

European Platform on Learning Mobility in the Youth Field Position Paper

Introduction

The **European Platform on Learning Mobility in the Youth Field** (hereinafter EPLM) is a space for **exchange and cooperation of researchers, policy makers, and practitioners**. Continuous co-operation of these three parties is seen as an added value for the further development, visibility and recognition of Learning mobility in the youth field.¹ Learning mobility is meant as *transnational mobility undertaken for a period of time, consciously organised for educational purposes or to acquire new competences*². It covers a wide variety of projects and activities and can be implemented in formal or non-formal settings³.

The EPLM focuses on non-formal learning with links to informal learning as well as to formal education. Learning mobility in this framework aims to increase **participation, active citizenship, intercultural learning and dialogue, individual competency development and employability of young people**. Mobility is also to be understood as a possible source of genuine and diverse learning experiences, and it therefore becomes important to critically investigate links between learning mobility (settings and contexts) and identity building. The EPLM, in its work, not only considers European youth mobility policies and programmes, but is also more generally interested in learning mobility as a set of complex social processes transforming the conditions of growing up in Europe. Moreover, the EPLM focuses on physical and organised learning mobility but does not overlook the virtual mobility facilitating and supporting physical mobility experiences.

The **EPLM is an open network and is conducted in a participatory way**. Thematic working groups may be formed and supported with means available and depending on the needs and developments related to Learning mobility in the youth field. **A Steering Group guides the EPLM** for a certain period of time. The members of the Steering Group represent a wide variety of stakeholders, programmes and formats in the field of learning mobility, a balanced mixture of the respective fields of work and a regional diversity within Europe. A **Coordination Office** supports the work of the EPLM and its Steering Group.

For more information about the structure of the EPLM, please refer to the **Presentation** document.

¹ Paper no. 1: European Platform on Learning Mobility in the Youth Field - Programmatical Frame

² Competences are to be understood as an overall system of values, attitudes and beliefs as well as skills and knowledge, which can be put into practice to manage diverse complex situations and tasks successfully. Self-confidence, motivation and well being are important pre-requisites for a person to be able to act out his/her developed competences'. SALTO T&C RC (2013). *Competence framework for trainers*.

³ ICON Institute for EU Commission, Education and Culture (June 2012). *Study on Mobility developments*.

Policy developments at European level

The contents of the current work of the EPLM should be framed by European youth policy. It is especially important to achieve the aims for progress in the field of learning mobility within the numerous initiatives at European level, such as:

- In its **conclusions** from November 2008 **regarding the mobility of young people** the Council of the European Union sets the target that learning experiences in a foreign country slowly become the rule: *Every young person should have the opportunity to take part in some form of mobility, whether this be during their studies or training, in the form of a work placement, or in the context of voluntary activities.*
- In November 2008 the **Recommendation of the Council of Europe on the 'Europe-wide mobility of young volunteers'**, requests the development of new possibilities of cross-border-mobility, quality assurance, the recognition of learning outcomes and the improvement of acknowledgement and support of volunteering.
- In July 2009 the Commission published its Green Paper on **'Promoting the Learning Mobility of Young People'**. It raised a number of questions, such as: How to enhance the chances of mobility of young Europeans?' Which obstacles to mobility need to be tackled? How can all stakeholders form a cooperative partnership for learning mobility?
- The 2009 **Renewed Framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018)** sees mobility as an overarching issue. It specifically recommends promoting the learning mobility of all young people and of cross-border professional and vocational opportunities; fostering mutual understanding among young people from all over the world through dialogue and by means of supportive actions such as training courses, exchanges and meetings and supporting the mobility of youth workers and leaders.
- The 2009 **Youth on the Move** flagship initiative within the **Europe 2020 Strategy** responds to the particular challenges young people face and intends to support them in succeeding in the knowledge economy. Supporting the learning mobility of young people is one main field of actions. Youth on the Move reiterates the aspiration that by 2020 all young people in Europe should have the possibility to partly spend their educational pathway abroad.
- In June 2011, the Council of the European Union's Recommendation **'Youth on the Move - promoting the learning mobility of young people'** refers to young people in Europe in all learning and training contexts, at school, in vocational training, in tertiary education, as well as in youth exchanges, voluntary activities or internships, inside or outside the Union. The recommendation seeks to encourage Member States to promote the learning mobility of young people and to remove obstacles that are impeding progress in this area.
- The November 2011 **Council** of the European Union's **Conclusions on a benchmark for learning mobility**, based on the Commission staff working document of May 2011, describes a differentiated strategy and specific benchmarks on learning mobility recognising the different starting points, circumstances and data situations of higher education, VET and youth mobility in general.
- The **Council** of the European Union's **Resolution on youth work** from November 2010 and the **Council conclusions on the 'contribution of quality youth work to the development, well-being and social inclusion of young people'** from April 2013 describe the frame for

Youth work in Europe. They also emphasize the need to promote opportunities for exchange, cooperation and networking of youth workers and youth leaders, policymakers and researchers at local, regional, national, European and international level.

- The **Erasmus+ programme** builds on the achievements of more than 25 years of European programmes in the fields of education, training and youth, covering both an inter-European as well as an international cooperation dimension. Erasmus+ is the result of the integration of the following European programmes implemented by the Commission during the period 2007-2013: Lifelong Learning, Youth in Action, Erasmus Mundus, Tempus, Alfa, Edulink, and Programmes of cooperation with industrialised countries in the field of higher education. These programmes have been supporting actions in the fields of higher education (including its international dimension), vocational education and training, school education, adult education and youth (including its international dimension). Within the Erasmus+ Programme, learning mobility is seen as one of three main lines of action to help as many as 800.000 young Europeans to be mobile each year.

In line with the above and based on the outcomes of the conferences of 2011 in Budapest and 2013 in Berlin, the Platform currently works on a series of topics and related actions, listed as follows:

1 | Linking youth work and learning mobility

Background

Youth work is a breeding ground for innovation and non-formal learning/education allowing the acquisition of skills facilitating - amongst others - social integration, personal development, participation and active citizenship. A number of youth workers also add learning mobility in their regular activities as an essential tool that reinforces the quality of their work, opening the door to skills and behaviours that local youth work alone cannot bring. Thus, they not only make use of European programmes and many other existing forms of co-funding, but also have a proven ability to create and generate new forms and approaches facilitating learning mobility. In contrast, other youth workers still very much resist the idea of explicitly tackling learning mobility - either for conceptual reasons or for educational ones - which might lead to limit the number of young people who could benefit from this process or who could be involved in processes that very often trigger positive changes and [personal-social] transformation. In other words, reality shows that youth work can be either a facilitator or a barrier to enhancing learning mobility as a means.

Actions

The EPLM will contribute to this field of action by:

- Developing a better understanding of the links between youth work and learning mobility;
- Exploring the impact of learning mobility on youth work (and reciprocally), to which extent youth work considers learning mobility as an instrument (its concept and objectives) and how does learning mobility contribute to policy and practice-related developments;

- Improving and promoting the above-mentioned links and cooperation through analysing all forms and models of learning mobility used and applied by young people and youth workers and studying their impact in line with, for instance, the work of the *RAY network*⁴, the study of the European Commission *working with young people: the value of youth work in the European Union*;
- Ensuring analysing young people's learning mobility path from an inclusion perspective.
- Highlighting and communicating identified knowledge-gaps in situations and contexts where youth work is conducted without any focus on learning mobility;
- Clarifying concepts and paradigms observed in different European countries.

The entire process will also have to ensure visibility of youth work in Erasmus+ and in relevant European policy development processes.

2 | Providing information and guidance

Background

Youth information and guidance consist of a wide range of services, activities, projects and frameworks that provide young people with necessary information, counselling and support for learning mobility opportunities. Since each learner has different needs, skills and competences, there is a need to provide access to learning mobility initiatives as well as work towards a conscious match-making between activities and potential participants. Youth information and guidance are therefore *significant* mechanisms to ensure tailor-made and targeted initiatives in supporting young people to make grounded and informed decisions about which programmes /projects to take part in. However, problems in accessing the information, the quality of information services, limited tools and channels, language barriers, and visa obstacles discourage young learners.

Actions

The EPLM will contribute to this field of action by:

- Elaborating a comprehensive definition of what learning mobility is and providing information on learning objectives and targeted competences for learning mobility opportunities;
- Developing mechanisms to collect and share reliable information on learning mobility opportunities, inside and outside the EU. This includes information on procedures and regulations for visa issues and work/residence permits;
- Providing easy access to [youth] information and guidance and explore ways to ensure their quality, paying a particular attention to the accessibility of the information by different target groups, especially by young people with fewer opportunities;
- Whenever possible, aiming at offering linguistic support and translations;
- Making extensive use of online social networks and related means;

⁴ Research-based analysis of Youth in Action Programme

- Creating awareness on added value of active participation and European dimension;
- Creating synergies between information networks like Eurodesk, ERYICA, etc.;
- Providing proper training of staff working in youth information.

3 | Ensuring quality and recognition

Background

Quality – when clearly understood in a learning mobility context - is a significant factor when considering how to tackle, reflect and apply non-formal education/learning principles in youth learning mobility schemes and projects. Thus, mainstreaming quality into learning mobility opportunities includes ensuring that the outcome is fit for purpose. Quality needs to be an integral part of the design, implementation, execution and monitoring/evaluation of a given learning mobility experience.

Thus, the EPLM should reflect upon the notion, understanding and developments of quality of learning mobility projects in youth work and through non-formal education/learning; explore and research on the link with competences and assessment; reflect on the development of quality standards and/or labels, and link recognition of learning outcomes in learning mobility schemes to the recognition of the achievements of youth work.

Actions

The EPLM will contribute to this field of action by:

- Reflecting upon what is quality in learning mobility projects and schemes;
- Exploring the pertinence/relevance of quality [frameworks] for learning mobility projects and the links to discourses on learning mobility from a practice perspective;
- Supporting research initiatives on the impact of youth work on learning mobility projects (and reciprocally);
- Actively contributing to the development and the promotion of training projects and/or related initiatives aiming at the recognition of competence acquired by youth workers, youth leaders and youth trainers involved in international learning mobility projects;
- Supporting reflection processes on the recognition of competence development processes from an inclusion perspective and on assessment (self and external);
- Contributing to the elaboration of quality standards and/or labels for quality learning mobility projects;
- Ensuring a clear and concrete contribution to the implementation of the ‘Strasbourg Process’⁵ and the part dedicated and linked to learning mobility of young people⁶.

⁵ The process of recognition of youth work non formal learning/education initiated by the Symposium on the same topic in Strasbourg in November 2011 and coordinated by the EU-CoE youth partnership through the Expert Group on Recognition.

⁶ Also taking into account the European quality charter for mobility

4 | Facilitating learning mobility for all and in diversity

Background

Learning mobility schemes and projects in the youth field aim at creating a unique learning experience accessible to all young people, regardless of social, economic, or geographical background, by promoting and supporting professional and personal development of young people and their social transformation. These schemes should facilitate mobility for all young people, providing equal opportunities. Unfortunately, too many young people remain excluded from taking part in learning mobility initiatives, due to social, legal, economical, personal and geographical reasons, among others. Even though mobility of young people is considered a vital contribution to intercultural learning both in Europe and internationally - in the context of cross-border learning mobility, many administrative, bureaucratic and financial barriers remain a real obstacle.

Furthermore and in spite of a relatively high attention given to the issue of employment, an ever-increasing number of young people have to leave their country to find jobs. This involuntary mobility generates new challenges for youth work in both, the home- and the host countries of these young people. Youth work needs to support them to turn this 'forced mobility' into a positive experience of Learning mobility.

Actions

The EPLM will contribute to this field of action by:

- Exploring barriers that hinder the participation of young people traditionally underrepresented in learning mobility schemes and projects;
- Analysing the related needs and mechanisms to improve access to learning mobility opportunities;
- Ensuring the participation of young people from diverse backgrounds in the design of learning mobility schemes and projects;
- Analysing the compliance of visa regulations with European learning mobility programmes;
- Fostering tailor-made support through networking and cooperation in the field of inclusion;
- Promoting free movement for young people from third countries, neighbouring partner countries, and candidate countries within the EU, especially if engaged in a learning mobility programme;
- Exploring factors that push young people into mobility experiences and what is needed to turn those into profitable, and successful learning opportunities;
- Supporting projects initiated by other stakeholders in exploring the link between learning mobility and employability;
- Supporting and/or initiating research in exploring the added value of learning mobility projects for young people's development.

5| Competences and training

Background

One of the key objectives of learning mobility schemes and projects in the youth field is to promote and contribute to the personal development of young people with a particular focus on competences development. Moreover and in line with more recent policy developments, actors in the field of learning mobility ought to also address the issue of competences in the context of the employability of young people.

Taking as reference the glossary of the *Set of competences for trainers working at European and international level* (2013) developed by SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource Centre, competence is to be understood as *an overall system of values, attitudes and beliefs as well as skills and knowledge, which can be put into practice to manage diverse complex situations and tasks successfully*. Other dimensions such as inner readiness, self-confidence, motivation and well-being are also considered as important pre-requisites for a person to be able to act out the developed competences.

Developing actions with regard to training and competences will first require analysing and examining the training needs and approaches in preparing/training actors involved in learning mobility projects and to pay a particular attention to the quality of the pedagogical/educational approaches as well as of the training mechanisms. It will also mean to identify further steps to improve the quality of training in a European learning mobility context with a focus on strategic initiatives.

Actions

The EPLM will contribute to this field of action by:

- Contributing to and promoting initiatives aiming at supporting quality youth work through training and competence development, such as those developed under the European Training Strategy or the work of the Council of Europe (e.g. with the European portfolio for youth leaders and youth workers);
- Initiating and/or supporting research projects aiming at highlighting the competence developed through learning mobility experience and their contribution to young people's employability;
- Supporting initiatives aiming at reinforcing the support provided to young mobility learners before, during and after their mobility experience.
- Contributing and promoting activity and projects aiming at the development of competence of young people with fewer opportunities and/or for those working with them

6| Evaluation, learning transfer and impact

Background

When looking at quality in the field of learning mobility for young people, the questions of impact analysis, assessment and evaluation are of utmost importance. Linked not only to training and competences development but also to the diversity of projects and their geographical scope, it seems essential to identify adequate approaches, criteria, indicators and more generally, pertinent measures to properly evaluate existing learning mobility initiatives.

Despite major developments and the emergence of different approaches and methods, there is still an ongoing debate on whether it is [needed and] possible to precisely evaluate the impact of non-formal education/learning and related mobility projects. If so, further working on this aspect will first require exploring existing approaches and methods to evaluation and then to assessing the impact of non-formal education/learning in learning mobility schemes and projects. Such approach should be seen from both short term and long term perspectives.

Actions

The EPLM will contribute to this field of action by:

- Compiling statistical surveys, researches and studies on learning mobility;
- Identifying existing quantitative and qualitative criteria and indicators that support measuring mobility within non-formal education/learning schemes;
- Advocating the need for formal and non-formal mobility indicators in Eurostat;
- Advocating evidence-based policies;
- Exploring qualitative as well as quantitative approaches;
- Pleading for short-term and long-term analysis (i.e. longitudinal studies: cohort studies);
- Promoting the development of impact analysis on biographies, on the acquisition of new competences, on employability, with a focus on the differentiated impact on young people with fewer opportunities, age, gender, cultural minorities, social background, etc.;
- Promoting the development of impact analysis on sending and hosting-organisations and on youth workers;
- Ensuring better links with the RAY and PEYR networks, ensuring that the results of their work are better interlinked, known and supported.