

International Mobility Schemes in Higher Education. Options Organised by Students for Students¹

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Abstract

The paper discusses the concept of youth learning mobility by drawing the attention on the findings of an empirical research conducted among university students. The students participated in international mobility schemes organised by a global non-governmental student organisation. The particular university network offers opportunities for two types of extrovert mobility. Students may choose either to pursue opportunities for professional experience in enterprises or to aim at volunteering engagement in various organisations all over the world. First, the paper refers to the labour market conditions in the EU and describes the organisation of the particular student mobility schemes emphasising their foundations on the values of the proactive citizen and of the conscientious socioeconomic actor. Then, it explores the students' motivation to participate in such schemes by focusing on factors referring to personal development and professional aspirations. In addition, the paper tries to identify the obstacles confronted by the students and to analyse the benefits from the mobility experience in an attempt to determine the probability for future involvement in similar schemes. Mobility initiatives should be expected to enhance youth participation in these processes. For this reason, the paper tries to define interventions that would support their qualitative improvement.

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1 Introduction

The Europe 2020 strategy has set distinct objectives that aim at ensuring the appropriate conditions for development, innovation and competitiveness, greater sustainability, stronger cooperation and social cohesion in the European environment. The success of these objectives requires the participation of the entire human potential. Young individuals are especially projected as valuable assets for Europe. However, they are very vulnerable due to unprecedented challenges for their future prospects either at social or at professional level. Although they incorporate a strong knowledge and skills potential, they have very few opportunities to implement their competences into practice and to succeed in their transition to employment. Consequently, this fact fuels the employers' argument of not being able to find experienced personnel matching their needs and easily adapting in the working environment, because the existing candidates lack the appropriate competences. Therefore, joint action by different socioeconomic entities is necessary in order for Europe to overcome the hurdles that arise and to establish conditions that will prove favourable for the overall advancement of young cohorts. Learning mobility has been designated as a dynamic policy tool, which can support such aspirations through diverse educational and/or professional experiences. The EU itself constantly highlights the importance of student mobility by issuing guidelines and setting benchmarks that monitor the process for its enhancement.

The paper discusses the concept of mobility schemes for higher education students by drawing the attention on the findings of a survey. The survey was conducted among university students who participated in international mobility programmes as proactive members of an international non-governmental student organisation. This student association bases its success on a global university network that promotes mobility schemes and extends its activities in a number of social responsibility interventions. The particular framework offers opportunities for two types of extrovert mobility. Students may choose either to pursue opportunities for professional experience in companies or to aim at volunteering engagement in various organisations all over the world. First, the paper makes a short conceptual and literature review analysis. Then, it refers to the conditions in the European labour market with a special focus on the key issue of youth employment deficiencies and analyses the institutional framework and the consequent policy initiatives that are being developed by various groups of interest in the European Union. It describes the organisation of the particular student mobility schemes emphasising their foundations on the values of the proactive citizen and of the

conscientious socioeconomic actor. It also explores the students' incentives to participate in such schemes by focusing on factors referring to personal development and professional aspirations. Finally, the paper tries to identify the obstacles which the students had to confront, as well as to analyse the benefits from their mobility experience in an attempt to determine the probability for future involvement in similar experiences.

2 Conceptual Analysis

The efforts of various stakeholders to introduce policy interventions that can effectively confront the complex social and economic conditions have –among others– broadened the concept of work placements significantly. Work placements especially organised for learning purposes are strongly connected with the concept of experiential learning [1] and appear in many different types: internship, traineeship, apprenticeship or volunteerism opportunities aspire to connect all forms and levels of learning activities with the labour market and to increase the final outcomes of their cooperation. The EU shows great interest in such schemes and has included them in its policy initiatives for work-related experiences. Therefore, the definition of the two particular types of placements under consideration –internship and volunteerism activities– is necessary.

Internships are a common work placement option that is usually offered to students or graduates³. The EU defines 'internships' as work-based learning opportunities that are part of formal education or take place outside of formal education (even after graduation). During an internship a person spends a period of time in an organisation in order to acquire specific competencies required by the labour market [2], [3]. Three different types of internships can be distinguished [4]:

- a) The mandatory internships that constitute part of the higher education curriculum and offer credit points.
- b) The non-mandatory internships that take place out of the formal education (also after graduation), but do not offer any credit points.
- c) Other forms of similar work experiences that are offered to young people as work-based learning opportunities, for example as parts of ALMPs.

The term 'volunteerism' describes the policy or practice of offering one's time or talents for charitable, educational, or other worthwhile activities, especially in one's community⁴. Three characteristics describe the volunteering activities; they

³ Internships are offered in many different occupations and can be either optional or mandatory, depending on the profession and the national legal framework. Internships are mandatory for medicine or law graduates in order to sit the national examinations and obtain their professional license. In some countries internships are a compulsory supplement to the theoretical knowledge offered in education institutions.

⁴ Volunteerism: definition from dictionary.reference.com.

are undertaken of free will, for the general public good and have non-pecuniary motivation [5], [6]. Volunteerism actually constitutes an interactive combination of non-paid work or service, activism and use of free time and allows individuals to show altruism and solidarity, and to contribute to the promotion and the protection of human rights [7].

3 Literature Review

Programmes, which integrate academic studies with work experience and aim at bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and professional practice, have been designated as essential components of a successful educational system. As the relevant debate became broader and the demand for organised schemes increased, different forms of work experience placements developed. Apprenticeships, traineeships, internships and volunteerism became concepts strongly related to the school-to-work transition. Each one of them addresses the needs of multiple beneficiaries through diverse institutional frameworks, organisational structures and operational approaches.

Besides the undeniable benefits for individuals pursuing such schemes, significant advantages derive from their implementation for other stakeholders: employers and education providers certainly benefit in a most direct way, but the indirect advantages for states, policy makers, unions and the civil society cannot be overlooked [8], [9], [10], [11], [12], [13], [14].

The increase in the demand for such programmes is certainly associated with the students' attitude towards learning. They seem to have consciously moved towards a different learning strategy by transforming the previous linear model into a more complex approach. Instead of concluding their studies before their entrance in the labour market, they prefer to combine study and work periods either in parallel or in rotation. For this purpose they pursue a large variety of work placement schemes [15]. Great emphasis is attributed to programmes that include an international mobility dimension and offer students the opportunity to participate in working experience or volunteerism schemes in other countries during or immediately after their studies [4] and to become true citizens of the world. Work placements are an excellent opportunity for students to acquire knowledge directly from experts in the field and to develop valuable social and professional skills that cannot be found in traditional classroom settings [16], [17], [18]. The learning outcomes of education and training activities are maximised and the academic performance is significantly improved through such participation [1], [19], [20], [21], [22]. Also, through a hands-on approach of the professional environment participants form a complete image of the working conditions and of the labour market demands. In this way they are able to match their knowledge with its actual needs by redefining their learning framework and adjusting their educational foundations and their competences accordingly [16], [17], [18], [23], [24]. Moreover, students have more opportunities to enrich their

CV and to develop their personal profile further in order to be more attractive candidates in the prevailing recruitment practices [14], [20], [21], [22], [25].

The great opportunity for young individuals to establish networks with the broader societal actors and the corporate world constitutes an additional advantage that has to be highlighted. Their future prospects regarding the professional career or the social interaction appear to acquire new and decisive dynamics, if they become members of broader networks that include key private and business actors [26], [27]. It can also be argued that individuals participating in social or professional experience projects have greater likelihood to achieve better job matches and earn higher remunerations [14], [16], [28], to stay in unemployment for shorter periods of time [29], [30], [31] and to maintain their first job positions longer [32]. Certainly, the benefits of internships and volunteerism are not limited only to the enhancement of theoretical knowledge and work-related competences, but they extend in personality traits, too. Young interns/volunteers experience the appropriate conditions for the development of additional transferable skills, which are expected to enhance their potential and positively affect their future prospects at social and professional level [14], [18], [20], [25], [33], [34], [35], [36], [37].

However, the significant advantages of internships for the entrepreneurial world exercise a remarkable influence on the interaction between employment supply and demand. By offering work placements employers can establish a closer cooperation with the education providers. Through this cooperation they can offer valuable guidance for the improvement of the education and training curricula according to better quality standards and with a focus on their adaptability to the labour market transformations [8], [10], [11], [26], [38], [39], [40], while the introduction of public-private sector synergies may gradually reduce the training costs. Furthermore, the intern-enterprise interaction at strictly personal level can secure not only valuable guidance and mentoring for interns by experienced professionals, but also the appropriate environment where future employees can be properly trained for the benefit of the companies [38]. In addition, the private sector has the opportunity to develop more effective recruitment processes by selecting its personnel from a large and accessible pool of skilled, highly competitive and easily adaptable labour force [14], [21], [22]. Therefore, such practices allow enterprises to deploy the appropriate human resources and to achieve their strategic goals; to promote research, to introduce innovation and to increase production.

Volunteerism, regardless of its content, is closely connected with civic participation and distinguishes for its multidimensional benefits for individuals and societies. Besides the satisfaction one feels for being able to contribute and to support those in need, volunteers can develop new skills and competences and acquire real professional experience, which are significant advantages for their personal profile [41], [42]. Volunteering activities are an excellent opportunity for someone to use his/her talents in order to unselfishly contribute to the welfare of others, thus enhancing one's self-esteem and sense of being useful to society [43]. Volunteerism usually includes involvement in various activities that are not

necessarily related to prior occupations. In this way one can acquire valuable experience in decision making and problem solving, gain specialisation on many issues of social interest and additional work experience enriching his/her CV [44]. In addition, by becoming volunteers individuals have the opportunity to make new social acquaintances and, more importantly, to become members of broader networks, which not only enhance the effectiveness of their contribution, but may also prove valuable for their future social and professional involvement [43], [44]. Most volunteers develop strong social awareness and commitment, which are expressed by their propensity to repeat their engagement in similar initiatives in the future and seem to enhance the concept of civil society [41], [42]. Furthermore, the ability to acquire better understanding and management of cultural diversity helps volunteers to be more flexible in their socioeconomic interaction, to set the foundations for the development of leadership qualities and to become real citizens of the world [42]. On the other hand, the existence of volunteers is a competitive advantage for societies. The provision of a broader range and of better quality services to communities can be attainable, while the volunteers' willingness to offer their services, competence and creativity for free contributes to the development of the local communities [45], [6]. Finally, a volunteering network keeps the societal attention on the existing deficiencies and develops a vision for social engagement in broader parts of the population [42], [5].

4 EU Policy on Internships and Volunteerism

The concept of work-based learning experiences –internships and volunteerism included– acquires a new meaning amid the recent developments in the EU policies, which have increased the importance they attribute to their promotion and support. Internships and volunteerism are included in the new framework that is being developed; they offer opportunities for personal improvement of equal importance and their outcomes have significant similarities. The interest of the EU for such schemes seems to be twofold. On one hand, the promotion of work-based experiences is seen as a tool that can restore the distorted relation between the education system and the labour market and combat unemployment. On the other hand, it is considered a means to develop transferable and professional skills and competences further, as well as to reignite innovation and growth in the European economy.

Certainly, it is very important to examine the conditions in youth employment in the European labour market, which not only influence the relevant policy initiatives, but also largely determine the individuals' decisions regarding their participation in work-based learning schemes. The rates of unemployment in Europe remain persistently high for many years now. However, in countries with serious fiscal and economic difficulties the levels of unemployment for the total population have risen dramatically since the beginning of the 2008 crisis and are accompanied by serious deterioration in the citizens' quality of life. Due to the

heavy burden of high unemployment rates countries such as Greece (26.5%), Spain (24.5%), Cyprus (16.1%), Croatia, (17.0%), Portugal (14.1%) and Slovakia (13.2%) face unfavourable socioeconomic prospects and serious social turbulence (Table 1).

Table 1: Unemployment rates in the EU
(total population and persons <25 years) (%)

| Countries | 2008 (<25) | 2008 | 2009 (<25) | 2009 | 2010 (<25) | 2010 | 2011 (<25) | 2011 | 2012 (<25) | 2012 | 2013 (<25) | 2013 | 2014 (<25) | 2014 |
|----------------|---------------|------|---------------|------|---------------|------|---------------|------|---------------|------|---------------|------|---------------|------|
| EU-28 | 15.9 | 7.0 | 20.3 | 8.9 | 21.4 | 9.6 | 21.7 | 9.6 | 23.2 | 10.5 | 23.7 | 10.9 | 22.2 | 10.2 |
| Austria | 8.0 | 3.8 | 10.0 | 4.8 | 8.8 | 4.4 | 8.3 | 4.2 | 8.7 | 4.3 | 9.2 | 4.9 | : | : |
| Belgium | 18.0 | 7.0 | 21.9 | 7.9 | 22.4 | 8.3 | 18.7 | 7.2 | 19.8 | 7.6 | 23.7 | 8.4 | 23.2 | 8.5 |
| Bulgaria | 11.9 | 5.6 | 15.1 | 6.8 | 21.8 | 10.3 | 25.0 | 11.3 | 28.1 | 12.3 | 28.4 | 13.0 | 23.6 | 11.6 |
| Croatia | 23.7 | 8.6 | 25.2 | 9.2 | 32.4 | 11.7 | 36.7 | 13.7 | 42.1 | 16.0 | 50.0 | 17.3 | 45.0 | 17.0 |
| Cyprus | 9.0 | 3.7 | 13.8 | 5.4 | 16.6 | 6.3 | 22.4 | 7.9 | 27.7 | 11.9 | 38.9 | 15.9 | 35.5 | 16.1 |
| Czech Republic | 9.9 | 4.4 | 16.6 | 6.7 | 18.3 | 7.3 | 18.1 | 6.7 | 19.5 | 7.0 | 18.9 | 7.0 | 15.9 | 6.1 |
| Denmark | 8.0 | 3.4 | 11.8 | 6.0 | 13.9 | 7.5 | 14.2 | 7.6 | 14.1 | 7.5 | 13.0 | 7.0 | 12.6 | 6.6 |
| Estonia | 12.0 | 5.5 | 27.4 | 13.5 | 32.9 | 16.7 | 22.4 | 12.3 | 20.9 | 10.0 | 18.7 | 8.6 | 15.0 | 7.4 |
| Finland | 16.5 | 6.4 | 21.5 | 8.2 | 21.4 | 8.4 | 20.1 | 7.8 | 19.0 | 7.7 | 19.9 | 8.2 | 20.5 | 8.7 |
| France | 19.0 | 7.4 | 23.6 | 9.1 | 23.3 | 9.3 | 22.6 | 9.2 | 24.4 | 9.8 | 24.8 | 10.3 | 24.3 | 10.2 |
| Germany | 10.4 | 7.4 | 11.1 | 7.6 | 9.8 | 7.0 | 8.5 | 5.8 | 8.0 | 5.4 | 7.8 | 5.2 | 7.7 | 5.0 |
| Greece | 21.9 | 7.8 | 25.7 | 9.6 | 33.0 | 12.7 | 44.7 | 17.9 | 55.3 | 24.5 | 58.3 | 27.5 | 52.3 | 26.5 |
| Hungary | 19.5 | 7.8 | 26.4 | 10.0 | 26.4 | 11.2 | 26.0 | 11.0 | 28.2 | 11.0 | 26.6 | 10.2 | 20.4 | 7.7 |
| Ireland | 13.3 | 6.4 | 24.0 | 12.0 | 27.6 | 13.9 | 29.1 | 14.7 | 30.4 | 14.7 | 26.8 | 13.1 | 24.0 | 11.3 |
| Italy | 21.2 | 6.7 | 25.3 | 7.7 | 27.9 | 8.4 | 29.2 | 8.4 | 35.3 | 10.7 | 40.0 | 12.1 | 42.7 | 12.7 |
| Latvia | 13.6 | 7.7 | 33.3 | 17.5 | 36.2 | 19.5 | 31.0 | 16.2 | 28.5 | 15.0 | 23.2 | 11.9 | 19.6 | 10.8 |
| Lithuania | 13.3 | 5.8 | 29.6 | 13.8 | 35.7 | 17.8 | 32.6 | 15.4 | 26.7 | 13.4 | 21.9 | 11.8 | 19.3 | 10.7 |
| Luxembourg | 17.3 | 4.9 | 16.5 | 5.1 | 15.8 | 4.6 | 16.4 | 4.8 | 18.0 | 5.1 | 16.9 | 5.9 | 18.9 | 6.0 |
| Malta | 11.7 | 6.0 | 14.5 | 6.9 | 13.2 | 6.9 | 13.3 | 6.4 | 14.1 | 6.3 | 13.0 | 6.4 | 12.7 | 5.9 |
| Netherlands | 8.6 | 3.7 | 10.2 | 4.4 | 11.1 | 5.0 | 10.0 | 5.0 | 11.7 | 5.8 | 13.2 | 7.3 | 12.7 | 7.4 |
| Poland | 17.2 | 7.1 | 20.6 | 8.1 | 23.7 | 9.7 | 25.8 | 9.7 | 26.5 | 10.1 | 27.3 | 10.3 | 23.9 | 9.0 |
| Portugal | 21.5 | 8.7 | 25.3 | 10.7 | 27.9 | 12.0 | 30.3 | 12.9 | 37.9 | 15.8 | 38.1 | 16.4 | 34.8 | 14.1 |
| Romania | 17.6 | 5.6 | 20.0 | 6.5 | 22.1 | 7.0 | 23.9 | 7.2 | 22.6 | 6.8 | 23.7 | 7.1 | 24.0 | 6.8 |
| Slovakia | 19.3 | 9.6 | 27.6 | 12.1 | 33.9 | 14.5 | 33.7 | 13.7 | 34.0 | 14.0 | 33.7 | 14.2 | 30.4 | 13.2 |
| Slovenia | 10.4 | 4.4 | 13.6 | 5.9 | 14.7 | 7.3 | 15.7 | 8.2 | 20.6 | 8.9 | 21.6 | 10.1 | 21.7 | 9.8 |
| Spain | 24.5 | 11.3 | 37.7 | 17.9 | 41.5 | 19.9 | 46.2 | 21.4 | 52.9 | 24.8 | 55.5 | 26.1 | 53.2 | 24.5 |
| Sweden | 20.2 | 6.2 | 25.0 | 8.3 | 24.8 | 8.6 | 22.8 | 7.8 | 23.7 | 8.0 | 23.6 | 8.0 | 22.9 | 7.9 |
| United Kingdom | 15.0 | 5.6 | 19.1 | 7.6 | 19.9 | 7.8 | 21.3 | 8.1 | 21.2 | 7.9 | 20.7 | 7.6 | : | : |

Source: Eurostat

Nevertheless, the problems appear to be worse in the case of young people and especially of NEETs (Not in Employment, Education or Training) [46] (Tables 1-2). Their difficulty in entering the labour market increases the danger of them becoming economically excluded and socially marginalised. This danger has been repeatedly highlighted by the European officials in their expressions of fear for a 'lost generation' [47] and incited the expectations for more actions in Europe in order to support the school-to-work transition of young people.

Table 2: Young people Neither in Employment nor in Education and Training

(NEETs) by age group

| Countries | 2008 | | 2009 | | 2010 | | 2011 | | 2012 | | 2013 | |
|----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | 15-24 | 25-29 | 15-24 | 25-29 | 15-24 | 25-29 | 15-24 | 25-29 | 15-24 | 25-29 | 15-24 | 25-29 |
| EU-28 | 10.8 | 17.0 | 12.4 | 18.9 | 12.7 | 19.6 | 12.9 | 19.8 | 13.1 | 20.5 | 13.0 | 20.9 |
| Austria | 7.1 | 11.3 | 7.8 | 11.4 | 7.1 | 11.6 | 6.9 | 10.3 | 6.5 | 10.1 | 7.1 | 10.4 |
| Belgium | 10.1 | 15.6 | 11.1 | 16.2 | 10.9 | 17.0 | 11.8 | 17.7 | 12.3 | 18.3 | 12.7 | 19.2 |
| Bulgaria | 17.4 | 21.1 | 19.5 | 24.0 | 21.8 | 27.8 | 21.8 | 29.9 | 21.5 | 30.0 | 21.6 | 32.3 |
| Croatia | 10.1 | 14.7 | 11.9 | 16.5 | 14.9 | 21.2 | 15.7 | 23.1 | 16.7 | 23.8 | 19.6 | 27.1 |
| Cyprus | 9.7 | 12.7 | 9.9 | 14.0 | 11.7 | 14.7 | 14.6 | 15.1 | 16.0 | 19.2 | 18.7 | 22.8 |
| Czech Republic | 6.7 | 17.4 | 8.5 | 19.8 | 8.8 | 19.8 | 8.3 | 18.7 | 8.9 | 19.6 | 9.1 | 18.8 |
| Denmark | 4.3 | 6.5 | 5.4 | 8.9 | 6.0 | 10.1 | 6.3 | 10.5 | 6.6 | 11.6 | 6.0 | 10.8 |
| Estonia | 8.7 | 16.9 | 14.5 | 26.0 | 14.0 | 25.6 | 11.6 | 20.2 | 12.2 | 20.1 | 11.3 | 18.9 |
| Finland | 7.8 | 10.9 | 9.9 | 14.1 | 9.0 | 13.3 | 8.4 | 13.0 | 8.6 | 13.7 | 9.3 | 13.8 |
| France | 10.2 | 16.7 | 12.4 | 18.5 | 12.3 | 19.0 | 11.9 | 19.4 | 12.1 | 20.2 | 11.2 | 18.8 |
| Germany | 8.4 | 15.8 | 8.8 | 16.1 | 8.3 | 15.2 | 7.5 | 13.7 | 7.1 | 13.2 | 6.3 | 13.0 |
| Greece | 11.4 | 20.1 | 12.4 | 21.2 | 14.8 | 24.6 | 17.4 | 31.9 | 20.2 | 37.5 | 20.4 | 42.1 |
| Hungary | 11.5 | 23.0 | 13.4 | 24.9 | 12.4 | 26.6 | 13.3 | 25.5 | 14.7 | 26.0 | 15.4 | 24.5 |
| Ireland | 14.9 | 17.8 | 18.6 | 23.1 | 19.2 | 25.1 | 18.8 | 27.1 | 18.7 | 25.5 | 16.1 | 22.7 |
| Italy | 16.6 | 23.8 | 17.7 | 25.5 | 19.1 | 27.3 | 19.8 | 27.8 | 21.1 | 28.9 | 22.2 | 32.9 |
| Latvia | 11.8 | 17.5 | 17.5 | 27.8 | 17.8 | 26.5 | 16.0 | 24.9 | 14.9 | 21.2 | 13.0 | 19.7 |
| Lithuania | 8.8 | 19.1 | 12.1 | 21.4 | 13.2 | 25.7 | 11.8 | 21.7 | 11.2 | 20.3 | 11.1 | 19.4 |
| Luxembourg | 6.2 | 14.2 | 5.8 | 10.5 | 5.1 | 7.7 | 4.7 | 9.8 | 5.9 | 10.4 | 5.0 | 11.0 |
| Malta | 8.3 | 17.2 | 9.9 | 17.7 | 9.5 | 17.1 | 10.2 | 15.6 | 10.6 | 13.8 | 10.0 | 13.8 |
| Netherlands | 3.4 | 7.1 | 4.1 | 7.6 | 4.3 | 8.7 | 3.8 | 9.1 | 4.3 | 9.9 | 5.1 | 11.1 |
| Poland | 9.0 | 19.3 | 10.1 | 20.5 | 10.8 | 21.6 | 11.5 | 21.4 | 11.8 | 22.1 | 12.2 | 22.7 |
| Portugal | 10.2 | 14.6 | 11.2 | 14.6 | 11.4 | 17.3 | 12.6 | 16.2 | 13.9 | 18.7 | 14.1 | 20.8 |
| Romania | 11.6 | 16.2 | 13.9 | 19.0 | 16.4 | 22.0 | 17.4 | 22.2 | 16.8 | 23.0 | 17.2 | 23.4 |
| Slovakia | 11.1 | 22.8 | 12.5 | 25.8 | 14.1 | 27.5 | 13.8 | 27.1 | 13.8 | 27.1 | 13.7 | 27.8 |
| Slovenia | 6.5 | 9.1 | 7.5 | 12.5 | 7.1 | 13.2 | 7.1 | 13.2 | 9.3 | 15.9 | 9.2 | 18.7 |
| Spain | 14.3 | 16.7 | 18.1 | 22.5 | 17.8 | 23.2 | 18.2 | 24.2 | 18.6 | 27.8 | 18.6 | 28.7 |
| Sweden | 7.8 | 8.5 | 9.6 | 10.4 | 7.7 | 9.5 | 7.5 | 8.6 | 7.8 | 9.4 | 7.5 | 8.7 |
| United Kingdom | 12.1 | 15.0 | 13.3 | 16.6 | 13.7 | 16.3 | 14.3 | 17.5 | 14.0 | 17.7 | 13.3 | 17.1 |

Source: Eurostat

Of course, the European interest in work placements for young people is not new. In the past schemes offering practical experience had become part of the national VET systems and had operated with considerable success in tackling the difficulties in youth employment and their negative effects on the school-to-work transition. Nevertheless, for many years any reference to them by the EU remained theoretical and no particular collective actions were undertaken. It was the Europe 2020 strategy [4], [48] that put great emphasis on the establishment of practical experience schemes that would be clearly work-oriented and inclusive. A number of interventions were launched either by the European authorities or by the European civil society and other stakeholders in order to formulate the appropriate institutional and operational framework. More importantly, these initiatives either explicitly or implicitly favoured youth international mobility for such purposes. Consequently, a number of different private or business actors started investing with greater intensity in the concepts of internships, apprenticeships and

volunteerism, in order to create the appropriate conditions for young people to acquire practical experience in the real social of professional environment. The Youth on the Move Initiative [4], [49], one of the seven flagships of the Europe 2020 strategy, was the first in a series of institutional interventions favouring the promotion of organised work-based learning and placing special emphasis on learning mobility through transnational schemes. It regarded them as a promising tool ensuring the development of skills and competences of individuals and facilitating their integration in the labour market. Besides explicitly recognising the necessity for such schemes, the initiative underlined the lack of a quality Charter and actually incited the intensification of the European interventions regarding youth opportunities. As a result, it was soon followed by two new policy initiatives aiming at the smoother youth transition to employment; the Youth Opportunities Initiative [50] and the job mobility scheme ‘Your first EURES Job’ (YfEJ) [51]. The former included a two-dimensional approach by encouraging employers to create more and better quality placement positions of all types and by highlighting the importance of mobility schemes in the European environment through projects organised by the ERASMUS programme or other socioeconomic entities. The latter targeted the mobility schemes in other European countries as useful policy tools combining learning and working experiences for young people⁵.

The aforementioned interventions acted as a catalyst that led the EU to undertake proactive initiatives that especially addressed the problem of youth unemployment, which continued to deteriorate. The Youth Employment Package [52] included a number of supportive measures that aimed at the improvement of the employment prospects for young cohorts and prepared future interventions towards the same direction. It made special reference to the role of work-based learning placements –internships, apprenticeships– and emphasised the need for a framework defining the quality standards and securing the social security and the remuneration package of each type of placements.

The introduction of the Youth Guarantee Initiative [53] came to establish a new and more effective policy framework regarding youth employment that should be customised according to national priorities and capacity. The Council of the European Union clearly supported the concept of all forms of placements by specifically noting that every member state should «ensure that all young people under the age of 25 years receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education» [53, p. 3]. The Youth Guarantee actions aspire to help young people to develop their professional

⁵ The job mobility scheme ‘Your first EURES Job’ (YfEJ) has been incorporated in the EU Programme for Employment and Social Inclusion (EaSI), which is a new financial instrument that is managed by the European Commission and promotes actions favouring employment and social security and combatting social exclusion.

competences and to be integrated in the labour market easier. The particular concept was further promoted through the European Commission communication titled “Working together for Europe’s young people: A call to action on youth unemployment” [54]. Among others the communication supported the development of EU-level tools that would be able to help the European countries and enterprises to establish more working experience schemes for larger numbers of participants.

Besides the establishment of a framework that favours the planning and the implementation of work placements by different socioeconomic actors, the debate regarding their quality characteristics resulted in particular institutional interventions by various stakeholders, who aspired to regulate the developing framework according to specific and common for the entire EU quality standards. The civil society was the first entity to embark on such a project. The European Youth Forum efforts to regulate the provisions for the learning content, the methodological approach and practices, and the terms and conditions of effective work placements brought into force the European Quality Charter on Internships and Apprenticeships [2] in 2010 at a time when the EU itself lacked similar official texts. The respective European text, the Quality Framework for Traineeships [55], was issued much later, in 2014, under the influence of the European Alliance on Apprenticeships [56] that aimed at mobilising broader groups of interest in pro-apprenticeship projects. The new Quality Framework underlined the need for the establishment of specific quality standards through the coordinated cooperation of the European countries, the social partners and the education providers, and encouraged the creation of more traineeship schemes with a transnational character.

The civil society has always been present in the socioeconomic developments in the European environment, but its power to exercise decisive interventions and to determine their outcomes has been kept within certain limits and neglected. Although it has been rediscovered in the debate regarding the relationship between democracy and governance, its actual role runs the risk of being compromised and of enduring limitations of its potential [57]. However, it has been gradually projected not only as the forum through which the voice of the European citizens could actually be heard, but also as one of the main actors in the planning and the implementation of new initiatives [58]. There are many recent examples of the European mobilisation towards greater involvement of the civil society and the field of volunteerism is one of them. The expectations regarding its contribution to development, social cohesion and effective confrontation of social needs appear greater than ever before [7]. The European Union through the establishment of the European Voluntary Service (EVS)⁶ has designated volunteerism as one of the

⁶ The EVS has been established in 1996 and in the years that followed it became an important field of action of the European interventions for the implementation of youth policies. For more information please see the official EVS website [59].

most important opportunities for young people to be mobile in the international environment and to proactively express their commitment to social involvement on a voluntary basis. EVS became one of the action fields of the Erasmus+ Programme (Key Action 1) [60]. The EU has introduced an institutional framework in order to ensure the ability of participation and recognition according to specific organisational and quality requirements [61]. EVS is a unique opportunity for young participants 18-30 years of age to experience the mobility benefits and to develop particular competences that will enhance their citizenship potential. The volunteerism mobility schemes may last from 2 weeks to 12 months. During this period board and lodging, insurance cover and a grant for the duration of the project are provided, while online linguistic support is also available.

5 The Survey

5.1 AIESEC Programmes

AIESEC [62], [63] is an international non-governmental not-for-profit organisation that was established in 1948 in order to support the international cooperation among university students. Since its foundation it has established a global network of 2,400 universities, which expands in 126 countries and territories with over 70,000 members. AIESEC takes part in a number of actions with social and professional dimensions and provides opportunities for the empowerment and the leadership development of young people who aspire to have a positive impact on society. Large part of AIESEC activities includes the organisation of international internships and volunteer exchange experiences. The fact that all its programmes are exclusively organised, monitored and implemented by students makes the activities of AIESEC very important, as they constitute a proactive expression of the youth creativity and potential.

The members of AIESEC are eligible for participation in the programmes not only during their undergraduate or postgraduate studies, but also within two years after their graduation, provided that they are under 30 years of age. Therefore, students who are interested in pursuing international volunteering or working experiences have flexible time limits, in order to adjust their overall programming easily. Furthermore, the ability to participate even after their graduation allows young individuals to take advantage of the transitional period and of opportunities, which can support professional or social objectives.

The survey that is presented in this paper focuses on two particular programmes: “Global Talent” and “Global Citizen”. “Global Talent” offers paid internships in companies all over the world for a period of 6 weeks to 18 months. Internships are offered in three fields: management (administration, finance, accounting, marketing, project management, HR), technology (web development, software, IT networks and databases, engineering) and education (promotion, curriculum development, teaching, counselling). “Global Citizen” offers short-term voluntary internships for up to 6 weeks. During these schemes students have the opportunity

to work on diverse community projects and in different organisations promoting their sense of social responsibility.

5.2 Research Methodology

This paper presents the findings of an empirical research that explores the mobility experiences of university students abroad by using a questionnaire. The population of the survey research consists of Greek university students who had participated in mobility programmes during the two years prior to the survey through the AIESEC branch of the University of Macedonia located in Thessaloniki, Greece. The particular student pool was chosen in order to achieve greater participation, as most of the students were still studying in university and should be more willing to share their experiences. Also, their internship or volunteerism experience was still quite recent, so they were expected to express a more concrete, detailed and objective opinion about it, as well as to be able to assess the incentives, the benefits and the challenges of such schemes in relation to their personal case and the particular strongly extrovert learning environment.

The use of a questionnaire was considered as the most appropriate instrument for the research purposes. Besides an overview of the demographics of the participants, the questionnaire was designed in order to explore the students' motives that incited their decision to pursue the particular programmes abroad and the benefits they gained from this experience. Furthermore, the questionnaire aimed at defining the factors that would challenge the respondents' intentions to work abroad or the future participation of other AIESEC members. Finally, the aim of evaluating the interaction between the AIESEC programmes and the Erasmus programme was also included in the research design.

The conclusion of the questionnaire design was followed by the selection of the methodology for its application. An important challenge was to secure an adequate number of respondents. No specific sampling technique was used as the population size was limited to less than 300 individuals. The use of an online questionnaire through the Google Forms application was designated as the most suitable, because it makes the process of sending it to a large number of students and of receiving their responses much easier and faster than other methods, while it simultaneously increases efficiency and data fidelity. This tool is offered free of charge and has many user-friendly settings. Its use requires the knowledge of using a computer and the internet [64], which in our case was already ensured. The response rates to web surveys are similar to those using other forms of addressing the target group, such as mail [65], [66]. The length of the questionnaire was kept as short as possible so that it would both serve the research purposes and need the least time possible to be filled in [67], thus attracting more respondents. The students were sent an invitation to their e-mail accounts and were asked to answer the questionnaire by following a link that was included in it. This message also contained a brief reference to the objectives of the survey in order to attract the students' attention and assured the students about the anonymity of their responses, that is essential for them [68]. The survey was

conducted from 14th July to 2nd August 2015 and during this period two reminder e-mails were sent to the students in order to increase the response rate [69], [70]. 108 invitation e-mails were sent to students and 66 responses were received; the response rate of 61% is considered very satisfactory.

The main research questions were the following:

Research question 1: What were the motives that incited students' participation in AIESEC mobility schemes?

Research question 2: What were the benefits from the mobility experience for the students?

Research question 3: What were the challenges confronted by the participants during the internship/volunteerism programme?

Research question 4: Is there an interaction between the mobility experiences organised by AIESEC and the Erasmus programme?

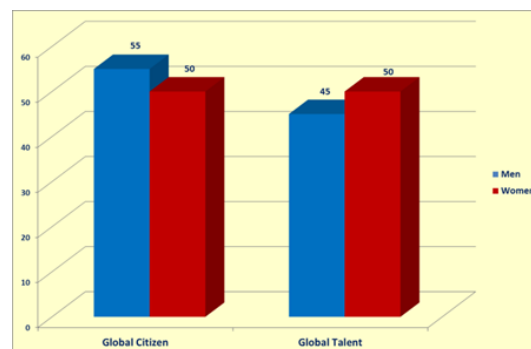
Research question 5: Do students intent to emigrate for professional purposes in the future?

Research question 6: Which reasons would incite the decision for emigration?

5.3 Findings of the Survey

5.3.1 Demographics of Respondents

Women participants in the AIESEC programmes responded to the survey invitation at greater rates (56%) than men (44%). With regards to the participation of each gender in the programmes, men seem to prefer to participate in "Global Citizen" (GC) more than in "Global Talent" (GT), while women are equally distributed between the two programmes (GC: men 55% - women 50% vs. GT: men 45% - women 50%) (Figure 1). The question about the students' employment status at the time of the survey showed that three out of four respondents were still continuing their studies (74.2%) and few worked in the private sector (22.8%) (Figure 2).



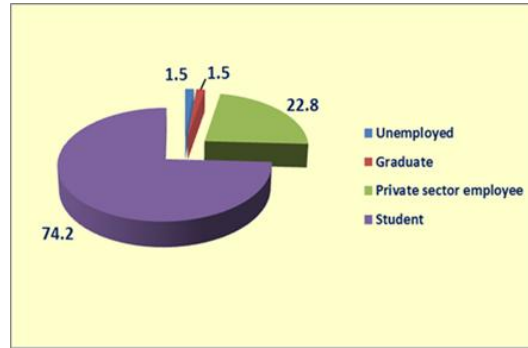


Figure 1: Mobility participation by gender and programme (%)

Figure 2: Employment status during survey (%)

5.3.2 Conditions of the Mobility Scheme

Three out of four respondents (77%) participated in the AIESEC programme during their undergraduate studies, while 13% of them did so after their graduation (Figure 3). It can be argued that undergraduate students are more likely to engage in such activities, because during their studies for a first university degree they pay great attention to developing an attractive CV and to forming an integrated image of society. On the contrary, individuals usually seek for opportunities to secure a job position in the labour market after their graduation or during their postgraduate studies and their willingness to participate in other forms of activities, such as internships or volunteerism, has certain limitations. Nevertheless, it must be underlined that such schemes offer a lot of benefits to participants during their school-to-work transition and have a special importance, when their employment prospects appear unfavorable.

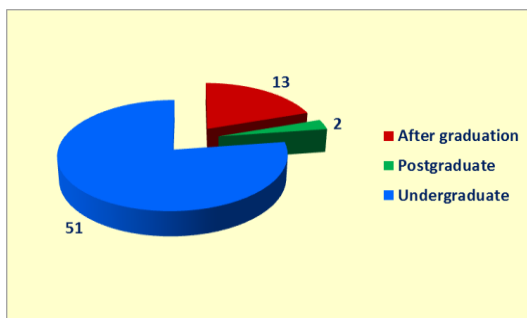


Figure 3: Study level during mobility programme (number of students)

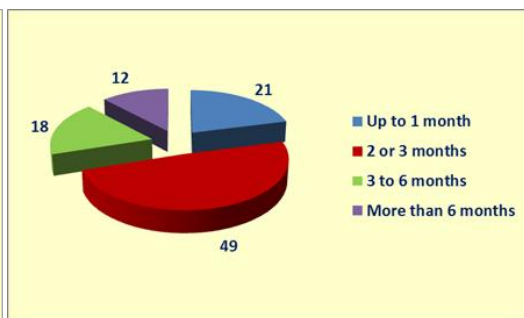


Figure 4: Duration of mobility programme (%)

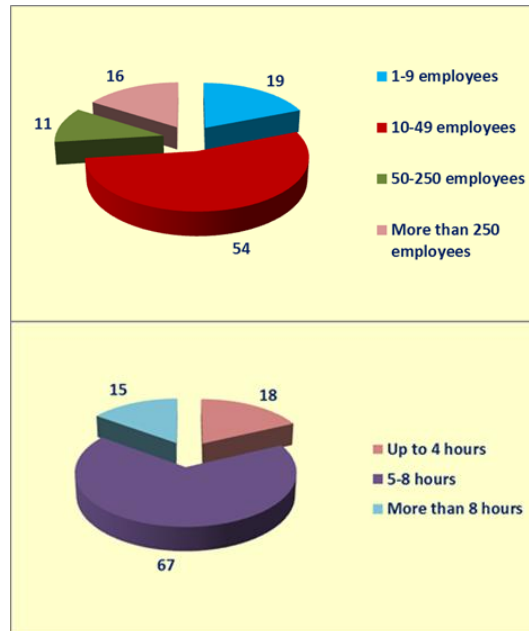


Figure 5: Size of the host organisation (%) Figure 6: Working hours per day (%)

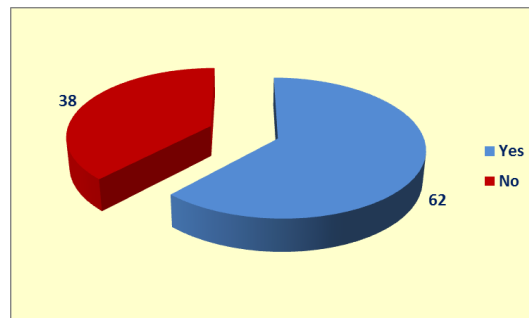


Figure 7: Provisions for a mentor by host organisation (%)

Most of the students attended one AIESEC mobility programme (89%) either in the EU or in other European countries (84.8%) and only few visited a country in Asia or Africa. For half of the students the mobility period lasted for 2-3 months (49%), while for one out of five (21%) it was limited to only one month (Figure 4). The majority of the participants worked in small enterprises or organizations for 5-8 hours per day (67%) (Figures 5-6). Also, most of the students (62%) reported that the host organisation provided a mentor, who supervised and guided their activities (Figure 7).

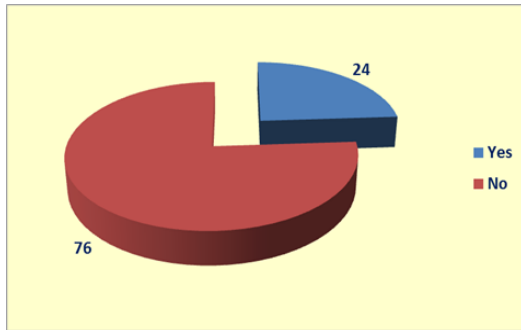
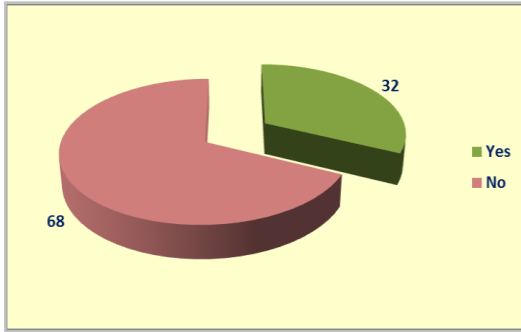


Figure 8: Sending-host organisation contract (%) Figure 9: List of professional duties (%)

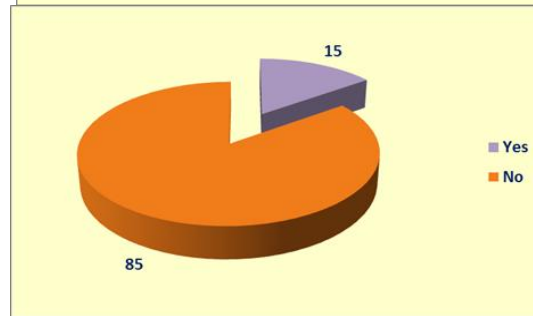
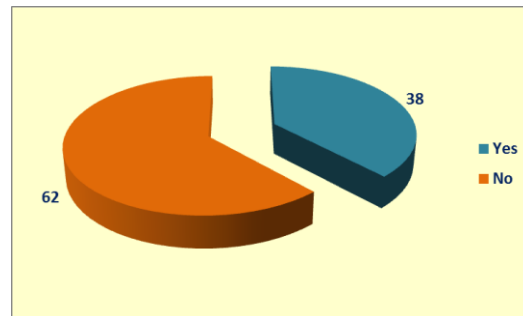
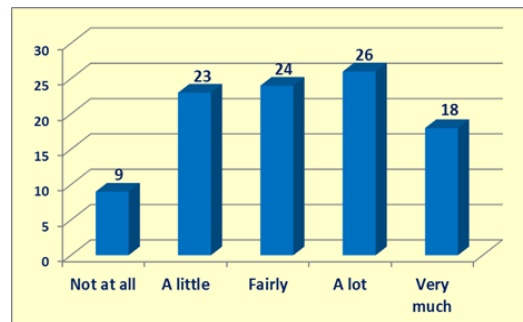


Figure 10: Compensation by host organization (%)

Figure 11: Health insurance by host organization (%)



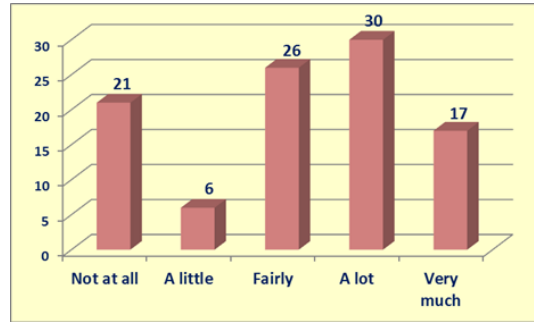


Figure 12: Relation of duties to university studies (%)

Figure 13: Positive influence of mobility experience on academic performance (%)

However, a contract between the sending and the host organization determining the terms and conditions of the mobility scheme was signed only in the case of one out of three students (32%) (Figure 8). Moreover, the mobility agreement included neither a list of the professional duties, with which the students would be assigned (76%) (Figure 9), nor any provisions for compensation (62%) or health insurance coverage (84.8%) (Figures 10-11).

The survey explored an additional aspect of the student mobility schemes. It attempted to define whether the professional duties undertaken by the students matched with the field of their studies. Their responses indicate quite satisfactory levels of matching; almost half of them (44%) reported a strong relation between their field of studies and the content of the mobility programme, while one out of four (24%) reported a fair relation (Figure 12).

Finally, the students were asked to assess the influence of the mobility experience on their overall academic performance. They recognised a strong positive influence that ranged from fair (26%) to strong (30%) and very strong (17%) (Figure 13). Of course, this positive influence exceeds the traditional learning framework of the studies and extends to the overall development of the students' skills and competences during the mobility programme. This fact definitely has its own impact on their diligence to study harder and in a better organised way, on the decisions they make and on the quality with which they cope with the demands of their studies.

5.3.3. Main Results

The main aim of the survey research was to explore the students' experience with regards to the incentives, the benefits and the challenges that were related to their mobility. The analysis of these dimensions is very important. Besides revealing the factors that affect the interest in participating in an AIESEC mobility programme, it can contribute to the improvement of the policy framework for other forms of youth mobility, too.

For each dimension the students were asked to define the level of their agreement

to a number of given statements allocated in a 5-level Likert scale ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’.

5.3.3.1. Incentives for Participation in the Programme

The students’ incentives to pursue an experience abroad (either to work or to offer volunteering work) were divided in different groups.

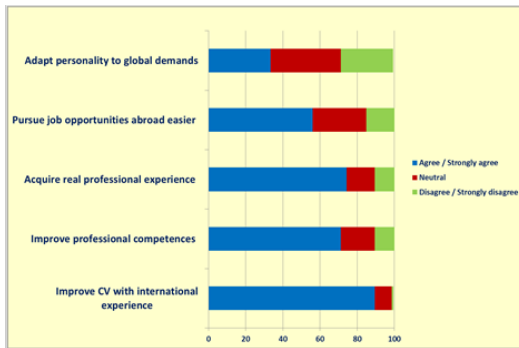


Figure 14: Motives-professional (%)

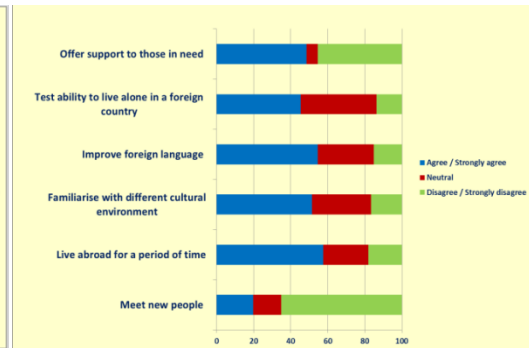


Figure 15: Motives-personal (%)

The first group of statements explored the influence of motives of professional nature that are clearly connected to the students’ aspirations regarding their professional prospects (Figure 14). The respondents’ primary motive was the opportunity to enrich their curriculum vitae with work experience from the international environment and, thus, to be more attractive in the competitive recruitment processes in the future (89%). They also attribute great importance to being able to acquire real professional experience (74%) or to improve their professional competences (71%), which constitute valuable advantages especially for those entering the labour market for the first time. In addition, more than half of the students actually revealed their intentions to pursue work opportunities in other countries after graduation by reporting the significance of international professional experiences for such a purpose (56%).

The second group of statements referred to the personal motives that incited the students’ participation in the AIESEC mobility programmes (Figure 15). It can be argued that, although the statements focus on factors that are related to the students’ personality, the responses clearly imply the existence of strong intentions to emigrate for employment purposes in the future. The students were greatly motivated by the prospect of living abroad for a period of time (58%) and of becoming familiar with a different cultural environment (52%). Furthermore, they placed great emphasis on the opportunity to test whether they can manage living alone in a foreign country (45%). Their desire to improve the knowledge of a foreign language (55%) coincides with the aforementioned interest in developing an attractive CV; the students aspire to improve their language skills that combine personal and professional traits and certainly affect the options for a good job

position as well as for easier social integration. Oddly enough, offering support to people in need was important for only half of the respondents (48%).

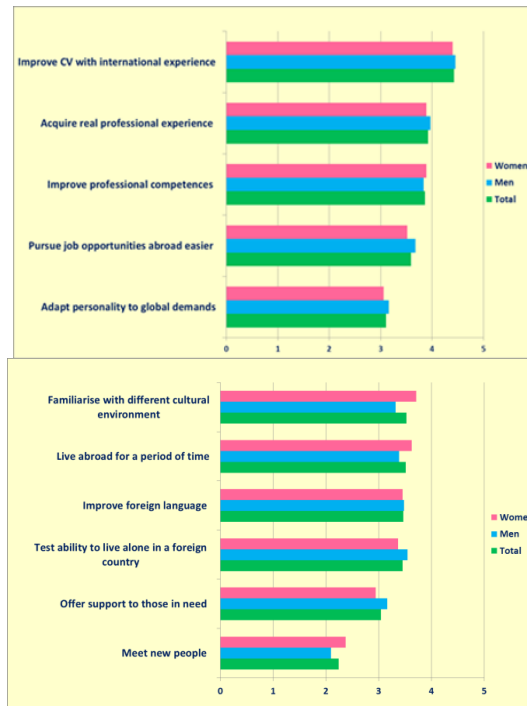


Figure 16: Professional motives/gender (mean rank) Figure 17: Personal motives/gender (mean rank)

The analysis of the responses by gender shows that there are no significant differences between men and women with regards to the factors that influenced their decision to participate in the AIESEC programmes (Figures 16-17). The interest in experiencing a mobility opportunity is based on similar grounds and is clearly related with the ability of transforming the particular experience into an indication of an extrovert life course perspective.

5.3.3.2. Benefits from Participation in the Programme

The benefits from the students’ AIESEC experience were divided in three distinct groups that referred to the professional, the skills development and the personal level. The students evaluate the most important benefits according to their interests by defining the levels of their agreement to given statements.

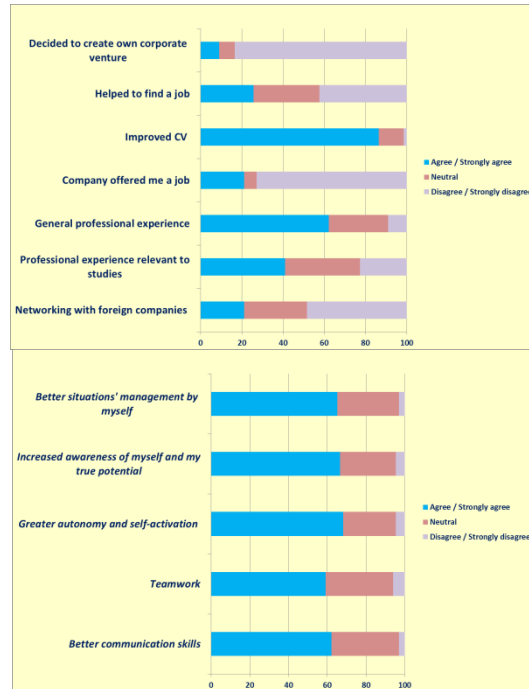


Figure 18: Benefits-professional (%)

Figure 19: Benefits-skills (%)

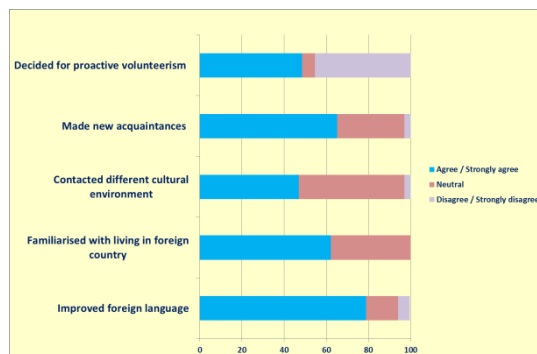


Figure 20: Benefits-personal (%)

There is no doubt that the professional benefits reported by the students (Figure 18) reflect the fact that the demands of the recruitment processes dominate their thinking almost completely. Students seem eager to show to potential employers a multifaceted personality, which allows them to easily integrate in multiple professional or cultural environments and to adapt to diverse conditions. On one hand, they recognise that the internship or volunteerism experience helped them improve their CV (86%), and to acquire professional experience (general: 62% or relevant with studies: 41%), which are really valuable for their transition to employment. Lacking such experience is constantly mentioned as a considerable

obstacle for young people to enter the labour market for the first time; employers seem to interpret it as an indication of the individuals' difficulty in adjusting to the working environment and to the company culture, while their actual skills and competences are being seriously questioned, if they haven't been properly tested before. On the other hand, due to the temporary nature of the mobility scheme the students haven't been successful either in establishing networks with companies abroad (21%) or in securing a job position (in the company where they worked 21% or other 26%). However, the experience of working in a corporate or a social environment did not incite a decision to create their own venture in the future at all (9%).

The second group of statements explored the benefits for the respondents in terms of skills development (Figure 19). The AIESEC experience is reported to have helped the participants to develop their skills a lot by offering the opportunity to connect their expectations with the actual social and economic circumstances. The students acknowledge that they improved their autonomy and self-activation (68%) and increased their awareness of abilities and potential (67%) significantly. In addition, they were able to develop greater confidence in managing situations independently (65%). The particular statements appear very interesting, when they are compared to the existing social interactions in the Greek society. In particular, the close control and guidance often exercised on most young Greeks by the family and the social environment deprives them from opportunities to put their competences into practice. Therefore, it is very important for them to overcome this control and to realise their ability to stand on their own feet. Finally, better communication (62%) and teamwork skills (59%) were also designated as benefits, although there obviously are many other situations supporting their development. Finally, the students were asked to define the benefits from the mobility scheme at personal level and, thus, to determine how much their personality was affected by their experiences (Figure 20). They especially highlighted that they improved the knowledge of a foreign language (79%), made acquaintances (65%) and became familiar with living in a foreign country (62%). All these benefits give them greater confidence to be active in the international environment. On the contrary, only half of the students placed emphasis on the decision to get proactively involved in activities of social responsibility and volunteerism (48%), as well as on the advantages from the contact with a different cultural environment (47%).

5.3.3.3. Obstacles during Participation in the Programme

The third dimension explored by the survey refers to the obstacles confronted by the students during the mobility programme. The challenges were allocated in two different groups according to their professional or personal content.

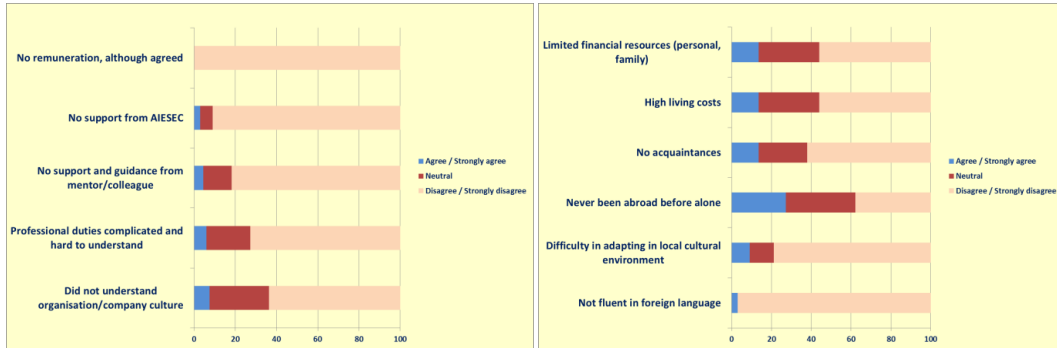


Figure 21: Obstacles-professional (%)

Figure 22: Obstacles-personal (%)

At professional level the students did not face serious difficulties (Figure 21). On the contrary, they mentioned the strong support offered by the AIESEC network (91%) and the mentors in the host organisation (82%), who helped them make the most out of their experience. Furthermore, they appear to have adapted to the working environment (64%) and to their duties quite easily (73%). This is a clear indication that they feel ready to enter the labour market and capable of confronting its demands.

At personal level the students faced certain difficulties, although they were not very intense (Figure 22). One out of four students (27%) mentioned that they confronted some difficulty, because they lived in a foreign country alone for the first time. Similarly, few students reported that financial deficiencies (living costs: 14%; limited personal or family resources) and lack of acquaintances (14%) challenged their personal traits. On the contrary, the obstacles related to limited fluency in the foreign language (3%) or to cultural adaptation (9%) were insignificant.

5.3.3.4. AIESEC – Erasmus Interaction

The opportunities for participation in mobility schemes for educational or professional purposes are many and can be pursued at different points of one's lifetime. One of the aims of the survey was to explore the interaction between different mobility programmes. In particular, the survey explored whether the students had also experienced other forms of mobility through the Erasmus programme and tried to establish a connection between the previous experience and their determination to pursue a new mobility opportunity.

Half of the students (47%) reported that they had also participated in the Erasmus programme, with most of them (90%) having participated before their participation in the AIESEC internship/volunteerism scheme. The respondents' previous engagement in one of the two mobility programmes influenced their decision for a new involvement "a lot" (41.9%) and "very much" (29.1%) (Figure 23). This finding clearly indicates the existence of a strong interaction between different mobility programmes regardless of their particular aims and content.

Their benefits are easy to define. For this reason, opportunities for international experiences provided by different entities should be founded on the cooperative communication, on the exchange of good practices, even on the development of a framework with more similarities and with the ability to operate on an accumulative basis.

5.3.3.5. Intention to Work Abroad after Graduation

During the last few years due to the financial deficiencies, the economic recession and the sharp rise in unemployment in Greece, the phenomenon of young well-trained Greeks emigrating in order to seek for work saw an unprecedented increase. The intensity of the phenomenon completely justifies the term ‘brain-drain’ that is symbolically used to describe it. The unstable economic and political circumstances in the country and the poor prospects for a prompt recovery seem to undermine young people’s aspirations further. Considering the probability to be influenced at some degree by their mobility experience, the survey attempts to define the respondents’ willingness to seek for employment abroad (Figure 24). Nine out of ten students (89%) reported their determination to seek for a job in other countries and pointed to a number of reasons, which fall into either the ‘pull’ or the ‘push’ factors.

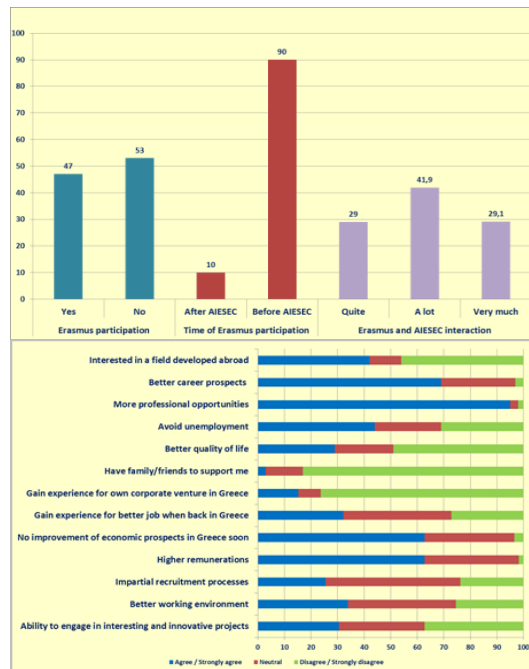


Figure 23: AIESEC-Erasmus interaction (%)

Figure 24: Reasons to work abroad (%)

In general, the respondents are mainly influenced by ‘pull’ factors. The most important of them refer to the increased professional opportunities (95%), the

better career prospects (69%) and the higher wages (63%) offered in other countries. Other factors that refer to the content of the professional duties and the probability of job satisfaction exercise a less influential role on students' decision to emigrate; the prospect to work in their field of interest that is more developed abroad (42%), in a better professional environment (34%), on innovative and interesting projects (31%), experiencing impartial recruitment processes (25%) and better quality of life (29%).

It is necessary to highlight the fact that the students clearly expressed their unwillingness to deploy their professional experience from abroad in order to prepare their return to Greece. Very few reported that they would return to Greece either as experienced employees (32%) or as entrepreneurs (15%). This attitude is certainly affected by the unfavourable conditions in the Greek labour market; due to them young people not only prefer to migrate, but also are unwilling to aspire the creation of their own corporate venture in the future.

However, the pessimistic financial prospects of Greece (63%) and the students' desire to avoid unemployment (44%) also seem to affect their decision to work abroad. These 'push' factors have to be considered in relation to the limited likelihood that the students will return to their home country. It can be argued that finding a job in their home country seems attainable to them, but the unfavourable terms and conditions make this choice unattractive. This fact actually negates the debate on how young people may be motivated by mobility experiences to create their own enterprises and to contribute to the national economic growth; the respondents clearly reported that such an option is not included in their future plans.

6 Conclusion and Recommendations

Young people are a major driving force for European economies and societies; therefore, initiatives that are especially planned in order to reinforce their future prospects are completely justified. Towards this direction the EU has engaged in an effort to achieve a multilevel planning and to mobilise all stakeholders for the implementation of the appropriate youth policies. Among others, the EU introduces particular institutional interventions that promote the concept of work-based learning. It is seen as a mechanism that can ensure better prospects for the successful transition of young people to the labour market. Internships and volunteerism have been designated as useful forms of work-based learning, which create opportunities for young people to improve their skills and competences, to acquire useful working experience and to become citizens of the world. However, such schemes still confront significant ideological and organisational challenges. Moreover, although the engagement of economic and social actors is considered essential, it seems to advance slowly.

This paper presents the findings of a survey conducted among university students who participated in international mobility schemes as interns or volunteers. These

mobility schemes were organised and supported by AIESEC, an international student association, and constitute an interesting example of work-based learning exclusively managed by the student society. The students report that their participation in the particular internship and volunteerism experiences was especially incited by 'pull' factors, which connect a strong knowledge-based potential with an ideological willingness and commitment. However, they understand that such participation cannot by itself secure job positions for them. Nevertheless, they recognise significant benefits from this experience, which has significantly enhanced their personal and professional characteristics and portfolio and, thus, can help with their transition to the labour market. The students regard their international mobility experiences quite successful in broadening their knowledge and skills foundations and in improving their academic motivation. According to them the development of multifaceted CVs, the acquisition of professional and cultural experiences, the enhancement of personality traits and self-confidence can positively affect their future employment prospects. Students appear to have confronted limited obstacles during the mobility period. This seems to have strengthened their intentions to emigrate in the future in order to pursue better career opportunities and well-regulated conditions in the working environments of other countries. Also, the strong interaction between the mobility schemes organised by AIESEC and the Erasmus programme was clearly highlighted. The intensity of this interaction shows the importance of establishing a proactive cooperation between different mobility programmes. Furthermore, besides policy makers, other stakeholders should be involved in the organisation, the appropriate support and the guidance of the schemes. In this way, the exchange of good practices and the establishment of a common framework accumulating the outcomes of the schemes would be attainable and would contribute to the improvement of their qualitative characteristics and to the confrontation of challenges.

More young people than in the past choose to follow a more complex learning model that combines study and work periods either in parallel or in rotation through a large variety of work-based learning schemes. This fact obliges the state authorities and the socioeconomic actors to coordinate their actions and to invest in such projects aspiring for successful outcomes. Furthermore, useful information and experience could be drawn from similar projects organised by other entities. They should be deployed for the development of a different perspective leading to the improvement of the institution and to its expansion in terms of diversification, place, time and organisational structure.

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