



Committee of the Regions

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**OPINION
of the
Committee of the Regions
on
GREEN PAPER ON PROMOTING THE LEARNING MOBILITY OF
YOUNG PEOPLE**

- The CoR welcomes the Commission's initiative in launching, with the Green Paper on Promoting the learning mobility of young people, a Europe-wide debate on the opportunities for improving the promotion of mobility, identifying obstacles to the cross-border ability of young people and highlighting the usefulness of the experience of mobility.
- The CoR considers that the discussion of learning mobility at European level offers significant European added value and can provide a major impetus for the shaping of European, national, regional and local programmes, instruments and initiatives promoting the cross-border learning mobility of young people.
- The CoR reiterates its support for mobility within Europe and beyond, and concurs with the Council and the Commission that study periods abroad should gradually become the rule for young people in Europe rather than the exception.
- The CoR points to the important contribution of the regional and local authorities to promoting learning mobility, particularly with regard to information, advice and awareness-raising, as well as in most cases support measures ensuring quality and the availability of financing; points out that it is often the small-scale mobility projects, adopted at local, regional or national level, which have a decisive impact and which contribute to strengthening the European way of thinking, and promote active Union citizenship and democracy.
- The CoR therefore calls on the Commission to take greater account of the fundamental role of the regional and local authorities in drawing up and carrying out mobility programmes, by constantly involving these authorities in the drawing up of programmes.

Rapporteur

Ursula Männle (DE/EPP), Member of the Bavarian State Assembly

Reference documents

Green Paper on Promoting the learning mobility of young people
COM(2009) 329 final

I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

1. welcomes the Commission's initiative in launching, with the Green Paper on Promoting the learning mobility of young people, a Europe-wide debate on the opportunities for improving the promotion of mobility, identifying obstacles to the cross-border ability of young people and highlighting the usefulness of the experience of mobility;
2. reiterates its support for mobility within Europe and beyond, and concurs with the Council and the Commission that study periods abroad should gradually become the rule for young people in Europe rather than the exception;
3. points out that promoting the mobility of teachers and students is a key feature of educational cooperation in Europe, specifically listed in the Treaty as one of the activities of the European Union in the field of education;
4. considers that, against this background, the discussion of this question at European level offers significant European added value and can provide a major impetus for the shaping of European, national, regional and local programmes, instruments and initiatives promoting the cross-border learning mobility of young people;
5. believes that much can be gained from developing the exchange of information and experience between the Member States and, in this context, attaches high priority to the dissemination of best practice in the Member States by the Commission;
6. endorses the broad-based approach of the Green Paper, which focuses on the situation of all young people in different learning situations, covering all areas of formal, informal and non-formal learning;
7. points to the important contribution of the regional and local authorities to promoting learning mobility, particularly with regard to information, advice and awareness-raising, as well as in most cases support measures ensuring quality and the availability of financing;

The growing importance of learning mobility

8. shares the Commission's view that learning mobility – i.e. a period spent abroad for the purpose of acquiring new skills and competences – is one of the key ways in which young people can achieve personal development, obtain access to new knowledge, broaden their knowledge of languages, acquire intercultural skills and improve their employment chances;

9. is convinced that, at a time of ever more rapid globalisation and cross-border networking of all areas of life and work, intercultural competences, language skills and international knowledge are continuing to grow in importance;
10. agrees with the Commission that mobility encourages a deeper understanding of the European identity and a sense of European citizenship in young people, and helps to combat xenophobia. It also increases the dissemination of knowledge, which is the key to Europe's future as a knowledge-based society;;
11. concurs with the Commission that learning mobility should be a permanent feature of the European identity and an opportunity for all young people in Europe, thus helping to ensure the competitiveness of the European Union, the development of a knowledge-intensive society and promoting the objectives of the Lisbon strategy for growth and employment;
12. shares the Commission's view that, overall, too few young people are going abroad for educational or training purposes, but points out that the Green Paper does not cover the many financial and organisational measures to promote mobility available outside the EU programmes in the Member States;
13. stresses that the Member States, as well as the regional and local authorities, schools, educational institutions and other educational and youth organisations, firms, societies and associations promote a multiplicity of mobility measures which serve the purposes of formal, non-formal and informal learning;
14. points out that it is often the small-scale mobility projects, adopted at local, regional or national level, which have a decisive impact and which contribute to strengthening the European way of thinking, and promote active Union citizenship and democracy;

The conditions for well-developed mobility among young people

15. sees the availability of comprehensive, targeted and locally available information and informed, personal advice, tailored to individual needs, as central criteria for mobility and its success;
16. considers that there is a need for additional information, particularly with regard to measures to promote mobility which do not fall under EU programmes, and, against this background, considers comparative summaries of programmes of this kind already existing in the Member States, e.g. in the form of handbooks, also in electronic form, to be useful;
17. considers that, in addition to the quality, transparency, compatibility and general acceptance of foreign educational programmes and qualifications, it is above all institutional and social conditions and financial factors which affect the willingness of people to spend time abroad;

18. considers it necessary to explain to young people the many advantages of a period of mobility, to publicise the existing support facilities and to convince them of the usefulness of time spent abroad;
19. points out that some obstacles to mobility can be influenced from the outside only to a limited extent, and stresses its belief that increasing mobility will require a great deal of willingness, time, effort and openness from all concerned;
20. therefore notes the lack in the Green Paper of any reference to the individual responsibility of young people for overcoming persistent obstacles to mobility by showing personal commitment and initiative, e.g. attempting to overcome existing barriers through participation in organised exchange schemes; draws attention in this context to the importance of measures which aim to encourage and promote the individual initiative of young people;
21. also notes the lack in the Green Paper of any emphasis on the important role of the parental home, as the foundation of the willingness to go abroad for educational purposes needs to be laid early, in the family; this requires parents to be aware of the considerable advantages of time spent abroad; it requires them to motivate their children to go abroad and to support them, if possible, in the preparation and execution of their stay; against this background, reaching economically disadvantaged sections of the population with lower levels of education presents a major challenge;
22. strongly advocates the greater involvement of economically or socially disadvantaged groups, people with special needs and young people from migration backgrounds in mobility programmes, who could possibly be offered a higher level of support, as it is often these very groups which face specific obstacles;
23. despite the justified call for development of cross-border learning mobility, sounds a warning against the neglect of the other tasks and needs of schools, higher educational institutions, training institutions and other educational bodies – e.g. with regard to planning of the academic year or long-term organisation of curricula – to the detriment of the quality of education;
24. advocates the continuation beyond 2013 of EU educational programs promoting mobility and calls on the Commission, Council and European Parliament to make early provision for sufficient funding in the context of the preparation of the 2014-2020 multiannual financial framework;
25. notes with satisfaction that the Green Paper repeatedly refers to the essential contribution of regional and local government to the promotion of mobility; and therefore calls on the Commission to take greater account of the fundamental role of the regional and local authorities in drawing up and carrying out mobility programmes, by constantly involving these authorities in the drawing up of programmes;

26. calls for the Community lifelong learning programme to reflect the aspiration that young people's mobility should also be promoted in a cross-vocational way; thus for example students from all kinds of schools should be offered support for periods of practical training in firms or other non-academic institutions abroad;
27. recommends that the burden of administration arising in connection with EU mobility measures should be significantly reduced and the voluminous application forms simplified;
28. points out to the competent authorities at national, regional and local level that they could leave financial resources freed up by the falling birth rate in the EU Member States in the education sector and use them, inter alia, for quantitative and qualitative promotion of learning mobility;
29. encourages Member States and the regional and local authorities to adopt rules in their areas of responsibility and competence supporting mobility and helping to reduce obstacles to mobility;
30. considers that macroregions, which play an increasingly important role in a European Union of 27 Member States, also have an important contribution to make in promoting learning mobility;
31. recommends that the regional and local authorities contribute to non-formal learning through mobility measures adopted in the context of regional or city partnerships;
32. considers that, in an increasingly global knowledge society, there is a need to do more to bring home the relevance of international skills to teachers, trainers, employers and the general public;

A new partnership for mobility

33. shares the Commission's view that, in order to achieve a significant increase in mobility opportunities for young people, coordinated action is needed in all areas, and that to that end a new partnership is required, with public bodies working together with civil society, firms and a whole variety of other actors in the education and youth spheres;
34. calls for efforts in all areas and at all levels to exploit existing potential for mobility and to find new ways of promoting mobility;
35. agrees with the Commission that multipliers - such as teachers, trainers, youth workers and former participants in mobility schemes - play a key role in promoting the mobility of young people, and therefore calls for the important function of multipliers to be given greater emphasis in future calls for tenders and programme generations;

36. welcomes the new COMENIUS Regio action, which facilitates the involvement of non-academic bodies and aims to promote European school cooperation at regional and local level; the partners work together in areas of common interest, exchange experience and develop permanent cooperation structures;
37. has reservations about the Commission's call for European, national and regional authorities to work together with educational institutions, civil society bodies and local authorities in order to combine financial resources, in view of the distribution of powers in the field of education and the heterogeneity of the actors in this area;
38. points out that combining financial resources will not increase the total amount available and therefore rather advocates the qualitative development of the existing programmes and improved provision of information about existing facilities;
39. calls on the local and regional authorities, in promoting learning mobility, not only to carry out projects in the framework of the lifelong learning programme, but also to consider to what extent mobility measures, e.g. in the framework of bilateral and multilateral regional vocational education partnerships, can be financed from European Structural Fund resources;
40. encourages higher educational institutions to investigate new forms of cooperation between public bodies and the private sector with a view to promoting mobility;
41. calls on firms to make their contribution to mobility, particularly in the field of initial and further vocational education and research, to support mobility schemes for apprentices despite the sometimes considerable structural differences in vocational education systems and to invest in knowledge, skills and competences even in these economically difficult times;
42. points to its support for the pilot initiative for an Erasmus programme for local and regional elected representatives¹, offering them the opportunity to expand their knowledge, acquire new experience and exchange best practice;
43. considers that virtual mobility can only accompany and cannot replace the experience of physical mobility, but is still convinced that it can make a valuable contribution to physical mobility, by significantly facilitating young people's preparations for the physical mobility phase and improving its quality in a lasting way;

Setting mobility objectives at European, regional and local level

44. refers to the Council Conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training, in accordance with which the Commission has been

¹ White Paper of the Committee of the Regions on Multilevel Governance, CdR 89/2009.

asked to submit a proposal for reference levels for European average performance (benchmarks) by the end of 2010, taking account of both quantitative and qualitative aspects, and it awaits the results of this work with great interest;

45. points out that the European benchmarks do not contain any national targets and do not pre-empt decisions which must be taken by the individual governments, although national measures adopted on the basis of national priorities contribute to the achievement of the benchmarks;
46. points out, in view of the Commission's proposal that, in addition to the European benchmarks, separate benchmarks be laid down for the regions, higher educational institutions, schools, firms and associations, that the establishment of national or regional benchmarks is a matter for the Member States;
47. further emphasises that the creation of new indicators and benchmarks could under certain circumstances result in a significant additional administrative and financial burden on national, regional and local government; in view of the Commission's efforts to reduce bureaucracy, such measures should therefore be put into effect only if the results of a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis are positive;
48. calls on the Commission, once the results of the consultation have been evaluated, to draw up an inventory of tried and tested procedures, with specific, practical approaches to solving existing problems with regard to promoting mobility, and to make this inventory available to the competent national, regional and local decision-makers.

Brussels, 10 February 2010

The President
of the
Committee of the Regions

Mercedes Bresso

The Secretary-General
of the
Committee of the Regions

Gerhard Stahl

II. PROCEDURE

Title	Green Paper on Promoting the learning mobility of young people
Reference(s)	COM(2009) 329 final
Legal basis	Articles 18, 63, 149-150, 163-173 TEC
Procedural basis	-
Date of Council referral/Date of Commission letter	8 July 2009
Date of Bureau/President's decision	-
Commission responsible	Commission for Culture, Education and Research (EDUC)
Rapporteur	Ursula Männle (DE/EPP)
Analysis	6 October 2009
Discussed in commission	11 December 2009
Date adopted by commission	11 December 2009
Result of the vote in commission	Adopted unanimously
Date adopted in plenary	10 February 2010
Previous Committee opinions	Multilingualism, CdR 6/2008 ² Efficiency and equity in European education and training systems and the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning CdR 335/2006 ³ Green Paper on migration and mobility, CdR 253/2008 ⁴ Mobility of young volunteers, CdR 252/2008 ⁵ Proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing an integrated action programme in the field of lifelong learning , CdR 258/2004 ⁶ University-business dialogue, CdR 157/2009 ⁷

2 OJ C 257, 9.10.2008, pp. 30–35.

3 OJ C 146, 30.6.2007, pp. 77–84.

4 OJ C 120, 28.5.2009, pp. 34–40.

5 OJ C 76, 31.3.2009, pp. 23–29.

6 OJ C 164, 5.7.2005, pp. 59–64.

7 Publication pending.

	<p>An updated strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training, CdR 96/2009⁸</p> <p>New skills for new jobs - Anticipating and matching labour market and skills needs, CdR 85/2009⁹</p> <p>Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council Creating the "YOUTH IN ACTION" programme for the period 2007-2013 , CdR 270/2004¹⁰</p> <p>Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the programme "Citizens for Europe" to promote active European citizenship for the period 2007-2013, CdR 120/2005¹¹</p> <p>Proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Culture 2007 programme (2007-2013), CdR 259/2004¹²</p> <p>The European research area - new perspectives, CdR 83/2007¹³</p> <p>"Think small first" - a "Small Business Act" for Europe, CdR 246/2008¹⁴</p>
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8 Publication pending.
9 Publication pending.
10 OJ C 71, 22.3.2005, pp. 34–39.
11 OJ C 115, 16.5.2006, pp. 81–83.
12 OJ C 164, 5.7.2005, pp. 65–75.
13 OJ C 305, 15.12.2007, pp. 25–29.
14 OJ C 120, 28.5.2009, pp. 17–22.