

# Impact of the Erasmus+ programme on **Education and Employment policies** in Europe



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- Erasmus Student Network
- Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
- Universidad Autonoma de Madrid Tilburg University
- Lifelong Learning Platform
- Expertise in Labour Mobility

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# *What is Erasmus Careers?*

COMPETENCE RESEARCH  
Explore how  
employers value  
mobility

# What is Erasmus Careers?

The Erasmus Careers project aims at enhancing the career prospects of Erasmus+ participants. Supported by academic research and the development of tools, this initiative is transforming the way competences gained abroad are recognised and integrated into students' career paths.

The objectives of the project include identifying the competences acquired during international mobility, enhancing students' understanding of their career trajectory post-mobility, informing international and career counselling departments of the support needed from students, and ensuring that employers recognise and value these key competences in their recruitment processes.

Erasmus Student Network (ESN), Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (UAM), Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH), Tilburg University (TiU), Lifelong Learning Platform (LLL) and Expertise in Labour Mobility (ELM) have been collaborating for three years, developing both crucial research on competence development and employers' perspectives on the relationship between mobility and employability; as well as significant tools targeting students, higher education institutions and employers.

Therefore, the Erasmus Careers project provides valuable insights into developing learning paths tailored to student's individual needs, exploring the employability outcomes of participation in international student exchanges, and designing a dedicated competence framework for Erasmus+ participants. This comprehensive approach includes a range of activities beyond research, aiming to understand the impact of international mobility on competence development. The project outcomes include practical guidelines, a digital self-learning tool for students, higher education staff training sessions, all to ensure that both higher education institutions and students gain a deeper awareness of

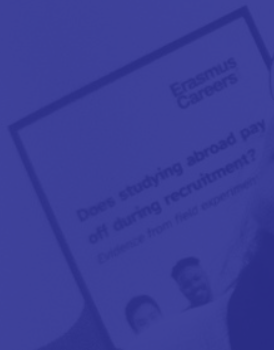
the competences and benefits acquired through mobility. As higher education institutions also play a crucial role in recognising these competences, the project aims at recognising the need for higher education institutions, especially career guidance offices, to support students identifying and assessing competence. By mediating the dialogue between students and employers, the project looked at employers' understanding of mobility in competence development through a field experiment, as well as an employer manual.



Your Go-To  
Platform for  
Career  
Insights

# *Policy landscape: from mobility to employment*

Learn what international  
skills matter most



RESEARCH:

Explore how  
employers value  
mobility

# Policy landscape: from mobility to employment

The Erasmus+ programme is the EU's programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe, turning 38 years in 2025. The current programme (2021-2027) emphasises social inclusion, the green and digital transitions, and fostering young people's participation in democratic life. The programme supports - through lifelong learning-, the educational, professional and personal development of people in education, training, youth and sport, enhancing sustainable growth, quality jobs and social cohesion, driving innovation, and strengthening European identity and active citizenship. With an estimated budget of €26.2 billion, the programme is an instrument to support the priorities and activities set out in the European Education Area, Digital Education Action Plan and the European Skills Agenda, supporting the European Pillar of Social Rights and implementing the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027. Three key actions are offered: learning mobility, cooperation among organisations and institutions and support for policy development and cooperation. This publication will concentrate on individual learning mobility, largely students and trainees, whereby a student from a higher education institution is hosted by a higher education institution in another country for a defined period, or when a student or recent graduate is placed in an organisation abroad to participate in a traineeship. In policy documents, it is expected that key outcomes from this key action include a better learning performance for Erasmus+ participants, greater self-empowerment and confidence, strengthened proficiency in foreign languages and digital tools and, most importantly in the context of this publication, enhanced employability and career opportunities. The impact of Erasmus+ on competence development is the key common thread of the Erasmus Careers project. The project looks at the International Student Lifecycle - which distinguishes between five phases, namely pre-arrival, arrival, during the exchange, preparing to leave, and re-entry - and analyses



the competences that the students acquired in each of these phases. A competence framework for students, as well as a self-learning tool are now available, as well as practical guidelines for employers and career counsellors to improve the knowledge of these competences and how to identify them/support students and recent graduates to maximise them. Competences gained through Erasmus+ mobility need to be identified and better understood and recognised by key stakeholders - students and recent graduates, higher education institutions and career guidance departments, and employers - to ensure the programme leads to employability gains and better career opportunities for participating students. As described in the [Council Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning](#) (2018) many competences can be developed through mobility, such as multilingual competence; personal, social and learning (PSL) to learn competence or cultural awareness and expression competence. This has also been confirmed by scientific studies. There is now solid empirical evidence on how participation in mobility can significantly improve foreign language proficiency (e.g. Aksay Aksezer et al. 2022; Huensch & Tracy-Ventura 2017; Mattern 2016; Tullock & Ortega 2017) and intercultural competences of participating students (e.g. Aksay Aksezer et al. 2022).

The European Union's social policy is driven by the European Pillar of Social Rights, proclaimed at the Gothenburg Summit (2017). Its 20 key principles ensure that the EU operates towards a more social, fair and inclusive society, with equal opportunities. With ambitious EU targets by 2030 on ensuring lifelong learning, boosting employment and reducing poverty, a European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan was developed to materialise these principles, including diverse initiatives related to quality education and training and employment. Within this framework, we can find the [European Education Area](#), the [European Skills Agenda](#), the [Youth Employment Support](#), accompanied by [Reinforced Youth Guarantee](#) or the [Review of the Quality Framework for Traineeships](#). While 60% of Europeans believe in a more social Europe by 2030 according to the [2021 Special Eurobarometer survey](#), the EU and Member States still have a long way to go to achieve the defined targets.

The [European Education Area \(EEA\)](#) is the overarching political strategy for European cooperation in education and training. At the time of the drafting of the report, the Union of Skills initiative is in development by the European Commission, which will subsume the EEA and other education and training initiatives, as an overarching framework. Within the EEA, EEA Member States and the European Commission aim to improve quality, equity, inclusion and success for all in education and training, make lifelong learning and mobility a reality for all, enhance competences and motivation in the education profession, reinforce European higher education and support the green and digital transition, as stated in the [Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond \(2021-2030\)](#). Launched in 2020, it established quantitative targets until 2025 and was later followed by the above resolution, expanding the outlook from 2025 to 2030. By 2030, one of the targets of the European Education Area is for at least 45% of 25-34 year-olds to have a higher education qualification. This target is likely to be reached in the EU, as in 2023, 43.1% of EU citizens aged 25-34 years old already completed tertiary education (Eurostat 2024). However, there are large international differences. For example, in Romania, this share is only 22.5%, and also other countries of the EHEA have comparatively low shares of higher education graduates in this age cohort, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina (26.6%), Hungary (29.4%), Italy (30.6%), Czech Republic (33.7%), Serbia (34.7%) and Bulgaria (35.8%) (Eurostat 2024). A top priority on the EEA political agenda is ensuring young people receive high-quality education and training to secure employment. To achieve this, the Erasmus+ programme is considered one of the key instruments to boost learning mobility throughout Europe. The European Education Area midterm review process in 2023 showcases, however, there is still a need to remove the remaining obstacles to mobility. While the [Bologna Process](#) is seen as a way to facilitate mobility and internationalisation, with the number of students having experienced mobility has increased significantly, the Bologna Process report, "[The European Higher Education Area in 2024 - Bologna Process Implementation Report](#)", shows the European

Higher Education Area (EHEA) countries did not achieve the 20% of mobile students by 2020. Participation in mobility, apart from being a once-in-a-lifetime experience, also equips students with unique skills that are specific to the experience and the country in which they immerse themselves. In this context, the lack of participation in mobility and the challenges in promoting these opportunities for both local and international students can hinder the achievement of the ambitious goals set by the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area. Mobility has always been regarded as a key tool to enhance its mechanisms and further promote internationalisation in education. By enhancing participation in mobility, we can strengthen the European Skills Agenda, fostering personal development, social inclusion, and employability.

The [European Skills Agenda](#) is a five-year plan (2020-2025) for the development of skills. Based on the ten actions of the Commission's 2016 Skills Agenda, the European Skills Agenda presented twelve actions to enhance human capital, boost employability, and increase competitiveness throughout the European Union via skills development. Among other objectives, the plan is working on increasing the visibility and comparability of skills, by establishing a European framework for validating and recognising non-formal and informal learning, while encouraging the use of Europass and other tools for skills; and improving skills intelligence and career information by upgrading the data collection and analysis on skill demands, and strengthen career guidance and counselling services for better career decision-making.

On validation of non-formal and informal learning, the EU follows the [Council Recommendation of on the validation of non-formal and informal learning](#) (2012) which urges Member States to implement national validation arrangements so that individuals can also see validated knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning. Much of the experience in an Erasmus+ mobility invariably features moments of non-formal and informal learning. Thus, this Council Recommendation's

implementation can have a stronger impact in identifying the competences obtained through an Erasmus+ mobility programme and make ways for their validation. In the VET sector, the initiative has been dedicated to equipping learners with labour market-relevant skills, including transversal skills, and increasing the share of learning mobility opportunities, supported by the Erasmus+ programme. With a skills plan ending in 2025, the political guidelines for the current European Commission 2024–2029 show a continuing investment in skills, with the establishment of a [Union of Skills](#) mentioned above, reinforcing, among others, the recognition of different types of training and incentive mobility. Alongside the same lines, skills development seems up on the agenda in the Commission's work, with the designation of an Executive Vice-President for People, Skills and Preparedness, Roxana Mînzatu from Romania. The [European Year of Skills](#) in 2023-2024 shows the momentum and commitment of the EU to address the skills agenda and focus on addressing skills gaps and the need for reskilling.

As a part of the vision of the European Commission for the EEA, the [Communication on the Digital Education Action Plan 2021-27 - Resetting education and training for the digital age](#) was published in September 2020, putting in place the Digital Education Action Plan (DEAP). This initiative focuses on digital education, setting out a common vision concerning quality, accessibility and inclusion. Key actions include strengthening digital infrastructure, advancing digital literacy and promoting digital skills. In the context of Erasmus+ mobility, the European Student Card Initiative (ESCI) plays a crucial role in enabling the secure electronic exchange and verification of student data and academic records, serving as a true differentiator for higher education institutions by streamlining the management of student mobility. The ESCI integrates the European Student Card, an Erasmus+ App for practical support and Erasmus Without Paper, a digital solution which bridges higher education institutions systems and assures a more efficient management of mobility processes for a paperless Erasmus mobility. The adoption of the European Student Card is strongly recommended by the European Commission, which aims at

increasing its access by mobility students in all Erasmus+ Programme countries by 2025, establishing the digital exchange of 95% of Learning Agreements and including a virtual European Student Card in the Erasmus+ Mobile App by the end of 2025. 2025 will also be a year to simplify current digital processes and technical work following stakeholders' feedback.

As a key component of the EEA and crucial to achieving the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027, which will be later detailed, the [Council](#) adopted in May 2024 the [Council Recommendation 'Europe on the Move' – learning mobility opportunities for everyone](#), which goal is to make learning mobility opportunities an essential part of all education and training pathways and to increase the share of citizens in the EU participating in learning mobility abroad. However, as shown as well in the Bologna process implementation report mentioned earlier, this can be challenging. Furthermore, existing scholarship on international student exchanges in Europe, including the Erasmus+ programme, strongly suggests that participation in mobility is socially selective: students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to participate (Findlay et al. 2006; Di Pietro, 2020; Lörz et al. 2016; Netz & Finger, 2016; Schnepf et al., 2024; Van Mol, 2022). The Council Recommendation 'Europe on the Move' – learning mobility opportunities for everyone, approved in 2024, states an aspiration of reaching 20% of learners with fewer opportunities. While the proposal suggested this 20% as a target, Member States did not agree and urged the European Commission to provide a new and complete definition of learners with fewer opportunities. Thus, while the share of participants in student or traineeship mobility has become a target for Member States, the inclusion of people with fewer opportunities is, until now, still an aspiration.

Clearly, one of the key areas for improvement is understanding the mechanisms driving this social selectivity in participation (Schnepf et al., 2024). The study of Schnepf et al. (Schnepf et al., 2024) in Germany, Hungary, Italy and the UK, suggests that the

merit-based selection of students is one of the explanatory factors for the unequal uptake of mobility, as students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are often performing less well in higher education. Furthermore, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds also seem to cluster in universities with fewer mobility opportunities (Schnepf et al., 2024).

Next to this, it has also been fairly well established in the academic literature that differences in participation across socio-economic groups are largely influenced by differences in economic capital (students' capacity to bear the costs of an Erasmus+ stay abroad - which also involves the fear of losing necessary student jobs to finance a degree when going abroad for students of lower socio-economic status), cultural capital (e.g. familiarity with foreign cultures) and social capital (friends and relatives with experience abroad who can offer advice) (Brooks & Waters 2021). This leads to a recommendation of distributing grants more equally across universities and reconsidering whether merit-based selection is the right approach for participation in the Erasmus programme (Schnepf et al., 2024).

The Council agrees on the link between mobility, skills development and employability, referring to its potential to help address the current skill shortages and ease transitions to the labour market and work mobility. The [Council Recommendation 'Europe on the Move' – learning mobility opportunities for everyone](#) contextualises the importance of learning mobility as an enabler for the development of transversal competences of participants, better skills match and employability gains, in particular among young people. New targets are defined, with a share of 23% of graduates having had a learning mobility experience abroad in higher education (an increase of 3% of the learning mobility target established in the context of the Bologna Process in 2009), and 12% of vocational learners in Vocational Education and Training (which builds on the [Council Recommendation on vocational education and training \(VET\) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience](#) (2020)).

Whether participation in Erasmus+ mobility truly eases transitions to the labour market, however, is questioned by existing empirical research. Several studies (e.g. Rodrigues 2013; Van Mol et al. 2021), for example, indicated that Dutch students who studied abroad even have longer education-to-work transitions. This might be because of the investment they made in their educational trajectory, making them less likely to accept ‘any’ job. Furthermore, the academic literature is also often times challenging the idea that participation in Erasmus+ is necessarily increasing employability: the linkages between studying abroad and employability outcomes are on occasion exaggerated (Wiers-Jenssen et al., 2021).

It is clear that employers are very important in this process. While the advantages of studying abroad are frequently celebrated, tangible evidence from employers on the actual value of mobility experiences is less clear. A recent Canadian study funded by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) highlighted the top skills employers crave in recent graduates and how these align with the skills cultivated through international mobility. However, the survey also showed that while employers emphasised that international experiences are beneficial, they are not a golden ticket to employment (Siegfried et al., 2024). Employers, in general, look for graduates with a broad range of skills and knowledge of ‘real-world settings’, which can be particularly acquired through internships (Wiers-Jenssen et al., 2021), both nationally and internationally. This might be the reason why several studies, including the Erasmus Careers project, do not indicate that employers are significantly more likely to hire students with international study experience (Petzold, 2017; Van Mol et al., 2024), whereas it is clear employers do particularly value internship experience when recruiting (O’Higgins & Pinedo, 2018; Van Mol, 2017). In terms of employability outcomes related to the social selectivity reported above, existing studies are less conclusive. On the one hand, several scholars indicated that those from higher socio-economic backgrounds are more positively impacted in terms of employability (Liwirski, 2019) or wages (Netz & Grüttner, 2021). Other scholars,

in contrast, find that those from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to profit in terms of employability (Di Pietro, 2015; Waibel et al., 2018) or the development of skills such as language proficiency (Sorrenti, 2017). These conflicting findings have been attributed to issues such as a focus on studies on different national contexts, the use of different measures of study abroad and social origin, and a focus on different outcomes (Netz & Grüttner, 2021).

The recommendation delineates steps for Member States to handle barriers to mobility, including improving access to information and recognising learning outcomes. The 2023 European Citizens' Panel on Learning Mobility, which brings randomly selected citizens from all 27 EU Member States to deliberate and make recommendations, also recommended more accessible information on Erasmus+ mobility. Not disposing of enough information on the programme is also something mixed empirical findings exist on: whereas some scholars indicated as a potential barrier to participation (e.g. Beerkens et al. 2015; Di Pietro 2023), others indicate this might be a barrier of lower importance compared to financial issues and leaving family and friends behind (e.g. Van Mol 2014). As Beerkens et al. (2015) indicate, the rapportation of a lack of information might also be a retrospective justification of not having participated instead of being a real issue, yet at the same time it might be the case that particularly for underrepresented groups in the Erasmus group a lack of information is particularly deterring them from participation (see e.g. Heirweg et al. 2020 on disabled students). On recognition, the recommendation advises Member States in advancing the recognition of competences gained through learning mobility in non-formal and informal learning to enable easier integration of these learning outcomes into formal education and the labour market. A more international mindset seems to be also an outcome of participation in Erasmus (Nada & Legutko, 2022).

According to the recommendation, learning mobility should be systematically considered in the different learning paths through an increase in flexibility and building upon other




EU initiatives such as the [European Universities Alliances](#) which set up a target of 50% mobility among participating institutions. The recommendation also mentions the need for a more systemic use of available instruments such as the Europass, Europass Mobility or the classification of European Skills/Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO). The Europass Mobility helps students to represent the skills acquired abroad through mobility experiences for learning or work. 2024 marked the [launch of a revised template](#) which allows the combination of the existing Europass Mobility template with the learning agreement model from Erasmus+, creating a single document for both pre- and post-mobility.

Youth unemployment persists to be a significant challenge in the EU, with rates more than double the overall unemployment rate. [Data from Eurostat](#) shows that for September 2024, youth unemployment (15-25 years) was 14.8% compared to a general unemployment rate (20-64 years) of 5.9%. The Commission considers, therefore, that traineeships can equip young people with practical experience and skills which foster their access to the labour market. In the context of an increase of cross-border trainees (as shown by the Flash Eurobarometer 523 with 21% of respondents having completed at least one of their traineeship abroad vs 11% in 2013), the two new proposals: the [Traineeships Directive](#) and [Directive on the Reinforced Quality Framework for Traineeships](#), aim at improving the fair working conditions including for mobile trainees. The European Commission acknowledges the potential gain of relevant transversal skills, recognising, however, the barriers to accessing this kind of traineeship. The proposals for streamlining cross-border mobility are in line with the Erasmus+ programme and the previously explained policies which aim at increasing and improving mobility. Please refer to the project [DETAS - Digitalising Erasmus Traineeship Application & Support](#) for an initiative on improving the quality of traineeships and the interaction between students and recent graduates with employers.

Within the fourth principle of the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) on 'Active Support to Employment, the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan aspires to decrease the share of young people aged 15-29 who are not in employment, education or training (NEETs) to 9% by 2030, comparing to 12.6% in 2019. When consulted in 2017/2018, young people, along with decision-makers, researchers and other stakeholders, reflected on the key challenges and came up with 11 goals, known as the [European Youth Goals](#). This consultation was titled 'Youth in Europe: What's next?' within the 6th cycle of the Structured Dialogue and aimed at contributing to the design of the [EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027](#). Two key goals highlight the need for quality employment and quality learning. With high youth unemployment rates, young people have a complicated time transitioning to the labour market due to, among others, the lack of crucial skills for employment. It is key, according to their opinion, to ensure young people have the necessary skills and gain practical experience to improve their employability. Quality education is also mentioned as critical for "active citizenship, inclusive society and employability". However, young people advocated a higher focus on non-formal education, learner-centred approaches and transversal skills development. The main targets stated funding for non-formal environments, better recognition and validation processes and development of skills as: open-mindedness, intercultural or creativity. All competences that relate to the learning gained during a mobility abroad. The qualitative study of Nada and Legutko (Nada & Legutko, 2022) with Erasmus alumni has findings along these lines. They find that the retrospective accounts of former Erasmus students particularly report on 'feelings of confidence, independence, self-efficacy, openness and adaptability' (p. 186). This implies that particularly personal growth is happening through participation, which is something other studies also confirm – personal growth is also shown to be a motivation to participate (e.g. Van Mol, 2014). However, whether student exchanges contribute to intercultural competence development is subject to debate in academic cycles (Schartner, 2016). It particularly appears to be context-dependent – namely on whom students socialize with etc.

The [Council Resolution on a framework for European cooperation in the youth field: The European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027](#), published in 2018, recognises the importance of creating connections and exchange of experiences fostered by mobility. It invites Member-States to increase and improve access to young people (and youth workers) to cross-border mobility opportunities and states the key links between the strategy and the use of the Erasmus+ programme. Note that there are synergies between the Erasmus+ programme and the [European Solidarity Corps programme](#), which allows for the mobility of volunteers. A recent [Council recommendation](#) was published in 2022 within the [European Year of Youth 2022](#) as a review of the 2008 Council recommendation to support further facilitating transnational volunteering, especially for young people with fewer opportunities. As a [follow-up of the European Year of Youth 2022](#), the European Commission pledges to youth ‘mainstreaming’ (considering the youth dimension in different policy areas) including the use of the [youth check](#) (regulatory impact assessment tool to analyse the impact of legislation on young people) and continuing the work on youth-specific policies under the current EU Youth Strategy.

With the [NextGenerationEU](#) package and following the EU priority to support youth employment, the new reinforced Youth Guarantee committees all Member States to provide young people aged 15 to 29 years-old with a good quality offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship, or traineeship within four months of them becoming unemployed or leaving education. The [Council Recommendation of 30 October 2020 on A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee](#) replaces the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee and strengthens the individuality of each young person’s path, offering them proper guidance and assisting them in accessing learning opportunities when upskilling is needed.



***How is  
Erasmus Careers  
connected to the  
policy context?***

## How is Erasmus Careers connected to the policy context?

In this context, the Erasmus Careers initiative aims to support these efforts at the EU level to further improve the recognition of transversal competences gained during Erasmus+ mobility, by bringing together the perspectives of students, universities and employers, and increasing the synergies between education and employment policies. The project is guided ultimately by the European Pillar of Social Rights, realising “everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market” (principle 1) and that young people in particular deserve active support in employment having the “right to continued education, apprenticeship, traineeship or a job offer of good standing within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving education” (principle 4). This last commitment is featured in the Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee, designed, as previously explained, to decrease youth unemployment and support young people under 30 with individual and tailored offers. The project aligns with the mentioned recommendation by helping students enhance their employability by maximising their competences and addressing challenges related to pre-departure preparation and re-entry support.

The work done in the last three years aligns with the European Education Area, Skills Agenda and new Union of Skills, as well as covering youth policies such as the EU Youth Strategy on boosting young employment. Erasmus+ participants gain key competences during their mobility abroad, but the Erasmus Careers project makes clear that these competences also need to be recognised by higher education institutions and employers to support a smoother transition to the the labour market. Particularly in today’s rapidly evolving labour market, the Erasmus Careers project equips students with tools and

insights to better identify and self-assess their competences, but also practical guidance to higher education institutions and employers on how mobility can promote the development of competences which are crucial for employability.

In terms of policies, Erasmus Careers aligns with the [Council Recommendation of 13 May 2024 'Europe on the Move' – learning mobility opportunities for everyone](#), a key part of the European Education Area (EEA) which aims at making learning mobility an essential part of all education and training pathways, increasing the number of people in the EU who benefit from a learning period abroad. The recommendation acknowledges the importance of the recognition of learning outcomes and how mobility periods equip participants with labour market experience, helping students and recent graduates to transition to the labour market. Erasmus Careers publications and guidelines go in this direction of raising awareness for the crucial role of learning mobility, especially in enhancing young people's career prospects.

The project outcomes arrive at an important time with the evaluation by the European Commission of the Erasmus+ programmes, the interim evaluation of the Erasmus+ Programme 2021-2027 and the final evaluation of the 2014-20 programme, which is set to be published in the first half of this year (2025). Inputs from Civil Society Organisations and other key stakeholders were provided in previous years, and this initiative aims to provide further concrete recommendations on how to shape future programme actions, to complement the previously mentioned evaluations with key messages on mobility, competence development and the impact on employability. The project results will precisely prove useful for the start of the negotiations of the new Erasmus+ programme for 2028-2034, in the framework of the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF).

***What are the main  
contributions  
from Erasmus  
Careers?***

# What are the key contributions from Erasmus Careers?

Measuring the impact of student mobility on employability outcomes remains challenging. Previous EU co-funded projects, such as Erasmus Jobs focused on the employability of Erasmus+ graduates, helping recent graduates looking for their first jobs. By creating a new [portal](#), the initiative concentrates its efforts on showcasing the benefits of mobility to prospective employers and brings the perspectives of students, employers and career officers at higher education institutions. Along the same line, Erasmus Skills aspired to test assumptions about the benefits of mobility experiences, while identifying shared employability outcomes. The initiative focused on the re-entry phase of the International Students Lifecycle, the reintegration of Erasmus+ students after their mobility and how they can do their self-assessment of competences acquired throughout the experience (via an assessment tool).

Building upon the work done on these two projects, among others, Erasmus Careers further elaborates on how competences gained through mobility can contribute to the career prospects of Erasmus+ participants. The work done over three years created synergies between students' and recent graduates' perspective and the higher education institutions' (career guidance departments) and employers' perspective and their stakeholder perspectives. Before entering the policy recommendations, it is relevant to summarise the key contributions of the Erasmus Careers project which will feed on the projects' recommendations.



## Identifying and recognising competences gained by students and trainees during their mobility abroad

To better understand the outcome of the impact of international mobility on competence development, the project developed an extensive research publication on [Competence frameworks in international student mobility](#), including desk research, secondary survey data analysis and focus groups. The results within the Competence Framework are not cohesively pointing in the same direction. When asking students directly, for example through the focus groups or surveys, respondents indicate that mobility experiences positively impact students, fostering competence development. According to students, the most predominant competences acquired or developed during mobility programmes are: academic gains: interactive learning and educational innovation; cultural gains: intercultural sensitivity, cultural awareness and language skills; personal development gains: autonomy, independence and social skills; and employability gains: work experience, professional competences and networking. Together, the desk research and focus groups suggest that the most developed competences during Erasmus+ are autonomy, independence, social skills, language skills, employability and flexibility. At the same time, the quantitative analyses of Eurostudent survey data also warn us from making any causal claims about the relationship between participation in Erasmus+ and the development of professional competences, social skills, entrepreneurial skills, literacy skills and managerial/leadership skills, as no differences in self-reappraisal of the development of such skills through educational programmes were detected between graduates with and without mobility experience. Furthermore, the report also notes the main barriers to Erasmus+ mobility are financial grants (the desk research results show that not everyone can afford this experience - which is in line with the research results on social inequalities reported earlier in this report), difficulties in integrating with locals and language barriers. Following this desk research, a Competence Inventory and Framework guide was developed to help students, Higher Education Institutions, employers, and other stakeholders understand and recognise these competences acquired during

mobility. This guide creates a [Competence Inventory](#), which is a new framework designed by the Erasmus Careers Consortium that identifies and categorises the key competences acquired by students during their study or work abroad. The document serves as a tool for guiding students in recognising their personal growth and professional development, while also providing HEIs and employers with a clear framework for understanding and valuing these diverse set of competences.

## **Better understanding of the learning that takes place during the International Student Lifecycle**

To support the learning of students, higher education institutions need to understand how to support student learning throughout their experience. The project created a [Roadmap for learning in an International Student Lifecycle](#), which defines learning paths that will define different means of verification of competences. The International Student Lifecycle is divided into pre-arrival, arrival, during the exchange, preparing to leave and re-entry. A bibliometric analysis of publications related to "Learning and services" was published, revising past literature on learning development and the international student lifecycle during mobility experiences in Higher Education. While there is an increasing focus on research about the phases students go through during their mobility and on the institutional support services higher education institutions provide in international mobility contexts, this field of research remains underdeveloped. The literature considers mobility programmes to have a positive impact on students, with the learning outcomes coming from stepping outside their comfort zone. However, students seem to need support to overcome the challenges brought about by the international environment. Following the stages of the international student lifecycle model, publications mention the lack of support perceived by students. The identified services supporting students before arrival aim at encouraging their participation in mobility programmes and preparing students for their stay abroad and no specific action for the re-entry stage is mentioned

in our set of publications, although it seems to be an important phase in the student lifecycle since more than half of the publications mention this stage. This is in agreement with results found through global research. Data from the International Student Barometer (2024 Global Student Experience Report) shows the emphasis from both sending and receiving Higher Education Institutions is on the arrival phase. These results also align with the XV ESNsurvey findings, which highlight that providing thorough pre-departure support is key to ensuring students' mobility success. According to the survey, students consider information about available financial support (15.37%) to be the most important aspect of pre-departure assistance, followed by help with the information about the application process (12.43%), detailed information about the programmes offered (12.29%), hearing from students who have previously studied abroad (11.84%), and information about courses available at potential host universities (10.90%) (Dias, Buseyne, et al., 2024). On the same note, 20% of students do not feel prepared for the next step in their career after completing their degree, underscoring the need for continued policy support to address these financial and informational gaps. Especially regarding HEIs' career services, students indicated that "information", "support" and "advice" are exactly what they need to smooth their way to job markets of a new country. Support at this stage can considerably improve the effectiveness of the Erasmus+ Traineeships programme in achieving its mobility goals. The '[Internationalisation in Career Guidance](#)' output of the Erasmus Careers project is a great starting point to support university careers advisors. To support students in their learning, a digital tool for self-learning was created to help mobility participants assess their competences and improve them through the available digital tools.

## **Employers' understanding and recognition of the competences gained by students during mobility**

The Erasmus Careers consortium published a corresponding study on the employers' perspective on the relevance of mobility during the recruitment process. The publication [‘Does studying abroad pay off during recruitment? Evidence from field experiments’](#) featured 2,100 fictitious applications submitted to real job vacancies in Belgium, the Netherlands, and Spain. Similarly, in Greece, 700 applications resulted in 101 responses by employers who were asked to evaluate these applications and decide whether they would invite the candidate for an interview or not. Based on the field experiment, studying abroad does not seem to increase the likelihood of being invited for a job interview and there is no advantage in describing the exchange period in a specific way in the motivation letter. The publication concludes one of the main possible reasons for this devalorisation could be the unawareness of the value of studying abroad for students' competence development, including relevant competences for the labour market. The authors mentioned researchers and practitioners in international higher education have not been focusing sufficiently on employers, being urgent to understand how employers assess study abroad experiences and raising awareness on employers to the professional added value of Erasmus+ graduates. As a next step to raising awareness among employers, we have developed an [‘Employer Manual - Things to know when hiring internationals’](#). To ensure we bring this stakeholder group on board and integrate the employer voice within the project and the wider context of Erasmus+ mobility. The Correspondence Study above mentioned showed a rather negative outcome on the employability value of studying abroad. However, based on research and discussions with employers, we do know going abroad builds exactly the skills that employers recruit for. This is also supported by the findings from the employers' survey conducted in Greece, which reveal that only a minority of Greek employers take international experience into account when making recruitment decisions. Instead, they prioritise previous relevant


work experience and well-structured self-presentation tools, such as a tailored CV and cover letter. Hence, the argument for more support and helping students unpack their mobility experience and translate their experience in such a way employers see the value seems to be essential. Based on the research done within Erasmus Careers and previously in Erasmus Jobs, the skills most sought after by employers correspond with those acquired by students during their Erasmus+ mobility experience: adaptability, communication, teamwork, creative thinking and self-efficacy. Thus, there is a need for students and recent graduates to reflect on and explain the transversal skills that a mobility experience indirectly brought to them.

From the point of view of the employer, the employer manual provides practical advice for employers to understand how these competences manifest through different indicators across the stages of the hiring process (Job Posting, CV, Cover Letter, Interview, Hire) to support the case for hiring the 'ideal' international candidate. However, we must understand we cannot force employers to 'like' students with an international mobility experience. We need to clarify the value of study abroad to them and work with employers as key stakeholders to understand what is the value to them. For that reason, we created a user-friendly document to cater for a wide and varied audience. Through employer consultation, both online using the Erasmus Careers Advisory Board employer member's connection and through the ESN Erasmus Generation Meeting 2024 in Seville, we ensured we included the employer's voice in the project.

## Students' understanding and recognition of the impact of international student mobility on their career path

To support students in identifying their ideal career path and supporting career development, internationalisation needs to find a bigger place in career development. To contribute to this, and recognise the pivotal role of equipped university staff, the project published a [Guidebook for Internationalisation in Career Guidance](#). This guidebook is based on a thorough review of scholarly articles, insights from student focus groups and survey data. The practical guidelines for career guidance departments covered the five stages of the International Student Lifecycle, helping career guidance professionals to better support students in each of these phases.

*Before the mobility*, practitioners need to make information available to students and support them in making choices, and once the decision is made, students may need support on language training and cultural adaptation. During the mobility, the hosting institution has a critical role in providing support, but the sending institution needs to encourage students to expand their professional network and engage in volunteer activities, local movements or further training at the host institutions. Before leaving and to better take advantage of the mobility opportunities, career guidance professionals should advise how to request and get reference letters. Once the students are back at the sending institution (re-entry phase), students should be supported in reflecting and identifying the (transversal) competences they acquired. By recognising these competences, career guidance professionals may help students to frame them for a better competence profile for further labour market integration. This is a critical phase, as sending institutions should invest in assisting students with career tools (such as LinkedIn, and Europass) and encourage them to engage in networking activities and



Erasmus+ alumni groups. Local activities were organised on the topic of employability, aiming at supporting students to understand their competencies better and plan their further career development, as well as international webinars on the main topics of the project.

The Erasmus Careers project focuses on the positive impact of Erasmus+ mobility on the students and recent graduates' competence development, which leads to potential employability gains. It reinforces the need to identify these key transversal competences gained, as well as the understanding and recognition of them by students, higher education institutions and employers. These stakeholders should learn about the International Student Lifecycle and which competences are acquired and improved in each of the main stages. Students should self-reflect on their Erasmus+ acquired competences, higher education institutions, especially career guidance departments, can improve their service support and it is critical to expand this knowledge to employers - competences gained through mobility correspond to key competences employers look into potential candidates. To be able to identify these competences and assess them based on indicators in each phase of the recruitment process is essential to enhance the career prospects of Erasmus+ graduates.

support for mobility application (how to apply for mobility, to write motivation letters etc.).  
support in the preparation of the Learning Agreement.  
information and support on grade transfer, ECTS and mobility studies recognition.  
Linguistic Support (Online Language Support, language courses).  
mentoring program (e.g. Buddy System).  
support in finding accommodation.  
assistance in the procedure of obtaining an insurance.  
assistance in the procedure of obtaining a VISA and residence permit.  
information for accessing to health care services (e.g. medical assistance).  
obtaining cultural information from the country that host the student.  
financial information.  
transportation information.  
plans of travel.

# ***Policy recommendations***



# Policy recommendations

By reflecting on the state of the art of the Education and Employment policies and the current recognition of the importance of Erasmus+ on transversal competence development for the labour market, as well as the main outcomes from the research of the Erasmus Careers project, the consortium proposes recommendations towards the four following areas:

- **Recognising transversal competences** and acknowledging the preponderant role of Erasmus+ mobility in competence development.
- Improving the support framework such as **guidance and counselling** provision to Erasmus+ participants.
- Enhancing the career prospects of Erasmus+ participants by raising awareness of **employers** on the competences acquired during mobilities abroad.
- Promoting a more inclusive and sustainable Erasmus+ programme and advance research on the **links between mobility, competence development and employability**.

**Recognising** transversal competences and acknowledging the preponderant role of Erasmus+ mobility in competence development

- Boost the validation of transversal competences across the EU, providing further guidelines on as well as increased monitoring of the outcomes of the implementation of the [Council Recommendation on the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning \(VNFIL\)](#). This also includes a more systematic reporting done on the implementation of the Council Recommendation through the European Semester and the Education and Training Monitor and more follow-up at national level by the Member States.

- Provide more impetus on transversal competences and the CEDEFOP validation guidelines and VNFIL inventory. The European Skills Agenda actions will be continued through the newly launched Union of Skills Communication that touches upon transversal competences and builds upon the work of European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupation (ESCO). Nevertheless, it is important to recall the commitment to provide a strategic framework for the recognition of transversal skills to support validation practitioners in Europe as part of the action 7 of the Skills Agenda. This has never been specifically developed, and the Union of Skills provides an opportunity to boost focus on transversal competences.
- Encourage policymakers to support digital platforms like the Erasmus+ App and EU-wide resources like Europass and or EURES, promoting their use in documenting and validating competences acquired during mobility. This includes the implementation of European Digital Credentials Infrastructure (EDCI) and stackable micro-credentials that align with ESCO competences.
- Foster a wider usage of existing tools like Europass and the ESCO competences classification and definition, with special highlights on competences developed in non-formal and informal contexts related to Erasmus+ graduates.
- Develop standardised tools for tracking the impact of Erasmus+ on transversal competences and employability, ensuring these tools are interoperable with existing platforms like the European Student Card Initiative.
- Linked with the previous recommendation, strengthening the European Student Card is crucial in the context of its positive impact on the facilitation of learning mobility and of facilitating a smoother interaction between higher education institutions and learners across the EU. The ESC can be an essential tool also for collecting and storing data on learners' competences acquired during a learning mobility.
- When developing the newly proposed Skills Portability Initiative, the European Commission must consider the role that the Erasmus+ programme plays in the skills development across Europe through learning mobility and cooperation projects.

- Strengthen connections between Erasmus+ graduates and employers by encouraging Member States to integrate transversal competences acquired during mobility into national qualification frameworks (NQFs) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).
- Improve visibility and value of competences gained during exchange and learning mobility programmes via badges of excellence, skills passports, stackable micro-credentials or a more prominent status within Europass while realising that these competences develop and change throughout time. It is important to look at the adaptability as a transversal competence for further and continuous improvements of competences.
- Mainstream the inclusion of Erasmus+ across different self-assessment tools, so learners can pinpoint which competencies were developed through their Erasmus+ mobility period.
- Highlight Erasmus Careers tools (Learning Journey tool, Competence Inventory & Self-Assessment tool) as best practices to integrate with Europass and other European frameworks.

Improve the support framework such as **guidance and counselling** to Erasmus+ participants

- Reinforce the provision of information to students before they go abroad, ensuring that the benefits and outcomes of mobility are addressed from the very beginning of their journey, rather than only after the experience. Higher education institutions should strengthen their pre-departure support mechanisms, providing students with the necessary resources and guidance to maximise the impact of their mobility experience.
- Provide better support for students in engaging with activities during their mobility, particularly those that help them expand their professional network and participate in volunteering opportunities. These experiences can enhance their skills, employability, and career prospects, ensuring they gain long-term benefits from their mobility journey.

- Develop stronger career guidance for mobile learners so they can understand and gain awareness about the competences developed during their mobility beyond the learning outcomes of the exchange programme/study.
  - This could include workshops, seminars or individual sessions on competence development before mobility or in the re-entry phase, as well as promoting Erasmus+ alumni groups.
  - Better leverage the existing Euroguidance Network, with links Lifelong Guidance and International Mobility Across Europe.
- Better support for the re-entry phase, by organising reentry actions for mobile students on competence acquisition and the connection with the labour market (CV preparation / interview training) with the support of employers.
- Raise awareness among students of Erasmus+ as a promoter for competence development useful also for later labour market integration: and better engagement for students who have not yet considered a mobility period.
- Involve employers in the work carried out by career counsellors by disseminating the key competencies they seek. Employers can also be consulted in the design of learning mobility programmes as external partners, providing extracurricular activities that help mobile learners better understand the labour market and the competencies required to access it.
- Strengthen Industry-Academia Links Through Erasmus+ Alumni, by facilitating guest lectures, mentorship programmes, and networking events featuring Erasmus+ alumni in companies to showcase the impact of mobility experiences.
- Disseminate the Erasmus Careers self-assessment tool within HEIs to increase awareness on the benefits of mobility and collect data on the different competences mentioned by students in different years.
  - Recommend use of the Learning Journey tool and Competence Inventory & Self-assessment tool in career services to support students and recent graduates to identify and articulate their competences.

- Training or raise-awareness initiatives for HEIs staff on issues related to the role of internationalisation.

Enhancing the career prospects of Erasmus+ participants by raising awareness of **employers** on the competences acquired during mobilities abroad.

- Raise awareness on the impact of the Erasmus+ programme and mobility other mobility programmes towards employers of the professional value of the transversal competences and how Erasmus+ mobilities develop such competences necessary in the workplace.
- Increase/ foster university collaboration with employers (via career centre activities, and not exclusively) in various formats and in particular foster collaboration with companies that work in an international context.
  - Organise challenge-based competitions (where employers bring specific challenges, and get learners to work together interdisciplinary on the challenge), arrange guest lectures and invite international alumni to create collaborative opportunities between students and employers.
  - Recognise employers that are "Erasmus+ hosts" of students or recent graduates with a badge (and in alignment with the standards suggested in the [Quality Framework for Traineeships](#)).
- Structurally create mentoring schemes between Erasmus+ students, trainees and employers to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and the transition of the students and trainees from university to the labour market; envisioning incentives for employees willing to engage in these mentoring processes.
- Training and raise-awareness initiatives for Human Resources staff on issues related to recruitment practices and how those could be better designed to bring out competences from potential employees in their selection process.
- Explore how the European University Alliances initiative can play a greater role in delivering impactful outcomes that drive the implementation of local initiatives, fostering stronger connections between higher education and the job market.

Promoting a more **inclusive and sustainable Erasmus+ programme** and advance research on the links between mobility, competence development and employability

- Ensure a comprehensive EU-wide framework for pre-, during-, and post-mobility support for Erasmus+ participants. This framework should draw on the [Council Recommendation on attractive and sustainable careers in higher education](#) and include EU-backed guidelines for career mentoring, competence self-assessment, for staff training on the internationalisation of higher education, and labour market integration. Ensure these support structures align with key EU initiatives such as the European Skills Agenda and the Digital Education Action Plan.
- Promote closer collaboration between higher education institutions, national career services, and employers, particularly through public-private partnerships incentivised by EU funding mechanisms such as the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+).
- Establish a unified EU-level data collection framework to analyse Erasmus+ participants' employment trajectories, income levels, and career growth post-mobility. This data should feed into the European Graduate Tracking Initiative - aimed at supporting the Council Recommendation on tracking graduates - to create annual reports on Erasmus+ graduates' career outcomes, directly informing future policymaking and funding decisions.
- Introduce and strengthen structured feedback loops for Erasmus+ students by integrating participant reflections into EU-level monitoring frameworks such as the Erasmus+ Mid-term Review and the Education and Training Monitor.
- Strengthen the Erasmus+ funding mechanism to ensure that mobility opportunities are accessible to all students, breaking down existing barriers for diverse student profiles, including students with disabilities, those from low-income backgrounds, and racial minorities.

- Erasmus+ programme and other learning mobility opportunities need to be strengthened across the different sectors including VET sector, adults and schools, to ensure that recent graduates can leverage such experiences when joining the labour market. To this end, the [Council Recommendation Europe on the Move](#) needs to be implemented to increase the attractiveness of the VET sector through learning mobility, contribute to the internationalisation of the sector and ensure that any kind of learner and future worker can leverage the transversal competences obtained from learning mobility.
- Continuing and expanding Counterfactual impact evaluation to assess the impact of mobility on transversal competences development as well as the bridges it creates towards the labour market through surveys, longitudinal and impact studies. We believe that the economic impact of Erasmus+ is highly positive but underreported. A comparable economic impact study across the EU would be beneficial.
- Collect and analyse data on participants' employment status, job satisfaction, and career trajectories post-Erasmus+. Generate yearly-basis employability data with separated ratios for E+ and non-E+ students graduates. Include incomes and possibilities of job internationalisation.
- Enhance outreach strategies for promoting Erasmus+ programme, ensuring that all students, regardless of their background, have access to clear information on how to take the next step toward participating in mobility and understanding its career benefits. Strengthening these efforts will also help diversify the Erasmus+ participant base, making the programme more inclusive and representative of the broader student population.

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