



EUROPE ON THE MOVE: ASSESSING THE REAL IMPACT AND AMBITIONS BEHIND THE NEW EU LEARNING MOBILITY TARGETS

CONTEXT

On 15 November, the European Commission launched its [Proposal for a Council Recommendation](#) on revamping learning mobilities across Europe. Titled ‘*Europe on the Move*’ – *learning mobility opportunities for everyone*, it **expands the vision beyond Erasmus+ and beyond the traditional learners targeted for mobility, namely those in higher education**. The new, all encompassing perspective will be up for voting during the mandate of the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU (**14 May**).

AMBITIOUS LIFELONG LEARNING PERSPECTIVE

Consultation

The Proposal’s text echoes demands and perspectives from civil society and mobility beneficiaries across the EU. **This was possible due to a meaningful consultation process which included at all steps stakeholders involved in the implementation, dissemination, monitoring and evaluation of mobilities across the EU.** The study commissioned for this Proposal organised interviews with varied civil society stakeholders, followed by a workshop with civil society to validate research results, and then by a series of online consultations to expand on the comments made during the validation stage. This was complemented by Citizens’ Panels organised over 2023, where (potential) beneficiaries of different ages and backgrounds were consulted, and came up with a set of [recommendations](#).

Impact

The incorporation of civil society and citizens’ recommendations becomes apparent, with several references made to lifelong learning in a holistic manner. References to the entire spectrum of the learning experience (school, higher education, vocational education and training, adult learning, early childhood education and care and sport) are made, while learners of all ages and staff in all sectors and formats of learning are considered. The lifelong learning perspective was not experienced only in terms of the Proposal’s breadth, but also in terms of its learning outcomes, with references made to developing competences from the [2018 Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning](#).

Nevertheless, two of the most important perspectives taken from stakeholders refer to **establishing new learning mobility targets and focusing on those most disadvantaged learners**. The new learning



mobility targets¹ reveal a commitment to be more ambitious, but also to expand the perspective of mobilities beyond higher education, and truly conceive them in a lifelong learning fashion. This has been welcomed by civil society, with hopes of finding meaningful ways to monitor and advance their implementation. Nevertheless, it has to be acknowledged that the devil is in the details, as, for example, the definition of learning mobility was watered down in higher education, decreasing the requirement of accumulating 15 ECTS to only a minimum of 3 ECTS.

Policy coherence

The consultation with the different stakeholders allowed for the new approach to the learning mobility framework to be considered within existent EU initiatives. **The Proposal gives new impetus to the implementation of the following Council Recommendations and initiatives**, among others:

- [Key Competences for Lifelong Learning](#)
- [Automatic recognition of qualifications and learning periods abroad](#)
- [European Universities Initiative](#)
- [Vocational education and training for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience](#)
- [European Learning Model](#)
- [European Digital Credentials for Learning](#)
- [European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships](#)

Similarly, the implementation of the future Council Recommendation is linked with diverse funding opportunities coming from DG EAC, DG EMPL and DG REGIO. **This was coupled with an understanding that the Erasmus+ programme is not the sole avenue for mobility, with other options from Member States considered in parallel.** The synergies are welcomed by civil society as long as they are followed-up by a coordinated effort for the funds to complement each other and for the beneficiaries to have access to information about all of them.

SKILLS AND TALENT MOBILITY PACKAGE

Employability discourse

The Proposal was launched within a broader set of initiatives dubbed as the [Skills and Talent Mobility Package](#). The other initiatives were linked to easing the road for third-country nationals to come within the EU for the purpose of closing labour market gaps. **This association between learning mobility and gains for the labour market narrows down the Proposal's scope.** It is clear that learning mobility benefits the professional development of all learners, and the Proposal acknowledges at all steps that the order of relevance for learners is as follows: 'personal, educational and professional development'. Nevertheless, the nuanced approach within the Proposal could be impacted by Council negotiations.

Specific measures

Considering the framing of the Proposal towards third-country nationals, all of the recommendations aimed at them revolve less around the holistic development brought about by a full internationalisation

¹ In higher education, the share of graduates with a learning mobility experience should be at least 25%. – In vocational education and training, the share of vocational learners benefiting from learning mobility abroad should be at least 15%. – In all education and training, and youth and sport systems, people with fewer opportunities should account for at least 20% of all learners benefiting from learning mobility abroad.



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of the learning system, and rather views **third country nationals as ‘talents’** that will enrich the performance of the education system and, potentially, the labour market. This is a perspective that civil society does not support, especially as this is **bound to exacerbate inequalities** rather than promote a proper recognition and validation of qualifications, non-formal and informal learning and a provision of legal migration pathways for all.

CONTRADICTIONS

Funding

Civil society has strongly supported the ambitions linked to the new learning mobility targets and the honest perspective of what still needs to be done to ensure learning mobility is a viable option for any learner that wishes to undertake them. Therefore, **it is surprising to see that the Proposal makes no request for additional funding to support mobilities and considers the existent available budget sufficient.** Multiple calls in the negotiations and reviews of the Erasmus+ programme have pointed towards the lack of funding to ensure mobility for all². Instead of addressing this gap, calls have been made to either reduce grants to reach out to more learners or simply diminish the amount of learners that go on mobilities. Cost-saving measures such as the much dreaded virtual exchanges have been made due to the same logic.

This situation is made worse by the documented evidence that the current size of Erasmus+ grants is insufficient even for those learners that manage to go on mobility³. In addition, grants may not match all the costs of going on mobility, such as the loss of income for workers, hence the need to increase the grants and also finance complementary measures such as transnational European paid training leave schemes⁴. Therefore, the question arises on how can these concerns be addressed while committing to increase the amount of disadvantaged learners benefitting from the programme, considering also the additional funding that such learners might require? How will the increased costs associated with green mobility be also weathered by a lack of financial commitment to the Proposal for a Council Recommendation? And finally, **one might question the actual commitment that the EU institutions place on mobility if no adequate financial support is allocated.**

Pressure on Member States and education and training institutions

A significant challenge recognised across different research related to learning mobility points toward **difficulties experienced by Member States in adapting their learning offer to include learning mobility**, due to legislative barriers related to the curricula, recognition, and other logistical elements linked to the mobility. In the context of a more ambitious Learning Mobility Framework, there is a **need to provide additional guidance to Member States** on how they can facilitate the implementation of the existing Council Recommendations linked to the Framework and on how they can improve the stance of mobility across their learning offer.

Similarly, the administrative burden on education and training institutions increases further, with many in need of cooperation with not-for-profit civil society organisations that can assist with learning

² The current total amount of the budget and the 5.8% total budget share for education and training for adult education are not sufficient to achieve a participation of 60% of adults in ALE by 2030, especially due to the lack of structural funding for adult education at the national and regional levels in Europe and the high degree of dependence on EU project funding. Data from EAEA's feedback to Erasmus+ 2023, [here](#).

³ ESNsurvey - XIV Edition: "Understanding the experiences and needs of exchange students in challenging times", [here](#).

⁴ EAEA Learning Mobility 2023, [here](#). EAEA Transnational Paid Education Leave Schemes 2023, [here](#).



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mobility. In the face of arising burdens, it is important to ensure more consistent monitoring on the implementation of existing initiatives linked to learning mobility at EU and national level, to ensure that all the commitments are followed through and pressures are alleviated from education and training institutions.

As the learning mobility targets become more ambitious, but the strain on Member States and stakeholders is not alleviated, it is **hard to believe that the ambitious wording of the Proposal will be taken up in meaningful policy changes**. This is also coupled with a lack of sufficient details on how the learning mobility targets will be monitored, and on how existing challenges related to data collection (i.e. to avoid double-counting), or to ensure that each sector of learning collects accurate data can be addressed. **LLLPlatform and its members consider it relevant to establish a detailed roadmap, with concrete examples, to help Member States and education and training institutions to implement the suggestions of this Council Recommendations more smoothly**. For the moment, a detailed list of ways in which the different stakeholders must operate at national level is not available.

Definition of mobility

The contradiction between ambitions and funding is joined by a further contradiction linked to how mobility is defined. The definition used by the Proposal is ‘moving physically to a country other than the country of residence to undertake studies, training or non-formal or informal learning’. **This comes at odds with any mentions of virtual mobility, considering that the ‘physical movement’ criterion is not met**. Therefore, it is surprising to see some inconsistent mentions of virtual mobility as a viable option to increase mobility across the EU. LLLPlatform and civil society stakeholders support digital tools in learning, and understand the benefits of blended mobility and of using digital technology to facilitate a more easy adaptation to the start of the mobility. **However, the stakeholders have made it clear on numerous occasions that virtual mobility does not exist and that virtual exchanges should not be counted as mobility considering that learners do not benefit from an immersive internationalisation experience that fully develops the competences associated to the mobile learning journey⁵**. Nevertheless, virtual exchanges bring significant benefits in blended learning as well as in the preparation and follow-up of physical learning mobilities. **To this end, they must be categorised and monitored as a support mechanism**.

NEXT STEPS

Mobility Scoreboard

LLLPlatform is excited to see calls to see a revamped Mobility Scoreboard that will be co-created with experts from Member States. The Scoreboard must be mainstreamed across the Education and Training Monitor as well as across the European Semester monitoring processes if it is to be meaningfully followed. Moreover, the selection of experts from across the EU must be done in partnership with the different stakeholders involved in the learning mobility process, while their engagement must be iterative and capture different stages across any reforms linked to learning mobility at Member State level. **Transparency and inclusivity must be the defining principles for the process of selecting experts**. LLLPlatform and its members look forward to collaborating with EU institutions and Member States in this process.

⁵ 2023 LLLP Statement on Learning Mobility for All, [here](#).



In addition, **there needs to be an acknowledgement that the level of monitoring is divergent across the different education and training sectors. Therefore, targeted, tailored and realistic measures for mapping learning mobility must be provided for each field.** In the absence of this, the sectors which struggle with monitoring will continue to be left behind and not provide reliable data for evidence-based policymaking. Related to this, accreditation mechanisms for the learning mobility schemes ought to be created at national level, especially for those programmes beyond Erasmus+, so as to ensure quality assurance but also to support the monitoring process and mainstream the Mobility Scoreboard across national level mechanisms for monitoring.

Collaboration with stakeholders

The promising recommendations to ‘establish a structural cooperation with stakeholders in the area of learning mobility’ have been called upon by all stakeholders in the sector, including the education and training institutions that have been burdened by the complex process of learning mobility. Therefore, LLLPlatform and its members are keen on making this a reality across the Member States, creating a new narrative around not-for-profit NGOs working on mobility that can support learners and education and training institutions. Nevertheless, such recommendations must be followed-up by a clear commitment to monitor their implementation in Member States, and guiding both Member States and education and training institutions in finding the right partners. LLLPlatform and its members remain available to work on this process.



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