

# Youth Partnership

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Partnership between the European Commission  
and the Council of Europe in the field of Youth



## Research on Community impact indicators Concept note

The impact of learning mobility on the participants of the international mobility projects is well known, broadly researched and published. However, while the impact on communities is known by practitioners or experts of the youth field and often referred to as “added impact”, it is rarely in the centre of studies or measured. Yet, recent developments in European youth policies and programmes show that more emphasis is put on understanding the impact not only on the individual level, but also on the local community or wider society.

In order to undertake research into the community impact, it is necessary to focus on some preliminary questions: What constitutes impact? And, for that matter, what constitutes a community? What do we already know and what do we need to know in order to improve? What is feasible? How is impact ensured and evaluated? Which sectors of our work are aware of this information, and who else needs to know? How is the research being connected to policy makers and practitioners across Europe? How is policy being built on the evidence from practice?

The importance of looking into the community impact indicators has been emphasised at various meetings of the European Platform of Learning Mobility (EPLM), and there is an agreement that we need a deeper and shared understanding of what community impact is, to start a process of common definition and then how to use it and build on it.

### Background information

The work on the indicators of the impact of learning mobility on community, stems from the previous research and activities of the EPLM network, including:

## **The conference “The Power of Learning Mobility”**

In this conference, held in Ostend in April 2019, the impact of Learning Mobility on different levels was discussed: the impact on the individual level, on organisational level and on community level – and their mutual connections and influences. Already the preparation of the conference highlighted the lack of profound results on the impact on the community level.

## **Desk research on social impact tools and resources**

Furthermore, the desk research on indicators on social impact of learning mobility analysed existing approaches for indicators of impact on different levels.

1. It showed the lack of coherent research approaches to assessing the impact of learning mobility for communities or the society.
2. Various research results indicate that there are effects of learning mobility programmes on home and host community:
  - Individual learning effects have impact on the person’s assessment of sending community upon return.
  - Fostering of cooperation,
  - increased participation, increased involvement in community issues, increased interest in political issues,
  - higher acceptance of diversity in society (sending community)
3. Concrete indicators or methods for measuring the impact on the community level are seldom formulated
4. Existing indicators and methods for impact assessment are almost exclusively focused on the participants and project leaders or managers

Based on the previous work on this topic, the planned research on indicators on community impact will analyse the impact from the following perspectives

- The impact of learning mobility on both, hosting and sending communities
- Looking at the impact from three angles: individual, (youth) organisations and community directly – always with focus on the impact on the community level
- Looking at various thematic topics identified.

These topics are the following:

- i) employment (labour market as well as training and employability),
- ii) education and skill / competence development,
- iii) infrastructure,
- iv) cooperation and networking
- v) participation, democracy, and active citizenship
- vi) culture and diversity,
- vii) tolerance – acceptance – respect,
- viii) inclusion,
- ix) identities and belonging,

These topics, though all inter-related and mutual influential, can be group to three different areas that will be analysed for the development of indicators on the impact of learning mobility on hosting and sending communities

While the indicators that will be developed shall offer an objective, non-context-specific approach, they are even more important as they will help assess also the impact on communities of the redefinition of learning mobility, with lockdown measures imposed by Covid-19 in many countries of the world. They will, furthermore, offer insight on how the high level of community engagement, collaboration, and focus on the common good that was witnessed in many communities in an effort to prevent the dissemination of the disease had any connection, or linkage, with learning to learning mobility.

## **Thematic areas**

### **Area 1: Skills, competences, employability**

Many types of mobility programmes as their key goal emphasise the acquisition of skills and competencies that can be useful in the labour market. Different types of (hard and soft) skills that could be learnt and/or developed abroad are one of the main reasons why young people engage in mobility programmes in the first place.

More and more academic research and project evaluation reports show the impact of learning mobility on individual level, where engaged individuals acquire new knowledge, develop skills and competences that increase their chances to find a (good and well paid) job. The knowledge, skills, competence and experience transfer from one social context to another could have impact on local labour market and community. If a young person returns to his country, he participates in the process of knowledge and skills transfer enriching the home community. Roman and Paraschiv explored the relationship between entrepreneurship and mobility and concluded that “experience of mobility inside the European space has a positive impact on entrepreneurship, which could lead to the attenuation of youth unemployment as well as to a sustainable economic development for the home countries” (Roman and Paraschiv, 2018: 774).

In order to measure the impact of learning mobility on the community, it is needed to:

1. Gather existing indicators related to the skills, competences and employability that make the difference in the local community, and classify them,
2. Propose a set of new indicators that would measure skills and competencies related to employability and the impact on local community.

### **Area 2: Citizenship education, civic activism and participation**

Citizenship education, civic activism and participation are at the core of many of the programmes that support learning mobility. They are also extensively covered in the manuals for youth workers or youth leaders, which often include a chapter on active citizenship, call for

action, ideas for action, and similar topics. The rationale behind learning mobility and youth work is to create a more active, responsible society that, in the long run, understands and lives by the principles of active citizenship in general, and European citizenship in particular.

Community engagement is of paramount importance to achieve a participatory, active, inclusive, and peaceful civil society. Communities should be accounted for and have a clear role in the dynamics, challenges and decisions that affect them. Regardless of the area of the world, or specific context, community engagement plays a meaningful role in assisting communities in being the key agents to address the issues that mostly affect them. Young people play a significant role towards that paradigm (Christens and Zeldin, 2016) but the extent to which their participation in learning mobility programmes, projects, and initiatives concretely unfolds remains to be assessed.

Research shows that learning mobility contributes to more active and cohesive societies by including young people with fewer opportunities. It also shows that through the learning mobility the hosting communities are becoming more active, they participate in more common activities together, and also engage with local organisations more (Jezowski et al. 2017: 16). There is also evidence that participating in a learning mobility programme leads to more active participation in the local (home) communities (Bello 2011: 352) and that “the ability of such programmes to influence levels of civic engagement and sense of civic responsibility” is apparent (Stanley, 2005: 109). Young people’s participation in learning mobility also translates both in an enhanced sense of self and a more significant understanding of the socio-political issues that surround them (Stanley, 2005: 109). Furthermore, it also promotes a deeper level of agency by making young people feel that they can try to “bring about change in society” (Stanley, 2005: 109). Shalayeva notes that volunteering, for example, “promotes active citizenship and facilitates participation in society; it safeguards the democratic foundations of European societies and is deeply rooted in their nature” (Shalayeva, 2012: 35). These and many other publications are based on the insights of experts and draw on the logic that if individuals participate in the learning mobility, this benefits the community. These conclusions are important, but they remain to depart from an individual level standpoint and assessment. While it is clear that there is more proneness to take action and that these young people will be, in principle, more active in result of joining a learning mobility, it is still important to develop instruments that will allow to evaluate how this enhanced community engagement will translate specifically in the community and impact on it.

The type of impact that goes through the direct participants of the learning mobility into societies could indeed be significant but is rarely proven with evidence and is mainly based in the personal opinions of the participants. In this sense, it cannot draw general and thorough conclusions on how the community impact of learning mobility concretises. The impact usually remains abstract as the concepts of participation, civic activism and citizenship education is rather broad. In this sense, there is a need to develop descriptive indicators that could show us that the change in a community has occurred and how it might look like, when we look to each of these areas. In order to do that, the concepts of civic activism, participation and citizenship education should be deconstructed.

Tools that can be supportive in developing these descriptive indicators: The Active Citizenship Composite Indicator is comprised of three dimensions: political life, civil society and community and can assist in outlining these thematic areas (civic activism, participation and citizenship education) for the purposes of developing community indicators. Additionally, a set of Minimum Quality Standards and Indicators for Community Engagement (UNICEF, 2020) was recently developed and it is a tool that can offer some direction on finding common ground and shed light on what is worth considering when looking at the specific impacts at the level of communities, with the necessary adaptations as there are intrinsic specificities to learning mobility.

In light of the research carried out, and the desk researches previously elaborated on 'Indicators of Social Impact' and on 'Social Impact Tools and Resources', it is clear that community impact and, particularly, civic activism, participation and citizenship education, have been gaining increased attention both at the local, national, international and European levels, and that these are particularly relevant in the field of learning mobility.

Are communities that welcome more learning mobility participants more active in terms of civic engagement? Do these communities promote more participation in the overall spheres of the community life? Are they more demanding towards the need of citizenship education after being in contact with these participants? And the communities that send the participants? Are they more prone in having its members participating in learning mobility, more civically engaged and better educated on citizenship? Or do they become so when the participants come back? Do some participants make a difference? Or, on the other hand, change only occurs when the participation numbers in learning mobility are significant? These are some of the questions that the indicators of community impact of learning mobility will be able to address.

### **Area 3: Culture, Social capital and Return Migration**

Building on Council of Europe's indicators for intercultural dialogue in non-formal education activities, this section focuses on proposing community impact indicators of intercultural learning and intercultural dialogue in the context of youth learning mobility.

Intercultural learning in this context refers to the process of becoming more aware of and better understanding one's own culture and reflecting the own identity (identities) and other cultures, in order to increase international and cross-cultural tolerance. In this concept culture is understood as term holding various elements: customs and traditions, religions and norms, gender roles, social structures like family concept, degree of individualisation or degree of openness.

Social capital can be understood, following Putnam (2001), as connections between individuals, social networks and norms based on reciprocity and trust. These connections can be bonding inside groups of individuals referring and creating a feeling of common identity, bridging to other groups and linking between socially structured groups. Learning mobility creates more and new connections and thus change existing social networks in hosting and sending communities. Recent discussions also focus on the mutual influence of social capital

and solidarity. The impact of return migration after mid- to long-term learning mobility is strongly connected to changes in social capital in the communities of the returnees – both on the sending and the hosting side.

Indicators of community impact in this section have to focus on changes of the awareness and reflection of identities, on changes in intercultural understanding, openness to diversity and trans-cultural change of community bonds, bridges and links in communities, solidarity infrastructural connections and innovations.

The areas are interconnected and mutual influencing and multiplying the impact.

