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# International Student Mobility and Labour Market Perspectives: A Comparative Analysis

Under the “Boost your International Mobility” Project





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# Introduction





## Introduction


The growing global interconnectedness of the job market has highlighted the importance of International Student Mobility (ISM) as a key factor in developing the skills and competencies required for future professionals. Programmes such as Erasmus+ play a pivotal role in facilitating cultural exchange, promoting global understanding, and providing students with valuable experiences that enhance their personal and professional growth.

As more students take part in these mobility opportunities, questions arise about the added value of such experiences and their impact on employability. While these programmes aim to foster skill development, the recognition and value placed on these competencies by employers can vary significantly across different national and local contexts.

This document, written by the “**Boost Your International Mobility**” (BIM) project consortium, funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Commission (EC), explores the complex relationship between **international mobility, skills acquisition, and employment outcomes**, with a particular focus on how different countries and regions perceive and utilise the experiences gained through student mobility.

The project aims to enhance the international mobility of students and, in turn, improve their employability. The project partners are located in **Spain, France, Croatia,** and Belgium, with this report focusing on the first three countries and the European Framework.

By examining case studies from previously mentioned countries, the aim is to better understand how students articulate the value of their international mobility



experiences to prospective employers, how these experiences influence their career trajectories and what is perceived by employers regarding ISM.

Furthermore, we will consider the role of employment stakeholders in shaping the perceptions and opportunities related to international mobility, acknowledging that these views can differ widely across borders.

This document draws on the policy agendas related to skills, education, and employment, such as the **European Skills Agenda**, the **Youth Employment Initiative** and the **European Pillar of Social Rights**, which provide a landscape for analysing current ISM programmes. Through a series of case studies, it will examine the challenges and opportunities that arise from international mobility in the perspective of employability, highlighting the varying perceptions of students and employers across different countries.

The case studies will offer insights into how the competencies gained abroad are recognised and valued in the labour market, and how students can better articulate these experiences to potential employers. Ultimately, this analysis aims to showcase the diverse impacts of international mobility on students' employability and career development, while also offering recommendations for aligning these experiences with the needs of the evolving workforce.

# Theoretical Framework






## Theoretical framework

To address the topic of youth employment through an evidence-based approach, and examine the perceptions and impact of international mobility on the career paths of students, while taking into account both the supply and demand sides of the job market, the BIM Project Consortium provided a structured approach (Perez-Encinas et al., 2024) to understand the added value of ISM, focusing on the development of skills and competencies, the perceptions of employers and the impact of mobility experiences on career trajectories across diverse contexts.

The concept of **employability** remains multifaceted, shaped by regulatory frameworks and labour market dynamics. As defined by the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2000), employability depends on core skills, access to education, continuous learning opportunities, and skill recognition, making it a key factor in enabling individuals to navigate changing job markets and achieve sustainable employment.

Employability focuses on the individual's ability to gain and sustain employment by developing skills, knowledge, and adaptability throughout their working lives (HM Treasury, 1997). Hillage and Pollard (1998) expanded this definition by incorporating the labour market context, defining employability as the capacity to navigate the labour market self-sufficiently to achieve sustainable employment. This concept depends on an individual's skills, knowledge, and attitudes, and how they align with labour market demands, as well as personal circumstances and external conditions. Employability is dynamic, requiring lifelong learning to adapt to evolving labour market needs, and applies to both employment and self-employment (ILO, 2004; Rentería & Malvezzi, 2008).

The **development of skills** such as cognitive abilities, effective communication, and adaptability is essential for employability in a constantly evolving job market. While




international mobility is seen as a way to acquire these competencies, research suggests that the impact on employability can be inconsistent. Although studying abroad has been linked to higher salaries and faster wage progression, these benefits vary depending on the job context and the specific skills required. Proficiency in foreign languages, especially for women, is particularly associated with higher earnings, though international mobility does not always guarantee a significant edge in the hiring process (Perez-Encinas, A. et al., 2024).

**Employers tend to value professional internships abroad more than international study experiences**, with some variation in preferences across regions. While Southern European countries place more importance on studying abroad, many employers do not prioritise it (Perez-Encinas, A. et al., 2024). Despite this, international experience remains valuable, and it is crucial to understand how students perceive the benefits of their international mobility in developing skills that make them competitive in the job market.

**Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs)** are government interventions designed to improve employment opportunities and reduce unemployment by enhancing individuals' skills, job prospects, and labour market integration (European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research, n.d.). These policies typically target unemployed individuals, those at risk of long-term unemployment, and groups facing labour market disadvantages, such as young people, low-skilled workers, and individuals with disabilities. ALMPs can take various forms, including training programmes, employment subsidies, public sector job creation, career counselling, and job-search assistance. By equipping individuals with relevant skills and experience, these measures aim to increase employability and facilitate transitions into stable employment.

ALMPs are often divided into four main categories: **training measures**, which provide vocational education and upskilling opportunities; **employment incentives**, such




as wage subsidies to encourage hiring; **direct job creation**, which involves temporary public sector employment; and **job search assistance**, which includes career counselling and job-matching services (Eichhorst & Rinne, 2016). These policies are widely used across Europe and beyond, particularly in response to economic downturns and labour market shifts. While ALMPs can be effective in reducing unemployment and improving workforce adaptability, their success depends on how well they are tailored to labour market needs, the level of investment, and the coordination between governments, employers, and educational institutions.

In conclusion, the theoretical framework research showed that **ISM plays a crucial role in preparing individuals for a globalised world by fostering cultural diversification, knowledge exchange, and the development of intercultural skills**. Programmes like Erasmus+ have significantly contributed to the internationalisation of higher education in Europe, promoting cooperation, enhancing competitiveness, and developing skills that boost employability. Through ISM, students gain valuable personal and professional growth, which also benefits the socioeconomic progress of communities. For a more thorough theoretical framework assessment, check out the “Theoretical framework: Why is international mobility an asset to youth employment?” project output.

## Research question

As explored by the Theoretical Framework, the gap between how students perceive the value of their international mobility experiences and how employers view these same assets has significant implications for youth employability and career development. Therefore, the research question chosen for this case study is:

**"What are the factors contributing to the gap between students' self-perception of the assets gained from international mobility and the perception of these assets by**



**employment stakeholders, and how can policies and/or programmes be developed to help young people better highlight these assets in their personal and professional lives?"**

This research question highlights the need to understand the mismatch between how students perceive the value of their international mobility experiences and how employers recognize these assets. By focusing on this gap, the research aims to uncover the underlying factors contributing to this misalignment, such as differences in expectations, communication barriers, or lack of awareness.

To bridge this gap and **facilitate better recognition of mobility-acquired skills**, the research examines the role of intermediate agencies such as employment actors, organisations, and employers in activating the labour market. These actors are crucial in translating international experiences into employment by shaping hiring practices, providing career guidance, and creating links between education and the workforce.

Furthermore, the research question also provides opportunities to search for effective strategies that can help students better articulate and showcase skills gained during international experiences.

# Policy Landscape






## Policy Landscape

The policy landscape analysed connects the intersection of **education, skills, and employment policies** that shape the added value of international student mobility in Europe. In an increasingly globalised world, fostering student mobility has become a strategic priority for national governments and the European Union alike. Policies such as the **European Skills Agenda**, the **Youth Employment Initiative (YEI)** and the **European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR)**, reflect this commitment, aiming to enhance intercultural exchange, develop transferable skills, and strengthen employability prospects for students.

This research contextualises how EU-level initiatives translate to national policies (from the project countries) therefore promoting the internationalisation of higher education and aligning educational outcomes with labour market demands. By addressing variations in policy approaches and their implications across **Spain, Croatia, and France**, this section underscores how distinct national and regional strategies influence the perception, delivery, and outcomes of international mobility. The framework offers insights into how these policies contribute to creating a competent and adaptable workforce while fostering socioeconomic development at national, and European levels.

To address this, the study examines the variations in education and labour policies concerning international mobility across different countries. These nations serve as a valuable framework for exploring how international mobility is perceived and its impact on the labour market. By doing so, the analysis supports the personal and professional growth of students, equipping them to navigate the competitive demands of today's globalised market. However, individual development alone is not enough; structural support is needed to ensure these opportunities translate into meaningful employment outcomes.



In this context, **the following policy agendas set the benchmark in Europe to promote youth employment and foster internationalisation.** By exploring how different policies support young people in entering the workforce and highlighting the importance of creating opportunities that enhance employability skills, the following policies will fulfil the goals set out for this project. By addressing these policy areas, the aim is to showcase how targeted strategies can empower youth while promoting a more interconnected and globally aware workforce.


## European Policy Landscape

### European Skills Agenda

The European Skills Agenda is a **five-year plan focused on upskilling and reskilling individuals to adapt to the dynamic demands of the labour market.** It aligns closely with the European Union's internationalisation goals by recognising and fostering skills gained through mobility and cross-border collaboration.

The Agenda empowers individuals to leverage their international experiences for professional growth and enhanced employability. This initiative set out **four objectives as part of its five-year plan**, ending in 2025:

- Participation of adults aged 25-64 in learning during the last 12 months to reach 50%;
- Participation of 30% of low-qualified adults 25-64 in learning during the last 12 months;
- Share of unemployed adults aged 25-64 with a recent learning experience to increase from 11% to 20%;

- 
- Share of adults aged 16-74 having at least basic digital skills to increase to 70%.

This policy framework counts **12 actions distributed across four blocks**:


1. A call to join forces in a collective action;
2. Actions to ensure that people have the right skills for jobs;
3. Tools and initiatives to support people in their lifelong learning pathways;
4. A framework to unlock investments in skills.

One of the most significant actions is the implementation of the **European Universities** initiative, a long-term structural strategic and sustainable cooperation between higher education institutions. The initiative aims to improve the international competitiveness of higher education institutions in Europe and promote European values and identity.

The European Skills Agenda encourages international collaboration to enhance skills portability across borders, making mobility experiences more relevant to employers. Up until 2022, the European Skills Agenda has managed to increase efforts related to the first three objectives in the countries analysed by this research . However, the fourth objective has seen a decline in France and Croatia (Eurostat, 2023).

The actions that fall under the European Skills Agenda are extensive. For instance, **France has a developed framework** for integrating the European Skills Agenda into national policies. The country actively participates in Erasmus+, and the Pôle Emploi structure offers extensive career guidance, vocational training, and employment support.

**Spain has a comprehensive approach** to the European Skills Agenda, with national policies such as the Youth Guarantee, and regional initiatives that focus on improving



youth employability. Spain's active participation in Erasmus+ and its emphasis on sectors like digital transformation and green energy align well with the European Skills Agenda's focus on building digital and green skills.

**The European Skills Agenda in Croatia is still in the early stages of development and integration into national policies.** Croatia has made strides in aligning its national strategies with the EU's goals, particularly through Erasmus+ and regional mobility programmes such as CEEPUS (Central European Exchange Program for University Studies).

The **Union of Skills**, launched in 2025, builds on the European Skills Agenda and related initiatives to keep improving high quality education, training, and lifelong learning across Europe.

## European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR)

The EPSR sets out **20 principles to strengthen social fairness and ensure equal opportunities.** The European Pillar of Social Rights is underpinned by 20 principles. Its 2021 Action Plan translates these principles into three EU-level headline targets to be achieved by 2030.

1. At least 78% of the population aged 20 to 64 should be in employment by 2030;
2. At least 60% of all adults should be participating in training every year by 2030;
3. A reduction of at least 15 million in the number of people At Risk Of Poverty or Social Exclusion (AROPE).

These actions were transformed into **country-specific goals**:


	Employment (%)	Adult learning (%)	Poverty reduction (AROE, thousand persons)
France	78.0	65.0	-1,100
Croatia	75.0	55.0	-298
Spain	76.0	60.0	-2,815

Through its principles, the EPSR highlights the transformative potential of mobility in building a fairer and more competitive Europe. It emphasises the role of education, training, and lifelong learning in achieving employability and social inclusion.

- **Education and skills for all:** encouraging equal access to mobility and educational opportunities, regardless of socio-economic background.
- **Inclusive labour markets:** promoting international experiences to reduce skill mismatches and foster cross-border employability.
- **Decent work opportunities:** leveraging internationalisation to prepare individuals for diverse and dynamic work environments.

## The Youth Guarantee

Following the Council Recommendation of 30 October 2020 on A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee and replacing the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee 2020/C 372/01, the Reinforced Youth Guarantee is an EU policy initiative aimed at **ensuring that all young people under 30 years old receive a quality offer of Employment, Continued education, Apprenticeship, or Traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving education.**



Connected to the 4th Principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights to active support to employment through concrete labour-market and education measures for young people. The EU has set a specific target: the share of young people aged 15 to 29 Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) should be less than 9% by 2030.

Moreover, the guarantee is supposed to allow member states to set up ALMP programmes to ensure that unemployed youth are offered high-quality employment or education. The primary objective of active labour market programmes for youth is to integrate unemployed youth into the labour market, stabilize their career entry, and/or promote the take-up of vocational training as an intermediate step to labour market entry.

The Youth Guarantee is implemented at the national level mainly through the European Social Fund (ESF+) and the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI). The Guarantee works by **each EU Member State designing its own national plan**, adapting it to local labour market conditions. The initiative includes:

- Career counselling and job-matching services.
- Subsidised employment and training programmes.
- Support for young entrepreneurs.

More specifically, this research will focus on the implementation of the Youth Guarantee in the three partner countries analysed in the BIM project.




## National Policy Landscapes on Internationalisation in Education and Youth Employment

**Spain, Croatia, and France** are actively fostering internationalisation in education through various national strategies and initiatives supported by the European Union.

Although it has not been renewed at this point, **Spain** previously developed a "**Strategy for the Internationalization of Spanish Universities 2015-2020**" aimed to attract talent, enhance educational quality, and promote mobility, reflecting a decentralised university system where state, regional, and institutional competencies intersect. Key objectives included increasing student and staff mobility, fostering international research partnerships, improving foreign language proficiency among students and faculty, and attracting international talent to Spanish universities (Ministerio de Educación, 2014).

**Spain** established the **National Youth Guarantee system** ("Sistema Nacional de Garantía Juvenil") through Royal Decree-Law 8/2014 of 4 July. This law outlines the registration procedures and eligibility criteria for beneficiaries. It provides dedicated support measures for young people aged 16 to 25, or until 30 in specific disability cases, who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET). For instance, specific provisions include:

- **Recruitment support:** non-wage recruitment subsidies for permanent and training contracts specifically aimed at registered youth.
- **Employability:** online training courses in areas like ICT and languages available free of charge to registered individuals.


- 
- **Training support:** a call for proposals with a budget of nearly €42 million for professional training activities.

Croatia's "National Youth Programme 2023-2025" focuses on promoting internationalisation by increasing awareness of programmes like Erasmus+ and ensuring co-financing for youth-oriented initiatives, with local and regional authorities playing a crucial role (Central State Office for Demography and Youth, 2023). The initiative was developed by the Central State Office for Demography and Youth to enhance the quality of life for young people. It outlines six priority areas encompassing 28 measures, with implementation overseen by five state administration bodies.

In Croatia, the **Youth Guarantee** was implemented on 27 December 2013, with updates in subsequent years. The plan includes dedicated measures for unemployed or inactive young people aged 15 to 29, including:

- **Employment incentives:** subsidies for employers to hire young people.
- **Training programmes:** vocational education and training to enhance skills relevant to the labour market.
- **Career guidance:** services to assist youth in career planning and job searching.

In France, a **centralised approach to education** integrates mobility initiatives into broader policies, with programmes targeting linguistic, cultural, and professional learning opportunities for students and educators, especially through cross-border and non-formal mobility efforts. A key component of France's strategy is the "**Bienvenue en France**" (**Choose France**) initiative, which seeks to attract international students by improving the quality of education, providing support services, and increasing the number of courses offered in English. This initiative also includes the introduction of differentiated tuition




fees for non-European Union students, accompanied by a significant increase in scholarships to ensure accessibility (Campus France 2018).

France's National Implementation Plan of the European Youth Guarantee outlines key measures to support youth employment and integration into the labour market. Among its main initiatives, "**Emplois d'Avenir**", in vigour until 2018, focused on helping young people facing difficulties secure their first work experience, while "**Garantie Jeunes**" now provides targeted support for the most disadvantaged youth in their job search. Additionally, the **Pôles Étudiants pour l'Innovation, le Transfert et l'Entrepreneuriat (PEPITE)** initiative fosters entrepreneurship, ensuring a smoother transition between secondary and higher education. Together, these measures reflect France's commitment to reducing youth unemployment and enhancing career opportunities for young people.

In France, the Youth Guarantee ("Garantie Jeunes") programme was implemented through the Youth Guarantee National Plan of 22 December 2013. It focuses on young people aged 16 to 25 in precarious situations and includes the following measures:

- **Intensive support:** personalized guidance to help youth integrate into the labour market.
- **Financial assistance:** monthly allowances to support participants during their job search or training.
- **Workplace exposure:** opportunities for internships and apprenticeships to gain practical experience.

These strategies highlight the importance of international student mobility in creating globalised educational communities. However, **none of these policies are currently linking internationalisation with employment.** This disconnect means that



while students gain valuable international experience, the recognition of these skills by employers and the integration of mobility into national labour markets remain insufficient.

By prioritising inter-institutional cooperation and knowledge exchange, **these countries utilise programmes such as Erasmus+ to strengthen their global connections and promote diverse, inclusive higher education systems.** However, to fully harness the potential of these initiatives, **it is essential to integrate them with national employment strategies**, ensuring that the skills gained through international mobility are recognised and aligned with labour market demands.

# Programmes Supporting Youth Mobility and Employment





# Programmes Supporting Youth Mobility and Employment


To better understand how policies supporting international mobility, skills development, and youth employment translate into practice, this section presents key programmes that align with these policy objectives. These initiatives aim to enhance young people's employability by providing international learning experiences, fostering cross-border professional opportunities, and equipping participants with the skills needed for a competitive labour market.

**This section explores relevant initiatives that aim to support youth employment, improve the transferability of skills, and strengthen the link between international experiences and professional success, providing concrete examples of how policies are being implemented to tackle the challenges identified in the case studies.**

## Erasmus+ Programme (2021–2027)

**Erasmus+ is the European Union's flagship initiative for education, training, youth, and sport.** It supports international mobility and collaboration between educational institutions, organisations, and students across Europe and beyond. The programme aims to equip participants with intercultural and transversal skills to enhance their employability and adaptability in an increasingly globalised labour market. Key aspects of the programme include:

- **Mobility for learners and staff:** opportunities to study, train, or volunteer abroad.

- 
- **Cooperation partnerships:** encouraging innovation and the sharing of best practices in education and training.
  - **Inclusion and diversity:** ensuring equitable access to mobility for disadvantaged groups.
  - **Green and digital priorities:** supporting eco-friendly travel options and integrating digital tools to enhance mobility experiences.

**Erasmus+ has contributed significantly to the internationalisation of education and the professional development of participants**, bridging the gap between educational outcomes and labour market needs.

The Erasmus+ Programme in 2023 supported 1.3 million mobility opportunities, funded nearly 32,000 projects, and involved over 84,500 organisations with a budget of €4.5 billion (European Commission, 2024). More specifically, in 2023:

- **More than 55,000 students from Spain** benefited from the programme, while the country remains one of the top destinations for Erasmus+ participants.
- **More than 60,000 students from France** completed an Erasmus+ mobility, making the country one of the key participants in the programme.
- Participation in the programme among students from **Croatia** has been increasing and **reached more than 4,000 students**.
- All three countries benefited from significant funding to support and enhance education and training initiatives for students.




## Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) under European Social Fund+

The Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) is one of the main financial resources to support the implementation of the Youth Guarantee. For the 2021–2027 programming period, the Youth Employment Initiative no longer exists as a standalone programme and has been fully integrated into the **European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)**, which now carries forward its objectives through specific youth employment measures.

The YEI specifically targets young people classified as NEET, focusing on regions with high youth unemployment rates. It complements mobility programmes by providing:

- **Access to apprenticeships, internships, and training:** opportunities often linked to international mobility.
- **Support for employment opportunities abroad:** encouraging youth to explore cross-border work experiences.
- **Skill-building initiatives:** preparing young individuals for the demands of the labour market, particularly in sectors requiring international collaboration.

Through the YEI, the European Union’s Member States should invest an appropriate amount of their ESF+ resources to **targeted actions and structural reforms to support youth employment, education and training**. This provision refers to the Youth Guarantee commitment to ensure that all young people under the age of 30 receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship and traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving education. **The YEI funds projects that help implement the Youth Guarantee in regions with high youth unemployment.**



Under the **ESF+ Regulation**, Member States with a NEET rate (ages 15–29) above the EU average are required to allocate at least 12.5% of their ESF+ shared-management resources to youth employment and activation measures, which applies to all countries in this study: France, Spain and Croatia at the the time of the reinforcement of the Youth Guarantee in 2020, with Croatia dropping just below the EU average of 11% in 2024 (Eurostat, 2025).


## ALMA (Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve)

**ALMA** is a relatively new European initiative **supporting disadvantaged young people in accessing international mobility and employment opportunities**. It seeks to bridge the gap between education and work through tailored support:

- **Targeting NEET youth:** providing them with the chance to gain work experience abroad.
- **Skill-building opportunities:** helping participants develop soft and technical skills through hands-on experiences in a foreign setting.
- **Personalised guidance:** offering mentoring before, during, and after the mobility phase to ensure successful integration into the labour market.

**ALMA embodies the EU's commitment to inclusivity in international mobility**, enabling those from marginalised backgrounds to benefit from the advantages of cross-border education and work.

This initiative is designed for NEET young people aged 18 to 29. The ALMA Network connects European Social Funds+ Managing Authorities and Implementing Bodies engaged or planning to engage in ALMA initiatives. France and Spain are




implementing ALMA projects under their ESF+ frameworks, while Croatia has planned and budgeted ALMA measures within its ESF+ programme, with implementation expected following dedicated calls.

## Eurodyssey

**The Eurodyssey is a youth mobility programme**, managed at the European regional level, for young people between 18-30 years old based in participating regions with a paid traineeship abroad, between 3 and 7 months. Eurodyssey promotes social inclusion and integration of young people in the job market while encouraging language learning and intercultural exchanges.

Organisations (companies, associations, public administrations) based and legally registered in the participating regions can sign up to the programme and submit traineeship offers through the website. Their registration and traineeship offers are reviewed by the regional authorities coordinating Eurodyssey in the region. The principles of the Eurodyssey Programme are:

- **Social inclusion:** providing young people from various socio-economic backgrounds with a paid traineeship abroad;
- **Skills, training and employability:** providing young people with a (first) professional experience, allowing them to apply and develop their skills and knowledge in a professional environment abroad;
- **Language learning:** all Eurodyssey traineeships include the opportunity to enrol in a language course, organised by the regions;
- **Social, cultural and international open-mindedness:** Eurodyssey trainees benefit from social and cultural activities, allowing them to discover a region, including its culture, history, or territory for instance.



For the participating regions, Eurodyssey enables the hosting of young talent, boosting local economies and cultural life. **Participants become ambassadors for their regions**, representing them abroad or after being hosted locally. For the hosting organisations, it builds international cooperation and implements mentoring and tutoring programmes, also highlighting the benefits of a sponsored traineeship programme to support the workforce.

The participating regions are:

- Belgium: Bruxelles Capitale, Wallonie;
- Croatia: Varazdin, Sibenik-Knin;
- Cyprus: Union of Cyprus Municipalities;
- France: Corsica;
- Georgia: Adjara;
- Ireland: Údarás na Gaeltachta;
- Italy: Sardegna, Valle d'Aosta, Trento;
- Portugal: Azores, Madeira;
- Romania: Hunedoara, Timis;
- Spain: Catalonia, Murcia, Valencian Community.

# Case Studies






## Case Studies

This chapter presents a summarised view of the case studies done by the Boost your International Mobility (BIM) project partners with students, employment stakeholders and recruiters. The document includes the main findings on the topics of the interviews, as well as the recommendations appointed by recruiters to bridge the gap between students' developed skills and the job market needs.

## Methodology

A case study is a methodology used for the research of a specific subject, such as a person, group, place, event, organisation, or phenomenon. In this case, in-depth interviews were conducted to analyse **the gap between the students' self-perception** of the assets of international mobility and the **employment stakeholders' perception** of these assets. With the objective of **proposing solutions to support young people in highlighting all the assets developed during international mobility** in their personal and professional lives, qualitative input was collected on the values that students gain during mobility (studies or traineeships) and correlated with what the **employment stakeholders believe to be the most important and easily recognisable competencies gained abroad**.

The case study methodology was chosen to employ a qualitative methodology, specifically designed to explore the perceptions and expectations of both labour market stakeholders regarding the competencies international students and trainees acquire and those that are required by employers. By using this approach, the research aims to provide a deep and nuanced understanding of the potential misalignments or alignments between




the competencies developed through higher education and those sought by the labour market. The qualitative method allows for an in-depth analysis of participants' discourses, capturing their subjective experiences and insights in a way that quantitative methods cannot.

## Characteristics of interviewees

A series of interviews were conducted with **professionals directly involved in employability and talent management**. The participants were mostly **employed, recent graduates, recruiters** from the private sector, **employment organisations specifically for young people** and **associations in the youth employment sector**. The selection of interviewees was based on their direct experience in facilitating the employment of university graduates and their expertise in understanding the competencies currently valued in the project countries and the European job market. Furthermore, many of the participants either previously experienced international mobility or were used to working around people with international experience.

**A total of 20 participants were interviewed, distributed equally between each analysed country (Spain, France and Croatia) and the European level.** In Spain, three participants worked at the national level, and two for the Madrid region. In France, three participants were from Île-de-France, one from another French region, and the last one worked at the national level. In Croatia, most of the participants came from the Dubrovnik area, except for one national stakeholder. The remaining five participants represent European Level stakeholders and representative organisations. This comprehensive approach enabled us to compare results from different **horizontal regions** as well as from a **top-down perspective**. The diversity of interviewed professionals also allowed this research to better address issues related to the student perspective, the recruitment process and the bridge between them, such as the employability officers.



**Employed recent graduates** could provide a perspective on how mobility influenced their possibilities and achievements, including employment opportunities. In turn, **employment officers** provided us with a bridge between the job seekers and the job recruiters. Indeed, they can analyse students' main strengths and weaknesses in job search, as well as strategies for improvement. . They are also aware of the expectations of job recruiters and how those recruiters analyse the profile of a student who has done international mobility. **The participants chosen can help identify where the gap is between recruiters and students.**


## Supporting employment and Labour Market Characteristics

The participants interviewed were asked about the current labour market characteristics in their designated regions related to the employment of young people, and more specifically, young people who have completed mobility experiences, either student mobility or traineeships.

### Spain

The participants from Spain acknowledged the challenges in youth employment and highlighted the ongoing efforts to bridge the gap between university curricula and the needs of the labour market. As of 2023, Spain's youth unemployment rate stood at 28.7%, which is above the EU average. Despite the **high youth unemployment rate**, there is a strong commitment from educational and national institutions to improve this situation.

When it comes to projects and policies for the employment of students, there seems to be a **lack of synergy with European policies and strategies**, as most




implemented programmes respond to national strategies. Participants have also called for **Higher Education Institutions to enhance the practical aspects of their curricula** and work on students' soft skills. Interviews revealed a disconnection between the skills taught in higher education and the needs of the labour market.

Interestingly, although youth unemployment is notably high in Spain, interviewees did not focus on this issue during the discussions. Instead, **they highlighted the mismatch between academic training and market demands**. Some university degrees, such as Engineering, Law, and Economics, struggled less with unemployment. This is possibly due to a closer alignment between curricula and current labour market needs. Nevertheless, the youth employment market in Spain remains limited in opportunities, significantly affecting young students' professional experiences.

## France

In France's non-urban areas, **opportunities are significantly limited compared to large cities**. Many young people are thus forced to migrate to major cities where job prospects are more abundant, such as Paris or Lyon. As a result, **young people living in rural regions face barriers not only in accessing jobs but also in gaining meaningful work experience**, which further limits their professional growth and development. Regional disparities in the availability of job opportunities are compounded by **difficulties in accessing education and training programmes** that align with labour market needs.

Another key challenge for young people in France is the **difficulty in showcasing competencies and experiences during the recruitment process**. Despite having valuable skills, particularly from mobility experiences, many young people struggle to articulate their achievements effectively in a way that resonates with employers.



This indicates a **disconnect between how students perceive the value of their international experiences and what employers are looking for**, respondents indicated **that in** specific job areas, for instance, International Organisations and/or NGO, value international experiences more.

While **education policies are generally aligned with national strategies**, some organizations do tap into European funds to address this issue. More widespread adoption of these resources could **bridge the gap between students' skills and the demands of the job market** in certain cases.

## Croatia

In Croatia, the labour market presents a challenging landscape for young people, **heavily relying on the tourism industry and offering limited opportunities in other sectors**. The **lack of diversification in the job market** implies that important skills in fields like technology, engineering, and other high-demand industries are not being fully utilized. It also prevents many young professionals with skills outside of the tourism scope from obtaining competitive roles, leaving many underemployed or unemployed.

Furthermore, there is a notable **absence of functional youth employment policies** at both the national and regional levels. Existing strategies are often poorly implemented or entirely ineffective, leaving **many young people without proper support in navigating the job market**. This lack of institutional support has contributed to a concerning brain drain, as talented young individuals leave Croatia in search of better opportunities abroad. Most programmes aimed at addressing youth unemployment are led by the private sector or specific employment institutions, exacerbating the issue as **support resources for youth employment are not widely available nor accessible..**




## European Characteristics

At the European level, the interviews highlighted evident **precarity in the labour market for young people**, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. Young women are considered more vulnerable to NEET situations, while **traineeships generally remain unrecognised by the labour market** and many **trainees are not fairly compensated**. Finally, it was noted that students in Vocational Education and Training (VET) have a lower unemployment rate, suggesting that hard skills are more recognised than soft skills in the labour market.

The labour market is also increasingly involved in **internationalisation processes**. This research observed an emerging trend related to the international dimension of both the public and private sector, showing that the labour market must keep innovating for meaningful internationalisation.

Moreover, interviewees expressed concerns regarding the adaptability of recruiters in hiring the current generation of job seekers. In some fields including engineering, IT, law and economics, the current generation was considered demanding and unsettling. Some of the participants of this case study have thus reported **recruitment strategies aimed directly at the newest generation**, trying to innovate and adapt to job seekers through social media platforms.

Interviewees reported that many European-level strategies and programmes support youth employment. However, there is a **gap between the accessibility of these programmes and the adaption of said programmes by the member states and the target audiences**. Young people are unaware of available opportunities or, in the reporting cases of Croatia for instance, are sometimes uninterested in benefiting from them.




In summary, the findings reported **great challenges for youth employment** in the labour market. Overall, the rate of struggling youth is still significantly high, gaps between education and market demands were noted, as well as a lack of synergies between national, regional and European youth unemployment policies.

## Mobility Experience Impact

The participants of the case study were asked about the impact of mobility experiences on the employment rate, recruitment process and competencies gained abroad.

Regarding the impact of mobility on employability, it was mostly mentioned that **mobility experiences are not a requirement for employers, but are appreciated** when mentioned by students. International mobility thus seems to make a difference in recruitment. However, interview participants stressed that the competencies students gained during mobility were not always correctly reflected in job applications. It was reported that students were not fully aware of developed skills and therefore **could not effectively translate their achievements in application materials**. There is a need for **better communication and recognition of students' long-term strategic view of their mobility experiences**, as well as for the implementation of **innovative practices to make students aware of the opportunities and competencies gained** while experiencing mobility abroad.

Although they help students better understand their gained competencies, recognition tools such as **Europass, are not widely used or recognised by recruiters**. There is also a **lack of recognition of volunteering programmes** such as the European Solidarity Corps.



Interviewed organisations mostly rely on workshops and direct and tailored support to ensure that young people can better understand the labour market and translate skills developed abroad. Unfortunately, these initiatives are not available everywhere, and most students are either unaware of those opportunities or not able to participate in them.

Questioned on the competencies that job recruiters are looking for in young people that match those developed by mobility students and trainees, interview participants mainly mentioned:

- **Adaptability:** ability to manage transitions and uncertainty, and to face challenges;
- **Self-confidence:** ability to reflect on needs, aspirations and wants in the short, medium and long term, and to identify and assess individual and group strengths and weaknesses;
- **Intercultural communication:** ability to interact effectively across cultural lines, showcasing perseverance and sensitivity to one another's differences;
- **Language skills:** ability to use language with a level of accuracy which transfers meaning in production and comprehension;
- **Problem-solving:** ability to develop and implement solutions to practical, operational or conceptual problems which arise in the execution of work in a wide range of contexts.



There are also **mixed reports on the differences between student mobility and international traineeships**. Some participants reported that traineeships are more appreciated by recruiters, since they deal directly with professional skills, while some others reported that mobility in general is appreciated, without distinction.

International traineeships were indeed considered more important in international study fields (i.e., international relations, tourism, economics) or in cases where traineeships were not explicitly required in the student's curriculum.

# Conclusion






## Conclusion

In conclusion, the case studies showed that **mobility experiences are perceived as valuable and positive for recruiters when approached correctly by job seekers**. Yet, resources available to help young people translate competencies gained abroad into the job market are not effective, partly due to a **lack of employers' recognition of available tools**. Furthermore, this research noted that although employers generally agree on the added value of mobility, **they would sometimes favour skills developed during traineeship experiences** abroad. **Croatia is actively integrating European into national policies**, aligning with European education and employment standards. The country benefits from Erasmus+ and other mobility programmes promoting skill development and increasing international experience. Programmes such as the Youth Guarantee offer employment incentives and training, which directly support policy goals.

**Croatia heavily relies on tourism, which limits skills development in other sectors and undermines broader European policy goals**. Many skilled young people leave Croatia for better opportunities, limiting the impact of skill development programmes. Croatia's high youth unemployment rate, due to skill mismatches and a reliance on seasonal employment, hinders the success of the European Skills Agenda and the Youth Guarantee. Through the case studies, it became clear that due to the lack of synergy with European policies regarding internationalisation and employment, Croatia is struggling to fight youth unemployment.

**France's high participation in Erasmus+ and other mobility initiatives offers students the opportunity to gain valuable international experience**. The country covers technology, engineering, and green sectors, aligning well with the European Skills Agenda's focus on digital and green skills. Government programmes like Pôle Emploi and Mission Locale actively support youth employment and training, complementing the



European agenda. However, the youth unemployment rate in France is relatively high, reflecting the challenges approached in the case studies that young people face in entering the job market. The gap between higher education curricula and actual labour market demands can hinder the effective implementation of European policies.

**For France, enhancing collaboration between educational institutions and businesses could help bridge the gap between skills development and job market needs.** Studies reveal that while many students benefit from Erasmus+ and other programmes, integrating these skills into local job markets remains a challenge due to lack of support to showcase and translate the skills gained during mobility into application materials.

**Spain's policies,** like the Youth Guarantee and Spanish Network of University-Business Foundations, **complement policies set at the European level and help young people gain skills and access employment opportunities.** The country sends and receives large numbers of students, facilitating international mobility and skill development aligned with European needs. Despite policies, Spain faces high youth unemployment, although Spain offers mobility programmes, a skills mismatch between higher education and the labour market limits the effectiveness of the policies set at the European level.

Spain's Spanish Network of University-Business Foundations (REDFUE) and regional mobility programmes can help better integrate mobility experiences into the domestic labour market, if proper support is implemented to **make the link between mobility and skills needed for employment.**



Overall, while European policies in Croatia, France, and Spain aim to support youth through mobility and employment initiatives, the effectiveness of these policies hinges on addressing the skills mismatch, enhancing integration of mobility experiences into the local labour market, and ensuring better coordination between national and European strategies.

# Recommendations to improve recognition of international mobility






## Recommendations to improve recognition of international mobility

The following recommendations were extracted from the case study interviews and the European policies landscape:

- **Enhance awareness and communication of international mobility competencies:** There is a need to create targeted workshops and training programmes to help students identify, articulate, and communicate the competencies they gain from mobility experiences. This could include seminars on writing CVs, cover letters, and interview techniques that emphasize mobility-related skills. This should be done by universities, mobility programme providers and employment agencies. That way, students would be encouraged to strategically plan their experiences and understand the transferable skills they gain.
- **Improve integration of competency recognition tools:** Encourage recruiters to utilise and recognise tools like Europass and other international frameworks that can help standardise and present competencies gained abroad. These tools should be widely promoted in both academic institutions and employment sectors.
- **Foster synergy between educational institutions, -employment structures and employers:** Facilitate closer collaboration between universities, employment agencies, and employers to ensure that the skills gained abroad are aligned with labour market needs. This includes having employers provide feedback on curriculum development and placement opportunities for international traineeships.

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- **Standardize evaluation of mobility programmes:** Establish a standardised evaluation system for both students and recruiters, making it easier to identify and recognise the key competencies gained through international experiences. This would involve creating a shared competency framework that universities, students, and employers can use to evaluate the skills gained abroad.
  - **Recognition of non-academic international experiences:** Recognize and validate informal or non-academic mobility experiences such as volunteering, voluntourism, and independent exchange projects. Many skills gained from these experiences are critical in today's labour market but often go unrecognised (e.g., problem-solving, cross-cultural communication, adaptability).
  - **Matching European policies to national strategies regarding internationalisation and employment:** National strategies need to be aligned with European policies to effectively tackle issues including youth unemployment and skills gaps. This alignment ensures that initiatives such as Erasmus+ are tailored to national contexts, while remaining consistent with European objectives. Strengthening the connection between international mobility and the local labour market is crucial for maximizing the impact of these policies.

# Quotes





## Quotes

“I’ve noticed that many organisations, especially in Dubrovnik, highly value that experience. Erasmus shows a willingness for personal growth, to learn new things, and the ability to socialize and adapt. I often refer to my Erasmus experience in my current job, and I noticed it caught the employers' attention when they reviewed my cover letter. I think anyone who’s been on Erasmus can use it as a significant advantage in their CV.”

“The job market is really trying to adapt to new generations and their demands because these have changed significantly. Previously, graduates adapted to the existing job market. Now, the job market has to try to adapt to graduates because they have a very different outlook and are much more demanding. They prioritise their private life, leisure, and free time above everything else.”

“Nowadays, in my opinion, it's almost useless to study just business and administration or to have courses in business administration universities. All these courses should be related to international business administration. There is no really big difference. Every company is almost exposed to some internationalisation. You can go to the local bakery, they will be sourcing probably some of their ingredients from abroad, and that's internationalisation.”

“There is also the fear of the ‘brain drain’ and the fear for governments of letting ‘skills’ go. For example, the leading students in France are Moroccans, two-thirds of whom will stay in France after their period of mobility, so this does happen, but these are skills that are not returning to Morocco. Personally, I think we need a global policy that will help everyone to grow. I think that international mobility should be a prerequisite, including in apprenticeships: you can do exchanges between countries (but it's complicated, because, for example, you don't get the same pay, you don't have the same legal obligations, etc.)”

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