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A METHOD THAT MATTERS

A Practical Guide for Youth Associations

Boost your
international
mobility

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OBJECTIVES

WHY ?

In recent years, international mobility has become a key component of academic life for young people in Europe. Yet despite its growing relevance, the added value of these experiences is still not fully recognised—especially when it comes to entering the job market after graduation.

Many young people struggle to articulate and demonstrate the skills they've developed abroad. At the same time, employers often fail to see the connection between international experiences and professional competencies. This mismatch highlights a pressing need: we must not only raise awareness about the benefits of mobility but also provide youth and student organisations with tools to collect, analyse, and share data that can shift perceptions.

HOW ?

This booklet is the result of collective learning and experimentation within the Boost Your International Mobility project. Throughout the project, participating youth organisations have strengthened their ability to work with evidence and build case studies that reflect real experiences.

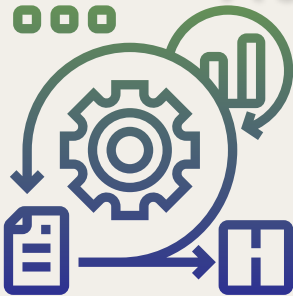
This guide is designed for youth and student organisations who want to tell meaningful stories based on real data—and who want to do it in a way that's methodologically sound.

WHAT ?

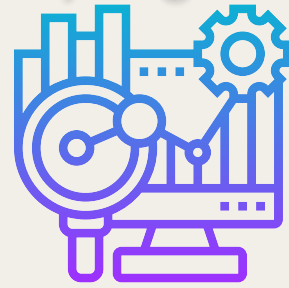
Ultimately, this booklet is a tool to help youth organisations speak with credibility, advocate more effectively, and reinforce their work through structured, well-documented evidence. Because sharing stories isn't just about communication—it's about building impact.

You'll find INSIDE :

A step-by-step methodology for developing case studies ;



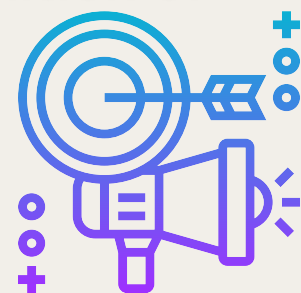
Tips for collecting and analysing qualitative data ;



Insights on how to involve young people meaningfully in research processes ;



Examples of how case studies can support advocacy and recognition of mobility experiences



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

DEFINITION

A theoretical framework is the foundation of any research-based project. It helps you structure your thinking by linking existing knowledge (from academic and expert sources) to the question or issue you want to explore. In simple terms, it answers two key questions:

- Why are we studying this topic?
- How will we analyse it based on what we already know?

By reviewing what has already been studied, you can give more credibility to your project and make sure your analysis is grounded in solid evidence.

For youth organisations, building a theoretical framework is useful when developing reports, policy proposals, advocacy papers, or case studies that aim to change perceptions or influence decision-makers.

STEP BY STEP

1

CONDUCT A LITERATURE REVIEW

Start by collecting existing studies, reports, and articles related to your topic. Use academic databases like:

- Web of Science ;
- Scopus ;
- Google Scholar ;

You can also use reports from institutions (OECD, UNESCO, national ministries), EU studies, or credible NGO publications.

2 USE KEYWORDS TO GUIDE YOUR SEARCH

Think about the core themes of your project and search for them using relevant combinations of keywords.

For the Boost Your International Mobility project, useful keywords included:

- International Student Mobility (ISM)
- Higher Education
- Skills / Competences
- Employability
- Labour Market

3 ORGANISE THE LITERATURE INTO THEMATIC SECTIONS

Once you've gathered enough sources, group them by topic to create a clear and logical structure.

In the BIM project, the literature was grouped into:

- International Student Mobility ;
- Employability ;
- International Student Mobility and Employability ;
- Impact on the Labour Market

This structure helped us understand the issue from different angles and ensured a balanced review.

4 DIVERSIFY YOUR SOURCES

Try to include a variety of source types:

- Academic papers ;
- "Grey literature" (i.e. national/international policy reports, NGO internal documents) ;
- Case studies and best practices ;





Always sort and cite your sources clearly. Use a mix of national and international perspectives to give your analysis broader relevance.

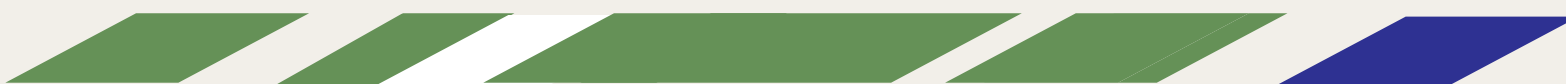
For example, in the BIM project, the consortium used:

- National labour market and education statistics ;
- Policy documents related to employability and mobility ;
- European studies on youth and skills development ;

WHY IT MATTERS ?

Building a strong theoretical framework gives your organisation's work more legitimacy. It shows that your analysis is grounded, not just opinion-based. This can be especially powerful when:

- Advocating to institutions or funders ;
- Designing projects and training for young people ;
- Demonstrating the impact of youth mobility and non-formal education



COLLECTING DATA

NAME 

SCOPE 

DESCRIPTION 



eurostat



Employment, wages, hours worked, structure of earnings, labour costs and other



Mainly SDG indicators, ages, labour force, productivity



Instituto Nacional de Estadística



Labour force survey, labour costs and survey on the labour insertion of University Graduates



Labour force survey, among other indicators



Insee

Mesurer pour comprendre



Localised unemployment rates, guaranteed minimum wages and labour cost index



Potential labour force, employment and unemployment rate, wages, labour market transition



European Commission



Gives simple economic data and forecasts about EU countries to help understand their economies.

CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

DEFINITION

A case study is a powerful tool to explore real situations in depth. It helps us understand how people experience specific challenges, how organisations respond, and what lessons can be drawn. Case studies don't aim to generalise, they aim to dig deep and uncover key insights from one situation that could help others in similar contexts.

Youth organisations can use case studies to:

- Document best practices ;
- Analyse specific challenges young people face ;
- Influence policy with real stories ;
- Showcase the impact of their activities

STEP BY STEP

To create a meaningful case study, you need to gather qualitative data—in other words, insights based on people's experiences, words, and reflections. There are two main methods you can use:

1 INTERVIEWS

Interviews are a great way to collect in-depth perspectives from individuals with key knowledge or experience.

- **Identify relevant people** connected to your topic (eg. youth workers, employers, student leaders, alumni...);
- **Prepare semi-structured** questions (some prepared in advance, but with flexibility to adapt)
- **Ask open questions** : What ? Why ? How ?

1. Define your Objective

Before anything else, clarify :

- What do you want to learn from this interview ?
- How will this data help your case study ?

This will help you stay focused during the conversation.

2. Structure your interview

To make your interview smooth and productive, organise it into clear thematic sections. A good structure follows the funnel method: start broad, then go deeper and more specific.



For an effective interview :

- **Adapt** to your interviewee : ask simpler or more technical questions, depending on their profile ;
- **Encourage storytelling** : ask them to describe situations, give examples, and share personal insights ;
- **Dig deeper** : don't hesitate to ask "Why ?" or "Can you explain more?"
- **Listen actively** : be ready to explore unexpected but relevant paths



In Appendix 1, you can find the "interviews observation sheets" document, used in the BIM project and providing with an illustration of detailed questions asked during interviews conducted. Get inspired !



In Appendix 2, you can find the "interview consent form", mandatory to ensure respect of privacy and data protection. You can use it directly or tailor it to your context !



2 FOCUS GROUPS

Focus groups bring together a small group of participants to discuss a topic collectively. This method encourages interaction and allows people to build on each other's ideas.

- **Gather 6-8 participants** who share a common experience or profile ;
- **Prepare guiding** questions or themes ;
- Let the conversation **flow naturally**, but keep it focused

Focus groups are a powerful qualitative tool to explore a topic deeply through group discussions. They're especially useful when you want to gather diverse perspectives and foster open, interactive dialogue.

Unlike general surveys or interviews, a focus group creates a space for spontaneous exchanges between participants, helping you understand not just individual opinions, but how ideas evolve in a group.

They help you :

- **Understand how** young people experience a program or initiative ;
- Spot **shared** challenges or misconceptions ;
- **Gather** ideas **directly** from the people you want to support ;

With the right structure and facilitation, they are **inclusive, rich in insights**, and fun to run !

1. Define who you want to hear from

Who should be in the group ?

Make sure your participants reflect the diversity of your target group (age, background, level of experience etc...).

6-8 people per group is ideal - it's big enough to show diversity, small enough to let everyone speak.

2. Choose a Moderator (and an Observer)

Choose someone in your organisation who can :

- Keep the discussion on track ;
- Encourage everyone to speak ;
- Stay neutral and friendly.

This person should be experienced in managing group dynamics, ensuring all participants have an opportunity to express their opinions. The observer takes notes and focuses on body language and group dynamics.

3. Recruit Participants

Reach out via social media, partners' networks or youth mailing lists for instance. Let them know why you're doing this, how long it will take and what their input will contribute to.

4. Prepare your discussion guide

Design a flexible “conversation map” using open-ended questions. Structure it from general to specific. This guide should be flexible enough to allow for spontaneous discussion and ensure that key topics are covered

5. Schedule and Set up

Set a date and time that accommodates the availability of your participants. Consider offering multiple time options to increase attendance. Gather all necessary materials, such as consent forms (see in Appendix 2), note-taking tools, audio or video recording equipment, and any incentives for participants.



6. Create a comfortable focus group setting

The most important consideration here is to create a comfortable, non-judgmental environment where participants feel safe to share their thoughts and opinions.

To know whether organising it in-person or online, take into consideration that in-person sessions typically enable better conversation and group chemistry, while online focus groups gives access to a much bigger, broader pool of potential participants.

7. Run the Focus Group !

Begin the session by welcoming participants and providing an overview of the focus group's purpose and structure. Emphasise the importance of honest and open communication. Encourage all participants to share their thoughts : keep the conversation focused, ensure equal participation and manage time effectively.

8. Record and Analyse

- Take detailed notes or record (with consent) ;
- Look for recurring themes, key quotes, and constrasting views ;
- Write a short report highlighting findings

9. Share the Results

Share the results with relevant stakeholders or decision-makers. Use the insights gained to inform future strategies, product development, or decision-making processes. Consider sharing a summary of the findings with the participants, demonstrating the impact of their contributions"



REQUIRED DOCUMENTS

- **Observation Sheet** : this document provide with an overview of the questions posed with potential expected answers.



In Appendix 3, you can find the “focus groups observation sheets” document, used in the BIM project and providing with an illustration of detailed questions asked during focus group conducted.



- **Consent form** : This document should provide clear privacy and confidentiality statements on how the data provided by participants will be stored and used. This consent form should be shared with the focus group’s participants before the start of the focus group, and it is a prerequisite for the use of information.
- **Sign-up sheet** : When possible and depending on the public you are working with, ask participant to sign a sheet to collect their details (surname, first name, email address) so that they can be contacted again at other times during the project if needed.
- **Transcript** : Finally, transcribe the discussions. This will make it easier for you to analyse them and bring out the key ideas and concepts.

ROLES IN THE FOCUS GROUPS

Participants

Usually, focus groups are rather small groups, the aim being to allow everyone to have their say and to explore the issues in greater depth. Thus, groups of 6 or 8 people can be a good setting.

Regarding their profiles, participants are there to contribute to the discussion – sharing their thoughts, feelings and experiences – and provide the data.

They are typically chosen because they represent the target or demographic profile being studied.

A balance between personal background such as gender, socio-economic background, should be ensured and recorded in the subject information sheet.



The research team

Moderator:

The moderator's role is to guide the conversation and focus group participants. They are there to introduce the focus group's purpose, lay the ground rules for the group members, and create a safe and respectful environment for discussion. The moderator should follow a discussion framework and be prepared to adapt to the flow of conversation.

Although rarely common, there can be two moderators in some types of focus groups.

Main mission: To conduct and maintain the discussion facilitating group interactions

Competences:

- Skillful in group discussions
- Uses pre-determined questions
- Establishes permissive environment

Observer:

They are typically members of the organisation conducting the focus group research, who watch the focus group discussion without participating. They are there for several reasons: to hear the discussion live, to ask the moderator to probe on certain points of interest, to collect data, to observe body language and group interaction, and to gather any additional insights.

The following elements should be respected with the role of the observer:








Main Mission:

- To not participate in the discussion but record the most important observations.
- Debrief with the moderator and give feedback on analysis and reports in the reporting stage.




CHECKLIST



-  **Use open-ended questions** and avoid dichotomous questions
-  **"Why?" is rarely asked:** Instead ask about attributes and/or influences. Attributes are characteristics or features of the topic. Influences are things that prompt or cause action.
-  **Use "think back" questions.** Take people back to an experience and not forward to the future.
-  **Use different types of questions:**
 - Identify potential questions
 - Five Types of Questions
 - Opening Question (round robin)
 - Introductory Question
 - Transition Questions
 - Key Questions
 - Ending Questions
-  **Use questions that get participants involved:** Use reflection, examples, choices, rating scales, drawings, etc.
-  **Focus the questions:** Sequence that goes from general to specific.
-  **Be cautious of serendipitous questions:** Save for the end of the discussion.

DON'T:

- Expect the group to reach consensus to the topic
 - Express judgement when moderating the group
 - Ask yes or no question
- 

APPENDIX

In **Appendix**, you will find the documents used in the frame of this Erasmus+ project, ‘Boost your International Mobility’ aiming at empowering students and young graduates by providing them with the necessary tools to value their international mobility experiences.

As part of this project, focus groups, case studies and a literature review were carried out : the examples you will find below are those used as part of this project. They are therefore closely linked to its context : you can, however, re-use them as they are, simply by adapting the specific details to your own situation

APPENDIX 1 INTERVIEWS OBSERVATION SHEETS



1 - Introduction

Target Audience

- French, Spanish, and Croatian employment stakeholders, with a focus on Youth career centres, that will be relevant to understand the perception they have on the added value of international mobility.
- Universities career centres, to understand their support role in the employability process, as they link students to employers.
- European Stakeholders developing employment mechanisms to support the implementation of the actions at national and regional level through policy instruments.
- Graduates who are employed in their field of study, with an international mobility experience.

Start the interview asking about their personal information and job background:

> Institution/Organization/Firm's Name:

> Full Name:

> Tenure in the position:

> Position:

> Experience with mobility:

> Relationship with recent graduates/job seekers:

Depending on the answers they give, one of the following blocks has to be covered first. The order of the next blocks can vary.

2 - Supporting to employment & labour market characteristics

In this session we are exploring which supporting tools the Agents have to support employment / entry into the labour market for recent graduates and/or job seekers.

1. Profile of the Labour Market:

- a. Could you describe in your own words the current labour market recent graduates and/or job seekers enter into in your national/regional reality.
- b. What is the current youth unemployment rate in the country/region? How have these trends developed in the past years?

2. Profile of recent graduates/Job seekers:

- a. What are the profiles of recent graduates / job seekers you engage which most often?
- b. Are they the most common group active in the labour market? Why is this the same/different.

3. Actions:

- a. What actions / initiatives do you do to organise to facilitate entry into the labour market of these recent graduates / job seekers?
- b. Please describe your activities to support these young people. What methodologies do you implement to reach out to young people? Depending on the different initiatives, probe further to see what channels they use and how frequently
- c. How this is funded? Where do the resources come from?
- d. What activities were the most successful in your point of view?

4. Support to Competence reflection:

- a. What support mechanisms do you offer job seekers to improve their recognition of their competences?
- b. What works or does not work?



5. Policies:

- a. What policies or strategies are in place at (National/Regional) level, in order to increase youth employment?
- b. Do they align to European Policy Agenda's on this topic?
- c. What concrete goals are set there? Can you perhaps share these with us?
- d. Who are your most important stakeholders and partners to succeed in this process?

6. Resources:

- a. How does this translate to into available budgets?
- b. Do they participate in European programmes in order to improve youth employment?

3 - Recognition of Mobility Experience

In this session we will talk more about the international experience recent graduates may or may not have had. It is important to stipulate that we are interested in any international experience in the framework of an educational or training activity that has a focus on learning and competence development.

1. *Strategic Internationalisation*: How do you national or regional policies reference international experiences in the job search?

2. *Top of Mind awareness*:

- a. Which Internationalisation activities in education & training do you know about?
- b. Probe to see which ones they know, which do they list? What do they know about each.
- c. Ask them to elaborate if they organise an internationalisation project themselves.



3. *Number of Job Seekers with Mobility Experience:*

- a. What is the % of job seekers you encounter that has taken part in an international education programme abroad?
- b. Do they have this data, if not, why not and who would have this information?

4. *Impact of mobility on employment opportunities:*

- a. How would a mobility experience impact the personal and professional development of a recent graduate / job seeker ?
- b. How do you believe this will develop over their career trajectory?

5. *Competences Gained Abroad:*

- a. What skills do recent graduates with an international experience have that recent graduates without an international experience may not have?
- b. Is there a perceived difference between internships and study abroad

6. *Competencies* that are considered more developed in students with mobility experience.

a. *Personal Improvements:*

- Self-confidence.
- Adaptability to changes.
- Decision-making.
- Appreciation of one's own culture.
- Appreciation of other cultures.

b. *Professional Improvements:*

- Working in diverse teams
- Adaptability to changes
- Problem-solving
- Communication skills in other languages
- Decision-making
- Diversity and sustainability.



4 - Relationship with Employer

1. *Recognition of Employers:*

- a. What competences are most valued by employers in your area?
- b. In your experience, what do companies value and why? How can job seekers highlight these experiences to employers?
- c. What role can internationalisation play in this regard?
- d. What can be done to improve the visibility of competences young job seekers?
- e. At which stage of the recruitment process do you believe this is valued by employers (motivation letter, CV, Interview)
- f. Is there a perceived difference between internships and study abroad?

2. *Competence Gap:* Detection of competency gaps among students,

- a. What are the biggest gaps between the competences employers expect, and students can present ?

3. *Relationship with Employers:*

- a. Can you explain your working relationship with recruiters from the area? How do you interact with them?
- b. Do you have contact with international recruiters?

4. *Stakeholders/Partners/Network:* Which other stakeholders in the sector work on this topic?

5 - Conclusion

Could you please give some recommendations on which tools would be useful to improve recognition of international mobility abroad by job seekers and employers.



APPENDIX 2

INTERVIEWS CONSENT



1 INTERVIEWS - INFO NOTE

The Erasmus+ programme is widely recognised in Europe for its positive impact on graduates' employability, as highlighted in the Erasmus Impact Studies (2014, 2019). However, it remains important to help students identify and communicate the skills gained during international mobility.

The Boost your International Mobility (BIM) project brings together four partner organisations representing students, universities, career services, researchers and employers to strengthen the link between mobility experiences and career opportunities.

This interview aims to explore the gap between students' perceptions of the value of international mobility and those of employment stakeholders, and to identify ways to help young people better highlight the skills developed during these experiences.

With your consent, the discussion will be recorded for research purposes. Participation is voluntary, there are no right or wrong answers, and all information will be treated confidentially and reported only in aggregate form.

This project is funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union. The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the EACEA.



2


INTERVIEWS - CONSENT FORM

I..... voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that participation involves...[outline briefly in simple terms what participation in your research will involve].
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be confidential.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research, my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of the people I speak about.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the BIM project publications.
- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained by the project team until the closure of the project in February 2026.
- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for 5 years, for reporting purposes.
- I understand that under freedom of information legislation, I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information in the Education & Policy Department at ESN International at policy@esn.org.

I confirm that I have read the information sheet; I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study, and I have received satisfactory answers to these questions and any additional details requested.

Signature of research participant



APPENDIX 3

FOCUS GROUP'S OBSERVATION SHEET



I. MOBILITY EXPERIENCE

Start the session with people sharing about their mobility background: Where did they go, for how long, in which university and field of study?

1. What was your mobility experience like? A round of “Where did they go, how long, which university and field of studies.”
2. What are the most important competences/skills that you gained during your mobility period?

Depending on the answer they give, one of the following blocks has to be covered first. The order of the next blocks can vary.

II. IMPACT ON PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

1. How has the mobile experience impacted your competence development? Did you see improvements on academic, professional, cultural and personal gains?
2. Could you give examples of what you learnt during your mobile experience?
3. Depending on their answers, we can specifically ask about the following topics:
4. What would you say about your ability to communicate in different languages?
Or with people from different cultures?
5. In which ways did your mobility experience influence your awareness of your own culture and the culture of others?
6. What type of Information was provided to help you understand your gains?

III. IMPACT ON PROFESSIONAL LIFE

1. How has the mobile experience impacted your competence development? Did you see improvements on academic, professional, cultural and personal gains?
2. Could you give examples of what you learnt during your mobile experience?



IV. SUPPORTING TO EMPLOYMENT

1. What is your current employment situation? Have you been in touch with employers, career services or employer agencies to support your search for employment?
2. Which agencies are active in the field of employment to support young graduates' access to labour market? How do they address international student mobility and your experiences?
3. What type of support would you like to receive in the future, so that ensures you can leverage your international experience?

Conclusion

Could you please give some recommendations to students returning from mobility on how they can maximize their experience for their future careers? What is your biggest takeaway?



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