62	47	46
I would like to work legally	78	10	56	41	74	54	33	57	70	46	57
I would like to work with a permanent employment contract	30	62	44	34	48	57	12	27	62	40	38
I would like my work to allow for a work-life balance	72	54	69	53	60	65	30	48	70	50	58
I don't want work to get in the way of me starting a family	54	22	46	12	58	47	27	43	69	16	43
I would like my job to allow for a fast career and promotion	25	22	30	21	52	16	35	39	38	28	33
I would like to work for myself, preferably in my own company	18	23	24	20	42	25	21	19	40	22	24
I would like my work to allow me to continue my education	30	15	58	34	50	12	25	32	32	31	39
I would like my work to give me scope for planning my leisure	62	33	56	19	57	45	28	49	60	23	50
I would like to have calm, non-stressful work	19	22	44	32	48	16	24	39	61	30	38
I would like my work to allow me to gain new knowledge and skills	80	54	72	64	73	53	46	61	75	62	67
I would like to work in the same field I studied in	33	46	49	58	46	43	48	42	55	51	45
I would like to have a job with little responsibility	4	4	6	11	4	13	5	8	12	9	7
I would like to find any job, and quickly	7	6	3	8	11	5	3	3	8	9	5

For the mobility participants from Austria, it was particularly important to acquire new knowledge and skills in their work (80%), to work legally (78%), to obtain well-paid job (72%) and that the work enables a work-life balance (72%). About a quarter of respondents (25%) would like to work abroad.

The mobility participants from Belgium Flanders prefer to work full-time (64%), to work with a permanent employment contract (62%), to have a well-paid job (56%) which, at the same time, allow to gain new knowledge and skills (54%) and reach work-life balance (54%).

The majority of respondents from Luxembourg wished most to have a full-time job (57%) and a permanent work contract (57%), allowing them to achieve a work-life balance (65%). 64% of respondents mostly want to work in their own country whereas 22% of them are keen on working abroad. As to the sector of their job, 43% of the respondents would prefer that their work is linked to their VET or higher education studies.

The most important factors in the job search process for the former mobility participants from the United Kingdom are as follows: a job allowing them to gain new knowledge and skills (62%), a well-paid job (60%), working in the same field as their studies (51%) and a job allowing them to have a work-life balance (50%). Having full-time and legal (in terms of contract) work also are quite important aspects (46-47%). The United Kingdom appears as one of the countries in which young people are more interested in working abroad than in their own country (42% vs 34%).

The most important job hunting aspects for the respondents from Ireland are work allowing them to gain new knowledge and skills (64%), working in the same field that they studied in (58%) and a well-paid job (56%). Obtaining a work-life balance also is a rather important factor for the former mobility participants from Ireland (53%). Also, Irish respondents are among those who want to work abroad a little more than in their own country (46% vs 35%).

For the former mobility participants from the Czech Republic, the ideal is a well-paid job (82%) that allows for further professional development in the form of gaining new experience and skills (72%) and which also provides them with the opportunity to balance their work and personal life (69%). 49% of the respondents would prefer to work in the same field in which they studied. 24% of the participants would like to try working in their own company. The place of residence does not play an important role when searching for a job, with little preference as to whether the work is in the Czech Republic (34%) or abroad (31%).

The job search preferences of the participants from Slovakia show that 83% of respondents express their willingness to find a well-paid job in the future.

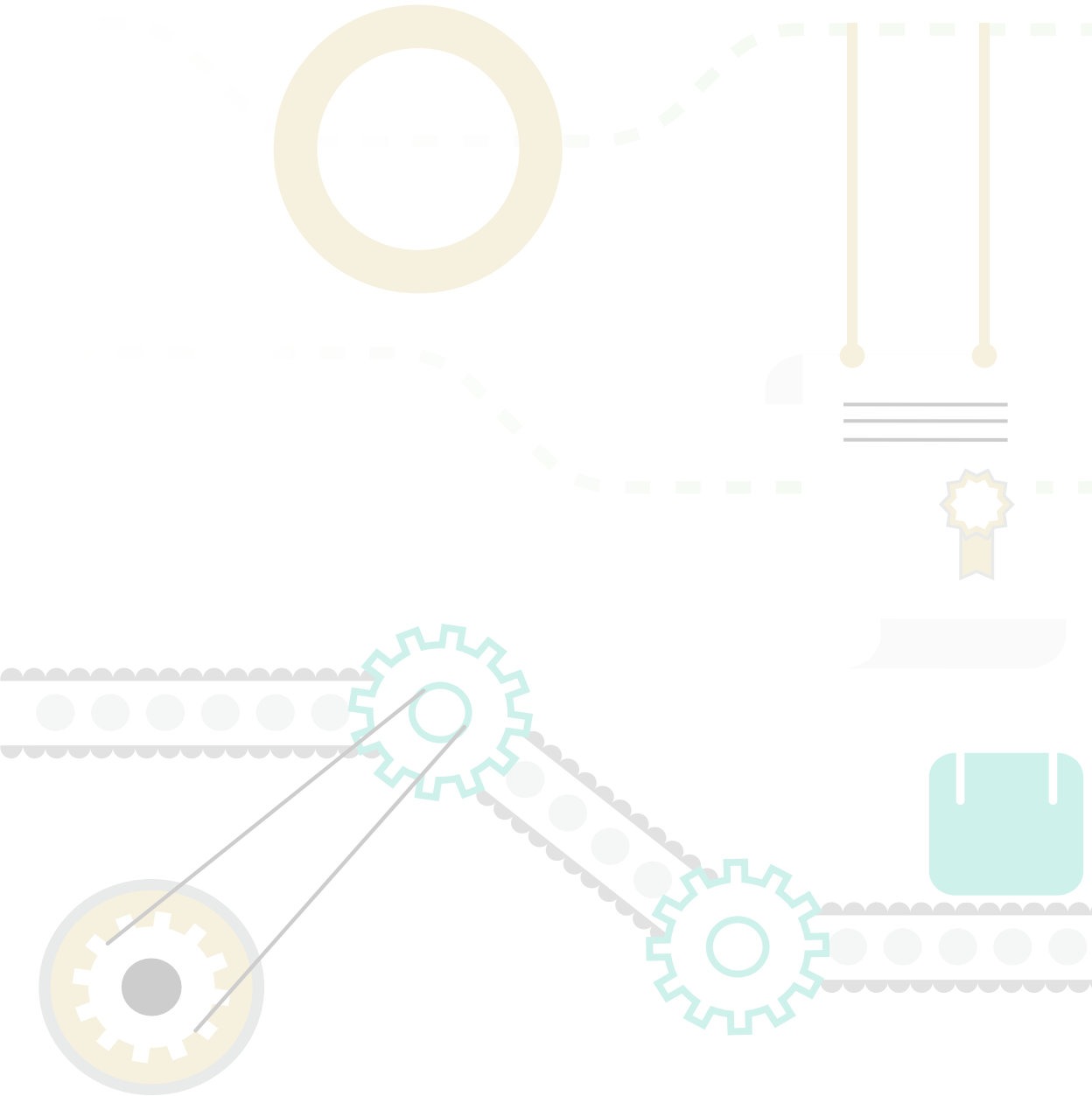
It is important for 75% of respondents that their work allows them to gain new knowledge and skills. 70% of respondents would like to work legally, i.e. with a valid work contract. The work-life balance is also important for 70% of respondents. A detailed analysis of the answers shows that these preferences were the most important across all categories of respondents, be it secondary school pupils, higher education students, the (un)employed or those with another status.

The mobility participants from North Macedonia indicated that the most important aspects for them when searching for a job are obtaining a well-paid job (55%), having an opportunity to work in the same field as their studies (48%) and gaining new knowledge and skills (46%). Although relatively few respondents expressed specific desires about the location of the job, 24% of them are relatively sure that it would be important to have a job close to their place of residence.

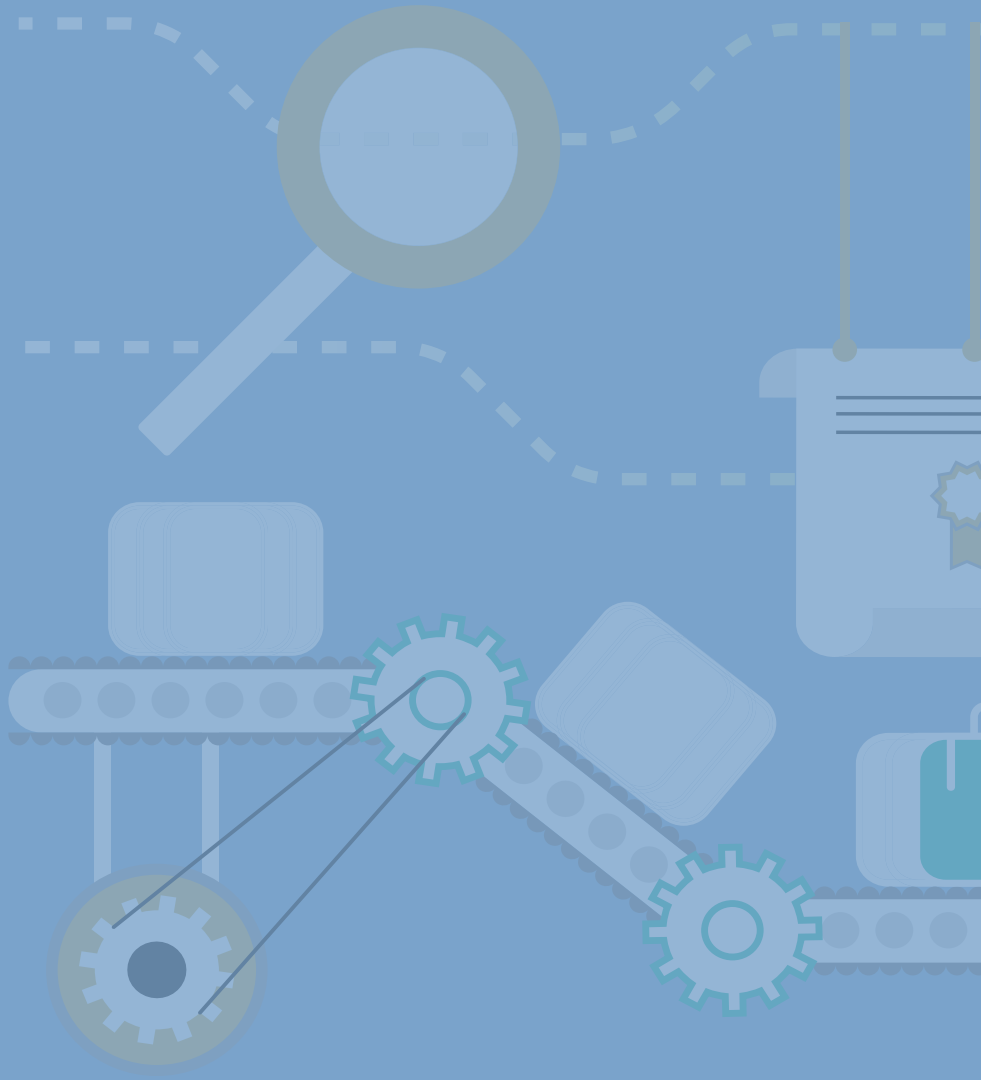
As key factors in their search for a job, the mobility participants from Latvia indicate having a well-paid job (78%), working legally (74%) and working to gain new knowledge and skills (73%). The next most important factors are having a balance between their work and private life (60%), the location of the workplace being close to home (59%), the possibility of a family life (58%) and the planning of leisure time (57%). Relatively few of the surveyed mobility participants would like to work abroad (36%, although young people feel more prepared to do so as a result of their foreign internship). In contrast, 55% of respondents would like to work in their own country.

For the vast majority of respondents from Poland, one of the most important issues was adequate remuneration (69% of the respondents declared that they would like their work to be well paid). Next, 61% of the respondents wanted a job that allows them to gain new knowledge and skills. At the same time, more than 57% of the respondents considered that employment based on a legally concluded contract is significant, and the possibility of combining work and private life is almost as important (48%). The respondents attributed less significance to the form of employment: 27% of respondents claimed that it is important for them to work on the basis of a contract concluded for an indefinite period.

Summarizing this chapter, former VET mobility participants view their future career development as being aided by working in a safe environment that enables them to develop their own interests, including the use of intra-EU mobility opportunities.



V. Conclusions



This research shows that former VET mobility participants are mostly satisfied with their experiences gained abroad. For many of them, their work placements in another country were, in fact, their first foreign experiences undertaken on their own, when they travelled without their parents or family. Based on the collected data, it can be concluded that such an experience contributed to the fulfilment of overall VET placements' objectives during which the transnational mobility helped them to obtain new skills and greatly influenced their lives. It should also be noted that, due to the visibly higher response rate among younger participants, the mobility training abroad still remains a rather fresh experience for them. Having the evaluation at an early stage allowed the participants to recall their mobility experience more clearly and interlink it to their current education or work-related decisions.

When assessing the mobility results, it appears that a large number of former VET trainees recognize its positive impact on their personal growth and basic life skills. In terms of the acquired soft skills, the learners especially enhanced their intercultural competences, communication and team-working skills. During the interviews, most of the participants mentioned that they became more independent, self-confident, stress-resilient and adaptable to new circumstances. Many of them also claimed that the main benefits of the foreign mobility stemmed from the improvement of their foreign language skills. This shows that the mobility largely concerns personal development in life, however, it should be taken into account that soft skills often go hand in hand with professional competences and that they are nowadays highly valued, if not required, by employers.

This research also shows that the longer placements had a bigger impact on soft skills and on most of the professional competences. The trainees with experience of a longer mobility enhanced their linguistic competences more, and they improved their communication and team-working skills more than others too. They also claimed that they became more aware of the characteristics of individual workplaces and became more able to work in an international environment. Moreover, those who took training that lasted a month or longer acquired more practical professional competences and transferable skills than those who went for a mobility that lasted less than one month. Finally, the length of placements also plays a noticeable role in shaping the participants' attitudes towards their position in the labour market as the participants of longer internships were more optimistic when answering questions about their prospects of finding an interesting and attractive job, having had a foreign mobility experience of such a kind.

When looking at VET domains, the tourism, hospitality and catering learners (who usually took part in the longest internships when compared to other

training fields) and those who had training in the field of administration and services benefited most from their VET mobility training abroad. The given groups of research participants, more often than other learners, claimed they gained more practical professional skills and enhanced their communication, team-working and interpersonal competences. Finally, they claimed they gained more transferable skills and learnt more elements of the profession that they would not have been able to learn at their school or college in their home country.

When looking at the further education and career paths of the participants, many of them acknowledged that they can use the skills gained during their placements abroad in their careers and personal life. This refers, in particular, to their soft skills, such as interpersonal and team-working skills. When discussing the relevance of placements for the current requirements of the labour market, the participants believed that references to their placement enhance their CV and give them advantages over those who do not have similar experiences. Some of the participants provided specific examples of skills that proved to be crucial in the recruitment processes (e.g. teamwork, leadership and adaptability). However, it must be taken into account that many of the research participants are still at the early stage of their careers. Thus, the mobilities' impact should rather be considered with regard to assessing the relevance of the skills acquired by the participants during their placements in terms of gaining and performing their first jobs.

Putting the job expectations of the participants under scrutiny, it can be observed that the most important aspects are related both to having decent and stable work conditions (a well-paid job with a contract on a legal basis that allows them to keep a work-life balance) and to having a satisfactory job with possibilities of acquiring new knowledge and skills. This means there is a mix of significance given to intrinsic and extrinsic work values, however the approach towards job opportunities looks different in individual countries which, most likely, stems from the specificities of the given national labour markets (i.e. the importance of having a well-paid job was less frequently mentioned in the Western European countries).

When looking at those participants who have continued their education at secondary or tertiary level, it can be concluded that their studies were often undertaken simultaneously with their job. This also reflects the current situation in the European labour market, where many young people study and work at the same time or continue their education after starting a career. Moreover, the participants' remarks show that most of them are aware that their first job is more or less temporary as it is consistent with other priorities in their lives,

such as the possibility of reconciling work with their studies, the chance to try something new or, simply, to gain their first permanent work experience.

The survey also indicates that – according to participants' beliefs – their transnational mobility experience reduces the potential barriers to working abroad. Those with a longer mobility experience noticed its positive impact on finding a job in another country more often. Moreover, the experiences of some research participants show they have already received real job offers from foreign employers. Mostly, such offers were made by their previous host companies.

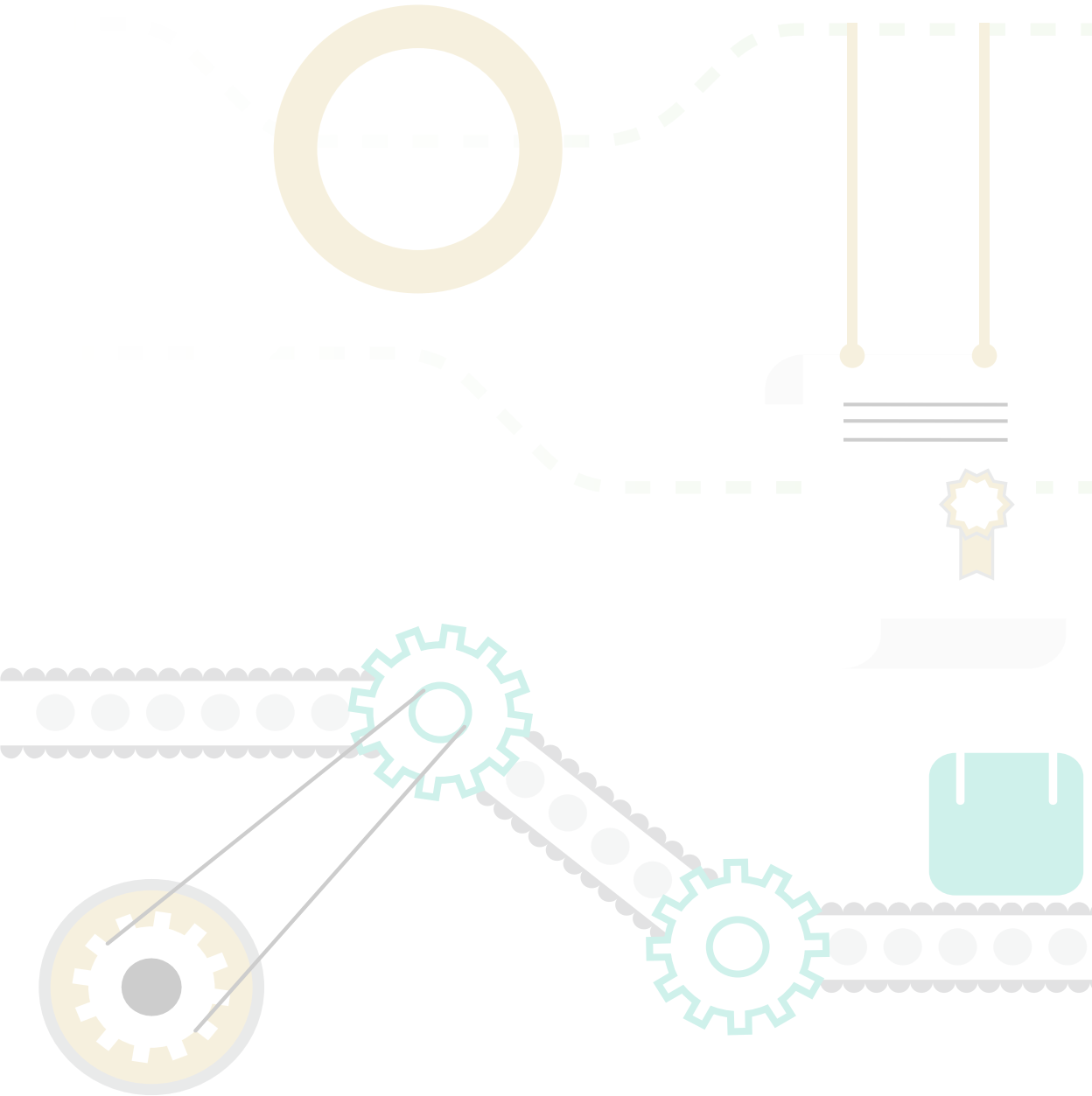
To meet participants' needs, the mobility placements need to remain in line with learning curricula undertaken in VET schools. Many interviewees claimed that the traineeships should be closely related to a relevant industry and remain as close as possible to the VET domain in which they were trained at their school. What also needs mentioning is the importance of having tasks that are closely related to future professional duties. Otherwise, it might be difficult for participants to notice any added value from foreign placements when comparing their mobility experience with the training undertaken in their home country. Moreover, the tasks to be performed during the mobility should be challenging enough to make the training attractive for VET learners.

The data show that living and working abroad was an entirely new experience for most of the participants, and it was a big challenge, especially for younger learners. This demonstrates the importance of meticulous selection as to host companies and participants' living conditions. Appropriate attention in this respect seems of importance as some interviewees gave accounts of problematic experiences that might be avoided if more attention is paid by the mobility's organizers when planning mobility projects. Therefore, detailed information about where they are going to work and stay should supplement the work programme and should always be delivered to participants in advance. These aspects might also be improved with the support of online communication tools that could be used to get the participants more acquainted with host institutions and mentors before going abroad.

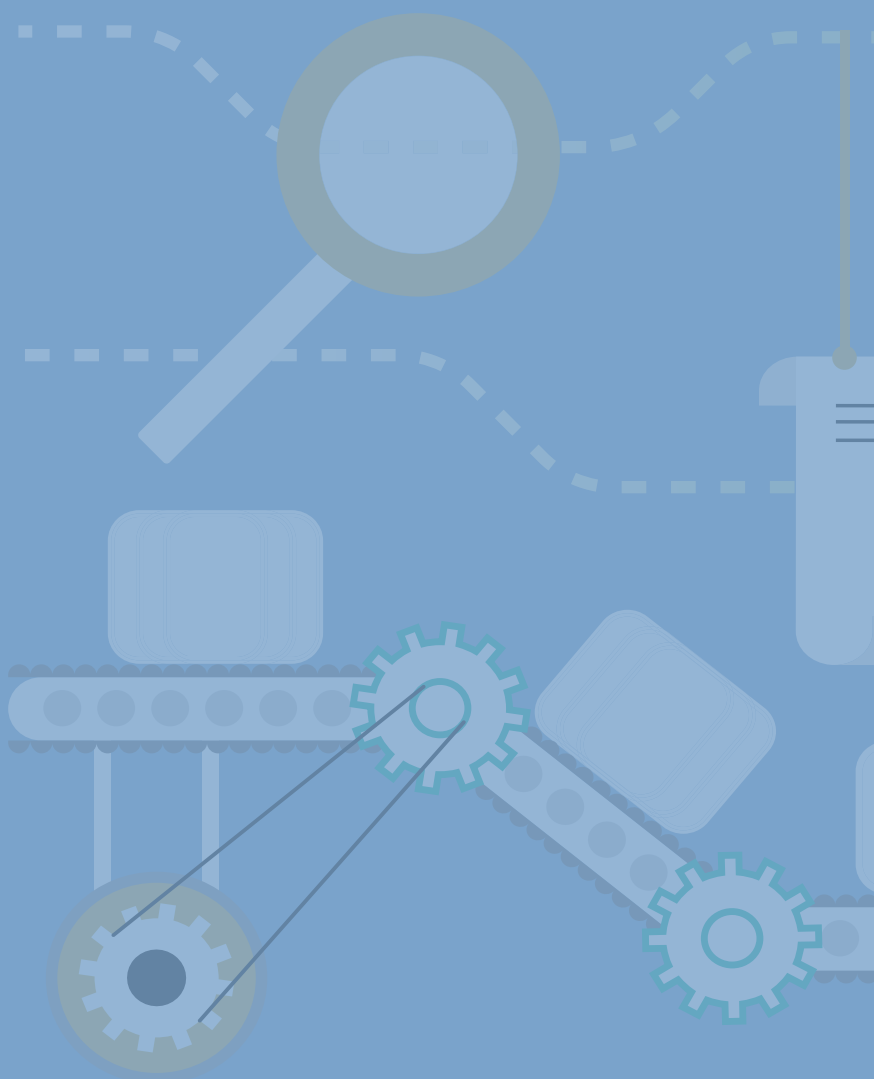
One of the aspects that needs more attention is the sustainability of contacts between former VET mobility participants and their host companies. As contacts with companies and host institutions are particularly low on the one hand and can be institutionalized on the other, a strategy to enhance these contacts could be developed at the school or programme levels. New communication tools could also be employed to increase the number of former participants keeping in touch with social contacts and enterprises they met abroad.

On-site mentoring was also appreciated by the participants and most of them felt well supported while performing their tasks. What was also raised in this respect was the possibility for them to reflect on their own work and practical training with mentors and/or teachers as this helped the participants to focus more on their professional achievements and skills gained during their mobility experience. Therefore, more attention should be paid to the time given to the participants to discuss their reflections made during their traineeships. In addition, with the aim of assisting unaccompanied participants without on-site support, clear procedures (i.e. in the form of a manual) might be worked out so that the trainees know to whom and where to turn in the event of any difficulties that might occur during their placements. Such manuals could also be developed at a national level.

Most of the former participants declared that they shared their knowledge and experience with others. Thus, not only the learners but also their colleagues and teachers at the sending schools benefitted from the transnational mobility. Besides, some participants also shared their knowledge with parents who work in the same trade, while others brought their experiences to foreign colleagues, or even to their mentors in hosting companies. Since this aspect seems of importance to extending the mobility's impact from an individual to an institutional level, it is worth considering the dissemination of benefits gained by the trainees within (and beyond) the sending school. This might help with knowledge from abroad being passed on to more VET learners who did not have a chance to participate in such training.



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Figure IV.9: Agreement with the statement: "Thanks to internships/trainee placements abroad young people have easier access to the labour market"

Figure IV.10: Agreement with the statement: "Internships/trainee placements abroad have a real impact on future career development"

Figure IV.11: Agreement with the statement: "Thanks to internships/trainee placements abroad, it is easier for young people to find work abroad"

Figure IV.12: Agreement with the statement: "Thanks to internships/trainee placements abroad, I am not afraid to take up employment abroad"

Figure IV.13: Agreement with the statement: "When I was looking for a job, I made the prospective employers aware of my mobility experience abroad"

Figure IV.14: Agreement with the statement: "Participation in an internship/trainee placement abroad helped me to get a job"

Figure IV.15: Agreement with the statement: "The certificates from employers obtained through my internship/trainee placement abroad helped me find a job"

Figure IV.16: Agreement with the statement: "The Europass Mobility certificate obtained through my internship/trainee placement abroad had a positive impact on my employability"

Figure IV.17: Agreement with the statement: "The certificates obtained during my internship/trainee placement abroad are useful in my further professional career"

Figure IV.18: Agreement with the statement: "Participation in the internship/trainee placement abroad resulted in an increase in my wages"

Figure IV.19: Agreement with the statement: "I believe that my wages and working conditions are satisfactory"

Figure IV.20: Agreement with the statement: "I believe that my wages and working conditions are appropriate to my skills and experience"

Figure IV.21: Agreement with statements demonstrating the impact of the mobility experience on the development of participants' entrepreneurial skills



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This report provides the outcomes of transnational tracer study on vocational school graduates with foreign mobility experience. The research was carried out in Austria, Belgium (Flanders), the Czech Republic, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg, North Macedonia, Poland, Slovakia and the United Kingdom. The comparison of data gave us the opportunity to better understand the expectations of young mobility participants from different parts of Europe. It also allowed us to establish contact with former interns and trainees to learn more about their feedback on how (and to what extent) their training abroad was relevant not only to their needs but also to the requirements of the contemporary labour market in Europe.

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