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# Position Paper on Internationalisation of School Education

Building on Europe on the Move  
recommendations for the future of Erasmus+



Internationalisation of education is essential to further develop national education and training systems in the EU and foster the personal and professional development of both learners and educational staff, as well as institutional improvement in line with key political objectives of the EU. The EU has been pursuing this objective in a more and more resolute way since 2017, when the European Education Area (EEA) was launched with the vision of 'making learning mobility the norm. On 14 May 2024, the Council of the European Union adopted the **Council Recommendation 'Europe on the Move' - learning mobility opportunities for everyone**, which outlines how Member States can progress towards this shared vision. In 2025 the Union of Skills has highlighted the pressing need for transversal skills to improve European competitiveness and resilience, and the role of learning mobility in their development.

**In spite of great strides made in key focus areas, we are still far from achieving the EEA.** Internationalisation of education and training systems has become widely recognised for its benefits for individuals, organisations and local, national, and European-level systems, but significant barriers to accomplish the EEA and follow up on the recommendations of Europe on the Move remain.

**Firstly, there is a lack of trust between education and training systems of Member States**, as exemplified by automatic recognition of learning periods abroad: "*the lack of automatic mutual recognition of qualifications and of the outcomes of learning periods abroad continues to hamper learning mobility in the EU*"<sup>1</sup>. Recognition of learning periods abroad - applicable not only for higher education, but also for secondary education - is central to the EEA and Europe on the Move, but requires further focus and concrete measures. And although most Member States have some legislation in place, the approach is fragmented<sup>2</sup>. In school education it is the responsibility of schools to recognise the learning outcomes of periods abroad in most Member States, but for the majority of countries there are no set guidelines. Longer-term learning mobilities - between 3 months and a full school year - are the most effective activities towards fostering policy change for automatic recognition. However, in the school year 2022/23 less than 6% of all pupils on an individual learning mobility with Erasmus+ stayed abroad for more than 2.5 months, and only 0.4% for a full year. Learners taking part in short-term mobilities are mostly able to catch up on missed content and easily reintegrate into their sending school, while pupils spending up to a full school year abroad rely on systematic and holistic school policies for reintegration and recognition. It is estimated that approximately 60.000 pupils take part in a longer-term learning mobility every year (pre-pandemic), but the vast majority does not receive recognition of the learning outcomes from the period abroad as there is no policy in place<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Europe on the Move, point 11, p. 6

<sup>2</sup> Expert Network on Recognition of outcomes of learning periods abroad in general secondary education (2021). *Member States Analysis*

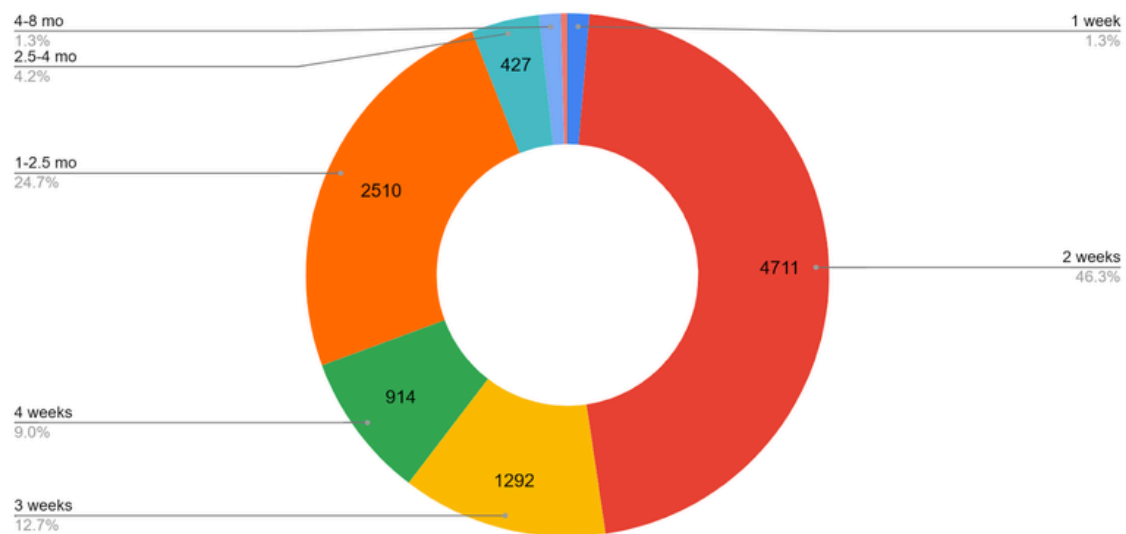
<sup>3</sup> Expert Network on Recognition of outcomes of learning periods abroad in general secondary education (2021). *Member States Analysis*

**Secondly, Europe on the Move calls for schools to offer a variety of learning mobility opportunities for learners and staff for the benefit of individuals, institutions and wider policy change<sup>4</sup>.**

While short-term mobilities are largely recognised for their benefits to individuals and for their unique accessibility, longer-term individual mobilities are not only more effective in terms of policy change for automatic recognition, but research shows that they have greater impact for individuals, in relation to language learning<sup>5</sup>, improvement in cultural self-awareness and respect, and higher levels of intercultural competence<sup>6</sup>. Research findings also show that EU common values related to respect for human dignity, fairness, cultural diversity, and human rights are developed in longer mobilities, especially when in the hosting country there is a welcoming environment and possibility to be active at local level in the hosting community<sup>7</sup>. In spite of this, **long-term individual learning mobility is largely underrepresented**: with Erasmus+ in 2023, approximately 92% of all learning mobilities for pupils in school education were short-term group mobilities<sup>8</sup>, while only 8% were individual learning mobility of pupils. For the school year 2022/23, approximately 10.000 pupils went on an individual learning mobility abroad with Erasmus+, but 94% of pupils stayed abroad for less than 2.5 months<sup>9</sup>.

### Learning mobility for pupils Erasmus+ 2022/2023

Total: 10165 pupils



<sup>4</sup> Europe on the Move, point 8a, page 7

<sup>5</sup> Trimestrale Intercultura 113, *What happens to exchange pupils' values during their life abroad*, Bardi, Vecchione, Baiutti, Ruffino, page 19

<sup>6</sup> Mattia Baiutti, Darla K. Deardorff & Roberto Ruffino (21 Feb 2024): International pupil mobility in secondary schools: which variables are most closely associated with the development of intercultural competence?, *Globalisation, Societies and Education* Fondazione research on values and behaviour

<sup>7</sup> Trimestrale Intercultura 113, *What happens to exchange pupils' values during their life abroad*, Bardi, Vecchione, Baiutti, Ruffino, page 26.

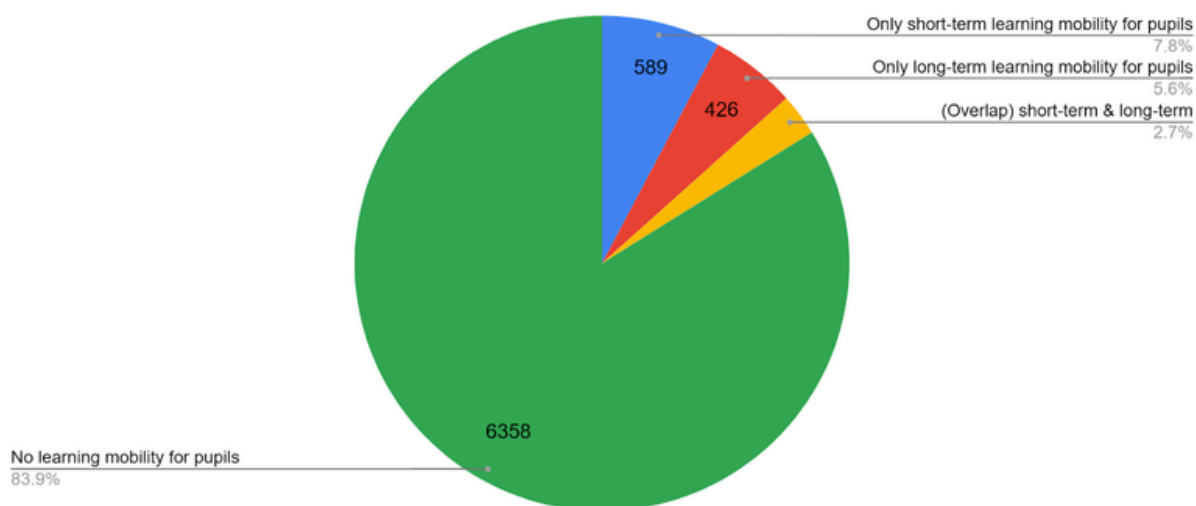
<sup>8</sup> Erasmus+ Annual Report 2023, p. 64

<sup>9</sup> Data publicly available: <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/resources-and-tools/factsheets-statistics-evaluations/statistics/for-researchers>

Even schools that have received an Erasmus+ accreditation in school education, and therefore have a simplified access to funding for internationalisation activities, are not engaging in organising individual learning mobility for pupils; as of the school year 2022/23, 84% of accredited institutions were not organising individual learning mobilities for pupils.

### Erasmus+ accredited institutions in school education

School year 2022/23



In addition, only 10 out of 32 Erasmus+ programme countries implement E+ IPM longer than 2.5 months, and the countries left out are often the same ones where private learning mobility organisations struggle to launch long-term IPM programmes, as there are no school policies supporting them. **Erasmus+ can play a key role in fostering a variety of school learning mobility programmes across the whole EU and neighbouring countries.**

### Thirdly, there is a lack of systemic approach towards internationalisation of education.

Efforts towards internationalisation should form part of an institution-wide internationalisation strategy comprising sending and hosting, led by the school leadership. However, *“developing such a strategy has, for many institutions, still turned out to be a challenge. And to fully embed internationalisation into the institutional policy and practice on all levels is a greater challenge still”*<sup>10</sup>. The absence of a holistic strategy hinders the effectiveness of activities contributing to internationalisation of education, as they are not leveraged to their full potential to the benefit of all pupils, and their value often goes unrecognised and underappreciated. Moreover, the lack of a coordinated approach leaves individual teachers to manage the activities by themselves, often without proper guidelines or additional support and resources. The

<sup>10</sup> Go International, EC, p. 7

lack of internationalisation strategies leads to learning mobilities that tend to benefit only the individual rather than the whole school, causes more pressure on school staff organising these activities, and results in a fragmented and unequal approach to learning mobility and recognition. In addition, school pupils take part in learning mobility opportunities provided by public funding - such as Erasmus+ and governmental programmes - and by private organisations, non-profit and for-profit ones. Unfortunately, very often all these initiatives are detached from each other. This is ultimately to the detriment of learners, educational staff, education institutions and broader European society alike. **The Erasmus+ programme has the explicit aim of fostering capacity building of participating institutions, and as such the programme should be leveraged to bring policy change that benefits both public and private programmes of a variety of formats and durations.** Erasmus+ cannot fund all mobilities taking place in a given educational institution, but can definitely support the development of school policies with a systematic approach to internationalisation, from which all of these mobilities can benefit.

**Fourth, efforts towards internationalisation of education places an unfair burden on schools and individual teachers.** Teachers in most Member States of the EU are overworked, underpaid and face a higher workload due to increasing administrative and teaching tasks, as well as additional demands surfacing due to societal change; *“educators have to deal with greater challenges with less resources, with weaker working conditions and wages lower than professions with similar qualification levels”*<sup>11</sup>. Compounding additional tasks related to internationalisation of school education onto teachers’ existing work without sufficiently compensating them with funding and resources (including time) is unreasonable and unsustainable. Especially in the case of longer-term mobilities the tasks expected from educational staff far exceed the usual pedagogical tasks and the core competences of educators, as these kinds of mobilities entail, for example, complex risk management, intercultural guidance, and project management duties not usually demanded from teachers in their day-to-day work. Although project management and developing experience with learning mobility programmes can be attractive and interesting for some teachers, managing the complexity of longer mobility cannot be expected from secondary school teachers across all EU countries, which is the condition that would guarantee access to this type of mobility through Erasmus+. Teachers are the key enablers of long-term IPM: to promote it, recognise its learning outcomes, reintegrate the pupil in the school upon return and ensure the experience of the individual impacts the whole class and school. **However, teachers should be supported by the European networks of civil society organisations that are expert in supporting IPMs of more than three months, to make this experience accessible to more and more pupils in Europe, and a manageable and sustainable task for schools.** Europe on the Move calls for *“cooperation between regional and local authorities, education and training providers,*

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<sup>11</sup> LLLP position paper 2024, p 14

*the youth and sport sectors, civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations and private bodies to promote and support outgoing learning mobility, including for people with fewer opportunities, and creating a welcoming environment for incoming learning mobility participants from abroad*<sup>12</sup>.

To learn more about this type of cooperation, read the Annex *Widening access to Erasmus+ Long-Term IPM. Schools and non-profit pupil mobility organisations working together* (p.8).

Following up on the measures outlined in Europe on the Move and facing the four challenges previously mentioned in this paper can go a long way towards fostering internationalisation of school education, but there are some aspects schools should not have to deal with alone. **A whole school approach to education, namely involving the wider school community and civil society organisations expert in learning mobility, is essential to meet the demands put upon school education and not exacerbate existing challenges.**

A cross-sectoral approach is the most effective and efficient way to meet the needs of school education by leveraging existing resources and expertise to support school staff in their work.

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<sup>12</sup> Europe on the Move, point 8b, page 7