

JOINT NETH-ER RESPONSE

In this response, Neth-ER identifies obstacles to learning mobility and possible solutions that can be addressed in the proposal for a Council recommendation.

Obstacles for students

- **Access to information:** Students may be hindered by a lack of complete and timely information about available opportunities and financial support. A particular group of focus in this context are students who have obligations, such as a care task or financial dependence on a (side) job.
- **Personal reasons or circumstances:** Students can experience a negative influence from their social environment, which is often related to personal or family circumstances or stimulation from their (school) environment. Students can also be hindered by their young age. Students in vocational education may experience additional obstacles because they often start their education at a young age (16-17 and in some cases 15 years). This is an obstacle to (internship) mobility because companies abroad often do not accept students under the age of 18.
- **Education quality and scope in the curriculum must be in order :** Education quality must be in order in all EU countries, to ensure that students have a wide choice of learning experiences abroad. In addition, the connection between mobility and the rest of the curriculum is not always clear. In vocational education specifically, some of the VET programs lack an international dimension or orientation as a whole. These programs are strongly focused on the domestic context and the domestic field of work. As a result, students feel compelled to use their internships to build up a network in the domestic professional sector in particular and see an internship abroad as a disadvantage. Students with an adapted training structure, such as a shortened track or dual/bbp-track, are held back by the lack of options and space in the curriculum.
- **Mobility not yet inclusive for everyone:** Students with lower grades have fewer opportunities to participate in mobility. Grade requirements for mobility can (unconsciously) create barriers for (underprivileged) students. Students with learning difficulties or a need for support may experience the policy of the home institution as an obstacle, for example regarding grade and language requirements.

Possible solutions for obstacles that students currently experience:

Access to information :

- Extra efforts are needed from the Commission and Member States to ensure that students can take with them the things they are entitled to in their own country (scholarships, insurance, etc.) during their stay abroad. The provision of information about this is also very important for

students, which requires attention at both national and institutional level. Bring the information to the student, wherever they are.

- Clear information is needed from the Commission and educational institutions for students about mobility options and possibilities and their duration. This can be organized, for example, through 'pre-departure meetings'.
- The Commission and Member States should use ambassador networks and role models in the provision of information. It reduces the threshold and appeals more to the experience of students. It can also help to get rid of personal barriers. Diversity (gender, socio-economic background and first-generation students) is important in the selection of role models.¹ Inspiration can be drawn from [Nuffic's network of ambassadors](#).
- The Commission should be clear about expectations regarding 'green mobility'. Set clear frameworks about how people expect to achieve objectives with regard to the green transition in mobility. For example, by exploring how financial compensation can stimulate students. The current top-up does not seem to provide for this so far. Other options could also be explored, such as minimum travel distances for air travel. Research into the balance between the goals of sustainability and inclusion is also important to carry out. Good communication from the Commission, member states and institutions about possible financial compensation for this to students is important.
- Proper information storage, management and sharing for exchanging and sharing data between educational institutions is essential for making mobility in the EU accessible. The (correct) use of new technologies such as AI and *blockchain* can play a major role in this.
- Foster digital readiness and digital resilience among teachers by avoiding technology-driven training.

Personal reasons or circumstances :

- Financial support is important for all students who can use a financial incentive to go on mobility, such as students with a lower socio-economic background. Given that financial uncertainty is a major barrier for students to go on exchange, timely payment of mobility funds from the Commission is very important. In addition, it may be considered to pay out the grant in full before the exchange starts.
- For students in general and especially students with support needs, encouragement, understanding and guidance from the school environment before, during and after the study abroad experience is essential. However, within educational institutions there is not always the capacity to organize this. To make mobility truly inclusive, more support is therefore needed from Erasmus+ to organize this. A point of contact during the mobility experience can also help make mobility more inclusive.
- International competences and intercultural skills can also be part of the curriculum in ways other than mobility alone, and/or complement or prepare for mobility. [Internationalization@Home](#) programs are good examples of this and can be stimulated by institutions, member states and the Commission.
- Instruments from the Commission and Member States for digital / virtual mobility can be effective as a complement or stepping stone to physical mobility and can also contribute to

¹See S. Favier et al., Inclusion in outbound mobility. An analysis of the groups of higher education students who are not inclined to go abroad for study or internship, and the obstacles they experience (Nuffic, 2022) p.9.

mobility inclusion. However, it should not be a substitute for mobility.

Education quality and space in the curriculum must be in order :

- Strong educational quality is an important precondition for balanced learning mobility in the EU. That is why agreements on this and the implementation of European instruments regarding recognition and quality assurance are necessary. This requires clear, balanced agreements and close cooperation at institutional, national and European level. The Erasmus charter and the Erasmus accreditation must be universal for all types of learning mobility. The formal recognition of learning outcomes is also not yet a formality according to the progress report on the automatic recognition of diplomas and learning outcomes, so additional efforts are required from the Commission and the Member States.
- The possibility of mobility should be embedded as much as possible in curricula within the Member States. The position of mobility in relation to the education system says a lot to students about how seriously the experience abroad is taken. Special attention is also needed for students with support needs, for example by exploring flexibility in or adjustments to the policy of the home institution, for example in grades and language requirements. It is important that the conversation and guidance are facilitated for these students, also from Erasmus+.

Mobility not yet inclusive for everyone :

- Given that grade and language requirements can (unconsciously) impede inclusion of mobility, educational institutions, the Commission and Member States could consider other ways and explore the advantages thereof. who is allowed on mobility where.
- The Commission and Member States can facilitate research into which students do not go abroad for study or internship and why?