State of youth learning mobility

The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and war in Ukraine on learning mobility programmes in Europe

Analytical paper

Dragan Stanojević and Sintija Lase

Co-ordinated and edited by Lana Pasic

November 2023

Executive summary

The aim of this paper is to identify the changes that have occurred in learning mobility programmes since 2020, considering two crisis contexts – the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and the crisis caused by the war in Ukraine.

Free movement and motivation. The Covid-19 pandemic presented a significant challenge to both young people and youth organisations and institutions as a result of the restrictions on freedom of movement. Many programmes were cancelled completely, while others moved to online formats. Short and medium-term mobilities were frequently cancelled, with no clear prospects of when or how the programmes would continue.

Digitalisation was an immediate solution to replace physical learning during the pandemic, and it has become an essential element that complements learning mobilities – it ensures better preparation and deepens its impact during and after the learning mobility. Digitalisation has challenged and expanded the ways of learning and collaboration, giving new opportunities and also questioning old ways of learning. The availability of digital infrastructures and access to the internet has been increasing, but the current infrastructure may not be able to keep up with new technological developments. Overloading people with information and opportunities is not increasing their digital competence, but rather creating confusion. Despite greater use of digital tools during the pandemic, this remains one of the challenges for the future.

Sustainability. Including sustainability as a priority in the learning mobility programme raises awareness and offers learning opportunities on environmental topics, but also leads to the risk that sustainability is implemented only "on paper" with no clear measures of impact and improvement. More clear indicators, requirements and measurements regarding sustainability in learning mobilities would help organisations and individuals to actually reduce their impact on the environment and make truly sustainable choices. It would increase their motivation and minimise the knowledge gap. "Green travelling" is a good example of integrating concrete sustainability aspects into learning mobility programme practices, followed by extra funds to promote this choice as it often requires extra resources (time and money). However, offering green travelling (and other sustainable practices) only as recommendations is not enough to prompt a fundamental change in travelling habits. While learning mobility programmes often require choosing the most economical means of travel, and sometimes only choosing the most sustainable means, the final choice will often be made based on budgetary constraints. It is also important to remember that travelling is not the only sustainability aspect of learning mobility projects to be concerned about and projects should integrate other elements of sustainability.

Mental health and well-being. The Covid-19 pandemic and war in Ukraine have had a significant negative impact on the mental health and well-being of young people, creating fear, anxiety and social isolation, as evidenced by various studies and surveys. Despite the policy responses and several programmes by European institutions, including the efforts of educational institutions and youth organisations involved in learning mobility programmes to address the mental health and well-being of young people, data

suggest that these support services have not been fully adequate and accessible for all, highlighting the ongoing need for greater support.

Contents

Introduction

The first study, "Covid-19 and Learning Mobility: A Desk Research Study", to examine the relationship between learning mobility and the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic was published in 2020, based on the results of initial reports and studies. The pandemic, along with other factors, has caused a shift in what was previously considered "a strong characteristic of the European way of life – [the] possibility to travel around the continent for different purposes such as education, work, travel, family reasons started to be described as an epidemiological threat. The transnational ideal was put into question" (Krzaklewska and Şenyuva 2020: 5). Since this study, a significant number of new insights have been published, providing a more detailed understanding of the consequences of the crisis.

The pandemic-induced crisis had persisted for almost three years before it officially ended in spring 2023, although restrictions in most countries in Europe were lifted in spring 2022. During this time, we witnessed a wide range of national policies, challenges and varying degrees of interpersonal and social solidarity. Just when a return to "normal" was anticipated, Russia's aggression against Ukraine on 24 February 2022 caused a new crisis in Europe, emphasising the importance of security concerns. This development again led to the interruption or suspension of numerous mobility and international co-operation programmes.

The aim of this paper is to identify the changes that have occurred in learning mobility programmes since 2020, considering the context of two crises – the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. We recognise two types of changes: those that are direct consequences and inherently linked to the crises, such as movement restrictions, fear and security issues, and those that are part of longer-lasting processes but that have become more visible and accelerated because of the crises, such as digitalisation, mental health and well-being, and sustainability within learning mobility programmes. The importance of these topics for understanding the current changes in the field is highlighted by the recent update of the Handbook on quality in learning mobility, which specifically addresses these topics, and the fact that the sustainability of learning mobility programmes was the main theme of the latest EPLM conference in Munich, Germany.

Research questions and methodology

The key questions we aim to answer in this paper are: How have the crises affected freedom of movement and the desire of young people to participate in learning mobility programmes, and how have institutions and organisations responded to these challenges? In what ways has the pandemic contributed to the digitalisation of learning mobility programmes, and what lessons have young people and youth organisations learned? How has the Covid-19 pandemic helped prioritise the topic of sustainability, and what strategies do young people, organisations and institutions use to reduce negative impacts? What are the consequences of the crises on the well-being of young people, what are their needs and how can organisations and institutions respond to them?

To address these questions, we will rely on two types of data sources. The first includes all relevant sources that deal with the topics at hand, such as official documents from European and national institutions, reports from institutions and organisations, and expert and scientific research. The second source consists of individual interviews and focus groups. These conversations were conducted with youth researchers, practitioners and policy makers during the EPLM "Sustain-Mobility" conference in Munich in February and March 2023.

In an EPLM-context, as stated in the "Conceptual background paper. Quality in learning mobility", a "learning mobility" is "transnational mobility undertaken for a period of time, consciously organised for educational purposes or to acquire new competences or knowledge". It aims to improve young people's "participation, active citizenship and democratic engagement, access to rights, social inclusion, intercultural and intergenerational learning and dialogue, individual competenc[e] development including digital competence, European cohesion, global solidarity, value-based learning, peace, diversity, sustainability and impact on the community" (EU–Council of Europe 2020: 3).

The European Parliament report "The role of intercultural dialogue, cultural diversity and education in promoting EU fundamental values" (European Parliament 2015) underlines the key role of mobility programmes for promoting intercultural dialogue and European values. The report highlights that "shared values that hold together our societies, such as freedom, social justice, equality and non-discrimination, democracy, human rights, the rule of law, tolerance and solidarity, are crucial for Europe's future" and that "the development of learning mobility ... can lead to a better world, in which people move freely and enjoy open intercultural dialogue". Despite the unprecedented challenges that the Covid-19 global pandemic presented for physical learning mobility, "it continues to remain the essence and the backbone of the Erasmus+ programme" (European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture 2020).

Analysis of the guidelines for the biggest European mobility programme, Erasmus+, during recent programme periods indicates that the main programme priorities have shifted towards a more digital and sustainable approach, responding and adapting to the new global realities. After successful legislative negotiations with the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, the new Erasmus+ programme for the period 2021-2027 was announced in 2020 "to address new challenges facing education and training, youth and sport, and build on the potential of digital and green opportunities" (European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture 2020). Alongside previous well-known priorities from the EU youth field such as "inclusion and diversity" and "participation in democratic life", two new horizontal Erasmus+ programme priorities were defined – "digital transformation" and "the environment and fight against climate change". However, its core tool – learning mobility – has stayed the same with a slight shift towards blended mobilities where residential activities are complemented with online meetings and additional digital learning processes before and after the actual residential activities take place (European Commission 2023).

The main tool – learning mobility – has remained the core activity, despite its partly conflicting nature with the two new priorities ("the environment and fight against climate change" and "digital transformation") in terms of the impact on the environment that international travel has compared to its

beneficial impact on the development of individuals. However, the nature of learning mobility has moved towards digitalisation and sustainability, encouraging more blended mobilities and developing digital tools for different purposes and therefore limiting physical travelling activities while expanding the impact of international learning activities. When physical mobility is implemented, a "green travel" approach is suggested and supported with extra financial means from the Erasmus+ programme's budget. Sustainability as one of the programme's new horizontal priorities suggests a "green approach" and awareness about limited resources when implementing learning mobilities residentially. Green travelling and digital activities are suggested and supported by the programme guide with defined funds. Blended mobilities are encouraged to reduce the volume of physical travelling and therefore its negative impact on the environment while still ensuring a quality learning process and its impact on individuals. Digital transformation has also been the solution for many organisations to enable them to continue their youth work and international projects during the pandemic.

This paper is structured into four thematic chapters, followed by conclusions. First, it presents the changes in travel regimes and restrictions that young people and organisations have encountered. The next chapter focuses on digitalisation, followed by an analysis of the changes and challenges related to sustainability. The fourth chapter pertains to the well-being of young people participating in mobility programmes. After that, key findings and recommendations for further action in the discussion are offered.

New cha(lle)nges within the field

Free movement and (lower) motivation for learning mobilities

Travel restrictions. During the Covid-19 pandemic, many countries closed their borders, imposed internal movement restrictions and implemented quarantine or self-isolation requirements, and as a result, travel options were limited, with visa restrictions and delays. The occasional and insufficiently systematic easing and tightening of measures caused uncertainty in terms of planning future activities, resulting in many young people giving up on participating in programmes. Fear of "being trapped" in a foreign country was based on the inability to return home, the potential for financial difficulties or loss of income, the risk of contracting Covid-19 and the lack of access to healthcare, the possibility of detainment or arrest due to immigration laws or regulations, separation from friends and family, the potential for discrimination or hostility, and the potential for academic setbacks such as being unable to complete academic requirements or missing important deadlines all impacted young people's decisions on learning mobility.

In the context of higher education, student mobility is considered a backbone of the European higher education system and the Bologna Process. The goal is for at least 20% of students to spend a portion of their studies (at least three months and earning 15 ECTS credits) in another country. Conservative estimates indicate that before the pandemic, around 13.5% of graduates were mobile, while research

such as that by EUROSTUDENT suggests that around 20% of students have experienced mobility (Farnell et al. 2020: 46).

The mobility programmes challenges. The data currently available still do not provide a complete picture. Available data from the 2016-2020 period (Table 1 in the appendix) and national reports for some countries, such as the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Spain, suggest that the number of international students is consistently increasing and was also the case during the pandemic. Research conducted with university representatives, on the other hand, indicates that there has been a decline in the enrolment of international students during the Covid-19 pandemic, especially within short-term programmes. "The Second IAU Global Survey Report on the Impact of COVID-19", conducted in 2021, also shows that universities are facing a decline in the number of students, particularly for student exchanges (which decreased in over 75% of higher education institutions (HEIs)) and to a lesser extent in degree-seeking students (which decreased in slightly over half of HEIs) (Trine et al. 2022). In contrast to mobility within higher education, mid-term and short-term mobilities have been significantly more affected (Salmi 2020). The Youth Partnership study Towards a better understanding of the impact of Covid-19 on the youth sector showed that many short-term projects were cancelled. "Summer camps were cancelled in many countries; in other cases these activities had to be reorganised" (O'Donovan and Zentner 2020: 3). Although no exact data are available on all learning mobility activities, the youth sector reports through surveys and interviews that a considerable number of programmes have been cancelled or postponed.

A comprehensive analysis of the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on learning mobility activities, "The Survey on the Impact of Covid-19 on Learning Mobility Activities", was conducted by Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps in April 2020. The study, which surveyed a sample of 11 800 participants, yielded findings that indicate the pandemic has had a substantial impact on programme participation. Specifically, the results reveal that less than half (42%) of participants were able to continue participating in programmes in some capacity, while approximately one fifth (22%) encountered delays in their programmes and over one third (36%) had their programmes cancelled altogether. Three quarters (75%) of the participants returned home, while one quarter (25%) remained abroad, with significant sectoral differences (for example, more than half of the European Solidarity Corps participants remained abroad, while only one tenth of vocational education and training (VET) participants did so). Among the reasons for remaining abroad, the desire to stay (57%) was prevalent, but almost one fifth of young people (19%) encountered difficulties returning home (primarily due to transportation and mobility restrictions). Despite the fact that a majority of survey respondents were satisfied with the functioning of online programmes, a significant number of them considered it not to be an adequate (and long-term) substitute, as even 81% of them stated that they were missing face-to-face interaction and 69% reported missing access to institutions (Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps 2020).

Research on the global impact of Covid-19 (April 2020) on HEIs shows that in Europe as much as 95% of HEIs have experienced challenges with learning mobility schemes. Approximately half (53%) of students in Europe remained in the country where they were located, while the others returned home. As a key alternative, online learning was implemented in Europe and was utilised by more than half of international

students (59%). The same research also indicates that one third of all international mobility was cancelled (Marinoni et al. 2020).

Analysing exclusively student exchanges (Gabriels and Benke-Aberg 2020), the study "Student Exchanges in Times of Crisis" shows that among students the situation was slightly better as around two thirds (65%) remained in the programme, a quarter (25%) of the programmes were cancelled, while the rest were uncertain about the future of the programme. Among those who were in the programme, half were in the destination country, but during the research itself, the trend was moving towards an accelerated return of students to their country of origin.

The research conducted during the initial stages of the pandemic indicated that for students participating in exchange programmes, the most prominent issue was the difficulty with transportation and that the information provided by host universities in this regard was frequently inadequate (Gabriels and Benke-Aberg 2020). One of the ramifications observed among international students is the deviation from the assumption that international mobility would provide ample opportunities for travel and experiential learning. Instead, these students have found themselves confined to a localised context (Calvo et al. 2021). The decision of international students to remain in their host country during the Covid-19 pandemic was influenced by several factors. Many of the students were aware of the technical limitations needed to follow the classes remotely (internet access, technical support, hardware, software, etc.). Some were uncertain about the possibility of returning to the host country post-pandemic due to the temporal nature of their visa. Many were worried about financial issues, including the potential loss of scholarships if they returned to their home country, limited means of covering travel expenses, especially for a return trip, and the lack of financial support from parents as a result of job loss, which forced some students into precarious employment situations. Health-related concerns were also a factor in the decision to stay, such as the fear of contracting the virus and the resulting inability to return, the possibility of their home country being included in the list of prohibited countries for entry into the host country and the concern of not being able to receive vaccinations in their home country (Calvo et al 2021; Farnell et al. 2021; European Commision 2020).

One of the institutional challenges encountered by international students pertains to the lack of responsiveness and consideration exhibited by educational institutions towards their specific needs. For instance, in some countries, several students have reported that they have not been approached or provided with any specialised services by official sources.

Visa delays. Even after the Covid-19 restrictions were lifted, exchange between EU and non-EU countries became more challenging as a result of the introduction of much stricter measures when applying for visas. For example, in Türkiye young people report longer waiting times for visas and higher rejection rates.

> We still receive a lot of applications from non-EU countries but the visa procedure is really difficult and [the wait is] four months. I was implementing last autumn simple mobility for youth workers and I got phone calls from the embassy to confirm each non-EU participant, and the procedure took forever. (Focus group participant).

Security issues. Although the European Commission has specifically targeted Ukraine through the Erasmus+ Annual Work Programme for 2023, opening up the possibility of increased mobility between Ukraine and other countries, the war in Ukraine has led to new concerns among young people and a new pattern of exchange. Not only have many programmes with Ukraine been suspended but also programmes in neighbouring countries have been cancelled. Young people are, for example, less willing to travel to Poland or Moldova.

> All programmes with Poland that were [in] the pipeline were simply cancelled. Sometimes it is not that young people do not want to go, but their parents don't authorise them to go. (Focus group participant).

As practitioners testify, young people's desire to travel to distant countries has decreased. Due to perceived risks, both related to the war and health concerns, most young people feel that it is safer to stay closer to home. On the other hand, some young people, especially peace activists, are more willing to travel and volunteer in other countries.

Higher costs. Increased inflation caused by Covid-19 and the war has resulted in rising costs for mobility programmes, especially for travel and accommodation in larger cities. This implies that young people from poorer countries or disadvantaged social backgrounds have fewer opportunities to participate in such programmes. Even when organisations cover basic expenses, many young people are unable to pre-finance or bear additional costs associated with such programmes.

The youth work challenges. The youth sector has been substantially affected by the crisis. Youth workers identify continuity of funding and programme completion as crucial challenges. Organisations solely reliant on donor funding have been particularly vulnerable since many planned programmes are being delayed. In countries where youth work is professionalised, youth workers enjoy greater job security. However, in contexts with lower security, their jobs are exposed to even greater risks (Donovan and Zentner 2020).

The Ray-COR study identified that during 2020 and 2021 a significant portion of youth work has been moved online (youth workers claim that in 2020 only 7% of work was done exclusively face to face, and in 2021 around 9%) and that the reach of young people has significantly decreased (only about 9% of youth workers claim that it remained the same as before the pandemic in 2020, and 5% in 2021). According to the study "Effects of Covid-19 across youth work and youth activities" by the Joint Council on Youth (CMJ) working group on responses to Covid-19, which was based on responses from 48 organisations from Council of Europe member states, the Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant negative impact on youth work programmes, participant numbers and funding and specifically on the participation of young people in volunteer and mobility programmes. Additionally, since most programmes had to move online, many organisations were unprepared as they lacked the necessary equipment, software and knowledge to successfully transition to digital formats. As a result, youth workers and trainers launched several initiatives (petitions, actions) in order to adapt to new circumstances.

Loss of resources and capacities. In some countries the youth sector is faced with the loss of capacities, primarily in terms of human capital. There is a growing scarcity of youth workers, as many are unwilling to persist with precarious work arrangements during times of uncertainty. Youth workers have been facing financial struggles and a lack of support during the pandemic causing many to seek other job opportunities. This has resulted in a shortage of available staff to keep youth centres and clubs operational.

> In Austria we experienced [an] interesting development: a lot of youth workers did not come back to the job after the pandemic and a lot of human resources and experience were lost. It is difficult to find youth workers that are eager to work more than half time and they are not participating in exchanges or in programmes. (Focus group participant).

Among the losses, practitioners have also noted a decrease in the exchange framework due to the war in Ukraine. Russia's aggression towards Ukraine has provoked a response from the European Commission and the Council of Europe, which has included sanctions and the discontinuation of co-operation with youth organisations and institutions from Russia and Belarus, making it impossible to carry out exchange programmes with these countries. The war has also led to restrictions on sending young people to countries that are either at war, like Ukraine, or to countries that are on the borders of the conflict.

Higher costs. Practitioners testify that systems have not systematically adapted to challenges. Organisations have faced significantly higher and unexpected costs during the last few years. The implementation and lifting of Covid-19 restrictions have resulted in project extensions, modifications to timelines and activity content, changes to destination countries and variations in the number of participants, among other factors. It was not possible to plan and stick to activities, and with rising inflation budgetary issues caused many new challenges. Many had to organise activities with the same amount of money in very different circumstances and with low predictability.

> I think there are many, many obstacles and from a practitioner point of view we don't even want to organise activities anymore. Because it's so risky. We had this project waiting to be implemented for three years without extra budget, and we had last-minute cancellations because of Covid. (Focus group participant).

Practitioners have noted that the capacities of national agencies and ministries are stretched, giving the impression that the budget for learning mobility projects has increased but without increasing the budget per project significantly. As a result, more projects must be managed with the same number of or even fewer staff members, as many have been forced to cut staff and funding for intergovernmental co-operation in youth departments.

Inflation, caused by Covid-19 and the war in Ukraine, has resulted in an increase in organisational costs for mobility programmes. The costs of travel, accommodation, visas and insurance particularly have risen significantly, especially for young people coming from high-risk areas such as Ukraine. Organisations

cannot always anticipate these expenses, particularly the extent to which they may increase during the project.

Symbolic significance of the learning mobility experience. One challenge that organisations potentially face is the decreased symbolic importance and role of learning programmes for the career development of young individuals. Cairnes and Franca "hypothesise that we are now experiencing an 'Immobility Turn' in youth transitions, which, even if temporary, has the potential to disrupt personal and professional development of many young people in problematising stays abroad at foreign universities" (Cairnes and Franca 2022: 1). Because of Covid-19, there has been a reduction in the pull factors of such programmes as a result of travel challenges and the inability to participate in intercultural exchanges (as classes were held online), which are typically seen as a crucial element of these programmes. However, even in the absence of the pandemic, this phenomenon has been recognised by practitioners and researchers, who suggest that young people are now less inclined to participate in learning mobility programmes for several reasons. The high availability and non-exclusivity of the programmes could diminish their symbolic value and importance. Also, the pressure to take part in such programmes during education or to be mobile later in their career can create resistance among young people. Additionally, an increasing number of young people work during their studies, often in jobs that are significant for their future career, which makes them less willing to disrupt their career path by going abroad.

Higher education institutions anticipate that the most significant challenge they will face in the future will be the restoration of student engagement and motivation for international mobility programmes, both for their own students to engage in study abroad experiences and for attracting international students to their institution. As a medium-term response to the impact of Covid-19, most universities are exploring the implementation of online learning, as well as potentially incorporating hybrid or blended approaches. In the medium term, HEIs anticipate challenges related to the use of virtual mobility, specifically with regard to providing added value for international students, similar to what they would have gained through in-person interactions such as learning intercultural skills. Additionally, this could potentially lead to a decrease in tuition fees as some students may be off-campus, which would have a direct impact on HEI finances. Another key challenge that HEIs anticipate is the potential reduction in interculturalism within higher education and research, as well as a decrease in a supportive atmosphere among students, faculty and researchers as a result of the decline in student mobility and internationalisation (Farnell et al. 2021).

Digitalisation as a cha(lle)nge and solution for organisations and participants

Digitalisation has been on the European education and youth work agenda for many years, but recent *force majeure* situations such as the pandemic, war in Ukraine and the energy crisis have intensified its application. Thanks to ongoing technology developments, a large variety of digital services are available to the wider population. Digitalisation has been the main solution to recent learning mobility challenges – travelling restrictions and safety measures, insufficient resources to implement residential mobility as a result of inflation and extra safety measures. In many cases, digitalisation was the only way to actually progress learning during the pandemic. For many, digitalisation contributes to caring for the environment, especially in terms of reducing the use of transportation. In many cases, it is a mixture of all these elements and of optimising resources – saving money, time and nature while trying to achieve a greater impact.

EU Policy level. In 2018, the European Commission introduced its first Digital Education Action Plan (2018-2022) with three priorities: (1) making better use of digital technology for teaching and learning; (2) developing relevant digital skills and competences for a digital transformation; and (3) improving educational systems through better data analysis and foresight. Under its first priority it was stated clearly that **mobility is an important part of education and digital technology is key for improving it further**. Its related actions focused on the improvement of the quality of student mobility in Europe, mostly reducing and optimising administrative procedures internationally (European Commission 2018).

The renewed Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027) calls for greater co-operation at European level on digital education to address the challenges and opportunities of the Covid-19 pandemic, and to present opportunities for the education and training community, policy makers, academia and researchers at the national, EU and international levels. It sets out a common vision of high-quality, **inclusive and accessible digital education in Europe** and aims to support the adaptation of the education and training systems of EU member states to the digital age. The new action plan has two strategic priorities: (1) fostering the development of a high-performing digital education ecosystem; (2) enhancing digital skills and competences for the digital transformation. It foresees 14 actions to support these priorities, highlighting the need to address the skills challenges linked to digitalisation, cybersecurity, media literacy and artificial intelligence (European Commission 2020). This EU policy initiative also contributes to the Commission's priority "A Europe fit for the digital age", helping to achieve its target of a climate-neutral Europe by 2050, and also supports its temporary recovery instrument Recovery and Resilience Facility, which aims to create a greener, more digital and resilient EU (European Commission 2022).

The Council of Europe runs a digital citizenship education (DCE) programme aiming to provide young citizens with innovative opportunities to develop the values, attitudes, skills and knowledge necessary to allow every individual to participate fully and assume their responsibilities in society. It defines the competences children will need to master to be competent, responsible digital citizens and provides the methodology for educators.

The pandemic forcibly escalated the implementation of the digital transition, demonstrating its particularly significant importance. The pandemic demanded a rapid global switch to online solutions to

ensure the continuation of education and youth work services, which became a great challenge. As highlighted in the Erasmus+ 2020 annual report, the biggest learning mobility programme in Europe and beyond, the pandemic illuminated the challenges that needed to be addressed related to existing disparities at institutional level in Europe in terms of infrastructure, digital equipment and digital readiness. These include issues related to the lack of digital skills and literacy among young people and adults (European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture 2020).

Limited access. According to Eurostat, the share of EU households with internet access in the last five years has increased from 86% in 2017 to 93% in 2022. In 2022, 90% of people in the EU aged between 16 and 74 used the internet at least once within three months. A majority (89%) were regular internet users – 84% accessed the internet on a daily basis and 5% used it at least once a week. (Eurostat 2022). The Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) shows that 92% of households in the EU had a subscription to an internet provider in 2021 with slightly higher subscription rates in cities (94%) than towns and suburbs (92%) and rural areas (89%) (DESI 2022). However, despite increasing internet access, the proportion of the EU population that have never used the internet is still significant – 7% on average in the EU in 2022, and over 10% in EU countries such as Greece and Portugal (14%) and Croatia and Bulgaria (13%). Also, it is important to note that a quarter or 25% of low-income EU households just before the pandemic, in 2019, had no access to computers and broadband (Eurostat).

Lack of digital skills. Internet access is higher among young people. According to Eurostat, 95% of people in EU member states that are 16 to 29 years old used the internet daily in 2021, compared with 80% for the whole population. However, a considerably **smaller proportion, 71% of young people, reported having at least basic digital skills** with the highest results in Finland (93%), Malta (92%), Croatia (89%), Greece and the Netherlands (87%), and the lowest percentages in Bulgaria (49%) and Romania (46%) among EU states. According to the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI), the digital skills in the EU are even lower. While 87% of people aged 16-74 used the internet regularly in 2021, only 54% possessed at least basic digital skills (DESI, 2022).

An International Computer and Information Literacy Study in 2018 indicated that young people do not develop sophisticated digital skills just by growing up using digital devices. According to the study, more than one third of 13 to 14 year olds do not possess the most basic proficiency level in digital skills, and students from higher socio-economic backgrounds had significantly higher skills than others (IEA 2018).

Two years before the pandemic, the report Digital Skills Gap revealed that even **44% or 169 million Europeans aged 16 to 74 did not have basic digital skills**. With the prediction that 90% of future jobs will require digital skills, it indicated that Europe could be facing a digital skills gap. Five years later, about a year after pandemic, a Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) report, which tracks Europe's digital performance and the progress made by EU countries, still showed that **only 54% of Europeans aged between 16 and 74 have at least basic digital skills**, indicating little progress in digital skills development in European society. The report shows that while the majority of member states made some progress in their digital transformation during the pandemic, they are still struggling to address the gaps in digital

skills and the deployment of infrastructure and that essential digital technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) and Big Data are still not widely used.

Just before the pandemic, in 2018, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in their Teaching and Learning International Survey found that **less than 40% of educators in the EU felt ready to use digital technologies in teaching** (OECD 2019).

With this gap in technology access and digital skills, during the pandemic schools were closed in more than 190 countries globally, affecting 1.57 billion children and young people or 90% of the world's student population (UNESCO 2020), and teachers and students were suddenly confronted with remote teaching and learning as the only way to continue education. Meanwhile, according to the ITU Digital Skills Insights 2020 report, workplace closures in the second quarter of 2020 resulted in the loss of 305 million jobs worldwide and 94% of the global workforce was affected, which also negatively impacted the resources of households and organisations (ITU 2020).

Low digital participation. According to Eurostat, social networks play a major role in the communication of and collaboration between young people. Very few young people have participated in online courses. Although their **participation in online courses has increased 2.6 times over the last three years (including during the pandemic), it is still comparatively low – 13% in 2019 and 34% in 2021**. The EU countries with the highest share of young people following online courses in 2021 were the Netherlands (69%), Greece (63%) and Slovenia (60%), while in Bulgaria, Germany, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary and Romania it was only 18%. But an even smaller proportion has advanced digital skills – only 17% of young males and 8% of young females in the EU have written code in a programming language (Eurostat 2021).

Missing person-to-person interactions. According to the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Survey on the impact of Covid-19 on learning mobility, about 75% or more than 107 000 participants of the Erasmus+ mobility programme were impacted by the pandemic. Some 42% of them, about 45 000 participants, continued their learning mobility activities with different arrangements, including distance or online learning. Among higher education students this rate was even higher – 55% continued their mobility with virtual activities. The majority of participants who participated in virtual activities were generally satisfied. The digital learning tools and platforms worked very well for 71% of respondents and 71% also agreed that moderators, professors, trainers and organisers ran these activities well and the activities were relevant to the participants' mobility. However, the overall quality of activities was good for 63% of respondents. Only 55% of the students felt that activities encouraged participants to learn, and 37% of them admitted spending less time in virtual activities than in physical ones. A **large majority (81%) missed the person-to-person interaction as well as the physical access to certain educational facilities, such as libraries (69%)**, compared to physical mobility activities. However, for only 72% of these students will sending institutions formally recognise these activities as part of the participants' learning periods abroad (Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps 2020).

Support. The satisfaction rate of the participants in terms of the support received during their mobility programmes is high – the majority received enough information or guidance from the host (87%) and sending institutions (86%), local organisations (83%) and national agencies (80%). The satisfaction of the

participants with the support from the European Solidarity Corps and Erasmus+ youth and non-formal learning activities is the highest (90%) (Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps 2020). However, for future activities, **only 31% of respondents would prefer to start their mobility as virtual learning and then use the opportunity for an experience abroad** and 5% would be ready to replace physical mobility entirely by virtual activities if there is no other alternative. The majority (55%) would prefer to postpone the start of the mobility until the situation gets back to normal and 9% of participants would opt for cancelling the mobility period. Participants who have already experienced virtual mobility are more confident about the "blended mobility" scenario (Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps 2020).

Youth work. A RAY-COR study identified that during 2020 and 2021 a **significant proportion of youth work moved online**. Youth workers claim that in 2020 only 7% of youth work activities were done exclusively face to face, and in 2021 around 9%. Many youth workers (35% in 2020 and 46% in 2021) claim that less than one third of their youth work was transferred online and only 17% in 2020 and 6% in 2021 claimed that they had transferred all their youth work online. They also admit that the reach of young people has significantly decreased – only about 9% of youth workers claim that it remained the same as before the pandemic in 2020 and 5% in 2021 (RAY-COR 2022).

Online solutions. In 2018, a new groundbreaking EU Erasmus+ programme initiative, **Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange**, was introduced, enabling more than 30 000 young people aged 18 to 30 in Europe and the Southern Mediterranean to engage in meaningful intercultural experiences online as part of their formal or non-formal education. When the pandemic started in early 2020 in Europe, bringing international travel restrictions, many regular learning mobility projects became fully or partly virtual by force. Despite the fact that virtual learning mobility was already a tested alternative, it was not for everyone. Experts admit that even if some of the projects were transferred online and took place virtually, the quality of this learning experience and long-term impact to the participants decreased significantly.

> [Physical] mobility is not any more an obvious option – it has a different image now. Ten years ago it was more exciting, but now it is so accessible. It used to be more enjoyable, now it becomes more like resilience. Discourse and the value of being mobile has changed – [because of] safety and sustainability. Also, pressure that you have to travel, do mobility, but I just want to stay [home] and take it slow. (Focus group participant).

> Some are going, but not too far, because then it is easier to come back. (Focus group participant).

As stated in the Erasmus+ 2020 annual report, the Covid-19 crisis brought an increased interest in participating in the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange, which offered a safe space for social interaction at a time when many young people felt isolated. Based on these good results and the increasing importance of virtual formats of co-operation, the European Commission proposed to integrate virtual exchanges into the new Erasmus+ programme and to extend their outreach to other priority regions (European Commission 2020). The pandemic reinforced the need for more flexible – blended or virtual – learning formats and highlighted the gap of skills, readiness and lack of technologies to make this happen (European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture 2020).

As part of the Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027), during the period of 2018 to 2022 the **Digital Opportunity Traineeships** gave about 30 000 higher education students and recent graduates the opportunity to gain hands-on professional experience in digital fields such as cybersecurity, Big Data, quantum technology, machine learning and others. In 2021 this training opportunity was expanded to not only higher education students and recent graduates but also higher education staff and VET students and recent graduates. Another Erasmus+ initiative, SELFIE, a self-reflection tool enabling teachers to develop their digital skills, reached two millions users by the end of 2021 and a milestone of one million people taking part in online language courses since 2014 has been reached. A new SALTO Digital Resource Centre was established, enabling more support for improving the quality of digital education and youth work. (European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture 2022).

The pandemic made it clear that the Erasmus+ programme needs to take an active role in preparing both organisations and individuals for the digital transition, offering to develop competences for smart and responsible use of digital tools (European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture 2020). **While physical learning mobility remains the core element of the Erasmus+ programme, digital competence development has become more present in all its actions.**

In 2021, 49% of the Erasmus+ budget was earmarked for co-operation projects supporting the digital transition and from 680 Erasmus+ projects in the field of youth, 152 were on digital topics. (European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture 2020). As also stated in the LTA Report on Digital Youth Work, the pandemic has highlighted and will no doubt continue to highlight new opportunities and approaches for young people to connect with online platforms (Kiviniemi 2021).

Challenges and changes. The Erasmus+ annual report 2021 emphasises that **developing digital skills** in forward-looking fields, such as combating climate change, clean energy, artificial intelligence, robotics, Big Data analysis, etc. is essential for Europe's future sustainable growth and cohesion (European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture 2022.). However, an increasing number of digital tools and information may not be an answer to the digital competence development of European society. A feasibility study, implemented in 2021 on digital education content and platforms, shows that there is an urgent need to harmonise the exchange of content, courses and related data (European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture 2022).

According to the results of an experts' focus group at the EPLM conference "Sustain-Mobility", a new learning paradigm in the digital world needs to be expanded and developed. During the pandemic, many learning activities were transformed from residential to virtual form and the training methods used were almost the same or very similar to the ones practised in residential settings, only with the computer screen in between the learners. But digital learning offers more than that, and these opportunities need to be explored and integrated into the future learning programmes more wisely.

Doing energisers in Zoom does not mean going digital. We need to rethink how we do things online.

> Using digital tools offers the opportunity to [experience] different learning types and personalities as non-formal education activities are usually designed for extroverted self-confident people who feel good learning in a group and talking in front of the group.
>
> It is a myth that everybody is included [online]. A person is there, but maybe they are reading news behind the screen. (Focus group participants)

Quantity and quality decreased. With the flexibility of the Erasmus+ programme administration as a response to this global *force majeure* situation, many organisations chose to conclude the projects virtually instead of extending them because of an uncertain future, and in many cases it was not even possible as there were also limits to the extension of the project periods. According to the Erasmus+ 2021 annual report, the number of learning mobility participants has decreased drastically: down 60% in 2020 and down 35% in 2021 for Key 1 learning mobilities of individuals (compared to the average during the period 2016-2019). Still, more than 648 000 individuals (83% learners and 17% staff) participated in mobility activities in 2021, including 10%, or about 65 000 participants, with fewer opportunities (European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture 2022.).

Financial challenges. There is a common assumption that "digital" automatically means "green", "sustainable" and "cheaper". But not all digital practices are sustainable in terms of saving energy and resources, as they are also leaving a digital footprint. And a digital transformation definitely does not happen without investing in resources. Despite the flexibility of donors regarding virtual activities and project extensions, the digitalisation of learning mobility programmes also presented financial challenges to organisations as the transformation of the residential programmes into digital formats costs extra working hours, means extra training for staff and participants and requires new digital tools for the organisations, which they often did not have, and the budget cut by transforming physical learning mobility into virtual was comparably high.

> It is not free and cheaper [with] digital, in terms of software and work invested. Lots of organisations do not have resources for equipment, software, subscriptions and training of youth workers. [It] is a myth that it is for free. (Focus group participant)

Health and safety. One more important issue regarding digitalisation is its impact on individuals' health, especially young learners. Plentiful research has been done on screen time and mental health. Despite many positive outcomes, including creativity, increased well-being and elevated psychosocial effects of using social media in adults, there are many negative mental health effects of using screens, such as depression, anxiety and brain fog. Research has shown that increasing screen time is associated with reduced self-esteem and an increased risk of obesity as the increasing prevalence of screen time has been shown to correlate with insufficient levels of physical activity and spending time outdoors in contact with nature. In other words, screen time has replaced "green time" (Williams 2022). It also comes with a high risk to online safety and the threat of cyberbullying. According to an international research project, Cyberbullying Among Adolescents and Children, the prevalence rates of cyberbullying ranged from 6% to 46.3%, while the rates of cyberbullying victimisation ranged from 13.99% to 57.5% (Zhu et al. 2021).

Camera on out of respect for the group? But I don't want to invite all the classroom into my bedroom, to my private space … And to set a background, you have to have a good processor [on] your computer. And what if someone records it? We share so much information online. Going online involves risks of cyberbullying. (Focus group participant)

Sustainability cha(lle)nges related to organisations and participants

It is generally common knowledge that climate change is happening and that we should address it all together. It is already reflected in many policy documents in Europe. Sustainability aspects have also been integrated into learning mobility programmes' guides as one of the topics and core principles for implementation. This can be viewed to be in contrast with the practice of learning mobility itself, as mobility is one of the challenges for environmental sustainability. There is an ongoing public debate on different levels on how to practically address this dichotomy. It is also becoming a worry and dilemma at the same time for many organisations and individuals involved in learning mobilities.

Definition. According to the United Nations, sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (UN General Assembly 1987). The mixture of ongoing global discussion about the harmful effects of travelling and online solutions for work and studies during the pandemic has led to the question, at individual and political levels, of what the future of learning mobilities is and how their environmental compatibility and sustainability can be ensured.

More than a decade ago the international organisation WWF – World Wide Fund For Nature warned that the freedom of personal mobility is on a collision course with the finite limits of our planet (WWF 2008). In 2008, when the report was published, personal mobility was responsible for 26% of carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions on a global scale and in Europe. Mobility had the fastest growing energy demands of all sectors and was the only sector with consistently increasing emissions in most countries. Recent research shows that the effects of climate change are so far-reaching that they will compromise achieving most of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, such as those relating to poverty, hunger, health and well-being, education, water and sanitation, and peace and justice (Sanson, Hoorn and Burke 2019).

In 2019, the mass youth climate movement initiator and activist Greta Thunberg addressed delegates at the UN Climate Action Summit, with the following words that have now become iconic to our generation: "Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are in the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you! … The popular idea of cutting our emissions in half in 10 years only gives us a 50% chance of staying below 1.5 degrees [Celsius] (Paris Agreement 2015), and the risk of setting off irreversible chain reactions beyond human control". These words still resonate globally to young individuals, policy makers and the providers of international learning mobility programmes for young people.

Policy level. Environment and climate change is the key priority at the European policy level. While the EU, as an economic and political union, acts on a wide range of environmental policy aspects, the Council of Europe focuses on environmental human rights – recognition of the interaction between human interests and nature protection.

The European Green Deal, the EU's new growth strategy, is an ambitious commitment to "transform the EU into a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy". With the great ambition to become climate neutral by 2050, the Erasmus+ programme is a key instrument for involving schools, training institutions and universities in "building the knowledge, skills, and attitudes on climate change and support[ing] sustainable development both within the European Union and beyond". In July 2023, the European Parliament passed the Nature Restoration Law, reinforcing the commitments made under the Green Deal (Liboreiro 2023).

The Council of Europe's commitment to sustainability and the protection of the environment and biodiversity, through its focus on human rights, democracy and the rule of law, was also underlined in May 2023 through the Reykjavík Declaration – United around our values at the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government (Council of Europe 2023).

Green priorities. The largest EU mobility programme Erasmus+ (2021–2027) has recently included "Environment and fight against climate change" as one of the programme's four main priorities. It aims to build up knowledge and understanding of sustainability and climate action, to create sustainable societies, lifestyles and economies, focusing on its qualitative impact and contributing to more inclusive and cohesive, greener and digitally fit societies. The programme states that "developing digital skills and competences and skills in forward-looking fields, such as combating climate change, clean energy, artificial intelligence, robotics, Big Data analysis, etc. is essential for Europe's future sustainable growth and cohesion".

Projects. The Erasmus+ 2020 annual report states that the programme has been shown to play an important role in preparing future generations of Europeans to engage with the climate challenge (European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture 2020). According to the Dissemination of Erasmus+ project results database, in the period 2019-2021, there were **3 126 completed or ongoing mobility projects (KA1) on the topic of the environment and climate change** and 937 projects on related topics – social/environmental responsibility of educational institutions (418), green skills (446) and green transport and mobility (73). According to the Erasmus+ 2021 annual report, out of 680 Erasmus+ projects in the field of youth, only 90 projects, or 13%, in 2022 were about green topics. Meanwhile 33% of the Erasmus+ budget for co-operation projects (that often also include learning mobilities in their activities) was allocated to projects on the environment and climate change priority (European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture 2020).

Green implementation. Alongside the programme's environmental priority is a horizontal principle that suggests the implementation of all learning mobility projects in a more sustainable manner – "projects should be designed in an eco-friendly manner and should incorporate green practices in all facets" (EC 2021). That requires the organisations and participants to apply an environmentally friendly approach when designing and implementing their projects, to discuss and learn about environmental issues and

come up with alternative greener ways of implementing their activities – saving resources and reducing waste, especially plastic, reducing energy use, compensating for carbon footprint emissions, choosing sustainable food and mobility means and ocean literacy. (European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture 2020).

As concluded in a recent exploratory study of the youth partnership, Sustainability in learning mobility, the concept of sustainability is more complex and has three vital dimensions: **environmental, social and economic**, and all three domains are applicable in learning mobility settings. According to the analysis, the lack of a common measurement approach makes more detailed definitions impossible to design. It gives space for "greenwashing", especially among young people and youth organisations who lack media literacy skills and credible sources for environmental awareness (Bárta and Ples 2021). But even with a deep understanding about all these three sustainability aspects, there is a risk that one aspect will suffer because of prioritising others. And the discussion of where to draw a line in between may be never-ending. Which element of sustainability should we care more about? Environmental, economic or social? Which one is more important? And what if one of the essential elements of learning mobility (mobility itself) supports one type of sustainability (economic or social) but damages the other (environmental)? And what if organisations are not sustainable enough themselves to care about sustainability?

Several organisations such as International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) provide international standards and guidance to organisations globally on how to organise work in a more sustainable manner and manage their social, economic and environmental impact. Many international and local organisations tend to develop their own inner environmental guidelines. In 2021, a Sustainability Checklist was introduced by the EU–Council of Europe youth partnership on how to make youth work activities more sustainable. The checklist covers the following areas related to youth projects: accommodation and venues with green certification; energy-saving practices and the opportunity to work outdoors; local, organic, seasonal, plant-based food in less packaging; paperless documentation; sustainable and fair-trade welcome gifts (or no gifts at all); minimal digital footprints and energy consumption; and low-emission transportation. It also suggests informing participants about these choices and including educational elements in the programme about sustainability, environmental protection or environmental activism (Tumėnaitė 2021).

These guidelines place less emphasis on economic sustainability. As pointed out in the study Sustainability in learning mobility by Bárta and Ples (2021), "learning mobility organisations should also show economic sustainability in efficiently using financial resources while achieving goals in the environmental and social sustainability domains". Even the organisations with high motivation may face challenges implementing all suggestions mentioned in environmental guidelines as they are often confronted with issues such as limited grants and resources, inflation, restrictions and limited supply in the market and other obstacles.

> Costs are increasing, but the lump sums stay the same. With current lump sums it is not possible to implement mobilities anymore after Covid, war and the energy crisis. (Focus group participant)

The study also suggests other preconditions for developing sustainability measures in learning mobility organisations, such as individuals' attitudes, values, knowledge and skills. **Sustainability measures and**

practices implemented at the procedural level should constitute the necessary first step before tackling sustainability on the content level, in this way avoiding "green hypocrisy" (Bárta and Ples 2021).

Grant programme guides and organisations' guidelines raise the awareness of sustainability and encourage organisations to adopt greener practices. They also provide practical tools for implementing learning mobility projects with as low a negative environmental impact as possible. But these guidelines and checklists are non-regulatory tools. They leave the interpretation of the environmental aspects and willingness to implement them up to the organisers. These aspects are also not monitored and therefore how sustainable the mobility projects actually are is unknown.

Youth attitude. According to an Amnesty International survey of more than 10 000 young people in 2019, climate change has been named as the most important issue facing the world. A youth survey, Learning Mobility in Times of Climate Change, implemented in 2021 across seven countries (Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Türkiye and China) explored the dilemma facing the young generation in reconciling mobility and the climate crisis. The results show that the majority of young people feel that climate change is serious and internationally mobile young people are aware that travel has a noticeable impact on the climate. But only a relatively small number are regularly engaged in climate issues. Even being aware that digital learning meetings cannot ensure the same effects on individual growth as a physical learning mobility experience (owing to its lack of informal learning and immersive intercultural experience in a foreign environment (IJAB 2021)), young people see it as a useful way to reduce travelling. They would like to travel less often, but for longer periods, maintaining a reasonable balance between the duration of the event and the carbon emissions produced by their travel.

> Online format limits the possibilities to come out with their stories and talk to people. (Focus group participant)

The youth survey Learning Mobility in Times of Climate Change points out that even with high motivation to live in a sustainable way, it can be difficult to make environmentally sustainable decisions. Information can be contradictory or wrong, and new insights are gained constantly. As a solution, the study recommends first to address the ability to deal with ambiguity and still find a way to take even small practical steps towards sustainable action. In other words, quoting zero waste activist Anne-Marie Bonneau, "we don't need a handful of people doing zero waste perfectly. We need millions of people doing it imperfectly."

> More people consciously decide not to travel and not to do Erasmus because of sustainability. (Focus group participant).

Green travelling. One environmental issue that is easy to measure is travel. Nonetheless, restrictions on travel run contrary to the values of physical learning mobility as such. Therefore, in line with the European Green Deal, the Erasmus+ programme encourages its participants to use lower-carbon transport as an alternative to flying, even allocating bigger lump sums and longer travelling time for "green travel" choices. However, it is still an option and not a requirement for the programme's beneficiaries. According to the Erasmus+ 2021 annual report, only 13% of participants have chosen the "green travel" option

during their learning mobility (European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture 2020).

In 2018, the European Commission launched a new initiative, DiscoverEU, that has now been integrated into the new Erasmus+ programme. It offers 18-year-old Europeans free travel passes across Europe, mainly by train. About 35 000 such travel passes have been issued each year since 2018. According to the recent Erasmus+ report, 90% of young people who answered a post-travel survey declared that, following their DiscoverEU experiences, they were more inclined to travel by train within the European Union (European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture 2022).

It is important to note that the checkbox "green travel" in mobility project applications does not fully reflect the reality of participants' travelling habits as they can also travel in sustainable ways using standard travel lump sums. The possibility to travel sustainably as part of learning mobilities depends on many aspects: applicant organisations and their partners and the resulting geographical distances, the rules for participants regarding their travel arrangements, the availability of the transportation on given dates and routes, and only then on individual's choice.

The report on the Impact of Covid-19 on CO_2 emissions (2020) shows that global lockdown caused an unprecedentedly large drop in emissions (8% in three months and 17% at its peak, in all sectors, including transportation), but "it left no detectable impact on atmospheric CO_2 or climate change". It was extremely small compared to the emissions accumulated so far, and compared to the emissions cuts needed to actually tackle climate change (Friedlingstein et al. 2020).

It is also worth remembering that the concept of sustainable travelling goes far beyond reducing emissions. According to the definition adopted by the EU Council of Ministers of Transport in 2001, a sustainable transportation system is the one that:

> allows the basic access and development needs of individuals, companies and society to be met safely and in a manner consistent with human and ecosystem health, and promotes equity within and between successive generations; is affordable, operates fairly and efficiently, offers choice of transport mode, and supports a competitive economy, as well as balanced regional development; limits emissions and waste within the planet's ability to absorb them, uses renewable resources at or below their rates of generation, and, uses non-renewable resources at or below the rates of development of renewable substitutes while minimising the impact on the use of land and the generation of noise.

Mental health and well-being of young people

The pandemic has significantly increased the importance of the well-being of young people in learning mobility programmes. While this topic has been gaining relevance in recent years, the experiences of individuals who are trapped in foreign countries, isolated from their family and friends, have drawn greater attention to the issue.

OECD (OECD 2021) data show that "young people's (15 to 24 year olds) mental health has worsened significantly in 2020-21. In most countries, mental health issues among this age group have doubled or more". The Global Report: Youth & Covid-19: Impacts on Jobs, Education, Rights and Mental Wellbeing (ILO 2020) shows that as many as half of young people aged 18 to 29 globally were at risk of anxiety and depression and that every sixth young person (17%) had some symptoms. The same study shows that as many as 38% of young people felt uncertainty and an additional 16% experienced fear regarding their future. The survey conducted by the OECD (OECD 2022) of 151 youth organisations from 72 countries indicated that the organisation representatives were "most concerned about the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on mental health". As the crisis progressed throughout 2020 and 2021, concern shifted from the immediate health threat of the virus to the longer-term impact on well-being.[1]

Universities and youth organisations have been proactive in responding by introducing or developing existing psychological support mechanisms. Research conducted (Gabriels and Benke-Aberg 2020) during the early months of the pandemic indicated that as much as 41% of students involved in exchange programmes had experienced anxiety or depression to a (very) great extent in the preceding two weeks, with this being particularly prevalent among those who had returned to their home country or were still uncertain about returning. Additionally, one in five students reported fear of social isolation and every sixth young person (17%) had received psychological support (Gabriels and Benke-Aberg 2020).

Factors associated with well-being. The abrupt transition to virtual education and the disruption of plans for international travel and study resulted in significant stress and disappointment. The factors that contributed to the anxiety and stress among international students may include: 1) an inability to return home and concerns related to their family's health, well-being and security, particularly for students from regions with high rates of infection; 2) a decline in social interactions, absence of in-person interactions and an exacerbation of feelings of isolation and loneliness; 3) an increase in independent coursework, adaptation to new forms of (digital) education and communication coupled with inadequate technological resources such as internet connectivity, software and hardware; 4) financial insecurity and concerns for the future. A significant number of programme participants were employed prior to the outbreak of the pandemic, which resulted in a loss of income. Financial uncertainty is also associated with the risks of securing housing and other necessities (Calvo et al. 2021; Bardill Moscaritolo et al. 2022).

For young people and professionals in learning mobility programmes, the added stresses of adapting to new cultures or languages remotely or not being able to travel and experience new cultures in person can compound these feelings. Additionally, those from disadvantaged backgrounds may face extra burdens due to difficulties with access to digital devices, internet connectivity and other technological challenges. Research indicates that individuals who feel trapped and fear illness and an uncertain future are at a high risk of experiencing depression and anxiety. Young people who felt that their education would have discontinued were at a greater risk. Subsequent research demonstrates that marginalised populations,

---

1. As much as 85% of youth organisation representatives are worried about the well-being of young people (OECD 2022: 9).

those who are engaged in educational pursuits, females and LGBTI young people[2] are more susceptible to experiencing a decrease in overall well-being (Spun.Out 2020; ILO 2020; Belong 2020).

For those young people who undergo regular psychological counselling or therapy, travelling, particularly participating in long-term programmes, may be challenging. If the therapy entails regular sessions conducted in their native language, the learning mobility programme requirements ought to consider the diverse needs of young people in the destination country (for example, provision of adequate internet connection for online consultations). An analysis of international students in Portugal shows that young people who had already experienced certain mental health difficulties prior to the pandemic subsequently experienced further deterioration. They also testify that they had difficulty accessing university support services and that the capacity of institutions to address the mental health of young people was insufficient (Cairns et al. 2021).

Studies show that long-term exposure to digital technologies and spending excessive time in front of screens can potentially harm emotional, mental and physical well-being (Dienlin and Johannes 2022). The Covid-19 crisis led to a significant increase in the daily use of digital devices, even for tasks and activities that were previously primarily done in person, such as studying, socialising, attending cultural and sports events, and so on.[3]

Institutional response. As soon as the Covid-19 pandemic started and the initial data highlighted negative effects on the mental health and well-being of young people, European institutions responded with a range of measures. The European Parliament urged the European Commission to develop mechanisms to support and empower young people, particularly with regard to their mental health: "the psychosocial effects of Covid-19 affect young people's mental health and ability to socialise owing to both immediate and longer-term factors ... the lack of leisure activities and social constraints have a disproportionate effect on children and young people with disabilities" (European Parliament 2021). The EU4Health programme was launched, which, among other things, addressed the issue of mental health. Additionally, the EU Health Awards funding programme supports community-level initiatives that specifically focus on young people's mental health. The European Commission designated 2022 as the European Year of Youth to comprehensively evaluate the repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic and identify systematic solutions to safeguard the well-being of young people.

The main challenge related to mental health is a lack of uniformity in the approach taken by different countries, institutions or youth organisations. Consequently, the level of support varies greatly and is dependent on the sensitivity level and available resources. The most visible change is that many services (at universities or other institutions involved in learning mobility programmes) shifted online, resulting in

---

2. An especially vulnerable group are young LGBTI people. The well-being of this population is already at a higher risk and they were particularly endangered during the pandemic. Two studies conducted in the Republic of Ireland in 2020 and 2021 show that more than 90% of LGBTI+ young people struggle with depression, anxiety and stress, two thirds of them struggle with suicidal ideation, one half with self-harm, more than half regard their mental health as (very) bed and more than 80% feel lonely (BeLonG To Youth Services 2021; 2020).
3. See also: www.nbcnews.com/news/education/remote-students-are-more-stressed-their-peers-classroom-study-shows-n1257632.

a decrease in the number of in-person counselling and therapy sessions and an increase in the number of online and telephone consultations, as well as online support groups. The Erasmus+ annual report 2020 (European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture 2020) confirms that the "Covid-19 pandemic has affected millions of learners and educators and has tested not only the resilience of education and training systems across Europe, but also the well-being of our young people". During 2020, as many as 25% more projects included themes related to health and well-being, representing the sector's response to the challenges that young people faced during exchanges (European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture 2020).

Discussion and recommendations

Free movement and (lower) motivation. The Covid-19 pandemic presented a significant challenge to young people, youth organisations and institutions due to restrictions on freedom of movement. Many programmes were cancelled completely, while others moved to online formats. Short and medium-term mobilities were frequently cancelled, with no clear prospects of when or how programmes would continue. A significant number of young people became stranded in foreign countries, without adequate support and unable to return home. Therefore, it was important to develop institutional responses to assist young people who find themselves in difficult situations with no clear way out.

The sector quickly refocused on supporting young people, with activities that include online health and psychological support. The biggest challenge three years after the start of the pandemic is ensuring the continuity of activities, for which it is necessary to ensure a sufficient number of engaged young professionals. There are serious indications that the sector has suffered a loss of human capacity in some countries and regions, making it challenging to rebuild the necessary infrastructure and organisational capacities. Stretched capacity and high risks in predicting future activities could lead to burnout or decreased youth work job attractiveness, especially in countries where youth work is not professionalised. Support for organisations involved in programmes should encompass the following aspects of their functioning during times of crisis: encouraging further professionalisation of youth work, increasing the attractiveness and importance of this profession and improving the job security of youth workers; providing organisations with greater flexibility in programmes and budgets given changing conditions and medium-term unpredictability; simplifying application procedures and reporting during the project's duration; increasing project budgets and providing for unforeseen costs (insurance, safer travel, etc.) and developing special support programmes for organisations that rely solely on donor funds. It is essential to ensure that all young people have access to programmes, with particular attention given to those from a) disadvantaged groups and b) non-EU countries. Increasing travel and accommodation costs, coupled with global inflation, have disproportionately affected young people from poorer social and economic backgrounds. As such, it is important to explore ways to offset the financial burden that programme costs place on participants (for example, some programmes require pre-financing while others do not include meals).

Moreover, young people's motivation to participate in mobility programmes decreased due to perceived risks and the role of mobility in their lives. The value of learning mobility programmes will no longer be self-evident, but will need to be reconsidered and presented to young people, together with different cost-benefit options that will include both personal gains and losses as well as the relationship to society, community, nature, economy, etc. In light of the potential for an "immobility turn", it is essential to monitor and mitigate any unwanted or negative effects. The sector should address any potential barriers that may discourage young people from participating in learning mobility programmes.

Digitalisation was a solution to replace physical learning mobility during the pandemic and it has become an essential element that complements learning mobilities – it ensures better preparation and deepens its impact during and after the learning mobility. Digitalisation has challenged and expanded the ways of learning and collaboration, giving new opportunities and also questioning old ways of learning. The availability of infrastructure and access to the internet has been increasing, but the current infrastructure may not keep up with new technology development. There is still an ongoing issue of digital competence and media literacy development, which has not been increasing over the last few years. Overloading people with information and possibilities is not increasing their digital competences, but rather creating confusion. Despite an active digital life during the pandemic, digital overload remains one of the challenges over the coming years. Therefore, there is an urgent need to harmonise the exchange of content, courses and related data and a need for digital competence development – starting from general technical skills using the technologies and ending with digital security and digital footprint.

Sustainability. Despite the variety of digital solutions available and young people's ethical dilemma to travel less, for now and, it seems, also for the near future, physical learning mobility remains the core activity and value for international learning programmes due to its high and meaningful impact on individuals. Including sustainability as a priority in the learning mobility programme raises awareness and offers learning opportunities on environmental topics, but also risks being implemented only "on paper" with no clear measures of impact and improvement. **More clear indicators, requirements and measurements regarding sustainability** in learning mobilities would help organisations and individuals to actually reduce their impact on the environment and make truly sustainable choices. It would raise their motivation and minimise the knowledge gap. The "green travelling" example is a good beginning for integrating concrete sustainability aspects into learning mobility programme practices, followed by extra funds to promote this choice as it often requires extra resources (time and money). However, offering green travel only as a recommendation is not likely to result in big changes in travelling habits. **While learning mobility programmes often require choosing the most economical means of travel, and choosing the most sustainable ones, the final choice will be often be made based on budgetary constraints.** It is also important to remember that travel is not the only sustainability aspect the learning mobility projects need to care about, and projects should integrate other elements of sustainability.

The recommendations and requirements of sustainable learning mobilities should also come together with commensurable resources so that the good intentions to make sustainable choices are not hampered by limited resources available to actually implement those ideas. Support measures for organisations such as increased project lump sums for following specific sustainable practices would encourage making more sustainable choices and developing new habits. An index or a label for green mobility projects with clear indicators to measure the sustainability level of projects could be developed, or the use of existing tools, such as a sustainability checklist, could be encouraged. And finally, monitoring the environmental aspects of implementation should be carried out on a regular basis to ensure that sustainability guidelines have been actually implemented and by how much.

Mental health and well-being. The Covid-19 pandemic and war crisis in Europe has had a significant negative impact on the mental health and well-being of young people, creating fear, anxiety and social isolation, as evidenced by various studies and surveys. Despite the policy responses and several European programmes, including the efforts of educational institutions and youth organisations involved in learning mobility programmes to address the mental health and well-being of young people, data suggest that these support services have not been fully adequate and accessible for all, highlighting the ongoing need for support that addresses the diverse needs of young people.

While the significance of appropriate psychological support was evident prior to the crisis, the crisis has highlighted its necessity. Support mechanisms before, during and after learning mobility programmes may include: a) provision of institutional psychological support and counselling to ensure that participants receive the necessary psychological support within institutions or organisations; b) establishment of collaborations with external, professional support – organisations and programmes can establish long-term collaborations with external psychologists, therapists and coaches to address the needs of their users; c) organisation of targeted workshops that can be informative, preventive or that help participants develop coping strategies when faced with specific challenges; d) sharing testimonials from programme participants who have faced specific challenges and their positive reactions; e) provision of online individual or group support through expert counselling and online participant groups (such as WhatsApp groups).

Considering that one of the causes of decreased well-being among young people is reduced social capital, feelings of belonging and community integration, the response during and after the crisis should involve increasing social capital and cohesion at community level.

References

Bardill Moscaritolo, L., Perozzi Bret, Birgit Schreiber, Luescher, Thierry, 2021. The Impact of Covid-19 on International Student Support: A Global Perspective. *Journal of International Students*, *12*(2). Available at: https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1352843.pdf.

Bárta Ondřej, Ples Marzena, 2021. *Sustainability in learning mobility: an exploratory study*, EU–Council of Europe youth partnership. Available at: https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47261800/Sustainability+in+Learning+Mobility_Exploratory+Study+by+B%C3%A1rta+Ples.pdf/fef158f2-5309-5156-f571-da65253095e1, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

Belong, 2020. *LGBTI+ Life in Lockdown Key Findings The Impact Of Covid-19 Restrictions on LGBTI+ Young People in Ireland.* Available at: www.belongto.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/LGBTI-Life-in-Lockdown-Key-Findings.pdf, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

Belong, 2021. *BeLonG To Youth Services LGBTI+ Life in Lockdown: 1 Year Later Key Findings*. Available at: www.belongto.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/LGBTI-Life-in-Lockdown-1-Year-Later_BeLonG-To-Youth-Services.pdf, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

Cairns David, França Thais, Malet Calvo Daniel & Francisco de Azevedo Leonardo, 2022. Immobility, precarity and the Covid-19 pandemic: the impact of lockdown on international students in Portugal, *Journal of Youth Studies,* 25:9, 1301-1315. Available at: www.tandfonline.com/doi/citedby/10.1080/13676261.2021.1948981?scroll=top&needAccess=true&role=tab.

Cairns, David and Thais França. 2022. "Managing Student Mobility during the Covid-19 Pandemic: An Immobility Turn in Internationalized Learning?" *Societies* 12, no. 4: 105. Available at: https://doi.org/10.3390/soc12040105.

Calvo Daniel Malet, Cairns David, França Thais, de Azevedo Leonardo Francisco, 2022. 'There was no freedom to leave': Global South international students in Portugal during the Covid-19 Pandemic. *Policy Futures in Education*, *20*(4), 382-401. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1177/14782103211025428.

Council of Europe (2023) Reykjavík Declaration - United around our values Available at: https://rm.coe.int/4th-summit-of-heads-of-state-and-government-of-the-council-of-europe/1680ab40c1 Access: 25 July 2023.

Dienlin Tobias, Johannes Niklas, 2020. The impact of digital technology use on adolescent well-being, *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience*, 22:2, 135-142. Available at: www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.31887/DCNS.2020.22.2/tdienlin?scroll=top&needAccess=true&role=tab.

Donovan, James, Manfred Zentner. 2020. Towards a better understanding of the impact of Covid-19 on the youth sector Summary analysis of the EKCYP survey. Available at: https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/72351197/Summary+13+Oct+2020.pdf/c8808ff7-25be-f7f9-3504-b2a189a64bd0, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps, 2020. *The Survey on the Impact of Covid-19 on Learning Mobility Activities.* Available at: https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021-09/coronavirus-mobility-impact-results-may2020_en.pdf

EU–Council of Europe Youth partnership, *Conceptual background paper. Quality in learning mobility.* Available at: https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262316/Background+Paper+on+Quality+in+Learning+Mobility.pdf/9613a580-5db0-43a0-acda-a8cf091a7afc, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

European Commission, 2018. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European economic and Social committee and the Committee of the regions on the Digital education action plan. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52018DC0022&from=EN, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

European Commission, 2020. *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions Digital Education action Plan 2021-2027 Resetting education and training for the digital age.* Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020SC0209&from=EN, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

European Commission, 2022. *The Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI).* Available at: https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/desi, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

European Commission, 2023. *2023 annual work programme "Erasmus+": the Union Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport.* Available at: https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/document/2023-annual-work-programme-erasmus-the-union-programme-for-education-training-youth-and-sport, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

European Commission, 2023. *Erasmus+ Programme Guide,* Publications Office of the European Union, Available at: https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-04/ErasmusplusProgramme-Guide2023-v3_en.pdf, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2020. *Erasmus+ annual report 2020*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2021, Available at: https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/36418.

European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2022. *Erasmus+ annual report 2021*, Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/635340.

European Parliament, 2015. *The role of intercultural dialogue, cultural diversity and education in promoting EU fundamental values*. Available at: www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2016-0005_EN.pdf.

European Parliament, 2021. The impact of Covid-19 on youth and on sport, www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0045_EN.html.

Farnell Thomas, Skledar Matijević Ana, Šćukanec Schmidt Ninoslav, 2021. *The impact of Covid-19 on higher education: a review of emerging evidence*, NESET. Available at: https://nesetweb.eu/en/resources/library/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-higher-education-a-review-of-emerging-evidence/, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

Fraillon Julian, Ainley John, Schulz Wolfram, Friedman Tim, Duckworth Daniel, Eds., 2019.

Friedlingstein Pierre, Le Quéré Corinne, Canadell Pep, Jackson Rob and Peters Glen, 2020. *Impact of Covid-19 on CO_2 emissions,* presentation. Available at: https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/1.GCP_.pdf, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

Gabriels, Wim, Benke-Aberg, Rasmus, 2020. *Student Exchanges in Times of Crisis - Research report on the impact of Covid-19 on student exchanges in Europe*. Erasmus Student Network AISBL. Available at: https://esn.org/sites/default/files/news/student_exchanges_in_times_of_crisis_-_esn_research_report_april_2020.pdf, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

IEA – International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, 2018. *EA International Computer and Information Literacy Study 2018. Technical Report,* Available at: www.iea.nl/studies/iea/icils/2018, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

IJAB, 2021. *Learning Mobility in Times of Climate Change*. Available at: https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/1.GCP_.pdfhttps://ijab.de/en/publications/lemocc-recommendations-for-a-climate-sensitive-learning-mobility, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

ILO, 2020. *Youth and COVID-19*. Available at: www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_753026.pdf.

ITU-International Telecommunication Union Development Sector, 2020. *Digital Skills Insights 2020*. Available at: https://academy.itu.int/sites/default/files/media2/file/Digital%20Skills%20Insights%202020.pdf.

Kiviniemi Juha, 2021. *LTA on Digital Youth Work National strategies for digital youth work Work Package 1*, Earsmus+, DIW, Finish national agency for education. Available at:

www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/DYW_National%20strategies%20for%20digital%20youth%20work_Report.pdf.

Krzaklewska Ewa, Şenyuva Özgehan, 2020. *Covid-19 and Learning Mobility: A Desk Research Study*, EU–Council of Europe youth partnership. Available at: https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/72351197/Covid-19-pandemic-and-Learning-Mobility.pdf/1092db65-9413-6eea-63bb-9ecce8282220, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

Kristensen Søren (Ed) 2022. *Handbook on quality in learning mobility*, Council of Europe and European Commission. Available at: https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47261953/Handbook+LM.pdf/3a5c103c-0367-4eba-1aca-ee544826f557?t=1574944472000.

Marinoni Giorgio, Hilligje van't Land, Trine Jensen, 2020. *The impact of Covid-19 on higher education around the World,* International Association of Universities. Available at: www.iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau_covid19_and_he_survey_report_final_may_2020.pdf.

OECD, 2019. *TALIS 2018 Results (Volume I): Teachers and School Leaders as Lifelong Learners*, TALIS, OECD Publishing, Paris. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1787/1d0bc92a-en.

OECd, 2020. *Shaping the Covid-19 recovery. Ideas from OECD's Generation Y and Z.* Available at: www.oecd.org/about/civil-society/youth/Shaping-the-Covid-19-Recovery-Ideas-from-OECD-s-Generation-Y-and-Z.pdf.

OECD, 2021. *Supporting young people's mental health through the Covid-19 crisis*. Available at: https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=1094_1094452-vvnq8dqm9u&title=Supporting-young-people-s-mental-health-through-the-COVID-19-crisis.

OECD, 2022. *How governments can put young people at the centre of the recovery*. Available at: www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/92c9d060-en.pdf?expires=1681572238&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=7ECFB4E5086595B3786A88EB0F2CFAC4.

Pool of European Youth Researchers of the Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth, 2020. *Effects of Covid-19 across youth work and youth activities*. Available at: https://rm.coe.int/report-of-the-survey-on-the-effects-of-covid-19-on-young-people-and-yo/16809feae9, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

RAY-COR, 2022. *Research project on the impact of the CORONA pandemic on youth work in Europe (RAY-COR)*. Available at: www.researchyouth.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/RAY-COR_Multilingual-Survey_Key-Findings_20220915.pdf.

Salmi Jamil, 2020. *COVID's Lessons for Global Higher Education*, Lumina Foundation. Available at: www.luminafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/covids-lessons-for-global-higher-education.pdf.

Sanson Ann, Van Hoorn Judith, Burke Sussie, 2019. Responding to the impacts of the climate crisis on children and youth. *Child Dev Perspect*, 13(4): 201–7. Available at: https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/cdep.12342.

Spun.Out, 2020. *Young Voices During Covid-19 HOW'S YOUR HEAD? Report of a national consultation with young people on mental health and wellbeing.* Available at: www.gov.ie/en/publication/91f4b-hows-your-head-young-voices-during-covid-19-september-2020/, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

Trine Jensen, Giorgio Marinoni and Hilligje van't Land,2022. *The Second IAU Global Survey Report on the Impact of COVID-19*. International Association of Universities. Available at: https://iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/2022_iau_global_survey_report.pdf.

Tumėnaitė Neringa, 2021. *Greening the youth sector, Sustainability checklist*, EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership. Available at: https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47261953/EUCOE+YP+Sustainability+Checklist+final.pdf/fd50d766-28a3-c119-bb29-06a0f33cc7c2, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

Williams Nicola, 2022. Screen Time and Mental Health, *News, Medical, Life Sciences*. Available at: www.news-medical.net/health/Screen-Time-and-Mental-Health.aspx#4.

WWF, 2008. *One Planet Mobility A Journey towards a sustainable future*. Available at: http://assets.wwf.org.uk/downloads/opm_report_final.pdf, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

Zhu Chengyan, Huang Shiqing, Evans Richard and Zhang Wei (2021) Cyberbullying Among Adolescents and Children: A Comprehensive Review of the Global Situation, Risk Factors, and Preventive Measures. *Front. Public Health* 9:634909. Available at: www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpubh.2021.634909/full.

Web pages

Amnesty International, Climate change ranks highest as vital issue of our time – Generation Z survey, www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2019/12/climate-change-ranks-highest-as-vital-issue-of-our-time/, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

Erasmus+ EU programme for education, training, youth and sport, Dissemination of Erasmus+ project results database, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

European Commission, 2021 EU Health Award, https://health.ec.europa.eu/eu-health-policy/interest-groups/eu-health-award/2021-eu-health-award_en, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

European Commission, 2340th Council meeting – TRANSPORT / TELECOMMUNICATIONS – Luxembourg, 4-5 April 2001, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/PRES_01_131, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

European Commission, A Europe fit for the digital age, https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age_en, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

European Commission, A European Green Deal, https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

European Commission, Commission welcomes the political agreement on the European Year of Youth, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_6648, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

European Commission, EU4Health programme 2021-2027 – a vision for a healthier European Union, https://health.ec.europa.eu/funding/eu4health-programme-2021-2027-vision-healthier-european-union_en, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

European Commission, Recovery and Resilience Facility, https://commission.europa.eu/business-economy-euro/economic-recovery/recovery-and-resilience-facility_en, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

European Commission, The Digital Skills Gap in Europe, https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/digital-skills-gap-europe, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

EUROSTAT, Being young in Europe today – digital world, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Being_young_in_Europe_today_-_digital_world, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

EUROSTAT, Digital economy and society statistics – households and individuals, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Digital_economy_and_society_statistics_-_households_and_individuals#Internet_access, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

France International Student Statistics, https://erudera.com/statistics/france/france-international-student-statistics/, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

Germany International Student Statistics 2023, www.studying-in-germany.org/germany-international-student-statistics/, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

International Student Statistics in Spain 2022, www.studying-in-spain.com/spain-international-student-statistics/, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

International Student Statistics in UK 2023, www.studying-in-uk.org/international-student-statistics-in-uk/, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

Liboreiro, J (2023) Nature Restoration Law survives knife-edge vote in the European Parliament amid right-wing backlash. Available at: www.euronews.com/my-europe/2023/07/12/nature-restoration-law-survives-knife-edge-vote-in-the-european-parliament-amid-right-wing Accessed 25 July 2023.

Paris Agreement, 2015, https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

Responding to the Impact of Covid-19 on International Youth Work Mobility, https://you.wemove.eu/campaigns/responding-to-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-international-youth-work-mobility, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

UNESCO, Reopening schools: When, where and how? www.unesco.org/en/articles/reopening-schools-when-where-and-how, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

Update on our actions connected to the call for a response to Covid-19 impact on international youth work, https://iywt.org/update-actions-call-response-covid-19-impact/, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

Youth Goals, The 11 European Youth Goals, https://youth-goals.eu/youthgoals, last accessed on 15/04/2023.

Appendix

Table 1. **Mobile students from abroad in European countries for the period 2016-2020**

YEAR	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Belgium	61 102	45 583	53 896	52 143	54 080
Bulgaria	12 201	13 746	15 155	16 499	17 575
Czech Republic	42 812	44 261	44 767	45 871	47 768
Denmark	34 034	33 602	33 288	32 371	31 478
Germany	244 575	258 873	311 738	333 133	368 717
Estonia	3 474	3 914	4 391	5 043	5 520
Ireland	17 883	19 983	22 283	24 913	24 141
Greece	23 734	25 067	26 325	27 789	22 429
Spain	49 837	64 927	70 912	77 062	82 269
France	245 349	258 380	229 623	246 378	252 444
Croatia	3 031	4 781	5 014	5 722	4 768
Italy	92 655	97 563	106 611	54 855	58 508
Cyprus	7 722	10 451	11 273	13 085	14 463
Latvia	6 465	6 130	7 564	8 380	10 148
Lithuania	5 501	5 806	6 300	6 697	6 559

Luxembourg	3 268	3 298	3 362	3 455	3 602
Hungary	26 155	28 628	32 332	35 479	38 422
Malta	1 032	1 195	1 515	1 999	2 414
Netherlands	89 920	96 289	104 690	115 724	124 876
Austria	70 483	73 964	75 259	74 631	75 870
Poland	54 734	63 925	54 354	55 191	62 091
Portugal	19 815	22 194	28 122	35 755	44 005
Romania	25 824	27 510	29 112	30 294	32 560
Slovenia	2 675	3 090	3 420	5 071	5 974
Slovakia	10 072	10 764	11 597	12 730	14 254
Finland	23 197	24 168	23 714	23 794	23 591
Sweden	28 029	28 747	30 912	30 912	31 935
Iceland	1 260	1 231	1 430	1 546	1 636
Liechtenstein	530	698	751	787	800
Norway	10 880	8 955	12 294	12 399	12 887
Switzerland	51 911	53 368	54 279	55 698	57 972
United Kingdom	432 001	435 734	452 079	489 019	
North Macedonia	3 188	2 903	3 096	2 946	3 657

Serbia	10 690	11 624	11 361	11 505	11 419
Türkiye	87 903	108 076	125 138	154 505	185 047

Source: Eurostat