



The Netherlands' position paper on the European Learning Mobility Framework

This paper presents the Netherlands' position on EU learning mobility and is intended as input for the development of the new EU Learning Mobility Framework¹.

Introduction

As one of the key strategic initiatives supporting the realization of the European Education Area (EEA), the European Commission (the Commission) is currently preparing a proposal for a Council Recommendation on a new learning mobility framework. In doing so, it aims to replace the Council Recommendation 'Youth on the Move – promoting the learning mobility of young people'² that was adopted in 2011. The goal of this new Council Recommendation is to build on the successes and lessons learned of the Youth on the Move initiative and elaborate a learning mobility framework that enables all learners and staff in all education and training sectors, youth and sport (including formal, non-formal and informal learning) to participate in short-stay, diploma or blended mobility opportunities.

The overall aim of the framework is to remove barriers and promote incentives to encourage balanced mobility flows across the EU and stimulate brain circulation. The Netherlands welcomes this initiative and strongly believes in the value of international learning experiences for pupils, students, teachers and staff for both personal and professional development. Cross-border learning can positively contribute to upwards convergence across the EU, by improving the quality of education across Member States and decreasing disparities. Learning mobility plays an important role in growing the EU knowledge economy as well as support tackling prevailing societal challenges, including those related to the green and digital transitions, equity and inclusion and fundamental values.

To achieve balanced mobility streams a differentiated approach per national context and sector is required. Challenges differ greatly between (border-) regions in Europe as well as between smaller and larger Member States. Moreover, challenges faced by higher education institutions differ from those faced by vocational education and training providers, primary and secondary education, adult learners, youth workers and sports staff.

¹ [Learning opportunities \(learning mobility\) abroad in Europe for everyone \(europa.eu\)](http://learningopportunities.learningmobility.abroad.in.Europe.for.everyone.europa.eu)

² Council Recommendation of 28 June 2011 — 'Youth on the move' — promoting the learning mobility of young people, [EUR-Lex - 32011H0707\(01\) - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/32011H0707(01)-EN-EUR-Lex)

In the Netherlands, we have been successful in removing barriers and providing incentives for students to undertake a learning mobility experience at Dutch educational institutions and training providers, particularly in the field of higher education. In this sense the Netherlands could function as a best practice in the EU. Consequently, however, we have experienced a disproportionately high number of incoming degree-seeking students at Dutch universities. In the academic year of 2021/2022 approximately 40% of first-year university students came from abroad³ (compared to 28% in 2015). It was furthermore estimated that 23% of the total student population was international⁴. While recognising that international students have a positive impact on learning and intercultural exchange and outcomes, we are now also confronted with the negative consequences of these imbalanced mobility flows across the continent, such as increased (financial) pressure on (the quality of) national education systems, accessibility issues for domestic students, and a shortage of adequate (student) housing. As a result, the Netherlands recently introduced new policy measures to address the imbalanced mobility streams⁵. The issues facing other education sectors differ from those faced by Dutch higher education institutions, and therefore require a different policy response.

Through this position paper, the Netherlands outlines several points of consideration for the development of the new EU learning mobility framework to ensure that it will effectively contribute to the realization of an inclusive, competitive and qualitative EEA. We strongly believe that it is important that through joint efforts at removing barriers and facilitating mobility we can create attractive learning environments across all EU Member States and ensure more balanced mobility streams while guaranteeing our fundamental academic values, such as academic freedom.

The Netherlands' position on learning mobility

We reaffirm the value and importance of the development of an EU-wide learning mobility framework and the support that it offers in realizing balance in mobility streams. It is through joint efforts across all Member States that we can realize balanced mobility streams. While there are differences across education sectors, mobility has especially impacted our higher education institutions. Currently some countries or regions experience a large influx, while others experience a large outflux of students, creating challenges for education systems. We believe that brain circulation with more balance between Member States should be the central goal underpinning the new framework.

³ Central Bureau of Statistics (2022) 40 procent eerstejaars universiteit is internationale student, 18 maart 2022, <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2022/11/40-procent-eerstejaars-universiteit-is-internationale-student>

⁴ Nuffic (2022). Factsheet internationale studenten, <https://www.nuffic.nl/sites/default/files/2022-12/NUFFIC%20Factsheet%20Internationale%20Studenten%20nov%202022.pdf>

⁵ Rijksoverheid (2023) [Kamerbrief over beheersing internationale studentenstromen in het hoger onderwijs | Kamerstuk | Rijksoverheid.nl](https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/kamerstukken/kamerstuk-rijksverordening-2023-01-01)

As part of the EU learning mobility framework, we would invite all Member States to develop a tailored action plan outlining their proposed measures by education sector to work towards balanced mobility streams. The starting positions and obstacles faced by Member States vary and therefore also require a differentiated policy response. Some countries and/or regions actively want more international students, while others are experiencing a high influx and have reached their capacity limit. By developing a dedicated plan, each Member State will be encouraged to critically assess its starting position, which barriers it is facing and identify measures to address them. For instance countries that wish to attract more international students could offer (more) degree programs in English.

To achieve the goal of balanced mobility streams, we invite the Commission to present concrete measures and activities ensure the effective implementation of the framework (and the proposed Member State action plans). The Commission should provide support in the development, implementation and assessment of the above-mentioned Member State action plans, for example, through the development of guidance notes, designated informative webinars and peer learning opportunities. Mutual and peer learning activities will be important for Member States to develop and implement actions addressing learning mobility. The Netherlands would welcome the opportunity to kick-start peer learning activities concerning mobility through the organisation of a designated event. In the event we could share best practices on our successful approach of removing barriers and providing incentives for students to undertake a learning mobility experience at Dutch educational institutions and training providers, particularly in higher education. Alongside exchanges of experiences, the framework should include concrete capacity building activities, communication initiatives and identify EU funding mechanisms (alongside Erasmus+) that Member States could draw upon to implement their action plans. The responsibility for coordination and implementation of each action should be clearly identified (with due respect to national competences). These actions should lead to a full and effective implementation of the EU-framework in the member states, removing the existing obstacles and give the right incentives to study in another country throughout the whole of the EU. This should lead to more balance in mobility flows in the EU.

We applaud the efforts to make mobility accessible to all learners, at all levels and across all sectors, but caution against diluting the effectiveness of the framework by making it too complex. The new framework ambitiously aims to support learners in primary and secondary school, VET and higher education as well as adult learners, teachers, staff, youth workers and sports staff, including all learners in formal, informal and non-formal learning. These target groups all face different obstacles and will require different incentives to partake in an international experience. Also, there are multiple types of mobility, including short-term, diploma mobility, virtual mobility and blended learning that should be considered for each of these target groups. To ensure that the framework

can be easily used, communicated and operationalised, we advise that it is organised along clear lines (e.g., by sector and mobility type) and that these lines correspond to the structuring of the Member State action plans.

Finally, we urge that the framework clearly communicates that physical mobility is a tool to achieve learning outcomes. Through an international experience, learners of all ages can gain valuable knowledge, skills and competences used for personal, educational and professional development. These learning outcomes are the underlying reason why physical mobility can be beneficial to an individual, and develop relevant skills for the labour market. In a broader sense physical mobility also contributes to better mutual intercultural understanding and strengthening the fundamental values in the EU.

There are a number of alternative activities that can offer an international dimension to a learning pathway, beyond physical mobility, such as blended or virtual mobility, COIL projects⁶, Internationalisation@Home, internationalisation of the curriculum and the International Classroom. Blended or virtual mobility opportunities are an effective way to gain a first exposure to cross-border learning, especially for younger learners (e.g., in secondary education where physical mobility is less prominent). The focus should be placed on tailoring learning pathways according to learners' needs rather than increasing physical mobility targets. All types of internationalisation activities should therefore be included in the action plans of Member States.

Concluding remarks

The Netherlands welcomes the efforts of the Commission in developing an ambitious learning mobility framework that actively prioritises issues of inclusion and accessibility and is adapted to the challenges of the digital and green transitions. We hope that the efforts under this framework will support all EU Member States to tackle prevailing barriers and facilitates international experiences. Through joint efforts of all Member States we can level the playing field and ensure balanced mobility. Whether in the form of a short-stay visit or following a complete course, through online courses or blended learning opportunities, international learning experiences have value and are a key tool to the realisation of the European Education Area by 2025.

⁶ COIL projects: Collaborative Online International Learning. In the Netherlands referred to as VIS: Virtuele Internationale Samenwerking.