Measuring Return on Investment from EU VET mobility

THE ROI-MOB SURVEY IN PORTUGAL – SOME NOTES

INDEX

Partners

Measuring return on investment from EU VET mobility – ROI-MOB. Project n°. 2016-1-IT01-KA202-005396

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1. THE SURVEYS

The surveys were applied in Portugal as agreed in the Consortia, with no need for major adaptations.

1.1. SAMPLES

The samples were mainly built using EUROYOUTH mailing list and national partners' contacts. An open call to answer the questionnaires was also made, adding 6 more contacts to the list. To identify and contact the highest number of sending entities, the Portuguese National Agency public list of the Erasmus+ KA102 funded projects from 2014 to 2017 was used. The final numbers of samples and answers are:

- Participants going abroad from Portugal: a total of 484 participants, of which 36,6% answered
- Participants coming to Portugal: a total of 1.030 participants, of which 27,7% answered[1]
- Sending and/or hosting schools and training centres[2]: 137 organisations, of which 69,3% answered
- Hosting companies and organizations[3]: 340 organizations, of which 51,8% answered

Such results in terms of answers allow us to claim for some representativeness in the groups focused and to reach some conclusions that will help in raising quality and understanding trends.

1.2. QUESTIONNAIRES

The questionnaires were translated and reviewed by the Portuguese project team to assure the correct application of technical words and jargon used in mobility projects, but also to make sure questions were correctly drawn and adapted to Portuguese reality. For the final validation of the questionnaire two tests were made: the alpha test, where the questionnaire was answered by the rest of EUROYOUTH staff also involved as experts in sending and receiving mobilities, and the beta test, with a pilot group of 6 sending schools, 4 hosting organisations and 5 outgoing participants answering the questionnaire and giving their feedback for fine tuning.

2. THE ACTORS

2.1. PARTICIPANTS

On the opposite to the European samples, the participants from Portugal are more male (55,5%) than female (44,5%). Participants are also younger, with an average of 20,5 years old (with no major difference between females with an average of 20,1 and males with an average of 20,8). It is therefore natural that the very vast majority, before starting mobility, were still attending school (93,7%), either exclusively (72,6%) or working at the same time (21,1%). Now-a-days, the number of respondents with no relation to school is higher: 53,4% are working or looking for a job and 5% are NEETs. Still a high number is still finishing their degrees or advance for higher qualifications.

The sectors they are working in follow the pattern of the hosting companies that answered the questionnaire: industry and hospitality. Actually 58,9% of participants are working in the same sector of their internship. There is

[1] The answers of the participants coming to Portugal where integrated in the other National Reports, when their original was from one of the countries represented in the partnership (Italy, Germany and Spain), for the remaining countries of origin the results were integrated and analysed in the in the global European report.

[2] In Portugal, dual system is not implemented and therefore Companies cannot be sending institutions. At most they can be Consortium coordinators. This is why referring to data in Portugal we mention only "sending schools". This also explains why there are no apprentices or almost no students/interns in a working situation, as they study full time.

[3] Hosting institutions are generally referred to as companies, including in Erasmus+ official documents. However, not for profit organizations can host participants for internships, like public bodies and institutions or non-profit organizations. Therefore, to reflect this diversity and to be more rigorous, the expression "hosting organization" will be preferred.

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also a relevant group of participants (33) living in other European countries, evidencing a concrete impact of mobility in life plans.

2.2. Schools and training centres

The schools involved in VET mobility are mostly vocational schools and training centres, representing in a total of 70,8%. Lower and higher secondary school represent 28,1%. Acting both as sender and receiver is common to 67,4% of schools. Respondents profile is mostly female (66,7%), from 30 to 60 years old (93,8%). We can consider their role reflects the relative importance of mobility within schools, as 50,0% state to be the mobility responsible and 25% are the principals or vice principals of the school. Experience with mobility goes beyond Erasmus+, including Leonardo da Vinci programme and others before this one, as 78% have more than 4 years of experience in sending participants abroad and in 2017/2018 almost half of them moved more than 20 participants (54,9%).

2.3. Hosting companies and organisations

The profile of hosting companies and organisations is much diversified. They are divided in 16 sectors that cover all business sectors, being the more represented hospitality (16,2%), service providers for other companies (13,9%), non profit services (11,6%) and industry (9,8%). Respondents are again more females (55,8%) and a majority is part of the board (56,2). Only 11,8% are have a specific HR function. The predominant range of age is 30 to 45 (52,8%). A total of 64,1% is well experienced in hosting participants with 4 or more years of experience.

The company sizes goes from 1 to more than 1.000 employees. However, the vast majority has less than 50 employees (72,6%), showing the high participation of small organisations and SMEs in Erasmus+ programme. Out of these, micro organisations (less than 10 employees) represent 42,9%. This is, of course, a reflection of the composition of the business sector in Portugal, but it might also be a sign that SMEs have advantages in terms of learning environment, openness and flexibility in the production process, proximity of the participants to the whole hierarchy, among other possible positive aspects. Apparently proportional to the company size is the number of participants hosted – 64,5% hosted between 1 and 4 participants in 2017/2018. Also related to the size of the company is the hosting strategy - 56,6% of the respondents state that they receive participants occasionally, this probably means their work does not count with or needs their participation.

3. The Erasmus+ mobility experience

3.1. The organisation of mobility

Most of the sending schools have variable numbers of participants sent abroad (87,9%), probably depending on funds raised. For 1 in each 4 schools (27%) it covers 50% or less of the requests received. To distribute the mobility grants only 1,1% of sending entities declares not to apply criteria. When criteria are applied, four are highlighted: personal and social skills (80,4%), curriculum/performance (73,9%), participants' motivation to go abroad (67,4%) and language skills (40,2%). Half of sending schools organise their mobility projects on their own (52,2%), but many act within networks of support – intermediary organisations (40,2%), consortiums (15,2%) or informal networks (12%).

Hosting companies and organisations are working on their own (49,1%) and/or with intermediary organisations (42,2%). The rate for acceptance of participants varies a lot – 28% accept less than 25% of the request and 27,4% accept all the requests received.

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3.2. The involved countries

The destination countries differ from European results. The countries of the ROI-MOB project – Italy, German, and Spain - only account for 47,2% of the mobilities' destination. If we compare this with preferred countries, we will see that there are preferences in destinations in many sending schools (50,6%), out of which some mention the three project countries - 4,4% mentions Spain, 8,7% mentions Germany and 19,6% mentions Italy. Companies also show little preference about the country of origin of participants (5,9%), but when there is Italy or Spain are mentioned. The relative presence of Italy and Spain might be explained by the cultural and linguistic proximity that favour integration in society and at work, making short mobilities more smooth and fruitful.

3.3. The experience length

The average duration is higher that European results – 10,7 weeks (against 8,3), ranging from 1 to 17 weeks. Regarding types of participants, those who were working or active in the labour market show lower durations of mobility. However the median duration is clearly 12 weeks and it accounts for more than 30% of the answers. This means the in Portugal projects implemented were already heading towards the ErasmusPro duration (3 months) since 2014, and not only since it is a priority for funding (since 2017).

3.4. Budget sources for mobility

Similarly to European results, sending schools rely on European funds to send mobility (83,5%), while hosting companies and hosting schools rely more on their own budget (67,7% and 60,2%), in spite of a part being originated in EU funds (21,1% and 31,8%). Other sources – own sources, other public sources and other sources – are also relevant, in sending (4,1%) and in hosting for companies (11,4%) and for hosting schools (8%). Hosting companies and organisations mention supporting extra equipment purchase (40,5%) and extra working materials (44,1%).

Families' investment was also inquired. It becomes clear that working participants, that were few, represent a lower costs for their families (median of 140) than participant studying or studying and working (median of 200). On the other hand, 32,9% declare that families have spent no money with their mobility. These values are lower than European numbers collected (863€) and if we divide it by the average duration of 10,7 weeks, it roughly corresponds to 21 Euros per week (versus 104€).

Looking at the global answers and at some particular answers, in particular the extremely high and deviated values, it seems the differences between concepts was not always clear, specially between own and private fund and the overlapping of own funds with EU funds. This would require a closer attention in a further study.

3.5. Non monetary costs of mobility

Even if sending schools and hosting schools and organisations consider the same three main costs for their mobility activity – organisations costs, staff indirect and direct costs and costs and time of dedicated structures – they differ in the weight given to each of them, according to the role but also depending if they are a school or an organisation/company.

Sending schools ranks of indirect costs is: organisational costs (37,9%), direct and indirect staff cost is equally balanced (25,3%) and costs of dedicated structures (24,1%). These same schools, when hosting, declare higher costs related to dedicated structures (31,7%), the lower organisational costs (31,7%). Staff cost remain the same (25%), but with more emphasis on indirect costs (18,3%). This might be explained because the sending activity usually involves mainly the project responsible, the participants and eventually their teachers, while hosting participants, individually or in groups, affects the whole school, classes, board, services, etc. Hosting schools have

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people devoted to tutorship/training (67,2%) and to social activities (18%) and sending schools have dedicated persons for tutorship/training (59,3%) and for the whole process (26,4%)

Hosting organisations feel less weight on organisational costs (13%) and on dedicates structures (22,1%), but much more on staff (53,9%), being the indirect staff costs more representative (37,7%). If we recall that hosting organisations' dimension in is quite understandable that all staff work is affected with the presence of interns, even if not in charge of them. Still, 83,5% answer to have persons with the specific task of tutoring/training. In terms of hours spend per month in hosting the two main scales are of 1 to 5 hours with 29,3% and the one with more than 10 hours with 48,2%. Commitment to participant and to his/her integration appears hence to be continuous.

Interestingly, few declare to have cost in losses of production or in losses in teaching time (the percentages go from 5% to 6,9%). This means either that participants hosted have a specific schedule and activity outside the daily and main activity or, on the opposite, integration of interns is very smooth and does not damage the working rhythm or work quality.

Indirect costs of participants were asked in terms of things sacrificed and time spent preparing. There are considerable differences between males and females. The biggest one is related with the respondents who stated to have sacrificed nothing – 2,6% of women against 12,8% of men. Female also have higher rates in job opportunities lost (6,6% against 4,3%), getting out of comfort zone (42,1% against 38,3%) and in family sacrifice (31,6% against 21,3%). Male numbers for 'sacrifices' are higher in relation to friends (4,3% against 2,6%) and other personal relationships (12,8% against 9,2%). Time dedicated by female participants in preparing mobility is practically the same (a median of 11 and 10 days). These features follow the European trend that puts at the centre of indirect costs the abandonment of a safe context with a safety network. The question of if these costs are seen positively is worth demanding if we consider than female participants gave higher importance to family and comfort zone but at the same time opted more to lose job opportunities.

4. Benefits perceived from mobility

4.1. By participants

For most of participants in terms of learning process, the internship abroad was in continuity of work (4,6%), of a possible internship organized in Portugal (26,7%) and of their training path (26,7%). Novelty in learning was perceived by 19,9% (less than European values with 40%) and richness (fair duties) is recognised by 18,2%. On one side, it is natural that novelty is not high, because if they were studying, they made curricular internship that demanded to pursue specific learning results. On the other side, this might mean that satisfaction needs to be related also to other facts than acquisition of professional skills, such as working in a different cultural and organisational environment, dealing with people in other languages, getting to know other products and services and ways to produce and deliver them, as much as the living abroad as a personal experience. Progresses in professional skills are confirmed by 87,3% of participants (with a small higher rate for males) and 37,3% of participants took up to 3 months to find a job.

Language, that appears to be a central dimension of mobility in terms of leaning and profile strengthening, was assessed for professional but also for personal communication. English was used to work by 61,6% and the language of hosting country by 33,3%, summing a total of 94,9% of participants using learned language at work. In their private life, non mother languages usage drops to 56,3% and mother tongue raises to 38,6% (instead of 2,3%). This might indicate, knowing that many times participants are sent in groups, that at destination they spend their leisure time both with other Portuguese origin participants, locals and probably with other nationalities (5,1% used

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other languages in their private lives). Progresses in languages skills are confirmed by 94,8% of participants, with equal share among genders.

The following tables summarize the evaluation of soft skills improved and emotional changes during mobility.

Table 1 - Soft skills improvement (%)

	Male	Female	Total
Intercultural skills	44,3	48,7	45,1
Autonomy, self management	38,1	41,0	39,4
Taking responsibility, initiative	33,0	33,3	33,1
Self-confidence	32,0	33,3	32,6
Problem solving	20,7	12,8	17,1
Team work	16,5	7,7	12,6
Mental agility	7,2	15,4	10,9
Commitment to school/company	3,1	1,3	2,3

Table 2 - Emotional changes classified as "very much" (%)

	Male	Female	Total
More sociable and helpful	66,0	76,9	70,9
More open to initiative and new challenges	63,9	76,9	69,7
Conscious of own resources	63,9	76,9	69,7
More extroverted and enthusiastic	61,9	69,2	65,1
More able to control your actions/future	59,8	69,2	64,0
Emotionally stable, resisting frustration	51,6	57,7	54,3

Soft skills more valued by both genders are undoubtedly intercultural skills and autonomy, as expected by the Erasmus+ Programme. Main difference between genders curiously regards to problem solving and team work that is more valued by male participants as an improvement. Female participants, on the opposite, recognize more development in terms of mental agility. To analyse self perception before mobility or departure point by gender could bring more light into these differences. In any case, compared to European results, the set of skills related to entrepreneurship seem relatively more valued than interculturality.

The main gains are on personal side, as commitment, identification and proximity with the organisations involved in mobility does not grow. One cannot say with this date if this happens because of the individualistic vision over mobility where organisations are seen as means and as temporary belonging or if the was already commitment that was maintained.

As for emotional change their impacts are lower than global numbers that range from 83,3% to 93,6% but also more focused on the relation with persons and outside world. Girls systematically state to have felt more emotional changes with differences up to 10% from males.

The more highlighted impacts in terms of occupational and social opportunities were:

- Added value for participants' profile (45,1%)
- Self confidence (43,4%)
- Feeling of European citizenship (43,4%)
- Willingness to work abroad (45,1%)

However, gender differ once again, added value of mobility for participants' profile is more recognized by female (59%) than male (34%). On the other hand, more male participants declare to have changed their life plans after mobility (37,1% vs. 34,6%). The will to start their own business was only strong to 1 person in each 5 (18,6%).

4.2. By hosting and sending schools

Benefits perceived by sending schools are clearly related with participants improvement of skills (language skills – 65,2%; motivation to learn, self consciousness, school completion – 80,4%). Benefits for schools themselves are more on global and organisational level and still moderate (around 1 in each 4 schools): enhancing reputation/brand (29,4%), innovation in teaching (26,1%) and improving international collaboration (26,1%).

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Staff's skills are lower in classification with 10,9% in management skills improvement and 15,2% in intercultural and intergenerational exchange.

When schools fulfil the role of hosting organisation the benefits perceived change a lot, maybe indicating, once again, how much the hosting activity reaches more the whole educational activity and local community, in comparison with the sending of students abroad. Enhancement of reputation/brand, improvement of international collaboration and encouragement intercultural and intergenerational exchange appear with higher scores (37,1%, 54,8% and 41,9% respectively). And, two new other dimensions appear: broadening mindset and business ideas (32,3%) and improving collaboration with local stakeholders (38,7%).

Such average level of benefits for the schools and for the staff should be further considered as, now-a-days, Erasmus+ project has for foundation European Development Plans that have a clear internationalization strategy on the long term for staff and organisations' development. With these data we can guess that probably mobility of participants only contributes for these aims up to a point and mostly when schools are hosting, maybe because the impact and involvement is more widespread and because 'action' is happening in the school and not abroad.

4.3. BY HOSTING COMPANIES AND ORGANISATIONS

Hosting companies seem to be less enthusiastic or categorical with benefits taken from mobility, with the higher value being attributed to intercultural and intergenerational exchange (52%). Apart from this one, benefits are multiple and recognized with almost equal importance:

- Improve international collaboration (32,4%)
- Improve employees' language skills (30,6%)
- Broaden mindset or business ideas (30,6%)
- Improve employees' innovation skills (28,9%)
- Enhance reputation/brand (27,8%)
- Improve production or sales (25,6%)
- Attract potential talents (24,9%)
- Improve teamwork efficiency (22,5%)

This brings into evidence the diversity of motivations and interests of organisations when hosting participants in internships, but also the internal and external impacts it can have.

5. PROBLEMS TO SOLVE

The obstacles that hosting schools and hosting organisations and companies highlighted more (at least 1 in 5) are:

- Language barriers (hosting organisations: 50,3%; hosting schools: 24,2%)
- Inadequate professional standards (hosting organisations: 39%)
- Inadequate personal and interpersonal competencies (hosting organisations: 29,6%)
- No financial benefit for hosting organisations (hosting organisations: 39,6%; hosting schools: 34%)
- Administrative burden (hosting organisations: 20,1%; hosting schools: 40%)
- Heavy costs (hosting schools: 24,2%)

It becomes evident that schools denounce less obstacles and mostly related to mobility management (administration and programme costs), while for hosting companies and organisations the focus is more on participants fitting to their needs and expectations (language, professional skills and personal profile). This might happen because when hosting internships schools can more easily tailor the training programme (theoretical and practical) to the

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participants' profile (50,8% do have special pathways for incoming students), while for companies and organisations it is participants who need to fit into their daily life and production process (92,3%). This is also reflected by the schools' criteria to host participants. Only 17,9% have a selection plan that evaluates duration, time of the year and participants profile, while other 46,4% make a case by case analysis.

Number of candidates, inadequacy of tutors, lack of trustworthy partners or accommodation have some expression, but are probably more related to specific sectors or experiences, as they hardly reach the 10%. All agree, in any case, that the inexistence of financial support for the hosting activity is an issue.

From the sending side, once again, the obstacles are related with structure and organisation of mobilities, not so much with participants:

- Administrative burden (62,1%)
- Language barriers (42,1%)
- Heavy costs (32,6%)
- Lack of grants respecting to demand (25,3%)
- Opposition of families (23,2%)

The novel feature here is the 'negative' role played by families, representing a call to raise more awareness of parents to make them perceive potential benefit for participants and their greater involvement in the preparation of mobility.

These aspects follow the European conclusions on the main obstacles. It is interesting to realise that two of them -- administrative burden and heavy costs - are related with the so-called quality in mobility, recognition of VET Charters and in the programme simplification by the European Commission. On the other hand, the obstacles related with participants are precisely those where selection criteria are applied and where participants declare to have improved and learned more: language skills, professional skills and soft personal and social skills.

6. Final evaluations

The overall satisfaction is very high for all actors questioned, with the following ascending order: hosting companies and organisations (7,4 over 10 points), hosting organisations (8,8), participants (8,8) and sending schools (9,3).

The fact that hosting companies and organisations have the lowest score can be explained by the more moderate benefits perceived. Still for these actors it is worth to host mobilities. To have a deeper understanding of hosting reality, maybe another perspective might be introduced in further studies, considering the small dimension of these organisations – are there more subjective reasons to host participants like sense of duty, fun or routine breaking.

Regarding global satisfaction of participants, there are still 4% of them that are bellow the neutral line, with 5 or less points, representing negative global evaluation. At the same time, it is relevant to see that satisfaction is much higher than the balance between efforts/investments (-10 points) and benefits/gains (+10 points). A few participants (3%) feel to have put in as much or more than they have taken out of the mobility and quite a number of them (27,2%) feels to have taken more than given, but not enough to the positive weight to higher than 5. The positive balance is 6 or more to 69,8% of the participants and only 16,6% reached the 10 positive points.

The main conclusion that can maybe be withdrawn from this is that mobility satisfaction and benefits do not come 'for free', they imply commitment and choices. This might not also mean that efforts made are negative; they are a price to pay or a choice to be made in order to make mobility happen. This is probably why 99,4% would recommend a friend to do mobility, because they only recall positive aspects or positive aspects prevail.

Finally, in terms of general impact distribution among the stakeholders identified, as shown in the next table, makes it once again clear that participants are at the centre of mobility in terms of gains. Apart from participants, no actors

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see themselves as the first or second most benefited or, as said in European analysis "all actors perceive a level of own benefit that is lower than levels recognized by other actors". Participants see as second most benefited their hosting organisations, these, on their turn, identify sending schools as second most benefited and these point out to labour market as second most benefited. We can almost say it is a perfect circle where benefits are passed to each other. Not so considered in the benefits seems to be the European Union that is moderately recognized by participants. This can be explained by the intangible impacts on European Union in social cohesion, economic competitiveness or innovation or even in population higher qualification and self realization.

Table 3 - Most benefited stakeholders according to each actor (%)

		% of answers by actor		
		Participants	hosting organization	sending schools
% that state these stakeholders are the most benefited	Participants	70,8%	76,2%	95,5%
	Sending schools	7,0%	12,3%	3,1%
	Hosting organization	10,5%	2,9%	1,5%
	Labour market	5,9%	5,8%	9,5%
	European union	5,9%	1,9%	1,6%

7. Future trends

Even if some differences were found between results raised in Portugal and results raised at European level, the mains ideas, conclusions ad trends remain, we believe, common to the four participating countries: Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain.

Mobility is a trend that came to stay and is enlarging to more and more European citizens and residents. Mobility is also an aim for 2020 and, by now, only 25% of the sending schools declare to involve more than 10% of students in mobility, when the aim is 20%. Practically all participants recommend others doing a mobility (99,4%). Most of hosting bodies also want either to maintain the number of participants hosted or to raise this number, with small differences between hosting organisations and companies (21,6%+76,7% = 98,2%) and hosting schools (18%+77,1% = 95,8%). And the same happens with sending schools, they want to maintain or raise numbers of participants sent abroad (13,3%+85,6% = 98,9%).

This calls for larger budgets, larger number of projects and mobilities and for larger number of actors involved in mobility programmes. However, this study points out for the need for some improvements and the need to remove obstacles. Some depend on European Commission, such as budgets, subventions and programme rules that will affect numbers, administrative burden and cost perception. Others belong to the so-called quality realm and can be workout by the several actors involved.

The main sensitive issues and those troubling more the benefits perceived are language barriers, mobilities management (administrative burden and direct and indirect costs) and the inadequacy of personal and professional profiles of participants towards the labour market (in is important to remember that at the end of the day hosting organisations are potential employers). Issues like family opposition or accommodation quality seem to be gaining space as well, even if they are seen as obstacles only by more or less 10% of the actors inquired.

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