

Whitepaper on Skills for Europe

Results of a survey among mobility students and their trainers



IHK-Projektgesellschaft mbH
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Introduction

Thousands of young people are being sent to gain work experiences throughout all Europe with the help of the ERASMUS + programme every year.

This survey has been conducted in order to better inform these trainees on European issues and to make most of their stay abroad. We therefore questioned them on their knowledge of the EU, their associations with the EU and their practical needs concerning online and offline training programmes.

The survey does not claim to be representative, as only 48 young people have been surveyed in an anonymised way in May 2016 (before BREXIT). Nevertheless, it is giving our project a direction to follow for we have found some remarkable notions on the students' perception of Europe. All partner institutions have actively participated in the study so that we could survey a variety of outgoing and incoming participants from many different countries.

The answers of the **young people (Part A of this Whitepaper)** have been complemented by some statements of **teachers and project managers in our own organization (Part B of this Whitepaper)**. In informal meetings in each partner institution, the staff has expressed their view on the students' perspectives towards the EU as well as on their own approach to European topics.

The main modules that will be designed consequently in the project "Skills#EU" are the following:

- **Skills#EU Module 1: Challenges and Opportunities as European citizen**
- **Skills#EU Module 2: Understanding, negotiation and decision-making in Europe**
- **Skills#EU Module 3: Intercultural communication**

Part A: Survey report trainees/students in the EU

1. Participants (origin and motivation)

The respondents come from **all over Europe**¹, with just one participant from Latin America. A large proportion of the respondents is German speaking (about 40 per cent) and travelling to UK (more than 50 per cent). Malta and France are the second most popular destinations, each receiving almost 20 % of respondents.

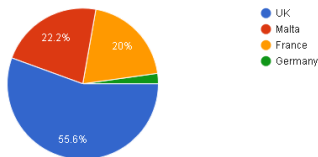
Respondents mainly **found the ERASMUS+-Programme at school/college/training company** (DE/AT), and only a few (4) through the internet or other intermediary organizations (pole d'emploi, Re:attiva, IHK).

When asked about their motivation to participate in the programme, **all candidates understand that the programme does not only enhance their language competences, but also their intercultural, social and professional competences.** This proves a certain level of self-awareness.

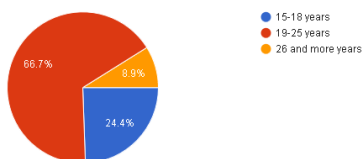
One student says: *“Erasmus+ is a great opportunity for young people to increase competences and skills, both professional and personal; soft and transversal skills; cultural knowledge. All are necessary to enter the job market nowadays.”*

Ninety per cent of the respondents are between **15 and 25 years old.**

What is your country of destination for your mobility? (45 responses)



How old are you? (45 responses)

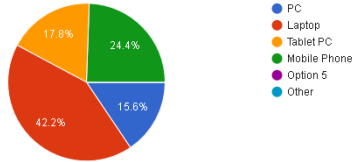


¹ Countries of origin: 11 from Austria, 10 from Germany, 9 from Italy, 4 from Malta, 3 from France, Belgium and Spain, 2 from Northern Ireland, 1 from the Netherlands, 1 from Colombia (the only NON-EU)

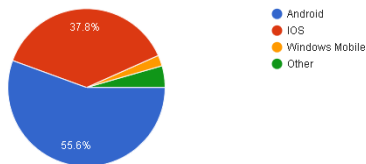


2. Methods, length and content of possible EU seminar

Which tool would you use most for getting online when learning? (45 responses)



Which kind of mobile phone do you use? (45 responses)

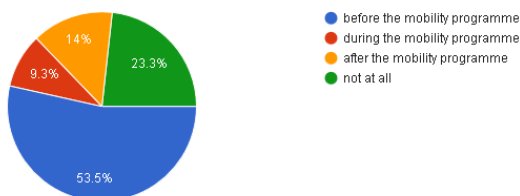


The respondents would like to learn either in **class** or being supported by **e-learning**. Only e-learning is not a choice for the majority.

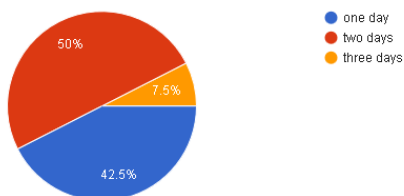
Most of them go online with either a **laptop or a smartphone**. More of half of the recipients use an Android system on their smartphone.

Would you be interested to participate in a training programme on EU issues...

(43 responses)



What is the maximum duration of such a course in your opinion (40 responses)



It seems to be best to plan a course **before the start of the mobility**. Interesting is that one fourth of all recipients would not be interested in participating in such a course at all.

Concerning the course length, respondents suggest that this should not exceed two days in total.

Topics for a possible course (in order of preference):

1. cultural identities and diversity
2. migration
3. civic rights
4. energy/politics and economics

3. Knowledge of the EU and attitudes towards the EU

Answers concerning the hours dedicated to teaching about the EU at school range from **one hour to a lot, i.e. 150 h in 5 years**. This would suggest that the level of understanding on EU topics varies a lot among the respondents. It is curious that the number of hours dedicated to teaching about the EU does not seem to depend on participants' home country, but rather on the memory of the respondent or on individual school career.

What was the EU founded for in your opinion?

- Economics (7 participants)
- Peace (10 participants)
- Creating one state (incorporation, one flag), purpose not being determined (12 participants)
- Free movement of students and workers

In the opinion of the respondents, the EU was basically founded for **political stability after World War II as well as for economic purposes**, with most stating either one of both factors. Some add their own perception and benefit: e.g. the EU was founded *“for economic and political purposes, to remove obstacles for workers, students and trainees in the EU”*.

A lot of the participants share the image of a will *“to integrate all the countries in one federal big State after the second world war”* without mentioning the underlying purpose. This could be rooted in a lack of awareness of the importance of peace to the founders of the Union. The question may be misleading as it does not differentiate between “EU” and its predecessors.

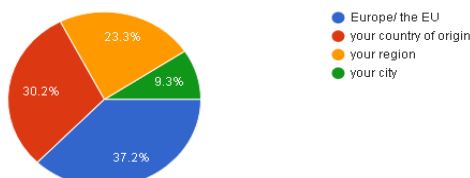
Nearly all respondents are convinced that the **EU makes sense** (95 per cent yes). Some of them even point at the understanding of its usefulness thanks to their mobility experience:

“Yes sure. If you get chances to do things like that, I will say yes directly. I think it's good for your next job/school to have already this knowledge.”

The **advantage of free movement in the EU** is dominant when it comes to the positive impacts of the EU. Democratic is the third most popular response, perhaps because other factors are more important to the daily lives of individual participants, such as job opportunities.

The negative challenges are not as clear to interpret as the positive ones. For example immigration itself may not be a problem, however mismanagement of immigration may be problematic. Contrary to what would be expected, participants also hint at the slow bureaucratic system of the EU and the lack of power of the EU, underlining the need for more powerful European institutions. The seven respondents who have not found any negative impact at all also show that the students are relatively pro-European.

What do you identify with most? (43 responses)



More than **one third of all respondents see themselves as Europeans** first and foremost. In second place is 'your country of origin', and third, 'your region' (which accounted for one quarter of responses). Identification with the city is less evident. Interesting is the perspective of one Irish respondent: *"I feel far away from Europe living in Northern Ireland - I don't really get to feel the experience of being European - I see it more for those who live in France, Germany etc."*

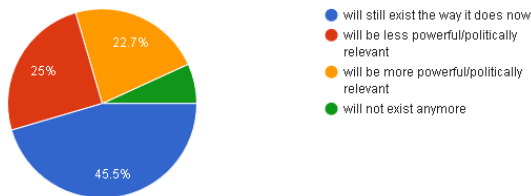
4. Impact of the EU on the own country and future of the EU

The majority of the respondents are **positive both on the impact on their own country(/ies) and the future existence of the EU**. Only 5 out of 44 think it has a negative impact (migration, rules and regulation), yet for the rest the EU is positive for the reasons given above.

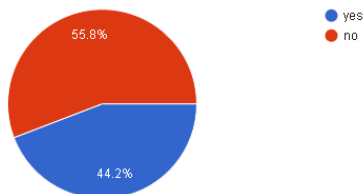
The same respondents who see rather the negative impacts also think that the EU will not exist any more (three respondents). The majority believe that the EU will exist either in the form it currently exists (20), or as a more powerful (10) or less powerful (11) institution.

There may be a gap in knowledge between respondents: the majority (**24**) **has never heard about the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights**.

Do you think the EU in the future (15 years from now)... (44 responses)



Have you ever heard about the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights? (43 responses)





5. Intercultural issues

The biggest issue for the majority is the **notion of time** and the practical aspects linked to it such as breaks, working hours and so on. This should be tackled in our course.

The respondents have very different ideas of what may differ in terms of working culture in the country of destination.

Most are aware that there are intercultural obstacles when working abroad, but most are really looking forward to tackling them.

“Working culture is different from one country to another. In some cases there are similarities. However, diversity is sometimes a wealth.” (Maltese participant)

Some are even expecting better working conditions than at home:

“To my working hours, in my country they are excessively long and unproductive. (Spanish participant)”

“I think that it will be a lot more relaxed. Germans are always SO serious about everything. (German participant)”

Most important intercultural issues

- Working hours (breaks, punctuality, number of hours)
- Behaviour: Being more relaxed, and less stressed
- Languages
- Colleagues
- Legal framework
- Dealing with Customers (respect)
- Communication codes
- Rules

Summary PART A:

The young people request interactive on-site classes lasting no longer than two days. The e-learning modules that should be integrated as a support should be compatible for both laptops and smart phones (Android and IOS). The courses should cover mainly intercultural communication (e.g. the notion of time), cultural identity and diversity as well as migration etc. Basic information on human rights, civic issues and EU political institutions might be helpful as well but should be taught in an interesting way since they have already dealt with these issues at school and don't want to repeat this way of formal learning.

Respondents are generally very open-minded towards the European idea and interested in working in Europe and gaining competences for the labour market. The participation in the mobility program has reinforced their positive attitude towards the EU, and only few consider predominantly the disadvantages of the EU. Most students hint at the economic and political background of the EU which, in their opinion, secures freedom to work, freedom to move, etc.

Part B: Survey report Focus group trainers

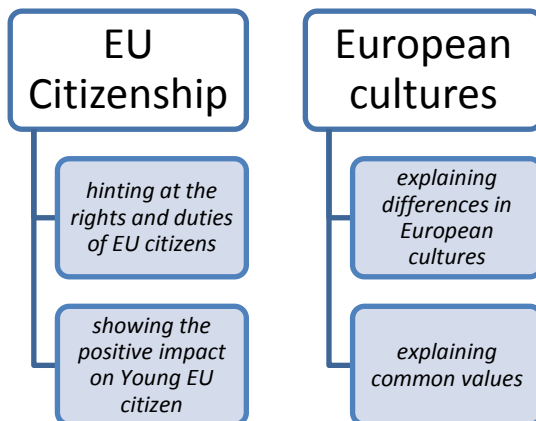
1. What do students associate with the term “EU”, in your opinion?

1. **Free mobility** of people on the labour market, especially for young people, but also in education
2. **Economic market**
3. **Common currency:** the Euro
4. Loss of political, economic autonomy and cultural identity (AT) of the Member States of the EU
5. Growing problems of migration and lack of collaboration of some member states

The perception is very close in the different institutions since the relevant topics are mentioned in the same order. Only Austria seems to stand apart as the focus groups observe a mainly negative perception of the EU by the students. The Austrians are therefore the most critical of the EU, within the parameters of the feedback for this whitepaper.

In summary, we might say that partners generally have a common perception on the topic of mobility being most relevant to the students, followed by cultural diversity and economy. History and functioning of the EU are perceived to be less relevant.

2. How to promote the European spirit best?



- *hinting at the rights and duties of EU citizens*: participation in the democratic life (voting!), since citizenship in the EU is going beyond borders (especially relevant in Northern Ireland which is due to BREXIT now again at the borders of Europe)

- *showing the positive impact on Young EU citizen*: mobility - diploma equivalents - labour market flexibility and opportunities

- *explaining differences in European cultures*: starting from a mobility perspective and figuring out related stereotypes

- *explaining common values* with regard to our Greco-Christian culture that are visible in our legislation e.g.: freedom of expression etc. → looking beyond national borders and noticing what is uniting Europe

3. How to integrate the training in the existing EU programmes?

Module	Objectives	Realisation	Methods
Modules 1 and 2 : BEFORE mobility	- be aware of being part of a European programme and of its rights and duties. Specifically, the roles and activities that are part of the European mobility project. The mobility is possible thanks to European strategies (BEFORE DEPARTURE)	In fact, young people are met before departing (at the sending organisation) to discuss with them the objectives of the Erasmus+ project and to give them information about the experience abroad. Modules 1 and 2 can be integrated at this stage in form of interactive workshops with online support since they open up the perspective on Europe and prepare for the mobility.	Material : case studies Simulation But also information material Concrete examples Simulation of the EU council Illustrative paper documents as a short documentary
Module 3 : DURING Mobility	- be aware of cultural differences and the meaning it has for them; meet a different culture from that of origin/sending country - develop skills of open-mindedness and ability to communicate effectively (BEFORE DEPARTURE – to help in reflection; DURING THE MOBILITY – to develop skills)	From the hosting organisation’s viewpoint, it is important during mobility to support young participants in the intercultural differences and linguistic obstacles. So we can insert part of Module 3: Intercultural communication into the introduction/language preparation phase of the mobility . Module 3 can be undertaken at different moments in the mobility abroad: in workshops on welcome day , for example, by discussing differences with concrete examples of real situations, roleplays, games etc. Another idea is to include Module 3 in the mobility inspections in the work placement asking for different working methods, cultural differences, etc.	Interactive training methods, case studies, simulations, simply working in another country will help participants develop a better understanding
Modules 1 and 2 : AFTER mobility	reflect on the experience and understand how to use the skills developed during mobility	We have therefore decided to offer Modules 1 and 2 in the sending institutions as a preparation and a reflection course where “new” and “old” participants meet each other. Module 3 will be trained in the hosting	Material : case studies Simulation But also information material Concrete examples Simulation of the EU



		<p>institution but learning material will be available before in order to better prepare the course.</p> <p>During the evaluation step, from the sending organisation's viewpoint, it is important to reflect on the experience abroad and to consider how to use the social-civic and intercultural competences developed.</p> <p>In Germany, it would be great to link this evaluation to the awarding of the Europass Certificate. Modules 1 and 2 can also be integrated at this stage since they provide more in-depth knowledge on what the mobility has been part of, and may motivate the students to study further.</p>	<p>council</p> <p>Illustrative paper documents as a short documentary</p>
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4. What should be the length of the course?

The orientation is that each module consists of one offline seminar and one online. The offline seminar should **last about 4 to 5 hours**, and would be best implemented through integration into an already existing event on site (such as a “welcome day” or a “Europass conferment/ “departure ceremony”).

5. What would be the most useful methods?

The online seminar for each module (which is not bound in time) should cover different material for preparation for, and the follow up of the offline course.

The choice of device depends on the content of the online modules. **Serious game might be best at a smart phone**. If the module is provided in the form of a quiz or survey with multiple choice responses, it is also more useful to use the smartphone.

If we want to propose readings or slides with a long content, it is better to use a classroom Moodle that you can see from PC or tablet, via a projector.

It is advisable to allow for phone/tablet access, for ease of organisation (i.e. meeting venue may not permit computer-access, such as in a lecture hall/auditorium).

Thus we need to have scalable digital devices.

Again the trainers reiterated that the training methods should be interactive. It was mentioned that concrete examples which the trainees can relate to from their everyday lives should be used where possible, and that the material used should not be too heavy or serious in nature. A general view was that the learning

The methods that we can apply can be different, depending on:

- If the modules are online it is better to apply slides or quiz games;
- If the modules are offline it is better to apply simulations or case studies;
- If we want to develop knowledge it is better to apply slides or quiz games;
- If we want to develop skills it is better to apply simulations or case studies as in the case of module 3.

outcomes should allow for as much self-reflection as possible.

Comparison between trainers and students' opinions

	<i>Students' perspective</i>	<i>Trainers' perspective (on students)</i>
Topics associated with EU	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Free movements of persons 2. Job opportunities, wealth 3. Democracy/stability in the political system 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Free mobility of people on the labour market, 2. Economic market 3. Common currency: the Euro
Topics interesting for a course	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. cultural identities and diversity 2. migration 3. civic rights 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mobility 2. Cultural diversity 3. economy
Opinion on the EU	Only 5 out of 44 think it has a negative impact, very positive identification with the EU (despite some restraints in UK and AT)	Rather positive image apart from the Austrian perspective (defined here by responses)
Relevance of the modules	Intercultural module is most important	They are all similar
Length of course	2 days maximum	2 days maximum
Online-offline relation	Offline is important, online as a support possible	Both are equally important
Methods	Interactive, recent topics, less school knowledge (not solely institution and history learning)	Interactive, methods corresponding to the relevant topic

Recommendations

Following the evaluation above, we recommend the consideration of the following issues when setting up a blended-learning training programme for young trainees that accompanies them before, during and after their mobility experience, and equips them with the means to develop key competences, and to fulfil their educational potential in the field of social and civic competences, cultural awareness and expression:

1. Preference of interactive on-site classes lasting no longer than two days to pure online training
2. Integrate e-learning modules as a support, those should be compatible for both laptops and smart phones (Android and IOS)
3. Provide information beyond formal learning: cover mainly intercultural communication (e.g. the notion of time), cultural identity and diversity as well as migration etc. and stress less basic information on human rights, civic issues and EU political institutions
4. Encourage the existing positive attitude towards the EU - most students hint at the economic and political background of the EU which secures freedom to work to move etc., in their opinion
5. Include recent developments and topics related to the students' world as illustrating examples and in (role) games
6. Find a balance between overloading and challenging the students
7. Make sure to best integrate the suitable modules of the workshops in the already existing programme (e.g. Welcome days- intercultural training, Europass conferment/departure ceremony – EU citizenship)

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