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**INVESTMENT IN
EDUCATION AND TRAINING
TRANSNATIONAL
COOPERATION: WHAT
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REPORT

INVESTMENT IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION: WHAT TARGET OR GOAL FOR LEARNING MOBILITY?

MEP Sirpa Pietikäinen, Chair of the European Parliament Lifelong Learning Interest Group, launched the meeting highlighting that **education, as a human right, cannot be reduced to specific skills or geographic boundaries.** Education can build an eco-social civilisation in which learners thrive while respecting the environment and adapting to different challenges. Therefore, she stated that the European Education Area (EEA) must better integrate teaching and learning, ensuring actions are in place and tying all developments in the sector from each Member State. Mobility is one such aspect, as this has to be enhanced while educators and teachers should themselves engage in mobilities for professional and personal development, and for ensuring that they can mentor learners to take up mobility opportunities. However, she concluded that for mobility to be a reality, funding needs to be available for certifications, recognition, validation and all ancillary services. Participants agreed that mobility can contribute to building democratic societies, effectively



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: UTE HALLER-BLOCK, DG EAC, GIUSEPPINA TUCCI, PRESIDENT OF LLLP, AND MEP SIRPA PIETIKAINEN

Initiated by the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) and by the Lifelong Learning Platform (LLL) together with a number of MEPs, the European Parliament's Interest Group on Lifelong Learning brings together civil society representatives and MEPs to discuss key issues connected to lifelong learning with strong emphasis on adult education.

An important reason to form the Interest Group on Lifelong Learning was the new Juncker's European Commission and its priorities. We stand for a comprehensive and trans-sectorial lifelong learning approach, and want to stress that education is not only about employment, but is linked to personal development, social inclusion, active citizenship, and much more. These topics represent an even greater transformative point, on the account of the digital and green transitions of the von der Leyen Commission.

The interest group works as a "watchdog" to what the European Union is doing on lifelong learning, and builds on its transversal composition to foster lifelong learning policies in Europe.

reverting current extremist trends.

Ute Haller-Block, Head of Unit Erasmus+ Coordination DG EAC, offered reflections on the topic of choice given that mobility is not a straightforward issue and people actually need to be convinced to engage, also in light of financial reasons. She reminded participants that education is a Member State competence but that the long-term education programmes and peer learning led to progress in learning mobility. The real recognition of mobility as a learning experience is

a victory, even if progress is slow. She highlighted that mobility remains high on the EU political agenda, as part of the EEA and financed mainly through Erasmus+. She underlined the fact that rules for participating in Erasmus+ have an impact on a Member State's policies as they have to be a member of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education and comply with the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), which require policy adaptation. **The demand for mobility remains high post-pandemic, as mobilities might have decreased by 60% in 2020 but have returned to pre-crisis levels.** EU initiatives such as the European Universities, the Teacher Academies, the Centres for VET Excellence can all contribute to facilitating a more organic implementation of mobilities. Similarly, the Learning Mobility Framework, and its upcoming 2023 update, or the Youth on the Move initiative, greatly contribute to mobility but more follow-up is required seeing how new challenges, linked to digital learning or greening have emerged. Teachers and educators, people with fewer opportunities and younger learners are target groups that need to be better included in mobility. She concluded by mentioning the opportunity that the European Year of Skills is for mobility, seeing how multiple EU DGs (GROW, EMPL, EAC) will collaborate on this, and considering that the automatic recognition of learning period abroad is a high priority for the coming years, making a reality at least for higher education by 2025.



THE PANEL DISCUSSION WITH CIVIL SOCIETY REPRESENTATIVES

Participants hoped to see **increased collaboration** among the different bodies of the EU seeing how training, education, culture, research and skills require joint cooperation and the recognition of all lifelong learning stakeholders. Increased amounts of mobilities, as well as funding for this, have been requested by citizens through the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE), and DG EAC will continue dialogues with citizens on learning mobility in 2023, as a legacy of CoFoE, therefore, a conversation on long-term investment on mobility is to be had. Participants concluded with reflections on how to ensure that for each mobility learners are guaranteed to have access to quality while at the same time to benefit from more flexibility in applying and receiving mobility grants.

Wim Gabriels, Director ESN, recalled that less than half of Europeans surveyed were aware of the different Erasmus+ opportunities, while countries are still a long way to reaching the 2020 mobility targets of at least 14.5% of young learners engaged in mobilities. The programme is in need of new targets, while the content of learning provided by mobilities should be adapted to reasons why learners choose to go on a mobility which range from the **desire to explore new ways of learning** to intercultural exchanges to the independent living experience. He insisted on the myriad of barriers to asking the programme for many which can be classified as institutional, environmental or attitudinal. The first include the lack of transparent information on what is financed during the mobility as well as the initial pre-funding required to launch a mobility. The second include barriers such as learners' lower-income background or their belonging to the rural area which could influence their access to information on the programme. The third refers to internalised barriers that impact a learner's perception of being able to go on an exchange. Given the impact that the mobility has on building multi-layered identities and helping learners better relate to the world around them, he called for more action on dismantling the barriers to the programme.

Elisa Briga, Interim Secretary General EFIL, reminded participants that the automatic recognition of learning periods abroad is the least developed element of the EEA. As a co-leader the European Parliament Preparatory Action-funded Expert Network on Recognition (2020-2021), EFIL collected data which revealed that **60.000 pupils are mobile annually, with only 21% as part of intra-EU mobilities and with 80% engaging in this action with private mobility providers** (out of which 63% are for-profit providers). The research revealed a lack of data on the volumes of mobility, but also on the recognition of learning outcomes, as well as a lack of legislation on recognition, a scattered approach with unclear guidelines for the enrollment of exchange pupils in sending and host countries. Lastly, the multitude of providers which cooperate insufficiently leads to the situation that allows for such a huge percentage of for-profit organisations to facilitate mobilities. Based on the upcoming Proposal for a European framework on recognition of outcomes of learning periods abroad in general secondary education, the Expert Network on Recognition is calling for the promotion of trust and transparency across education systems, the valuation of diversity of education cultures and contexts, the assurance that pupils are fully supported in their sending and host schools during mobility and throughout reintegration and recognition processes upon return, the promotion of flexibility in summative assessment of learning outcomes of study periods abroad, and the support of development of national frameworks, along with guidelines, tools and training to support consistent and fair recognition processes.

Christin Cieslak, Head of Programmes & Stakeholder Engagement EAEA, discussed the apparent equal access to education for all, considering how in the past decades the terminology in EU funded programmes has changed to pre-define what low skilled learners are and which conditions would be applicable to them. Accessibility is limited due to such stigmatisation. At the same time, **any funding available for individuals should also be extended to supporting the structures around the individuals**, namely, amongst others, the learning providers. For mobility to truly be mainstreamed, Erasmus+ must address its own structural issues and the structural issues of organisations that provide learning.

João Pinto, University of Minho, addressed the role played by Erasmus+ in EU foreign policy. As the programme has expanded towards third countries, as a budget for mobilities was added from the European External Action Service, from DG NEAR, it has become clear how the scope of the programme has expanded from the European identity mechanism that it used to be. The investment in the Erasmus+ programme brings the capacity to change perceptions via student

engagement. Considering the sanctions imposed by the EU on Russia, even if collaboration was reduced, mobilities were on an ascending path at least until the beginning of Russia's war of aggression. Therefore, investment in mobilities and Erasmus+ can become an effective foreign policy tool for changing perception which can build up intercultural and peace competences that can prevent situations as the one currently in Ukraine from occurring again.

Monica Verzola, Board Member EVTA, considered the spillover of positive effects caused by mobility in the VET sector. However, professionals need to be re-trained to facilitate the internationalisation of VET mobilities. **Currently, mobility is not mainstreamed across the VET curricula** while further coordinated effort is needed among VET providers, civil society and policymakers at national and EU level. The challenge is also that VET mobility has a strong work-based approach and is in need of an improvement of its cultural side. All is compounded by the cuts to VET mobility during the pandemic which have still not returned to pre-COVID-19 levels. Within LLLP, a dedicated Internationalisation Working Group which promotes internationalisation as a tool for living up to social inclusion and innovation, to providing a life changing chance to disadvantaged learners but also to activate learners and train professionals so that they can learn from each other. The Internationalisation Working Group serves as a capacity building opportunity for LLLP members on advocacy and good practices related to the meaningful internationalisation of the mobility experiences.

Participants discussed the existing opportunities for virtual mobility or hybrid mobility, acknowledging that hybrid mobility can be complementary, that virtual pre-mobility exchanges are desirable but that performing entire mobilities online is undesirable for preventing learners to experience a new environment which what mobilities are about. The virtual side of mobility can contribute, however, to the greening of the Erasmus+, though alternatives to transport modes, such as the usage of trains and buses, should also be considered while acknowledging that the bulk of environmental pollution is not necessarily caused by the education sector per se.



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