



# **ALMA: Aim-Learn-Master-Achieve**

Active inclusion initiative for integrating disadvantaged young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) through mobility

## **Manual of Guidance**

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# **ALMA: Aim-Learn-Master-Achieve**

Active inclusion initiative for integrating disadvantaged young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) through mobility

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## **What is the European Social Fund+ (ESF+) Transnational Cooperation Platform?**

Mutual learning is at the core of the ESF Transnational Cooperation Platform and its five Communities of Practice (CoP): employment, education and skills; social inclusion; migrant integration; material support and social innovation.

The ESF Transnational Cooperation Platform gives CoP members, including managing authorities, intermediate bodies and other ESF stakeholders, the opportunity to participate in mutual learning activities and tackle common challenges together. The CoPs were created as a place for members to share ideas and concerns, deepen knowledge and expertise, and help one another to solve problems with practical approaches.

The mutual learning activities generate hands-on outputs such as toolkits, guides, practice mapping, checklists and recommendation papers that can inspire practitioners and policymakers alike.

## **Acknowledgement**

The ALMA manual is based on the Coordinated Call on ESF Transnational Mobility Measures for Disadvantaged Youth and Young Adults Manual of Guidance developed by the TLN Mobility in 2013-2014 and published in September 2014. Special thanks go to the members of the TLN Mobility for their involvement in the preparation of the Manual of Guidance at that time. The Manual of Guidance was updated by ALMA Network Lead thematic expert Bettina Reuter and the ALMA Network members in May 2026.

## Contents

<b>Foreword</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>1. Disadvantaged young people and work-related learning experiences abroad: a unique opportunity</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>2. Target group</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>3. Programme cycle</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>4. Implementation structure</b> .....	<b>15</b>
4.1. Applicants and partners at domestic level .....	15
4.1.1. Potential applicants and partners .....	15
4.1.2. Partnership and strategic networks .....	16
4.1.3. Ensuring applicants have staff with the skills needed.....	17
4.2. Selection and award criteria for applications .....	17
4.3. Transnational partner(s)/application process.....	18
4.4. Principle of equal opportunities and non-discrimination.....	19
<b>5. Common eligibility criteria ( )</b> .....	<b>19</b>
5.1. Eligibility of costs .....	19
5.2. Cost split, control and audit obligations .....	20
5.3. Use of simplified cost options .....	20
5.3.1. EU-level SCOs for transnational mobility programmes for disadvantaged youth.....	21
<b>6. Minimum quality standards</b> .....	<b>25</b>
6.1. Project set-up and management.....	25
6.1.1. Project structure.....	25
6.1.2. Agreements between sending project operators and hosting organisations	28
6.1.3. Monitoring and evaluation.....	29
6.2. Participant recruitment.....	30
6.2.1. Encouraging participation .....	30
6.2.2. Participant selection.....	31
6.3. Participant preparation.....	32

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6.3.1. Participant learning/development plans .....	33
6.3.2. Baselining participants' competences .....	34
6.3.3. Mentoring.....	36
6.3.4. Intercultural, linguistic, professional and practical preparation.....	37
6.4. Work-related learning experience abroad.....	41
6.4.1. Key elements.....	41
6.4.2. Duration of the stay abroad.....	42
6.4.3. Mentoring during the stay abroad .....	42
6.5. Follow-up .....	43
6.5.1. Key elements.....	43
6.5.2. Assessing and recording participants' progress .....	44
6.5.3. Preparing employers to provide employment for participants .....	46
<b>7. ALMA Network .....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Annex 1. Agreement between sending and hosting partners .....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Annex 2. Range of costs to be taken into account for ALMA.....</b>	<b>50</b>

## Foreword

**"Europe needs all of its youth. We must step up our support to those who fall into the gaps – those not in any kind of employment, education or training."**

President Ursula von der Leyen, 2021 State of the Union address

ALMA (Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve) is an active inclusion initiative to support the social empowerment of disadvantaged young people.

The objective is to help young people find their way to the job market and integrate in the society by combining support for education, vocational training or employment in their home country with a work-related learning experience in another EU Member State. Individual coaching and counselling will be offered at all stages of this initiative. The objective of ALMA is to improve the skills, knowledge and experience of these young people, but also their self-confidence.

ALMA builds on a social innovation initiative implemented first in Germany and transferred to several other Members States/regions, including through the Transnational Learning Network Mobility (TLN Mobility).

In 2021-2027, ALMA will be implemented in the context of the ESF+ programmes at national or regional level. In particular, ALMA can be implemented under the thematic concentration requirements for youth, social inclusion or social innovation and, in the latter case, the programmes would benefit from a high co-financing rate (up to 95%).

This Manual of Guidance provides practical guidance to support Member States in setting up active inclusion programmes to address disadvantaged NEETs under the ALMA initiative. It contains background information and examples of approaches and methods for successful implementation of mobility schemes available to NEETs.

Support is also available from the ESFA, which has been entrusted by the Commission to coordinate the ALMA Network.

Our hope is that the ALMA initiative will now take off and benefit a large number of NEETs, allowing them to go back to education or training, or to find employment.

# 1. Disadvantaged young people and work-related learning experiences abroad: a unique opportunity

## ALMA: Theory of change

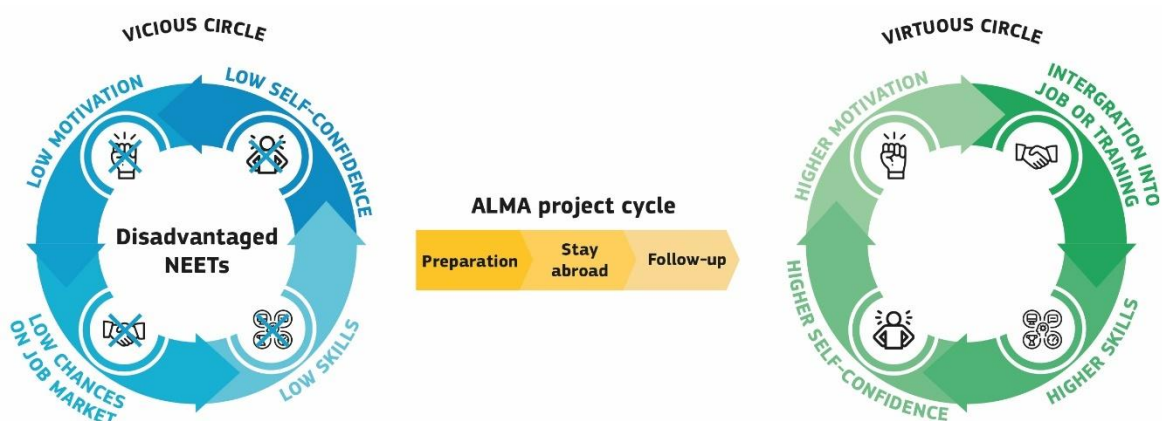
ALMA <sup>(1)</sup> (Aim-Learn-Master-Achieve) is an active inclusion initiative to empower the most vulnerable young people aged 18 to 29 who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs), by implementing a tailor-made approach to support them to find a job and integrate into society.

ALMA offers these young people counselling in their home country followed by a supervised, work-related learning experience in another EU Member State, with the aim of supporting their integration into the labour market and society in their home country. ALMA is one of the European Commission initiatives for the European Year of Youth 2022, and will be a key instrument in implementing the Reinforced Youth Guarantee <sup>(2)</sup> adopted in 2020.

ALMA operations consist of three phases:

- **Preparation:** participants will receive intensive tailor-made training and coaching in their home country to prepare them for a stay abroad.
- **Mobility:** participants will spend 2 to 6 months in another EU Member State, integrated into the work environment of a company.
- **Follow-up:** Upon their return, continued support will guide them to use their newly acquired skills in their home country to gain employment or further education.

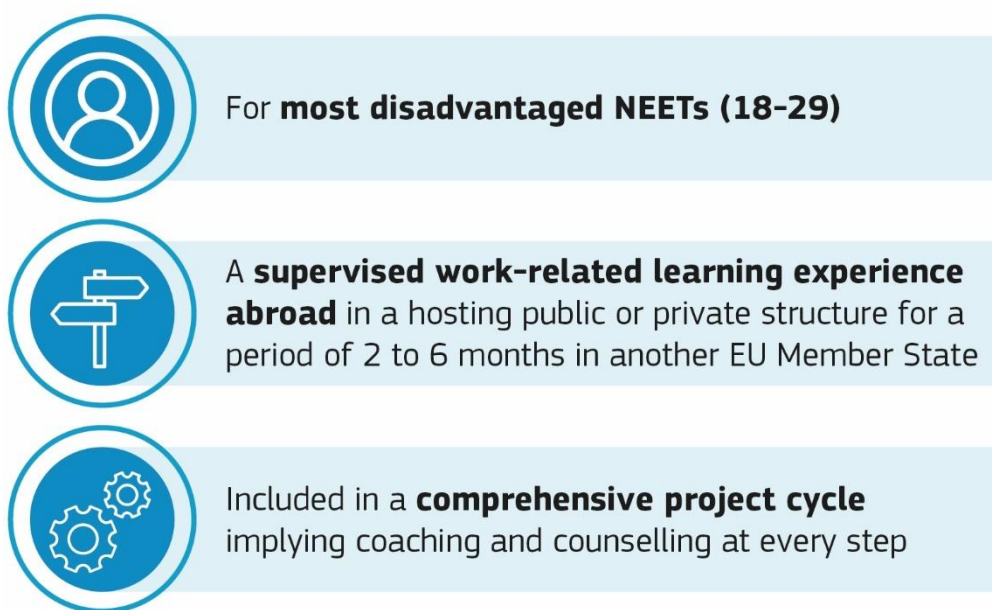
Figure 1. ALMA: Theory of Change



<sup>(1)</sup> ALMA initiative: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1549&langId=en>

<sup>(2)</sup> European Youth Guarantee: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1079&langId=en>

**Figure 2. A unique approach**



ALMA is based on the TLN Mobility scheme for disadvantaged young people, which has been implemented by a number of Member States under the European Social Fund (ESF) since 2008, with promising results.

### **From TLN Mobility to ALMA**

The ESF Learning Network on Transnational Mobility Measures for Disadvantaged Youth and Young Adults (TLN Mobility) was set up in February 2013 and consisted of ESF Managing Authorities and Implementing Bodies who wanted to implement mobility programmes for disadvantaged young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) in their national/ regional 2014-2020 ESF Operational Programmes. It was led by Germany and funded by the European Commission (until 2015), as well as national and regional budgets.

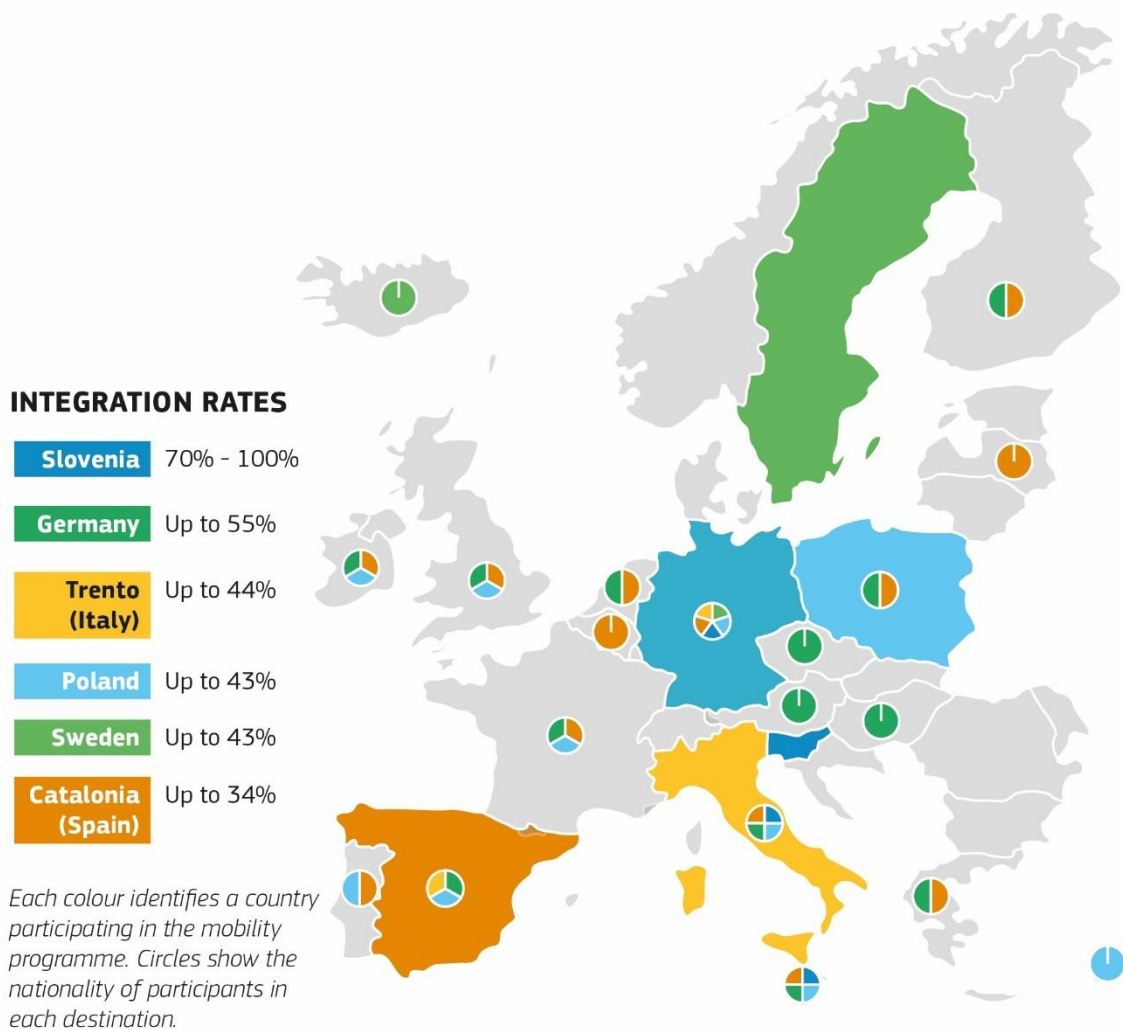
Based on the positive results of the German ESF programme *IdA-Integration durch Austausch* (Integration through Exchange), which ran from 2008 to 2014, TLN Mobility jointly developed a framework to help synchronise and harmonise the national and regional schemes.

Since 2015, transnational mobility measures that follow this approach have been successfully implemented in eight EU Member States and regions: Catalonia (Spain), Czechia, Galicia (Spain), Germany, Poland, Slovenia, Sweden and Trento (Italy). The mobility programmes have proved remarkable success, with integration rates of up to 60%. The participants are much more likely to finish school, find a training place or get a job.

**Figure 3. Past experience: 2014-2020 participants**



**Figure 4. Participants integrated into employment or education after the stay abroad**



## **Objectives of the ALMA Network**

Established in September 2022 the ALMA Network now continues the successful work of TLN Mobility with the objective to:

- support Member States (hereinafter “MS”) and regions launching ALMA calls under their national and regional ESF+ Operational Programmes 2021-2027 and
- encourage more MS and regions to participate in ALMA.

Network activities focus on:

- Coordination and practical support for launching and implementing ALMA calls at different levels: from the planning to the drafting of calls, and to supporting the different phases of the implementation, depending on the needs of network partners. They will have the opportunity to address challenges, share good practices and discuss different approaches and solutions.
- Work on specific and cross-cutting themes to ensure high quality and further development/improvement of the ALMA projects: measuring soft outcomes/ soft indicators, taking forward Simplified Cost Options (hereinafter “SCO”), validation concept for mobility projects.
- Reach out to a wider audience with information sessions about the state of play regarding national/regional ALMA mobility projects and activities of the ALMA Network to promote ALMA and encourage more MS and regions to implement ALMA.
- Providing support for the central ALMA call directly implemented and managed in 2023/2024 by the European Competence Centre for Social Innovation as an additional strand for ALMA projects.

The ALMA Network is organised and supported by the European Competence Centre for Social Innovation under the ESF+ Social Innovation+ Initiative.

## **Purpose and structure of this manual**

This Manual of Guidance will help Member States to set up high-quality mobility programmes for disadvantaged NEETs under the ALMA initiative. It is based on the experiences of the TLN Mobility programmes and sets out quality criteria for all phases of the mobility project. It also provides background information and examples of approaches and methods for successful implementation of mobility programmes under ALMA.

It is structured into the following sections:

- Target group
- Programme cycle
- Implementation structure
- Common eligibility criteria
- Minimum quality standards.

## **Legal basis**

ALMA will be financed by ESF+ under shared management. Its legal basis is the ESF+ Regulation 1057/2021 and the Structural Funds Regulation 1060/2021. Programmes under the ALMA Initiative can be planned within the national and regional ESF+ Operational

Programmes, under the thematic concentration requirements for youth employment and social inclusion, or the dedicated social innovation priority axis (cofinance of 95%) <sup>(3)</sup>.

## 2. Target group

The target group for programmes under ALMA are most disadvantaged young people aged 18-29 not in employment, education or training (NEETs) who have difficulties accessing work or training for individual or structural reasons (e.g. disability, long-term unemployment, insufficient school performance or vocational skills, migration background, etc.). Member States are, however, free to include participants from the age of 15, in line with the youth employment thematic concentration (15-29 years) in the context of the ESF+ <sup>(4)</sup>.

## 3. Programme cycle

This manual provides the framework for transnational youth mobility measures under the ALMA initiative, which ESF managing authorities and implementing bodies can launch under their respective national and regional 2021-2027 ESF+ Operational Programmes.

### **Time frame for launching national and regional calls**

Programmes under ALMA can be implemented during the ESF+ period 2021-2027, and developed with a flexible programme structure, duration and application procedure. The duration of TLN Mobility programmes for instance have varied from one to five years what is important is that the time frame for participants is long enough to go through the different phases of the project cycle. New partners may start with a pilot or shorter programme periods so that they can learn from the first round and build on those experiences in the next round. The advantage of longer programme periods is a lower administrative burden for new calls and project selection, projects can send more groups and learn and improve the measure. Longer programmes should offer flexibility within the call so that potential changes can be incorporated.

### **Key management aspects to be considered**

- Selection and preparation of participants.
- Work-related learning experience of 2-6 months in a company abroad.
- Group size: 8-12 participants.
- Pedagogical support for participants before, during and after their stay abroad.

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<sup>(3)</sup> Article 7(4) on social inclusion for specific objectives; Article 4(1) a) and I); Article 7(6) on youth employment; Article 10 on social innovation VO (EU) 1057/2021.

<sup>(4)</sup> For reporting purposes, the following categories will apply: number of children below 18 years of age; young people between 18 and 29 years of age.

- Allowances and reimbursement for participant-related costs for mobility and the organisational services of the partner organisation.
- Hosting young people from abroad (hosting costs will be covered by sending project).

### **Applications only by sending organisations**

Applications in response to a call from the managing authority at national and regional level should come from organisations that send participants abroad, as specified in section 4.1 <sup>(5)</sup>.

All participant-related costs for the mobility and the hosting organisation's services for setting up and implementing the stay abroad will be covered by the sending project.

As the applicant, the sending project operator is the signatory for the grant agreement contract with its regional or national authority on behalf of the transnational partnership. It is therefore answerable to its responsible managing authority for ensuring the quality of services delivered by the hosting organisation in the partner country.

This requires clear agreements between the sending and hosting organisations, covering all of the key aspects of setting up and implementing the stay abroad. The hosting aspect is organised by the sending and hosting organisations without the involvement of the managing authorities/implementing bodies. For more information on setting up the transnational partnership agreement, see section 6.1.2.

### **Acting as a host as well as a sender**

Although project operators who want to send participants abroad can apply for funding, it is strongly recommended that they also host participants from other countries. This is considered highly beneficial for the overall success of transnational mobility actions, as project operators will gain an improved understanding of all phases, and the respective support and preparation required. Joint quality standards, as set out in this manual can also be much more easily applied.

As mentioned above, all costs for the hosting services are covered by the sending organisation in the partner country, in accordance with the transnational agreement set up by both organisations.

### **Applicants with or without a transnational partner (hosting organisation)**

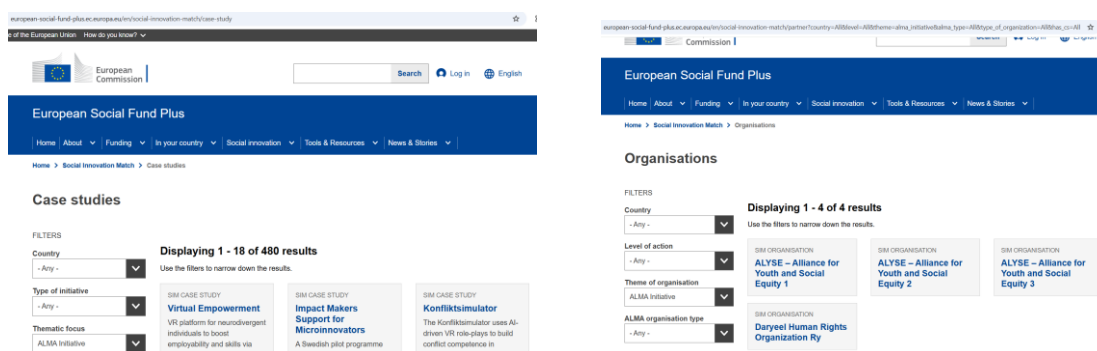
With regard to establishing transnational partnerships, managing authorities/implementing bodies may accept project proposals from applicants with a prearranged transnational partnership or a transnational partner that is still to be determined. To facilitate transnational partnership building for project operators that have applied without a predefined transnational partner, a partner search database is available in the public section of the Social Innovation Match (SIM) website <sup>(6)</sup>. This database will include all project operators and organisations that have been expressed an interest in becoming sending, receiving or both sending and receiving organisations under the ALMA program.

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<sup>(5)</sup> While it is not impossible to open calls to hosting organisations, it would be difficult to justify: ESF+ operations may be implemented outside of a Member State, including outside the EU, only under the condition that they contribute to the programme's objectives (Article 63(4) VO (EU) 2021/1060).

<sup>(6)</sup> <https://european-social-fund-plus.ec.europa.eu/en/social-innovation-match>

Figure 5. SIM database



## 4. Implementation structure

### 4.1. Applicants and partners at domestic level

#### 4.1.1. Potential applicants and partners

ALMA is open to any type of organisation that is considered eligible by national and regional managing authorities. For the programmes to be successful, it is important that projects involve strategic partners with interests in the region from the beginning. This is particularly relevant for the recruitment/outreach and follow-up phase as part of the labour market integration. Managing authorities should therefore encourage this involvement early on within the calls for proposals.

A non-exhaustive list of potential partners includes:

- institutions/bodies able to reach the target groups;
- NGOs, and third-sector, voluntary and non-profit organisations;
- local authorities and municipalities;
- job centres;
- employment agencies;
- vocational education and training (VET) providers;
- schools;
- companies, social partners and other representative bodies linked to the labour market, including chambers of commerce and other trade associations;
- agencies responsible for skills validation;
- lifelong-learning research centres and organisations;
- associations and representatives of those involved in VET;
- guidance, consultancy and information services linked to lifelong learning.

## 4.1.2. Partnership and strategic networks

### **The advantages of opening calls to partnerships**

To ensure that effective partnerships are involved, managing authorities should establish award criteria for the selection of project proposals that take into account the types of partners needed to implement the proposed activities. This will help to ensure that the composition of the project partnership is closely linked to the tasks and services to be delivered. More specifically, the presence of employment agencies, job centres, public authorities, youth organisations, social services and VET providers in implementation structures has proved to be vital to a project's success. It is therefore recommended that managing authorities include an award criterion that ensures that applications include one of the types of organisations mentioned above. They could also include a similar criterion on the creation of a network of strategic partners (see below). In this context, partnerships should be informal groupings of at least two different organisations.

To avoid administrative burdens that might deter participation, it is up to managing authorities/implementing bodies to decide what kind of cooperation agreement is required, if any. One of the organisations in the partnership will act as project leader. That organisation will sign the grant agreement with the managing authority (and be the formal grant beneficiary), and will therefore be uniquely responsible to the managing authority for implementation of the activities and financial reporting.

A distinction should be made between partners and external service providers. Whilst partners are engaged in all stages and aspects of project implementation (from planning to project implementation), external service providers provide limited goods and/or services (e.g. accommodation and travel arrangements, language courses, etc.) and play no role in project management or implementation. The involvement of external service providers should be permitted for the implementation of specific actions.

### **The value of a wider network of strategic partners**

Proposals can also include a wider group of 'strategic partners' in a project network at national, regional or local level. These partners should be able to interpret both the needs of the target group and the socio-economic context into which the participants will return. That group might include: job centres; employment agencies; VET providers; public authorities (e.g. social services, departments of culture and leisure, and departments of education); national youth organisations, competent authorities for validation, assessment and certification, NGOs; schools; and companies. As already noted, it is recommended that managing authorities establish an award criterion in the selection of project proposals relating to the creation of such a network to support the project's activities. Strategic partners should demonstrate their commitment to a project through 'letters of commitment/engagement'. These letters should declare the nature of their support and the phase of the project in which it will be delivered.

### **Involving both receiving and sending organisations**

Although national and regional calls are aimed at organisations that send participants abroad, project networks should include organisations that both send and receive participants. It is therefore recommended that managing authorities include, in the preselection phase, an award criterion for applications from sending organisations that also declare their availability to receive young people from abroad. It should be possible to verify this using objective criteria. For example, the partnership or strategic network can include

entities in which young people can complete their placement abroad, and has agreements with those entities in place to enable this.

#### 4.1.3. Ensuring applicants have staff with the skills needed

Implementing mobility projects aimed at disadvantaged youth and young adults requires a particular focus on the recruitment of skilled staff. It is necessary for staff to have experience in dealing with disadvantaged youth and young adults in general, as well as the skills needed to deal with the special needs of their particular target group.

In addition to the staff responsible for project coordination and management, it is crucial to have skilled staff who, together, cover the entire range of skills needed. These include social and psycho-pedagogical skills, mentoring, and intercultural and linguistic competences. It is also important to have project staff with expertise in equality who are able to deal with its different dimensions, including disability, ethnic groups and gender.

It is recommended that managing authorities list a minimum set of staff skills (including the required professional profiles) in their calls, and reflect these in the award criteria for the selection of project proposals.

## 4.2. Selection and award criteria for applications

It is highly recommended that managing authorities include the following criteria in the call for proposals <sup>(7)</sup>.

- The sending and receiving organisations provide multiskilled teams that are appropriate to the needs of the target group, including trained mentors.
- Tried and tested outreach and engagement methods are in place for targeting and selecting mobility participants, and are detailed in the application.
- Support mechanisms are in place for participants across all phases of the mobility lifecycle.
- An appropriate programme of activities tailored to the needs of the target group is in place.
- Staff from the sending organisations should have appropriate language abilities so that they can assist participants in all aspects of their mobility.
- Optional: Experience of mobility or ESF+ funding within the partnership, and at least in the hosting organisation.

Applicants should be requested to demonstrate their experience of working with vulnerable young people and provide details on the following in the application.

- How they will reach out to, engage, and recruit their target group. Outreach and engagement methods should be tailored to the needs of the target group. For example, applicants need to explain how they will cater for prospective project participants who do not have access to computers or lack literacy skills.

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<sup>(7)</sup> Source: 'Learning from experience: Integrating disadvantaged young people through mobility schemes', European Commission 2021.

- How they will deliver preparation activities to their target group, including language, cultural, and work-related preparation, and how they will make adjustments based on their specific needs (e.g. organising evening sessions, pitching lessons at their level of understanding or using trained tutors to deliver training).
- Arrangements and back-up plans for replacing dropout participants before the mobility phase (if possible).
- How they will bring peer groups together before the mobility phase (i.e. face to face and/or virtually).
- Support for participants through mentoring during the mobility phase, and protocols for emergency situations and in cases where participants drop out during the mobility.
- Follow-up with participants after completion and on their return home.

### 4.3. Transnational partner(s)/application process

Under ALMA, all projects must establish operational partnerships with at least one transnational partner from another Member State.

In national and regional calls, managing authorities/implementing bodies may accept either applications with a prearranged transnational partnership or with a transnational partner that is still to be determined.

For applications with a prearranged transnational partnership, this means:

- any costs incurred in the search for a partner before the application is submitted are not eligible for reimbursement;
- applications are selected based on the quality of the project idea and prospective transnational partnership (in addition to other requirements), and managing authorities/implementing bodies will decide whether a letter of intent, a signed cooperation agreement or a joint working plan is required.

For applications with a transnational partnership still to be determined, this means:

- applications are selected based on the quality of the project idea, in addition to other requirements;
- applicants will have to find at least one transnational partner that is willing to receive young people from the sending organisation before moving into the implementation phase;
- costs incurred in the search for a partner are eligible for reimbursement.

After they are selected, it is strongly recommended that both types of projects are included in the partner-search database to facilitate partner matching <sup>(8)</sup>.

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<sup>(8)</sup> For 2026, a database is available on the Social Innovation Match (SIM) website (<https://european-social-fund-plus.ec.europa.eu/en/social-innovation-match>)

During the preparatory phase and project set-up, projects will have to prepare and sign a written agreement with their transnational partner(s) covering all the key aspects of setting up and implementing the stay abroad (see section 6.1.2).

Managing authorities/implementing bodies can either make it compulsory for applicants to be available to also host participants, give an award criterion on that or leave it open so that applicants may act as sender only.

They can also include award criteria for demonstrating their procedures for selecting transnational partners and companies for placements, as well as the overall quality of the partnership (see section 6.3.4).

## 4.4. Principle of equal opportunities and non-discrimination

ALMA reflects the horizontal principles set down by the EU. Managing authority actions must therefore reflect the objectives of equity, non-discrimination and social responsibility applied to both public and private actors. Actions must strive to promote gender equality and to ensure that professional development opportunities are available to people with disabilities.

## 5. Common eligibility criteria <sup>(9)</sup>

This chapter contains explanations and recommendations on the eligibility of costs.

When setting up eligibility rules for a national or regional call, national and regional authorities are advised to take into consideration the common minimum requirements for project structure and management under ALMA, as these include further specifications of eligible costs.

### 5.1. Eligibility of costs <sup>(10)</sup>

Under ALMA, expenses for activities in the following project phases are eligible:

- partner search and project preparation;
- participant recruitment, selection and preparation;
- the stay abroad;
- follow-up.

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<sup>(9)</sup> This chapter is not a complete inventory of the legal and administrative aspects of eligibility of costs in transnational mobility measures funded through the ESF. However, it does contain references to relevant European rules and regulations. ESF activities are covered by two sets of rules and regulations: the general rules and regulations adopted at European level that apply to all ESF-funded activities; and rules and regulations adopted at national (or, in some cases, regional) level, which are particular to each Member State or region.

<sup>(10)</sup> See Regulation (EU) 1060/2021 Article 63.

The different types of expenditures can be divided into the following categories.

- Costs related to the individual participant (e.g. for travel, accommodation, subsistence, insurance and social security).
- Costs related to pedagogical and labour-market interventions (e.g. for recruitment, preparation, supervision, placement search, debriefing and (re)integration into the labour market).
- Costs related to the organisational set-up (e.g. for partner search, project preparation, management during project implementation, meetings, administration, expert advice and consultancy, translation and interpretation, and hire of facilities).

When working with disadvantaged young people, the nature and scope of pedagogical and labour-market interventions vary widely depending on the target group, and special target groups may have special types of expenses. To cater for different types of groups, more specific rules on the exact type and nature of eligible costs in the different phases will be decided by the national and regional authorities in charge of launching national or regional calls.

### **Catering for the special needs of the target group**

Within the framework of the Integration through Exchange (IdA) programme, six young single mothers were sent on a work placement scheme in Spain. As the children could not be left at home for an extended period of time, they went with their mothers to Spain and stayed there for the duration of the project. This incurred unusual extra costs for the organisers – not just for someone to accompany them and look after the children during the mothers' working hours, but also to cover expenses associated with the children attending a Spanish nursery and doing various other activities.

## **5.2. Cost split, control and audit obligations**

Under ALMA, the sending country is, in principle, carrying all costs associated with activities for their participants, irrespective of whether they are incurred in the home or host country. This arrangement is based on the fact that the expected project outcomes are in line with the objectives of the sending country's programme<sup>(11)</sup>. This also means that the management, control and audit obligations remain with the sending country, and project operators in the sending country need to make sure that national audit requirements are met when using services abroad.

The administrative burden of real-cost accounting for expenses incurred outside of the programme country can also be very heavy. To ensure that administrative management is as effective and efficient as possible, it is recommended that Member States or regions participating in the ALMA initiative make use of the simplified cost options instrument.

## **5.3. Use of simplified cost options**

The legal basis for the use of simplified cost options (SCOs) in the ESF+-period 2021-2027 is laid down in Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 Article 53-56 and covers flat rates, lump sums

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<sup>(11)</sup> See Regulation (EU) 1060/2021 Article 63 (4).

and standard units of costs. They must be calculated using a methodology that is fair, equitable and verifiable. They are either based on statistical data or historical practices (including experiences with SCOs applied in other EU programmes), or on policies for similar types of operations and beneficiaries.

SCOs are an opportunity for project operators, and national and regional authorities, to reduce the administrative burden and audit requirements, and introduce added flexibility. Furthermore, SCOs lead to an increased focus on outputs and results rather than inputs.

Under ALMA, it is up to each managing authority to decide on the use of SCOs based on national or regional regulations and priorities for ESF-funded activities. However, in light of the profound administrative challenges of accounting for real costs incurred outside the programme country, **it is strongly recommended for partners participating in the ALMA initiative to make use of SCOs.**

Managing authorities should also ensure that projects are aware of any differences in accounting procedures in their own country and in the partner country, to avoid problems when the final statement of account is made.

### TLN programmes used a mix of real costs and SCOs

In TLN programmes, different financial arrangements were used depending on the financial regulations in each country. While Czechia used a real-cost principle, other TLN members such as Catalonia, Germany, Poland, Slovenia and Sweden used a combination of real costs and SCOs. Germany, for instance, used real costs for salaries, three different standard unit costs for the stay abroad, and a flat rate for administration.

#### 5.3.1. EU-level SCOs for transnational mobility programmes for disadvantaged youth

To support the implementation of ALMA operations under ESF+, the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion has defined EU-level SCOs and 'Financing not linked to cost' (FNLC) schemes in a delegated act. The amounts and conditions set in the delegated act are based on a recent study, 'Simplified cost options' and 'Financing not linked to costs' in the area of social inclusion and youth <sup>(12)</sup>.

The calculation of the EU-level SCOs developed for transnational mobility is based on historical data and good practices from five TLN Mobility programmes. They cover activities associated with organising and implementing transnational mobility programmes for disadvantaged youth in the following three phases.

Preparatory phase (project set-up and participant preparation):

- joint and individual preparatory activities, including briefing participants in their home country before the mobility phase.

Mobility phase:

- training and pedagogical programme for participants in the host country;
- social and cultural activities during their stay abroad;

<sup>(12)</sup> [EUR-Lex - 32022R2175 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#). The amounts and conditions set in the delegated act are largely based on the study: 'Simplified cost options' and 'Financing not linked to costs' in the area of social inclusion and youth: a study complementing the ESF+ impact assessment:  
<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/5175a20b-3ac3-11ec-89db-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

- support and monitoring of participants by the hosting organisation or accompanying staff.

Follow-up phase:

- support and monitoring of participants after the mobility phase, including counselling and professional guidance.

Following consultations with the Technical Working Group and the Community of Practices on Results-Based Approaches, the delegated act will define **basic unit costs for each Member State**, as well as **various daily top-up amounts** to accommodate specific requirements and circumstances (see also the table below).

- **Column A: A single unit cost per participant day, for all participants**
  - The applicable daily amount is the amount set for the Member State where the preparation and follow-up phases take place.
  - It applies to all three phases of the operation.
  - It covers the average total costs per participant day for a standard ALMA operation.
- **Column B: An optional daily top-up, for participants in need**
  - A daily allowance to ensure that ALMA participants can have a decent standard of living.
  - Although participants in some Member States are entitled to financial support (such as a minimum income, unemployment benefits or other social support), depending on their individual situation, this is not the case for all Member States. The managing authority may therefore decide to apply this top-up <sup>(13)</sup> to the basic unit cost, depending on the situation in the respective Member State and the needs of individual participants.
  - This assessment and the decision on whether to apply this top-up are entirely at the managing authority's discretion.
  - The eligible amounts are set out in Column B (for the mobility phase, the amount of the destination country applies).
  - These amounts are only eligible if the condition that they are paid in full to the respective participant(s) is met.
- **Column C: A top-up for successful participants**
  - This amount will be applied to all participants who experience a positive change in their occupational status within six months of participating in an ALMA operation (i.e. they find employment, or enrol in or re-enter further training, education or a labour-market programme).
- **Columns D and E: Additional daily amounts for the mobility phase (if relevant)**

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<sup>(13)</sup> This should be clearly stated in the call for proposals (or equivalent selection procedure for operations), as well as in the document setting out the conditions for support (e.g. the grant agreement).

- Top-up for participants going from a country with relatively low average costs (Group 2 or 3) to a country with relatively high costs (Group 1 or 2).
- These amounts are added to the basic unit cost (Column A) per participant day spent abroad during the mobility phase.
- They cover the relatively high costs of the stay abroad in these mobility flows.
- There is no condition attached to applying these top-ups: they do not have to be passed on to participants (unlike the top-up under Column B).

**Figure 6. Overview table of amounts**

	A	B	C	D	E
	Daily unit cost per participant in ALMA operation	Allowance to ensure a decent standard of living (paid directly and paid in full to participants in need). Daily amounts per participant in need as a top-up to the basic unit cost (column A). During the mobility phase, the amounts of the destination country apply.	Daily top-up per successful participant (8%)	Additional daily amount per participant going from Group 3 to Group 2 countries	Additional daily amount per participant going from Group 3 or Group 2 to Group 1 countries
Member State	DURING ALL 3 PHASES			DURING MOBILITY PHASE ONLY	
Austria	€80.53	€42.29	€6.44		€14.97
Belgium	€77.45	€40.45	€6.20		€14.39
Bulgaria	€31.92	€6.94	€2.55	€5.00	€11.86
Croatia	€41.09	€12.01	€3.29	€6.44	€15.27
Cyprus	€59.24	€26.65	€4.74		€11.01
Czechia	€46.37	€16.43	€3.71	€7.27	€17.23
Denmark	€86.91	€50.49	€6.95		
Estonia	€50.34	€18.84	€4.03	€7.89	€18.71
Finland	€78.19	€40.90	€6.25		
France	€73.00	€37.09	€5.84		€13.57
Germany	€77.61	€38.65	€6.21		€14.42
Greece	€50.80	€13.47	€4.06		€9.44
Hungary	€41.80	€9.62	€3.34	€6.55	€15.54
Ireland	€90.51	€41.96	€7.24		
Italy	€66.31	€28.22	€5.30		€12.32
Latvia	€49.78	€12.47	€3.98	€7.80	€18.50
Lithuania	€44.75	€13.46	€3.58	€7.01	€16.63
Luxembourg	€121.23	€59.76	€9.70		
Malta	€56.87	€25.24	€4.55		€10.57
Netherlands	€80.34	€40.46	€6.43		€14.93
Poland	€37.41	€11.71	€2.99	€5.86	€13.90
Portugal	€54.10	€16.48	€4.33		€10.05
Romania	€38.65	€6.33	€3.09	€6.06	€14.36
Slovakia	€47.98	€13.35	€3.84	€7.52	€17.83
Slovenia	€69.44	€23.12	€5.56	€10.88	€25.81
Spain	€109.20	€24.68	€8.74		€12.90
Sweden	€79.64	€40.23	€6.37		

Country group 3	Country group 2	Country group 1
Bulgaria	Austria	Denmark
Croatia	Belgium	Finland
Czechia	Cyprus	Ireland
Estonia	France	Luxembourg
Hungary	Germany	Sweden
Latvia	Greece	
Lithuania	Italy	
Poland	Malta	
Romania	Netherlands	
Slovenia	Portugal	
Slovakia	Spain	

A more detailed overview of costs to be taken into account for transnational mobility programmes that target disadvantaged youth is provided in Annex 2.

## 6. Minimum quality standards

Preparing and sending participants to foreign countries, and then ensuring their integration into education, training or employment once they return home, requires high-quality programmes with a number of separate but related steps. It is important for these steps to be reflected in the project structure to ensure that each is given the due attention, in order to make transnational mobility as impactful as possible for participants. Continuity between phases is vital for stays abroad to be successful.

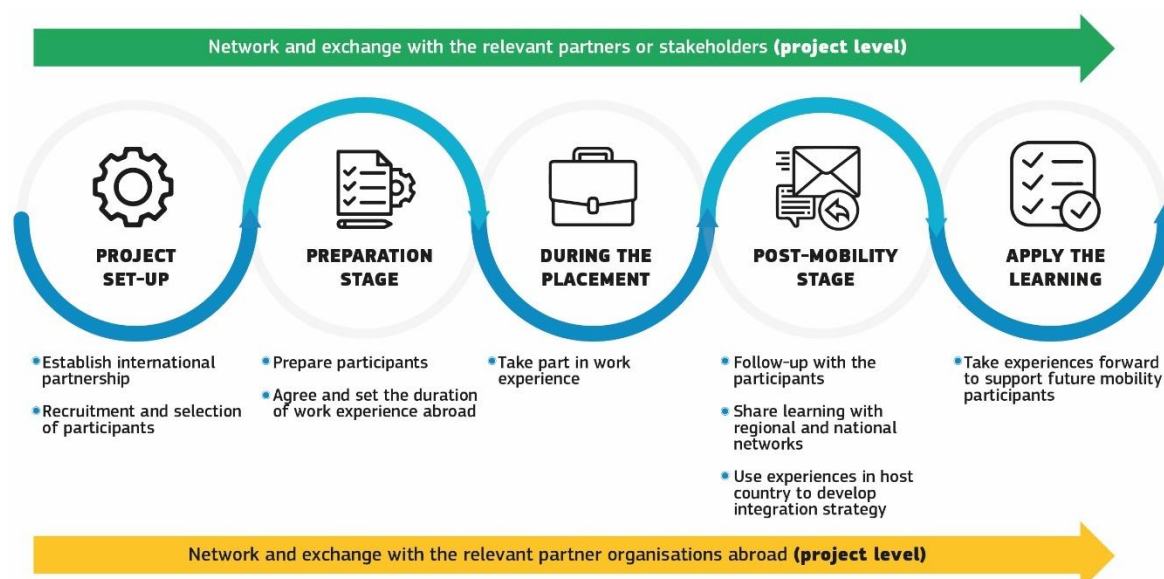
### 6.1. Project set-up and management

#### 6.1.1. Project structure

Projects under the ALMA initiative must include the following phases.

- Participant recruitment and selection:
  - identify people who, with the right support, will benefit from participation in terms of integration into education, vocational training and employment.
- Participant preparation:
  - learning and development plans; intercultural, linguistic, professional and practical preparation; and mentoring.
- Work-related learning experience abroad:
  - support programme for developing non-formal skills and competences; language training; mentoring.
- Follow-up:
  - assessing and recording participants' progress, identifying employers that could offer participants employment.

**Figure 7. Project-life cycle for mobility programmes**



All of these phases are interconnected and interdependent, and therefore crucial to the success of mobility projects. Recruitment and preparation need to be appropriate to the target group. Without appropriate support, participants may become disappointed and demotivated. Adequate mentoring and support is needed during the stay abroad, otherwise even the best preparation could come to nothing. Well-structured and organised follow-up activities are also required after participants return, to make sure that they capitalise on the skills and attitudes they have developed and do not go back to their former way of life.

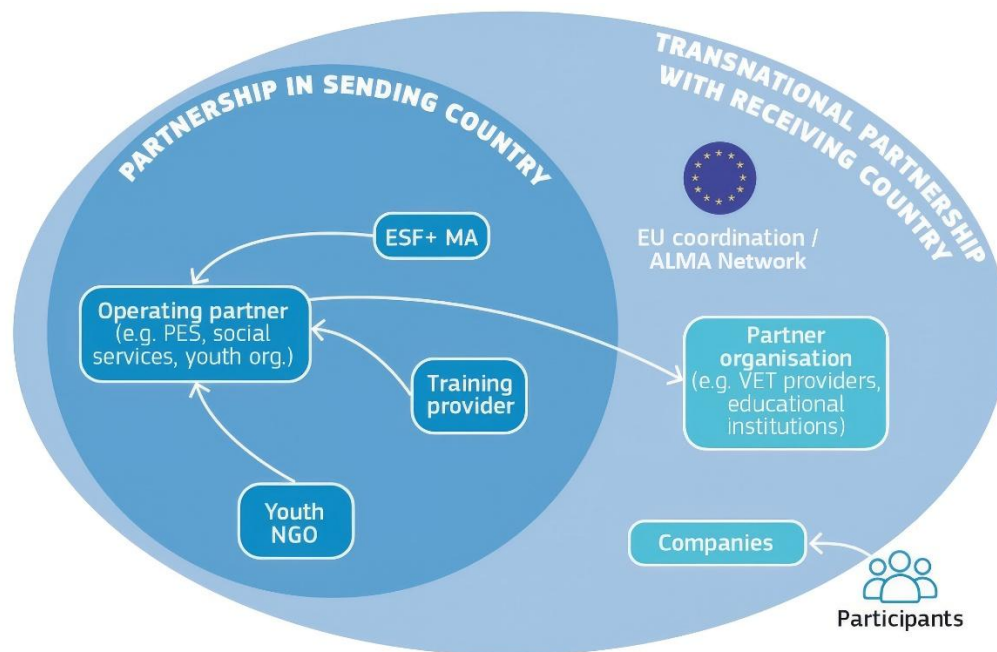
### Continuity between phrases

It is important that there is continuity between all the phases so that participants experience a smooth transition from preparation into the stay abroad, then into the follow-up activities, and right through to their integration into education, training or employment.

### Involving relevant actors and project partnerships at national and regional level

Involving different actors in the design and implementation of transnational mobility is vital to ensure access to the different types of expertise required, and also to ensure that different activities (such as identifying and involving the target group) can be carried out efficiently and effectively. It is therefore important that projects involve the relevant actors (such as youth organisations, job centres, social services, training providers and companies) from the beginning.

Figure 8. ALMA: actors involved



The involvement of **public employment services** (PESs) and job centres is crucial to the success of the programmes. They play an important role in the recruitment and integration of participants into employment, education or training in many countries (as described in sections 6.2 and 6.5).

### Different models for involving PESs in TLN programmes

For the German programme, it was mandatory for project operators to involve companies and job centres or employment agencies actively, because they know the target group best

and are already in contact with them. In Sweden, it was also obligatory to involve PESs in the project.

The programmes in Catalonia and Slovenia were directly implemented by PES.

In Czechia and Poland, it was merely a recommendation to project operators and there was no award criterion requiring it.

However, depending on the target group, other types of partners are needed to reach out to potential participants successfully. In Czechia, where the mobility programme addressed target groups with multiple disadvantages (such as the Roma community, and young people from socially excluded areas and low educational backgrounds), the project operators had to be youth organisations, as they know the target group best through their local work with children, young people and families.

### **Involving companies**

The mobility measures are aimed at securing future employment or training for participants. Involving companies from the outset ensures a realistic view of the requirements, provides authentic information about the regional market, and optimises career guidance and empowerment processes. A vital business network and systematic involvement ensure a labour-market focus, appropriate development progress and successful placements. At the same time, the systematic involvement of companies makes it possible to convince employers and make them aware of participants' potential.

### **Intensive support**

Many of the young people involved through ALMA need intensive support, sometimes over a long period of time. It is not about providing a 'quick fix': it may take a participant many months to pass through all of the required phases.

#### **Example from the Swedish Activa project**

##### **Four phases**

**1. Recruitment:**

- find participants and start the process.

**2. Preparation (three months):**

- group activities two days a week, plus individual work;
- compulsory modules;
- group activity, including accommodation and food.

**3. Implementation (two months):**

- work placement;
- accommodation;
- leisure activities;
- hosting organisation.

**4. Future (minimum of two months):**

- Report by the participant on the experience abroad;
- personal development;
- how they can use their new skills;
- individual support for work/study.

## 6.1.2. Agreements between sending project operators and hosting organisations

One factor that affects the success of transnational mobility is the strength and clarity of the relationship between the project operators that send participants abroad and the partner organisations that host them. Written agreements covering all of the key aspects of setting up and implementing the stays abroad should be prepared and signed by both sides, as a first step.

Clarifying tasks and responsibilities is an important part of this transnational agreement. This includes specifying the risk of any unforeseen difficulties arising and the steps to be taken if they do (i.e. which partner will take what action). It is especially important that the support system for participants and accompanying staff abroad is clearly set out. As mentioned in section 3, all costs for the mobility phase are covered by the sending project operator.

An example of the main points to be covered in the written agreement between sending project operators and hosting organisations can be found in Annex 1 of this manual.

### Hosting organisation requirements

It is important for sending project operators to ensure that the organisations receiving and hosting participants have experience in organising placements, and are able to provide effective mentoring during the stay abroad. Potential partner organisations that are able to host participants are listed in the Social Innovation Match database, but project operators can also find partner organisations themselves through existing contacts, for instance.

#### Key elements of successful transnational cooperation

- Getting to know each other (organisation, aims and objectives, target group(s), etc.).
- Developing an atmosphere of trust as a basis for the partnership.
- Clarifying expectations with regard to ALMA (aims and objectives of the mobility programme, expectations of each partner, competences, etc.).
- Developing a common view about the stay abroad/project.
- Clarifying ways of working together and steering the process (e.g. working language, communication and conflict resolution processes, number of meetings, deliverables, etc.).
- Clarifying each partner's tasks and responsibilities (staff involvement and responsibilities will be made transparent).
- Face-to-face meetings.

### Study visit to host

When setting up a transnational partnership, a study visit is recommended as an opportunity to meet representatives from the hosting organisation and see potential workplaces, accommodation and the city. This helps to give a picture of whether the potential partner shares a common view and similar values on the target group. During a study visit, it is important to ask questions about each workplace, including: whether it is possible to adapt working hours and tasks; whether it is possible to work together; what language skills are needed; whether participants will need a uniform or protective equipment; and what support the hosting organisation offers in the event of a crisis, illness or conflict in the group.

### Added value for projects

Apart from the added value for participants, project operators will also benefit from transnational cooperation, as shown in the example below.

### **Learn from each other: transnational workshops**

The Swedish foundation Activa (Örebro), as project manager in the ESF Active Mobility project, along with the German IdA network partner Q-Prints & Services (Pforzheim) and KIDS & Co. g.e.V. (Berlin), worked to develop mobility for young unemployed people in line with their transnational cooperation agreement.

During the 2018-2021 project phase, in addition to sending and hosting participants, the project organisations also held pedagogical workshops. The entire ESF Active Mobility project was evaluated by a Swedish external evaluator, who also interviewed the participants about their mobility experience. During the pedagogical workshops, staff from all of the partners exchanged experiences and compared their methods. Together, they developed ideas to improve the different stages of mobility projects, particularly the follow-up phase and dealing with intercultural experiences. They also did an intensive analysis of the programmes' horizontal objectives.

### **6.1.3. Monitoring and evaluation**

Monitoring and evaluation are essential tools for project operators to keep track of progress among participants, and to understand the overall impact of activities. Monitoring and evaluation activities should therefore be integrated at an early stage and include the perspectives of all key actors. There should be methods in place for this, such as regular meetings to discuss practical aspects and potential problems, and weekly reports on activities and achievements.

An example of evaluation from the Czech programme is shown in the box below.

#### **Evaluation of the Czech mobility programme**

Evaluation of the Czech mobility programme takes place on two levels: project level and call level. This was detailed in an official attachment to the call.

**Project evaluation:** During project implementation, it is important to obtain ongoing feedback and, based on that, adjust activities to ensure that the project is as effective as possible. For this reason, the beneficiaries will have the opportunity to implement project evaluation as key, separate activity. Although the outputs of the evaluation are primarily intended for the beneficiaries, they will also be passed on to the managing authority.

**Call evaluation:** To evaluate the call as a whole, the managing authority will carry out an overall evaluation. Beneficiaries will be required to cooperate with data collection as part of this by collecting questionnaires from participants at the following milestones:

1. on entering the project;
2. immediately after returning from their stay abroad;
3. 4-5 months after returning from their stay abroad, but no later than the end of the project.

There will be three questionnaires for each participant in total. To get higher rates of return for the final questionnaires (4-5 months after returning), it is possible to offer participants a fee for completing it. The aim of the final questionnaire is to find out about a participant's situation after the end of their active participation in the project. The estimated time to complete one questionnaire is, at most, one hour, or 30 minutes for the final one. The data obtained through the questionnaire can also be used by the beneficiary for self-evaluation purposes.

## 6.2. Participant recruitment

### 6.2.1. Encouraging participation

Participants from disadvantaged backgrounds may have had negative experiences in education, training or the labour market, and special measures may be needed to encourage them to participate.

#### **Taking low self-confidence and self-esteem into account**

The target group(s) often do not see themselves as 'natural' participants in mobility programmes: low levels of motivation linked to low self-confidence and self-esteem are common issues. Recruitment activities may therefore need to tackle the issue of encountering negative attitudes directly. Potential participants may need to be motivated and stimulated to take part.

#### **Using community gatekeepers**

Tackling motivational issues requires approaches that are tailored to the individual and involve direct contact with, and knowledge of, their situation. Intensive contact with individuals and communities is therefore a prerequisite for success and it may be necessary to work through communities to reach individuals. This can be difficult when communities are the source of negative attitudes towards completing a stay abroad. Building strong relationships with community 'gatekeepers' is a key approach. Participants from local communities can also be developed as 'outreach' workers to help identify and encourage disadvantaged young people to participate.

#### **Implementing a range of methods**

Such approaches can be supported with a range of other methods, including: web-based tools (targeted emails, webinars, social media, etc.) and open days. Involving previous participants is also likely to be an effective strategy with participants from many different backgrounds, whether through face-to-face meetings, or video or audio testimonials.

Information for participants should be objective, frank and clear about what is involved in a placement abroad.

As the target group(s) have become disengaged or discouraged from education, vocational training and opportunities in the labour market, project operators should use methods that:

- enable them to reach the target group;

- are appropriate for the target group;
- encourage, motivate and stimulate the target group to participate.

### 6.2.2. Participant selection

The target groups are likely to lack formal qualifications, and non-traditional selection procedures will therefore be needed to reveal their non-academic competences and potential. They are also unlikely to have had experience of foreign travel and may lack self-reliance, so selection processes will need to identify young people who will be able to cope with a stay abroad.

In light of the needs of the target group, project operators must use participant selection methods that:

- identify people who, with the appropriate support and based on their level of personal motivation, will be able to benefit from participating in terms of their integration into education, vocational training and employment;
- identify people who may find foreign placements challenging, but who, with the appropriate support, will be able to cope with a stay abroad.

For disadvantaged groups, the real value of a stay abroad is in the acquisition of personal competences such as self-confidence, self-esteem, a sense of purpose, and clearer personal goals and ambitions. The learning modes used should therefore help participants to take responsibility for their own actions. For many, the most significant learning outcome is often psychodynamic, arising from the sense of achievement of having coped with the challenge of a stay abroad.

#### Careful design

In light of these issues, selection processes need to be carefully designed. On the one hand, they need to enable the selection of individuals who will be able to benefit from participating. On the other hand, the ability of some participants to benefit may only become apparent during the preparatory phase, as they begin to develop new outlooks and competences. It is therefore important that selection processes do not filter out participants who might otherwise be regarded as 'too difficult', as this would deprive many potential beneficiaries of the opportunity to take part. Providing support to participants from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, and with the greatest emotional and psychological needs, should therefore be an important part of selection processes.

#### Participant selection: key questions

- Does the disadvantage criterion apply for this participant, and do they therefore belong to the target group?
- Is there potential for positive development of the person selected and can the basic objective for their integration into training/work be identified?
- Is the individual's motivation clear? What is it?
- Will the person be able to cope with difficulties in an unfamiliar and complex situation abroad? What evidence or examples can be found in their background information?
- Does the person selected fit into the overall group structure?

## Feedback

Once participants have been selected, it is important that feedback is provided to both successful and unsuccessful candidates. It should be clearly explained, using the assessment criteria, why they have or have not been selected. Ideally, unsuccessful candidates should be provided with constructive feedback and their options explained. This can help to ensure that the project maintains a good reputation in the communities it serves.

## 'Positive' and 'negative' drop-outs

Experience from the TLN programmes has shown that participant drop-outs are quite common between the preparation and mobility phases. These are either for 'negative' reasons, if personal circumstances prevent them from completing the programme; or for 'positive' reasons, if they have found employment or enrolled in training or education before completing the programme.

## 6.3. Participant preparation

Ensuring that participants are well equipped for their placements (e.g. able to cope with linguistic and cultural differences) is a vital part of supporting them to reap all of the potential benefits.

### Length and intensity

Some target groups will require an intensive period of preparation before they are ready to go on a work-related learning experience abroad. For example, early school leavers with negative experiences of and attitudes towards formal education, who have been disengaged for some years, will require significant support. For example, check the best practices from Slovenia and Czech Republic below.

#### **Example from the Slovenian programme targeted at long term unemployed NEETs**

The preparation phase for the Slovenian mobility programme has a duration of around two months and involves:

- 48 hours of foreign-language training;
- 40 hours of additional programme activities covering motivation for mobility, fears and expectations related to mobility, conflict management/resolution, living and working in a host country, and questions related to finding work placements abroad;
- around 4 hours of individual mentoring;
- Optional Individual coaching sessions are offered to participants.

### **Example from the Czech programme targeted at most vulnerable young people**

The preparation phase for the Czech mobility programme has an average duration of around 115 days, with the following mandatory activities:

- participants assessments, individual interviews and counselling, and preparation of a 'participant profile';
- language training – the applicant will take into account the level of language education achieved, as well as the specific target groups, and language education will end with an exam (format/type is not specified);
- multicultural training;
- general financial literacy training.

In addition to the mandatory activities, there is a comprehensive list of other possible activities related to participant preparation. These had to be specified in the application along with a timetable, and chosen based on the specific needs of participants:

- more intensive language training if needed;
- training in labour legislation;
- vocational training;
- travel organisation (including insurance for internship participants);
- practical information and points of interest about the destination;
- other activities (equal opportunities and non-discrimination, social skills, coexisting in a group, etc.).

Preparation for the stay abroad takes place in groups or individually, depending on the nature of the activity.

#### **6.3.1. Participant learning/development plans**

It is important for project operators to draw up individual learning and development plans with each participant. Learning plans should be built around placement objectives and expected learning outcomes in terms of the skills and competences to be developed. They should specify how the learning outcomes are to be achieved and recorded, including how broader competence development might be incorporated into work experience and work tasks. The learning plan should also specify the follow-up processes. These should address how the skills and competences acquired are to be recognised; for example, through Europass documentation and links to any qualifications. It should be explained to participants from the very start how their experience abroad will be integrated with their existing skills and competences.

##### **Involving participants**

Participants must be involved in developing their own learning and development plans, with support provided for people with disabilities and special needs. Many disadvantaged people have had negative experiences of education and training, and a common cause of dissatisfaction is their sense of powerlessness in the learning process. Involving participants in developing their own plans empowers them and gives them a sense of ownership of their learning goals.

A learning and development plan, adapted specifically to each participant's needs, skills and competences (including accessibility), should include:

- the objectives and intended outcomes of the participant's placement;
- the activities they will undertake;
- the assessment methods that will be used.

The same documentation should be used throughout a participant's work-related learning experience.

### 6.3.2. Baseline participants' competences

It is important for project operators to understand the skills and competences that participants have at the start of the project, in order to set clear goals for their development.

Once participants have been recruited, project operators should create a baseline of the participant's competences in a way that enables them to:

- work jointly with the participant to set their individual goals;
- adapt the provision to the participant's needs;
- assess the participant's progress during and after the mobility period.

Assessment is therefore part of the participant preparation phase. The methods described in this section could also be used in the initial selection of participants.

#### **Designing assessments that are positive and constructive**

Although participants will vary significantly in the nature of their 'disadvantage', it is likely that all participants will, to some degree, have negative perceptions of themselves as failures, either because they have not succeeded in qualifications at school or because they are experiencing difficulties in finding work. As a result, assessment procedures need to be designed in a constructive, positive and sensitive way, paying careful attention not just to how to assess individuals, but also how to deal with potential participants who do not go on to participate.

#### **Relating skills and competences to mobility goals**

It is important for project operators to set out, from the outset, the skills and competences that participants will aim to acquire during their placements. These should be related to the main goals of mobility, whether personal (e.g. self-confidence, self-esteem, taking responsibility, reliability, perseverance and teamwork), intercultural, linguistic or professional/vocational.

#### **Benchmarking**

Setting out these skills and competences provides the benchmark against which participants' progress can be assessed during and at the end of placements. Personal competences related to individuals' attitudes and attributes are especially important for the NEET target group, which is often lacking in these areas that are vital for success in life and in employment.

**Suitability**

Assessing participants carefully is particularly important in the case of disadvantaged youth and young adults, because of the greater likelihood of them dropping out. Assessment procedures should be designed with two issues in mind: (1) ensuring that participants are generally suitable for transnational mobility exchange; and (2) ensuring a good match with the placements available.

**Encouragement**

It is important that assessment processes do not discourage potential participants. Participants may have had negative experiences at school or with welfare benefit systems, etc., and may need a lot of encouragement to take part. The assessment criteria should therefore be clear and transparent, and explained to participants so that they understand them fully.

**Non-academic competences**

A range of criteria can be set for the assessment process, including academic performance and personal motivation, attitudes and aptitudes. However, academic performance is likely to be much less relevant in this case, given that educational underperformance is likely to be a key feature of most participants. Academic performance will certainly be less useful as a means of differentiating between individuals who are likely to participate successfully and those who are not. The emphasis in any effective assessment process will therefore need to be on non-academic competences.

**Participants' potential**

The purpose of assessment will also be to work out participants' potential to benefit. This requires a balance to be struck between selecting people who would clearly be able to cope with the unfamiliar and complex situation abroad, and those whose potential for labour market integration would be enhanced by the mobility period. Evidently, they are not necessarily the same. This issue cannot be addressed simply through the level of support available. The real question is whether an individual will be able to cope with the stay abroad given the framework of support available.

It may also be necessary to determine whether an individual fits into an overall group structure.

**Participants with health problems**

Disadvantaged youth and young adults may be suffering from significant issues, such as drug addiction, depression or other mental health problems. These need to be addressed in any assessment procedure.

**Assessment methods**

Assessment procedures should not be narrowly conceived as involving simple methods, such as written applications and interviews. These are unlikely to bring out the best in people from disadvantaged backgrounds and are not the best methods of revealing the non-academic competences and potential referred to above. Rather than using conventional interviews, assessment should involve discussions or guidance sessions to give participants a realistic understanding of what is involved in the stay abroad. This is likely to reveal whether participants have the motivation to continue. In addition, methods such as self-assessment, individual profiling (using psychometric tests, for example) and assessment days can be used.

### **The value of self-assessment**

Self-assessment by participants can be a highly effective component of the preparation phase. The German ESF Integration through Exchange (IdA) project has found that participants benefit from reflecting on their occupational aims (attitude, competences, direction, etc.), their identity, and their 'culture' in the broader sense. Self-awareness can also be improved through situations that introduce a sense of 'foreignness' to help them prepare for dealing with difficulties. Approaches taken from educational theatre and experiential education can be applied here. The aim is to enable participants to see potential problems abroad as positive challenges that they can master.

The following prompts and questions have proved helpful as part of self-assessment.

#### **Occupational guidance and clarification**

- Where am I going?
- How will a work-related learning experience abroad help me?
- What would help me to progress (wishes and compromises)?
- Before and after assessment (current situation and expectations).

Weighing up expectations and possibilities (ensuring that participants have a realistic vision).

Clarifying any special aspects of a participant's psychological situation and assistance needs.

Identifying suitable assessment and documentation tools in collaboration with participants.

### **Foreign-language skills**

Every participant in a placement will require some degree of foreign-language capability. Foreign-language skills are likely to be underdeveloped in people who are not in employment, education or training, but this should not be a barrier to participation, as acquiring language skills is not the main purpose of mobility for this group. Rather, participants should be equipped with 'survival' language skills as described below (section 6.3.4).

#### **6.3.3. Mentoring**

##### **Role of mentors**

It is important that participants have support throughout their stay abroad to enable them to achieve their objectives and provide opportunities to reflect on their progress. Day-to-day issues, homesickness and other problems can overshadow core learning issues. Mentors have a key role to play in making sure learners have the support and 'space' they need to grow and develop. It is important that participants have mentors in host countries as well as at home (for host country mentors, see 6.4.3 below).

##### **Ratio of mentors to participants**

It is important that the ratio of mentors to participants is agreed in line with the needs of the group involved, as some groups will need more support than others.

## **Continuity**

Continuity in mentoring support is important to provide participants with stability during their placements. This is especially true for the most disengaged participants, whose family or community backgrounds may be quite disorganised and who may have chaotic lifestyles.

## **Building trust**

It is crucial for participants to engage with a mentor who has built up trust; understands their current situation, and their real and perceived barriers and aspirations; and has provided support for them from the start, right through to the end of the placement and beyond (in some cases). The mentor is often the only trusted person in their life.

## **Regular discussions**

Regular discussions should be held between mentors and participants and scheduled in advance. They should be supplemented by participants writing weekly reports, either in their mother tongue or the language of their host country. Other methods can be used, including learning diaries, group discussions and blogs.

## **Accompanying persons**

Some target groups with particularly challenging needs (such as people with disabilities), may require the support of people to accompany them, in addition to mentors.

## **Mentors from the host localities**

During the participants' preparation, mentors from the host country can play an important role in allaying any anxieties that participants may have about going abroad.

## **Dealing with conflicts involving participants**

Mentors have an important role in dealing with conflicts that are likely to be a particular issue for disadvantaged youth and young adults. Handled properly by mentors, conflicts can become opportunities for learning and competence development. At the same time, for this to be most effective, it is important for the role of mentors in conflict management to be seen as part of an overall framework involving a range of techniques. Such a framework could range from local mentors taking immediate action to calm situations to terminating placements where there have been serious breaches of rules. The escalation processes for dealing with different grades of conflict should be made clear to participants and can be part of partners' risk management plans (see section 6.1.2).

## **Feedback**

It is important that mentors provide feedback on participants to project operators so that there is a record of the progress made, and challenges overcome or unresolved, etc. Feedback in the form of written – rather than oral – reports is normally a key part of quality-based approaches.

### **6.3.4. Intercultural, linguistic, professional and practical preparation**

## **Intensity**

Once participants have been recruited and assessed, intensive and well-structured preparation for the stay abroad is an important feature of successful mobility programmes for disadvantaged people. Participants are unlikely to have travelled much, particularly to foreign countries. As they may not be very self-reliant, project operators need to ensure that

participants are well prepared in all areas where they are likely to encounter new experiences and personal development.

Project operators should have a structured programme of activities that ensures that the needs of all participants are met, and that they are well prepared in terms of:

- the intercultural aspects (helping participants to address any kind of 'culture shock' in advance, and to reflect on their own and foreign cultures, as well as on socio-cultural processes taking place when going to a foreign country);
- linguistic support;
- the requirements of the professional/vocational placement (discussing and clarifying the options open to them, and providing vocational guidance and counselling);
- practical matters involved in travelling to and spending time in a foreign country (such as travel and social security arrangements, accommodation and daily life abroad).

The activities should involve participants in an active way rather than as passive recipients and support a process of team building amongst the group of participants.

### **Providing opportunities for learning and empowerment**

The preparation activities should be seen as an integral part of a project as they provide opportunities for experiential learning and the empowerment of participants. Participants should be given the opportunity to be actively involved and not just passive recipients. For example, participants can shape their own preparation by collecting information about the host country or region.

### **Balancing individual needs with the benefits of group work**

Tailoring preparation and support to the individual can be very important, especially where the needs of participants are many and varied. Preparation can be done individually or in groups. Group dynamics can be highly beneficial to participants, but the right balance between individual and group work needs to be found based on each participant's needs.

### **Involvement of former participants**

Former participants can play a valuable role in helping to prepare participants. For instance, former participants can be invited to give talks to alleviate the fears of potential participants by telling them about their experiences and how they were managed.

### **Involving families**

It can also be beneficial to involve families as part of wider projects to engage disadvantaged young people. Families are one of the key influences on individuals, and overcoming negative attitudes in the home can be an important addition to the formal preparation activities.

### **Involvement of hosting project operators**

It is also important to involve the hosting project operators in preparations. Ideally, they should get to know the participants before they depart, and even visit their home country, as in the case of host mentors (mentioned in section 6.3.3 above).

If this is not possible, they should at least receive individual participant profiles well in advance of their stay abroad, so that they can acquaint themselves fully with the individuals

and the group as a whole. Sending project operators also need to make sure that they have handover discussions with hosting project operators.

### **Testimony from an IdA project operator <sup>(14)</sup>**

The transnational partner visited to help to prepare the participant when they had settled as a group. The partner held individual interviews that the participants had prepared for, covering their curriculum vitae, motivations, language proficiency, career goals and preferred type of accommodation. A two-day group information meeting was held at the employment agency, including both formal and informal elements. The whole thing was carried out in multiple languages, with an English introduction and a mix of languages in the individual discussions. The participants thought it was great and were already able to recognise faces and connect experiences with their upcoming stay abroad.

### **Accessibility**

Preparation activities will need to be adapted to the needs, skills and abilities of the participants concerned. People with particular accessibility needs, such as those with disabilities or poor health, should have their needs assessed so that preparatory activities can be adapted accordingly. People with disabilities often fear that they will run into problems while travelling, and they should be given reassurance that such issues have been anticipated and taken into account. This applies, for example, to practical matters such as using public transport, and the kind of accommodation they will have in the host country, as well as the workplaces in which they will be placed.

### **Preparing for intercultural experiences**

Intercultural preparation for a stay abroad is not about learning the country's history and geography: it involves participants reflecting on their own culture, as well as on ideas and preconceptions about other cultures. For disadvantaged young people and young adults, preparatory techniques that help them face the potential challenge – or 'culture shock' – of going to a foreign country are important. Their aim should be to support participants to see any potential problems or issues as positive challenges that they can overcome (such as learning how to deal with cultural conflicts caused by cultural differences).

Techniques include various experiential education methods, role play and educational theatre, which help participants to think through and simulate what they are likely to experience abroad in advance, in a secure environment. They enable participants to reflect on their own culture, and their ideas and preconceptions about other cultures.

### **Linguistic preparation**

As noted above (section 6.3.2), every participant in a placement requires some degree of foreign-language capability. It is vital that participants have their language skills assessed before they depart and are provided with any language training they need. This should be provided in their home country before departure and continue in the host country before and during the placement. It is likely that most participants will have little knowledge of the language of the host country. In this context, a focus on basic 'survival' language skills (e.g. how to say 'hello' and ask for things in shops, etc.) is appropriate. It will also be necessary to ensure that participants receive any technical language instruction needed for their professional placement.

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<sup>(14)</sup> The testimonies in section 6 are taken IdA-Brochure 'Unlocking potential: a manual for successful transnational work with disadvantaged target groups'; Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Germany (2021). Available from: [https://www.esf.de/portal/SharedDocs/Publikationen/EN/37948e\\_ida\\_unlocking\\_potential.html](https://www.esf.de/portal/SharedDocs/Publikationen/EN/37948e_ida_unlocking_potential.html)

Experiences from TLN programmes have shown that language is no obstacle: it is an asset. Limited language skills are enough at first, if you are willing to make mistakes. When participants are abroad, they develop foreign-language and communication skills to manage and find their bearings in a foreign language and culture.

### **Professional preparation: involvement of local employers**

Participants need to be provided with guidance on the professional options open to them before their placement. They also need to be made aware of the nature of their placement in advance, for example through informative meetings.

A vital part of professional preparation involves working with local partners in the host country to ensure that they understand and, most importantly, accept the needs of the participants. Some participants from disadvantaged backgrounds will need intensive help and support during their placement.

Preparatory activities also need to take place with the employers who will host participants. This is an important activity for hosting organisations, which need to have good contacts with local businesses and experience in organising, monitoring and evaluating placements. Considerable resources may need to be devoted to encouraging employers to participate.

The target group is often the subject of negative perceptions among employers, who anticipate difficulties in the workplace. Case studies are a valuable way of demonstrating the benefits for employers and encouraging them to see the placements as a 'win-win' situation.

### **Benefits to companies**

The provision of internships and cooperation by foreign companies is a prerequisite for the success of these projects. The challenges of hosting foreign interns are often outweighed by the benefits this can bring. The benefits for companies can be very diverse, from opening the workforce up to other cultures (e.g. employing people with a migration background) to developing the staff's intercultural skills or providing support in international business dealings.

### **Example from an IdA project**

It was always something very special when young people from other European countries came to our retirement home. The residents felt quite honoured when people went out of their way to do work for them in our residence. Usual routines changed. And as not all residents are mobile and can travel around the world, this brought a bit of Europe to them. People talked about the countries that the young people came from. Some residents had even travelled there and were proud to discuss their experiences. There were some language barriers, so our residents had to make an effort to overcome them. You could feel a certain politeness and respect. Everyone made an effort to approach these special employees accordingly. Years later, we still recall the interns from Spain, Sweden, Slovakia and Italy. People from abroad were seen in a clearer light. This ultimately also generated sympathy and led to conversations during the refugee movement.

Ensuring the most suitable placement for a participant involves working closely with local organisations and companies. It is important to make sure that the relevant documents for the trainee (such as qualifications, certificates and curriculum vitae) are organised in a timely manner to send to the enterprise involved.

## 6.4. Work-related learning experience abroad

### 6.4.1. Key elements

Throughout a work-related learning experience abroad, the NEET target group will typically need more support than non-disadvantaged people generally do. They will also need support to develop team working and other skills, which will help them to develop qualities such as self-confidence, self-esteem, self-reliability and perseverance. Continued language support (see 6.3.4 above) during their stay abroad is important, as their ability to speak the host language is unlikely to be well developed. Language support helps participants to reap a wider range of benefits from the work-related learning experience.

During their experience abroad, participants must be provided with a support programme that is structured to develop non-formal skills and competences, support the team-building process and develop language skills.

#### **Choosing the most appropriate type of supervision**

Participants need opportunities to develop these skills that they will be able to use when they return home. Getting a good balance between active and passive supervision can make the difference between success and failure. Active supervision involves taking action to pre-empt possible problems, while passive supervision means establishing the basis for dealing with problems that participants are unable to cope with themselves. Too much active supervision can fail to create a 'free space' within which participants can develop.

#### **Social and cultural activities**

In successful stays abroad, cultural and social activities that provide opportunities for participants to socialise with local people of the same age are seen as important intrinsic elements rather than add-ons.

They can develop a range of competences related to employability and personal development, including the ability to socialise with people with different backgrounds and languages. Such competences, in turn, help to boost self-confidence.

Organising opportunities for team building and soft-skill development is an important function of hosting organisations.

#### **Testimony from a Czech participant**

I am happy that I was able to complete such an internship. It was not just about the work experience. I also learned how to overcome stress better. And my life experience tells me that only what you accomplish on your own is really yours. I have known that for a long time, but this time I really learned that I can actually put it into practice. If I can also indulge in a little self-praise, let me say that I have very high standards for myself. I have now learned that not only do you have to work hard, but you also need to put in a certain amount of time to get everything done. And then the German. From nothing to a good little basis. For someone else that is nothing, but for me it is a great success.

#### **Accommodation**

The type of accommodation should also be tailored to the participant's needs. Different types of accommodation are appropriate for different target groups, depending on the level of support they need. In addition to the usual options, such as accommodation in a hotel, hostel or with a host family, flat-sharing can help participants to see different lifestyles, offer

new future prospects and also fosters self-reliance. At the same time, it poses a particular challenge for learning social skills.

### **Testimony from an IdA participant**

During our stay abroad, we stayed in a shared flat where we felt very comfortable. That enhanced our sense of community, and we were able to practise tolerance and conflict management as a result of individual conflicts among 'foreign' personalities. Other alternatives were available, such as accommodation in guesthouses or with host parents. We had the impression that those in charge had made an effort to choose the right accommodation for individuals or groups and taken into account our individual needs.

## **6.4.2. Duration of the stay abroad**

It is important that the work-related learning experience abroad is long enough for participants to benefit from it fully.

Experience with stays abroad indicates that short-term stays of a few weeks are generally inadequate to achieve the type of personal development that participants from disadvantaged backgrounds need. Along with acquiring work-related skills, the goal of stays abroad for the target group is to help them develop positive attitudes and behaviours. These new competences provide the basis for motivating individuals to put them into practice once they return home. This takes time, as it requires them to unlearn old habits and embed new ones. From the employer's perspective, longer stays may also be preferable, as they enable participants to be better integrated into work and be part of a team in the workplace.

That is why the minimum duration of the work-related learning experience abroad is set at two months for ALMA programmes.

Some target groups need longer stays. Based on experience, people with disabilities are likely to need three months or more.

## **6.4.3. Mentoring during the stay abroad**

Mentoring during the stay abroad is a crucial task for mentors from both the sending and receiving countries, and it requires coordination between the two to be as effective as possible. The division of responsibilities between home and host mentors will vary according to the circumstances, including the needs of participants. However, experience suggests that mentors from the home country should travel with participants to the host country to help them to adjust to the foreign culture. Experience from TLN programmes shows that especially vulnerable target groups should be accompanied by a mentor who speaks the participants' native language, as well as the language of the host country. They should also work in collaboration with the host mentor.

Host country mentors have a vital role to play alongside the mentors appointed by sending organisations. For their part, host mentors can help participants to feel part of the local community.

It is therefore strongly recommended that project operators that are hosting participants:

- assign at least one mentor to each group of participants;
- ensure that there is regular contact between mentors and participants;
- ensure that the same mentor is assigned to the group throughout their stay abroad.

## Experiences from TLN programmes

Different approaches were taken in TLN programmes depending on the target group.

In Czechia, as the target group had multiple disadvantages, the call specified that the mentor would accompany participants for the entire stay abroad:

*‘During the placement abroad, the beneficiary will ensure a permanent presence of at least one person with knowledge of the Czech language and the language of the destination country, or English. The person must be from the project implementation team (either from the beneficiary or from a Czech partner).’*

In Germany, Poland, and Sweden where there was a similar target group, it was highly recommended that a mentor from the sending project should accompany the group during the stay abroad. For Poland, it worked well to maintain regular contact between participants and the Polish mentor using online tools.

In Catalonia, Slovenia and Sweden, addressing target groups less far away from the labour market requirements were less restrictive.

## 6.5. Follow-up

### 6.5.1. Key elements

The follow-up phase after the work-related learning experience abroad is an essential part of the transnational mobility experience. Its purpose is to prepare participants for integration into education, training or employment as a result of the knowledge, skills and competences they have developed during their experience. Not all participants will achieve their goal and find education, vocational training or employment within the time limits of ESF-funded support. In these cases, it is important for there to be a smooth handover to other relevant agencies that can support them further, such as PES.

Project operators must also provide support to participants after the stay abroad, including:

- support and guidance to identify and reflect on the competences they have developed;
- an implementation plan for each participant setting out how they will be integrated into further education, vocational training or employment;
- ensuring that, if they do not find education, vocational training or employment within the time limits of ESF-funded support, they are passed on to the appropriate support agencies.

### Well-structured follow-up

A well-structured follow-up phase is essential for a programme that is designed to give participants new prospects in the labour market. It enables participants to reflect on the knowledge, skills and attitudes they have acquired, and understand how to capitalise on these new competences when applying for further education, training or employment.

### Support and guidance

Disadvantaged young people and young adults whose personality or vocational orientation have begun to develop during the placement will need support and guidance to build on

that. Without support and guidance, it may be difficult for participants to maintain a new perspective or outlook when they return to their original environments and are met with the former image of themselves, as reflected in others' expectations of them.

### **Testimony from a Czech participant**

Thanks to the stay abroad, I learned that I can achieve more in my life! I didn't expect to be able to handle the whole stay without my family. I overcame that and succeeded. I don't regret going. I have become self-sufficient. I manage my own budget. I can take care of myself on my own. After returning from abroad, I felt I needed more support. I suddenly saw what another life could look like. Now I have a real job for a year, as an assistant. After that, I will possibly go to a technical school.

Support and guidance are particularly important where the placement has been short and there has been not much time for changes to be assimilated.

### **Advice and encouragement**

One of the characteristics of people from disadvantaged backgrounds is their lack of 'social capital' in terms of connections with local employers. It is therefore very important that support is provided to compensate for this, to provide advice and encouragement, as well as specific support with making job applications. This may last for many months, until participants are successfully integrated into employment.

## **6.5.2. Assessing and recording participants' progress**

It is important that participants' development is measured and recorded. This enables participants to systematically identify the skills and competences they have developed and use them to support their next steps into education, training or work.

### **Role of guidance counsellor**

To reflect on their experiences, participants should be able to talk through their stay abroad with a counsellor and discuss the consequences for their future career path. For these discussions to be most effective, they should be well structured and evaluate the mobility period against the learning plan. They should also look forward to how to find employment by drawing on the competences that have been acquired or improved. The guidance counsellor helping the participant should be able to draw on evidence from all of the organisations and individuals involved in the participant's stay abroad, including the host employer. This will enable the most accurate assessment of progress and prospects and reinforces the need for a strong partnership to maximise its effectiveness.

### **German survey of IdA participants**

Together with the project networks and the participant job centres and/or employment agencies, the Federal Labour Ministry developed a questionnaire to ascertain integration outcomes. The questionnaire addressed project-implementation agencies, job centres and employment agencies, and included questions on the assessment of personal, social and occupational competences, maturity to choose an occupation, and the successful integration of IdA participants.

The assessment showed a remarkable gain in the social competences (motivation/self-reliance, self-confidence/self-esteem, and appearance, behaviour and social skills) of IdA participants after the mobility phase.

These outcomes have been confirmed by a survey of the participants themselves, which was carried out as part of the overall evaluation of implementation of the 2007-2013 ESF Operational Programme.

### **Measuring soft outcomes and ‘distance travelled’**

Common profiling methods are often not suitable for most disadvantaged groups. It is better to look at this target group from the perspective of ‘distance travelled’, meaning what progress participants have made towards sustainable employment as a result of the mobility. This could be an increase in self-confidence and self-efficacy, positive learning behaviours and attitudes, or social capital.

There are several tried and tested tools available at European level, such as My Journey (developed by Pobal for the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) in Ireland<sup>15</sup>) and Talent Match (developed by the National Lottery Community Fund in the United Kingdom<sup>16</sup>).

#### **My Journey tool developed by Pobal for SICAP in Ireland**

My Journey is a ‘distance travelled’ tool measuring soft skills that are relevant to employment, education and personal development for service users engaging with SICAP (a national social-inclusion programme that supports disadvantaged individuals and communities). The need to consult local service providers throughout its development was stressed from the start, as this can help to identify and address the target group’s barriers and support needs. In this context, the My Journey tool measures five soft-skill areas:

- confidence in literacy and numeracy;
- confidence, goal-setting and self-efficacy;
- connection with others;
- communication skills (including self-advocacy);
- general work readiness.

The tool itself is a quick and easy questionnaire with 27 questions that are suitable for anyone aged 15 or over. It can be used in individual or group settings, and is designed for repeated use to identify what has changed over several months.

My Journey puts the person at the centre and empowers them, through a strengths-based approach. It encourages the service user to self-reflect and gain a better understanding of their strengths and areas they would like to work on.

### **Self-assessment**

Getting participants to undertake self-assessment should be an important part of follow-up activities, as it can have a strong motivational effect. Participants can be given help to put their experiences into words and thereby gain an awareness of what they have experienced. This can be done through appreciative enquiry, for example. Getting participants to brief new applicants, and answer questions from an interested and engaged audience, can also help them to think systematically about their experience.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/8dee88-my-journey-distance-traveled-tool/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/media/documents/talent-match-briefing.pdf?mtime=20190107120637&focal=none>

## Practical support

Participants can also be provided with further practical assistance, such as help with job/training applications and how to make the most of Europass documentation and employer testimonials.

## Making use of European tools

The question of how the competences acquired will be recorded should be set out at the start of the placement (see sections 6.3.1 and 6.3.2). At this point, the relevant processes will need to be put into action. Knowledge and skills acquired can be recorded using Europass documentation, which has been designed specifically for mobility activities <sup>(17)</sup>.

The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), which has been adopted at EU level, provides a useful set of principles for validating competences obtained through stays abroad against qualifications <sup>(18)</sup>.

### Key elements of sending projects to be taken into account during the follow-up phase

- Work with participants to identify the progress they have made in comparison to their initial baseline (see sections 6.3.1 and 6.3.2).
- Provide an accurate evaluation of participants' potential to integrate into education, vocational training and employment.
- Recognise and validate participants' achievements to enhance their prospects of integration, where possible in relation to national qualifications using the ECVET principles and Europass mobility documentation.
- Involve all relevant organisations and individuals in assessing participants' progress, including the sending and hosting organisations, the employers and the participants.

## 6.5.3. Preparing employers to provide employment for participants

For participants who will be seeking work once they have completed their stay abroad, it is important for the ground to be prepared among employers in their home country. Employers may not have a positive view of disadvantaged young people and young adults. Project operators may therefore need to put time and effort into persuading employers that participants who have benefited from placements have developed positive attitudes to work, as well as having the skills that employers need.

Employers should be made aware of the specific needs of the target group and offered support in case of problems and conflicts.

In addition, strong links between the organisation leading the mobility activities and relevant employment agencies or job centres is very important where employment is the goal.

In the German IdA programme, it was mandatory for projects to include companies or public institutions, as well as job centres or employment agencies. Furthermore, the project had to fit into the job centres' local/regional labour-market policy to make sure that there was something to offer participants when they returned from abroad. Project operators also

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<sup>(17)</sup> <https://europa.eu/europass/en>

<sup>(18)</sup> <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/ecvet-toolkit>

offered support to the companies in the event of conflict, and companies felt that integrating these young people also added value in terms of corporate social responsibility.

## 7. ALMA Network

The ALMA Network is a network of ESF+ Managing Authorities and Implementing Bodies at national and regional levels, that are currently implementing or planning to implement ALMA measures under their national or regional ESF+ Programmes 2021-2027. The aim of the network is to support Member States and regions to implement ALMA projects.

The Network activities focus on:

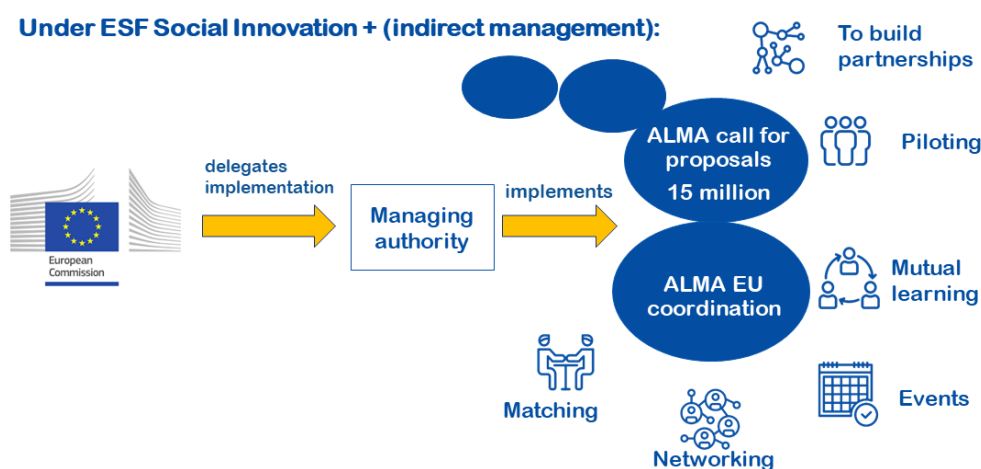
- Coordination and practical support for launching and implementing ALMA calls (e.g. discuss the planning and drafting of calls, share good practices, discuss different approaches and solutions. etc.);
- Work on specific and cross cutting topics to ensure the high quality and further development of ALMA projects (e.g. measuring soft outcomes/ soft indicators, taking forward SCOs, etc.);
- Information sessions about the state of play regarding ALMA projects.

The ALMA Network is organised and supported by the European Commission (EC) and the European Competence Centre for Social Innovation, which is based at the European Social Fund Agency (ESFA) in Lithuania, under the ESF+ Social Innovation+ Initiative.

Website: <https://socialinnovationplus.eu/network/alma/>

Email: [ALMA@socialinnovationplus.eu](mailto:ALMA@socialinnovationplus.eu)

**Figure 9. ESF+ support to ALMA at EU level**



## Further resources

- Learning from experience: integrating disadvantaged young people through mobility schemes'; European Commission (2022). Available from April 2022 from: <https://ec.europa.eu/european-social-fund-plus/en/publications>
- Resources from the webinar on "ALMA and Supporting disadvantaged young people to take part in mobility under ESF+" (2021). Available from: <https://ec.europa.eu/european-social-fund-plus/en/transnational-cooperation-platform>
- IdA-Brochure 'Unlocking potential: a manual for successful transnational work with disadvantaged target groups'; Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Germany (2021). The testimonies in section 6 are taken from this. Available from: [https://www.esf.de/portal/SharedDocs/Publikationen/EN/37948e\\_ida\\_unlocking\\_potential.html](https://www.esf.de/portal/SharedDocs/Publikationen/EN/37948e_ida_unlocking_potential.html)
- 'Simplified cost options' and 'Financing not linked to costs' in the area of social inclusion and youth: A study complementing the ESF+ impact assessment; European Commission (2021). Available from: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/5175a20b-3ac3-11ec-89db-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>
- Impact evaluation of the projects implemented under the ALMA EU-level call (2026). Available from: [https://socialinnovationplus.eu/app/uploads/2026/02/Final-evaluation-report\\_ALMA-Impact-evaluation-1.pdf](https://socialinnovationplus.eu/app/uploads/2026/02/Final-evaluation-report_ALMA-Impact-evaluation-1.pdf)

## Annex 1. Agreement between sending and hosting partners

The following key issues should be covered in a written agreement between the sending project operator and the hosting organisation.

- The types of participants to be involved and their needs in relation to their stay abroad,
- How mentors appointed by either side will work together.
- The structure and content of the mobility activities before placements take place, covering intercultural and linguistic activities, the professional/vocational placement, practical matters related to travelling to and spending time in a foreign country, and teambuilding and soft-skill development.
- The level of language skills that participants must have, so that there is a shared understanding of their language needs and the relevant support needed during the stay abroad.
- How participants' achievements will be assessed, recognised and validated, including initial baselining.
- Cooperation with hosting organisations in all phases as follows.
  - In the preparation phase: hosting organisations should receive information in advance of placements, so that they are fully acquainted with participants' profiles and can take part in handover discussions.
  - For the stay abroad: hosting project operators should be involved in organising the professional/vocational placement, working closely with local organisations and companies to identify suitable placements and make sure that hosting organisations are aware of the participants' needs. Hosting project operators should also be involved in organising a cultural/linguistic programme, and in providing mentoring and tutoring personnel.
  - In the follow-up phase: hosting organisations should be involved in participant assessments.
- The risks that might be encountered and how they would be addressed, including procedures for dealing with conflicts (e.g. using a risk management plan).
- How equal opportunities and non-discrimination principles will be upheld (e.g. the provision of reasonable accommodation and accessibility for disabled participants).
- How regular effective communication with hosting organisations and partners, especially PES, will be set up and maintained.
- Financial arrangements.

## Annex 2. Range of costs to be taken into account for ALMA

This section is based on the experience of the TLN mobility programmes. It may be used by project promoters for their internal financial planning as well as for their agreements with partner organisation in hosting countries.

### **Costs linked to partner search and project preparation**

Partner search and project preparation during the preparation phase involve the following costs:

- travel, accommodation and subsistence associated with using the partner search forum;
- travel, accommodation and subsistence associated with visits to potential partners;
- external advice on drafting partnership agreements and other project documentation;
- translation of relevant documentation;
- staff costs for carrying out the above tasks.

### **Specifics**

These costs are likely to vary greatly between project operators. Some will have existing contacts and networks that make the partner search a lot easier (and in some cases even unnecessary), while others will have had no previous relevant transnational experiences. For some, one meeting with a potential partner may be enough to establish a successful partnership. For others, two or even three visits are needed. When it comes to drafting agreements, some project operators that have already accumulated experience from previous activities will have templates that only require slight adaptations for a new context, whereas newcomers may need to invest considerable resources in developing these.

### **Assumptions**

Although project operators have very diverse backgrounds, even complete newcomers do not need to start entirely from scratch. In the context of the ALMA initiative, a Social Innovation Match (SIM) database is available to potential applicants so that they can identify potential partners. With regard to project documentation (partnership agreements, participant contracts, etc.), there are many existing templates that can be used (e.g. TLN Mobility templates and templates in the ECVET toolkit: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/ecvet-toolkit>).

### **Costs linked to pedagogical support for participants in the home country**

The following costs are involved in making the necessary pedagogical interventions before and after the stay abroad, in accordance with the quality-assurance guidelines:

- joint preparation activities (linguistic, cultural, vocational and pedagogical);
- individual guidance and personal preparation;
- debriefing activities, including validation/documentation of learning outcomes.

### **Specifics**

The diversity of the target group means that the pedagogical interventions cannot be carried out using a 'one-size-fits-all' model, and must be largely tailor-made to suit the needs of specific participants. More intensive work on these aspects is generally required than for

mainstream target groups, as the participants are more fragile and learning processes more complicated.

### **Transnational travel costs and costs for individual participants during the stay abroad**

The following direct costs are involved in the mobility experience and the pedagogical programme in the hosting country <sup>(19)</sup>:

- transnational travel;
- daily subsistence during the stay abroad;
- local transport during the stay;
- insurance;
- the pedagogical programme during the stay (excursions, special events, etc.).

### **Specifics**

This group of costs covers many types of expenses. Real-cost accounting is very time-consuming and difficult: it is impossible to draw up an exhaustive list of costs, and unexpected expenses are a rule rather than the exception with fragile target groups. Costs under this heading may also vary significantly depending on the following parameters.

- Nature of the target group: for special target groups, significantly higher costs may be incurred for travel (e.g. for wheelchair users), practical support (e.g. single mothers bringing their children with them), etc.
- Length of stay: some costs are the same irrespective of the duration (e.g. transnational travel costs), whereas others decrease the longer the stay lasts. It is therefore often possible to negotiate cheaper rates for accommodation and subsistence, and the social and cultural programme is generally not as intensive for a longer stay as it is for a shorter stay.
- Target country: there are significant differences in the cost of living between Member States.

### **Assumptions**

It is necessary to adapt or construct a flexible funding mechanism for these costs that can accommodate the very diverse circumstances surrounding each project, while also reflecting the real expenses of the activities.

### **Costs associated with accompanying staff and project visits**

Vulnerable target groups need staff from the sending organisation to accompany them for part or all of their stay abroad. During the project period, other project staff may also need to travel to the host country for reasons connected to the running of the project. Costs that fall under this heading are:

- transnational travel;
- daily subsistence during the stay abroad;
- local transport during the stay;
- insurance;
- salary.

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<sup>(19)</sup> Please note that costs for accompanying staff are not included under this heading but constitute a separate cost category.

## **Specifics**

The need for accompanying staff varies greatly from project to project, depending on the requirements of the target group. Some may only need this support during travel and to settle in during the first couple of days. For others, however, accompanying staff are required for more or all of the stay in order for a meaningful learning process to take place. Accompanying staff may also split their time abroad into several visits, for example at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the participant's period abroad. The number of accompanying staff needed depends on both the size and nature of the target group. In some cases (e.g. with paraplegic wheelchair users) a 1:1 ratio of participants to accompanying staff is required. The nature of the target group also determines the qualifications and experience needed from the accompanying staff.

## **Assumptions**

For longer stays, the presence of accompanying staff is usually only required at intervals, and not for the entire duration. The qualifications and experience that accompanying staff need varies widely, ranging from providing simple, practical assistance to highly specialised interventions. However, the most common requirements can probably be met by staff with social-work qualifications or similar.

## **Costs for the hosting organisation**

The costs that the hosting organisation will incur in relation to implementing project activities include:

- administration;
- office supplies;
- communication (postage, telephone and electronic data transfer);
- identifying placements;
- monitoring participants;
- induction courses;
- rental and upkeep of premises;
- pedagogical activities and associated staff costs;
- learning materials;
- documentation of learning outcomes.

## **Specifics**

The costs for the hosting organisation may vary considerably depending on the number of participants, the duration of the stay and the way the project is organised. Activities involving work placements in public and private enterprises will incur costs for identifying placements, matching them to the participants and maintaining ongoing contact (monitoring). If activities are organised on the host's premises, there will be costs in relation to staff (trainers and instructors), rooms, learning materials, etc. Most hosting organisations also organise induction activities. Staff costs for the hosting organisation (particularly associated with monitoring) may be reduced considerably, however, if accompanying staff from the sending organisation are foreseen, and the costs for some of the pedagogical activities can be covered from the participants' daily allowance.

## **Assumptions**

The organisation and financing of any major induction process or training activity (e.g. language courses, tailor-made activities for participants with special needs etc.) taking place in the hosting country should be included in the agreement between both organisations.

In the TLN Mobility programmes five additional days were available to cover such preparation activities. If a group had fewer than 8 or more than 12 participants, the standard scales of unit costs were reduced or increased by 5% per participant, respectively.

### **Indirect (administrative) costs for the sending organisation**

The costs incurred in the management and administration of mobility projects include:

- administrative support;
- management;
- external evaluation and auditing;
- office supplies;
- communication (postage, telephone and electronic data transfer);
- rental of equipment and premises.

### **Specifics**

Although some costs under this heading are quantifiable (evaluation and auditing), and calculations can be based on tenders from external agencies, most of the costs are embedded in the sending organisation's everyday work and are very difficult to quantify if the organisation also runs other activities. Calculating and accounting for these costs as real costs demands a lot of resources.

### **Assumptions**

The size of these costs does not necessarily correspond directly with the scope of the project (number of participants, nature of the target group and duration of the stay), but there is a strong correlation. It would therefore seem fair and equitable to link the amount available for indirect costs to the size of the project, expressed as the total budget for direct costs.

### **Additional costs**

The following costs are associated with dissemination of the project's results and are optional:

- meetings and seminars;
- publications;
- translation of documentation.

These costs only apply to projects (rather than participants or staff) for which it is important to make the lessons learned available to others.



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