

Towards an Erasmus School Mobility Charter

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1. Summary

The mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme shows that many schools, in particular small ones or with fewer resources, are struggling with drafting and managing project applications and dealing with aspects related to risk management and support of the exchange students.

An Erasmus School Mobility Charter could be a way for organisations experienced in pupil and/or school staff mobility to support and reach out to schools struggling to use the programme, and access a simplified procedure to apply for a number of mobilities every year under Key Action 1 (KA1), for the whole duration of the funding programme.

Charter holders should meet certain criteria (i.e.: inclusion of newcomers and evidence of outreach, quality of learning mobility, experience in the development of internationalisation plans for educational institutions, and experience in managing grants), in order to submit simplified KA1 applications with a consortium of partners (such as schools, pupil exchange organisations, and public authorities) which could vary over the years.

Thanks to their expertise in mobility and their outreach, non-profit pupil exchange organisations can be crucial partners in supporting a variety of schools in applying for projects and managing mobilities, thus making quality mobility programmes more accessible, not only to schools that have the capacity to engage in EU-funded projects.

2. The current situation

Internationalisation of schools is essential in a Europe living by the motto 'united in diversity', promoting common European values and preparing pupils to live and work in the EU common labour market.

Internationalisation is possible through projects aimed at cooperation with educational institutions in other countries, and usually includes individual pupil mobility, class exchanges and school staff mobility (trainings abroad, job shadowing, teaching assignments). These projects concern mostly upper secondary schools.

For what concerns long term individual pupil mobility, to the knowledge of AFS Intercultural Programs¹, pupils between 14 and 18 years old are increasingly mobile thanks to exchange programmes (+3% every year). Every year more than 40.000 pupils are coming to an EU country on exchange and about 150.000

¹ The biggest international non-profit pupil exchange organisations

pupils from EU countries are going abroad for a period between 3 and 10 months². The large majority of pupils goes on an exchange programme offered by specialised organisations. Since 2009, the EU has included individual pupil mobility within its funding programme 'Comenius', after the successful implementation of the [pilot action run in 2008](#)³. This action was then included in Erasmus+ and between 2014 and 2016, about 800 pupils enrolled in it.

Moreover, schools organise so-called 'class exchanges' namely short-term group mobility of pupils, thanks to twinning agreements with schools and towns in other countries, specialised organisations, and EU funding. Only in 2016, almost 70.000 pupils participated in such programmes thanks to Erasmus+.

A first attempt to map the overall phenomenon of pupil mobility has been made thanks to a study by the European Commission in 2013⁴, which shows that almost 200.000 pupils from EU countries go on a 'school stay' abroad every year. However gathering data by researchers has proved to be very difficult.

Teachers (students and in-service) are also mobile thanks to a variety of EU and non-EU funding programmes. Short-term mobility, in particular training courses, is the main type of mobility. Job shadowing or long-term mobility of teachers is very limited due to language barriers and the fact that education systems do not allow for teachers to spend a long period abroad during their initial education or working time.

In November 2017 the European Commission set out the vision of an **European Education Area**, through the Communication 'Strengthen European identity through education and culture', recognising that mobility at a young age is crucial to foster European identity and to reach a wider range of young people. The Communication identifies pupil mobility as priority within the doubling of Erasmus+, and sets the **target of about 500.000 pupils mobile every year** thanks to EU funding, starting gradually as from 2021 and increasing throughout the duration of the funding programme. This target includes both individual and group mobility. The proposal for the Erasmus programme post 2020 confirms the objective of expanding pupil mobility, as well as school staff mobility.

3. The feedback from the mid-term evaluation of Erasmus+

The mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme shows that schools would like to engage more in pupil mobility but at the same time are **struggling with drafting and managing project applications and dealing with aspects related to risk management and support of the exchange students**. In fact in country reports we can read that "the implementation of simplified grants has not changed the administrative burden of schools" (Estonia), and "we see that only larger schools/institutions can invest the time and resources needed" (Belgium), and "there are major difficulties in developing and implementing mobility projects in schools with high staff turnover, such as many of the schools in rural area" (Romania). Moreover, "there is perceived to be untapped potential in the cooperation between the school education and youth fields, which have the same target group, in order to ensure greater interconnection between formal and non-formal education" (Czech Republic).

² Internal market study, AFS Intercultural Programs

³ Comenius Individual Pupil Mobility Pilot Action run by the European Federation for Intercultural Learning

⁴ Study on mobility developments in school education, vocational education and training, adult education and youth exchanges, European Commission

It is therefore clear that small schools and schools with fewer resources do not have the capacity to engage in internationalisation process alone. If this initiative is left to the willingness of single teachers or other staff, a mobility project would not have a long-term strategic impact on the whole school. In addition, the possibility of cooperation between formal and non-formal education providers within school mobility project should be seen as a valuable opportunity.

4. A solution: an Erasmus School Mobility Charter for organisations expert in pupil and school staff mobility

An Erasmus School Mobility Charter could be a way for **organisations experienced in pupil and/or school staff mobility** to access a **simplified procedure to apply for a number of mobilities** every year under Key Action 1 (KA1), for the whole duration of the funding programme.

A Mobility Charter is already used within the Erasmus+ programme in the Higher Education and in VET in different ways, according with the specificities of the sectors, therefore when conceptualizing a Mobility Charter for the school education sector, specific needs and characteristics need to be considered.

The holders of the Erasmus School Mobility Charter would meet the **following criteria**:

- **Inclusion** of newcomers in mobility programmes and evidence of outreach to learners and staff in the school education sector
- **Quality of learning mobility**, namely thorough active involvement of all stakeholders in the process (students, school staff, parents, the community) and thorough preparation, support and follow up of the mobility experience, including: recognition of the study period abroad, development of intercultural competence of participants, risk management.
- **Experience** in **mobility** and in the **development internationalisation plans** for educational institutions
- **Experience in managing grants**

A **possible model** is granting the **Erasmus School Mobility Charter to organisations meeting the criteria mentioned above** (coordinators) **which every year can submit a simplified KA1 application with a consortium of partners** made by any public or private organisation active in the field of school education (such as schools, pupil exchange organisations, and public authorities).

The consortium applying for mobilities would not be the same year after year: **an award criterion would be to involve always new partners in the projects.**

In the project application **the Charter holder would have to explain the European development plan for each of the partners involved and detail a sustainability plan** which would enable the partners to become experts in pupil mobility and fundraise to ensure the continuity of the internationalisation with different funding sources and initiatives.

Schools could be part of the project either directly as a partner or through a partner organisation which involves them during the project implementation. Schools would access the support in internationalisation provided by the Charter holder (coordinator) and would remain responsible for the quality, the content and the recognition of the mobility periods and would be required to sign an agreement with the coordinator to specify the roles and responsibilities, once the mobilities have been granted. All organisations involved

would need to comply with the European Quality Charter for Mobility⁵.

If a Mobility Charter would be adopted in the School education sector and schools and organisations experienced in school mobility could obtain it according to the model explained above, they would be able to:

- **Ensure continuity of the engagement of schools in the internationalisation process** outlined in the 'European development plan'. Charter holders would ensure that all mobilities of their institution and of the partners involved are systematically part of the school curricula. Mobilities would range from job shadowing and teaching assignments, to training for school staff, long-term mobility of teachers, short-term group exchanges and long term individual mobility for pupil. These elements of internationalisation would allow networking with bodies in other countries, getting to know and appreciating different school systems, developing the professional competences of teachers, promoting the acquisition of key competences of pupils, in particular citizenship, multilingualism, personal, social and learning to learn competence.
- **Ensure outreach to and inclusion of schools that do not have the capacity to manage EU projects alone.** In fact experienced schools and organisations expert in pupil mobility that are Charter holder would reach out to schools in disadvantaged and rural areas which have no access to the programme.
- **Ensure quality of mobility.** Only schools and organisations expert in pupil mobility and operating with well-defined standards would access the Charter and therefore offer a quality experience, including to schools that are newcomers to the programme, as they would actively reach out to and support them. A key aspect of quality in projects involving mobility in the field of school education is the cultural immersion in the host country and host community, both from the side of pupils and school staff. Quality also includes the support to all stakeholders involved before during and after the mobility, in particular related to risk management and psychological support.

⁵ [Recommendation \(EC\) No 2006/961 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on transnational mobility within the Community for education and training purposes: European Quality Charter for Mobility \[Official Journal L 394 of 30.12.2006\].](#)

5. A key role for expert pupil mobility organisations for outreach, inclusion and quality

Non-profit pupil mobility organisations exist since the 1950s, they have strong relations with schools and support them in running quality mobility programmes. However, organisations expert in pupil mobility which are not schools currently cannot apply or take part in Erasmus+ projects which include pupil exchanges, which are implemented under KA2 Strategic partnership – School education, as the format offered for this type of mobility specifically targets schools.

In the VET sector, in some countries National Agencies allow access to the programme to the so-called ‘VET mobility providers’, namely entities that are expert in organising mobility activities in the VET sector, which are not VET institutions. EfVET⁶ claims that this is a relevant phenomenon and that ‘VET providers today prefer to receive services such as searching of hosting institutions, arrangements of accommodation from professional organisations than to organise these on their own, or rely on the hosting institution with which there is a reciprocal agreement’.

The Erasmus+ mid-term evaluation confirms that most schools struggle in engaging in international projects and need support from experts. Pupil mobility organisations are willing, able, and committed to support schools in their internationalisation, with a view to ensure quality of all mobilities within the Erasmus programme framework. In particular, **non-profit pupil exchange organisations have specific characteristics which make them suitable to offer the most effective support to schools, bringing in expertise in mobility and also cooperation with the non-formal education sector:**

- They are **structured in local chapters all over the territory** of a country and can look out for schools needing support.
- They are **part of international networks of trusted partners** who have strong relations with schools, therefore can reach out to schools in any other country.
- They have the **resources, expertise and interest in**
 - **assisting the school in developing an internationalisation plan** and valorising in a systematic way the mobility experiences of the students, both in-person or virtual, individual or group ones;
 - **fostering intercultural learning** and the use of new pedagogical methods, and introducing experiential learning methods typical of non-formal education, which help students and teachers reflect on intercultural encounters;
 - **ensuring quality mobility**, by offering trainings to students before, during and after the exchange, by supporting teachers in managing risks, by preparing for and supporting cases of cultural shock, emotional counselling and other typical scenarios in long-term international pupil mobility;
 - **recruiting and supporting host families**, making the exchange a learning experience also for them.
- They enable **impact in the local community** thanks to the involvement of host families and volunteers in the mobility experience.
- They **promote volunteering and solidarity**: being non-profit and mission-driven, exchange organisations offer the opportunity to engage in volunteering activities, both during and after the exchange. Thousands of volunteers are active in different capacities, united by the common mission of increasing intercultural understanding. Through cooperation between schools and exchange organisations, pupils can be part of this growing community and engage in concrete experiences of lifelong learning and active citizenship.

⁶ European Forum of Technical and Vocational Education and Training, almost 300 members.



Who we are



EFIL is the umbrella of 30 national organisations running AFS Intercultural programmes in Europe, providing intercultural learning opportunities for school pupils, schools and volunteers. AFS is a non-profit organisation reaching 12.000 pupils and 40.000 volunteers in 110 countries every year.



EEE-YFU is the umbrella organisation for national YFU organisations in Europe and currently has 29 member organisations. YFU is a non-profit youth exchange organisation, providing exchange programmes for 15 to 18 year old students in more than 50 countries. EEE-YFU works to support its member organisations to grow as quality and sustainable organisations



The Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU) is the platform for cooperation between the national school student unions active in general secondary and secondary vocational education in Europe. All Member Organisations are independent, national, representative and democratic school student organisations.



The Association for Teacher Education in Europe (ATEE) aims at enhancing the quality of Teacher Education in Europe and supporting the professional development of teachers and teacher educators at all levels. Its members are individuals and institutions involved in the research and practice of teacher education, both within and outside higher education.

