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# **Educational mobility from the perspective of vocational schools students participating in the Erasmus + programme**

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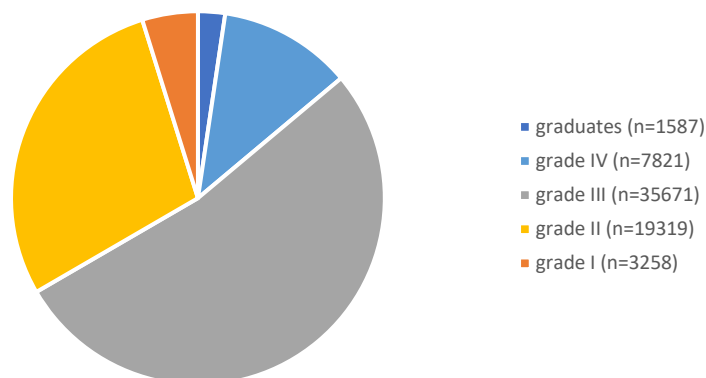
## Introduction

Within the calls announced in 2017-2020, almost 68 thousand vocational education and training students benefited from the mobility financed by the Erasmus + programme. This study focuses on how mobility participants perceive selected aspects of the programme. In addition to the analyses focusing on the characteristics of overall satisfaction with mobility, the study also compares how the assessments of individual aspects of mobility differ among people who are generally satisfied and dissatisfied with mobility. The aim of such an approach is primarily to identify areas that could be improved from the perspective of mobility participants, and indirectly - to provide indications for further analyses focused on evaluation and - as a result - to improve the Erasmus + programme in the spirit of *evidence-based policy*.

### 1. Characteristics of vocational school students participating in the mobility

The subject of the analyses is the satisfaction of students and graduates of Polish educational institutions who took part in mobility for learners within vocational education and training projects. These activities took place at different stages of the participants' education. Students in third grades were the largest group, followed by students in second, fourth and first grades. Graduates were the smallest percentage of participants. The number of participants at individual stages of education is presented in Chart 1.1. The implemented activities in terms of the type of receiving entity are divided into mobility to companies, to vocational training institutions (including schools) or to organisations combining the features of a vocational training institution and a company.

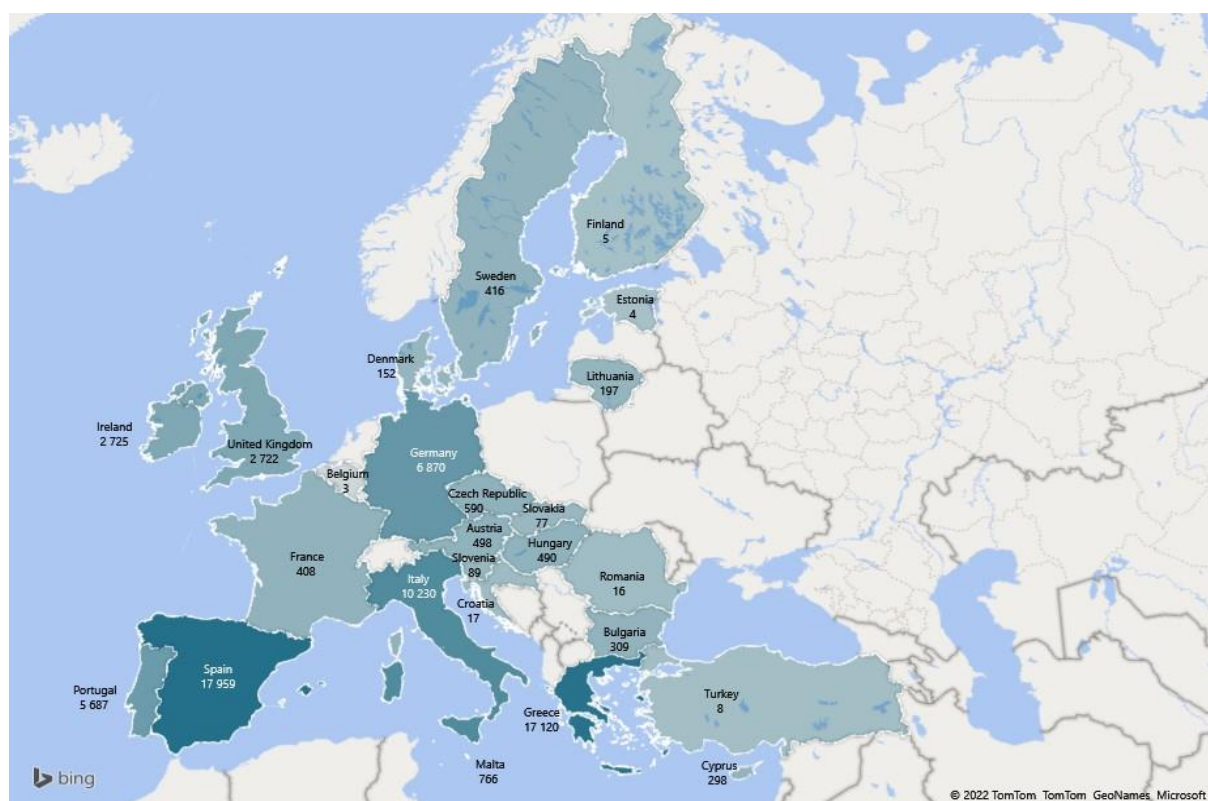
Chart 1.1 . Number of participants in the mobility of students and graduates by stage of education



Source: Own work based on the data from the Mobility Tool + system, tab "Collective data export from participants' reports" KA102 action, 2017-2020 editions, as of November 17, 2021

These departures were carried out to 25 destination countries, among which, two countries clearly dominate in terms of the number of participants from Poland – Spain and Greece. More than half (51%) of the analysed population went to these two countries. For a significant proportion of the participants, Italy and Germany were also chosen as a destination country (15% and 10% respectively). The number of participants received by individual countries is presented in Map 1.1

Map 1.1. Receiving countries for Polish VET students and graduates in the 2017-2020 edition projects



Source: Own work based on the data from the Mobility Tool + system, tab "Collective data export from participants' reports" KA102 action, 2017-2020 editions, as of November 17, 2021

#### **Comment 1: Methodological notes.**

We have prepared this study on the basis of data from obligatory reports submitted by students and graduates of vocational education institutions who participated in learning mobility within the "Vocational Education and Training" Erasmus + programme field ("VET learner and staff mobility"). These projects can come in two formats: without a Mobility Charter (KA102 action, approx. 98% of participants) and with a Mobility Charter (KA116 action, approx. 2% of participants). The study covers KA102 action (detailed rules for applying and implementing projects under each of these actions are specified in the "Erasmus + Programme Guide"). After the mobility, each participant is required to fill in the evaluation questionnaire prepared by the European Commission (called "Participant Report").

In order to assess overall satisfaction with the mobility, the question "Are you generally satisfied with the experience/knowledge gained during your Erasmus+ mobility?" was included in the questionnaire, asking the participants to indicate their level of satisfaction on a five-point scale from "very dissatisfied" to "very satisfied". Based on this question, two analytical categories were created, i.e.: "satisfied with mobility" (those who answered "very satisfied" or "rather satisfied") and dissatisfied with mobility (those who answered "very dissatisfied" or "rather dissatisfied").

The questionnaire also includes other questions related to the level of satisfaction, concerning aspects such as: the length of the placement, how it fits into the curriculum of the sending institution, travel arrangements, accommodation, and support received from the sending and hosting institutions. In most situations, for the purpose of the analysis, the response categories for these questions were aggregated according to a similar

pattern as with the question on overall satisfaction with the mobility (i.e. combining two extreme answers from the cafeteria questions and excluding the 'I have no opinion' answer).

Due to the availability and almost full comparability of data for this period, observations from 2017-2020 were taken into account. Thus, the analysed collection included almost 68 thousand records, of which only about 0.5 thousand were people dissatisfied with their mobility. The data is as of November 17, 2021.

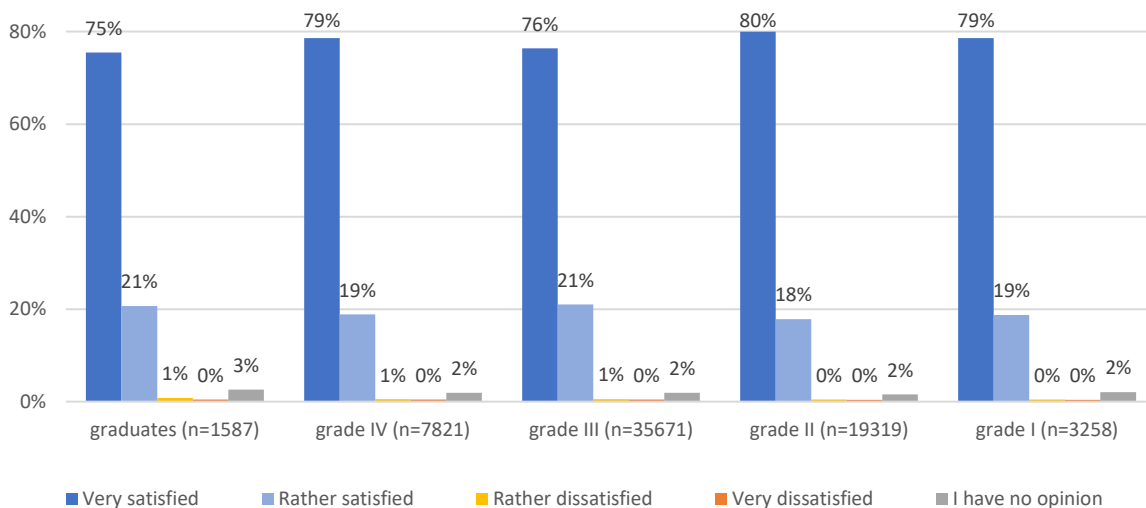
## 2. Overall satisfaction of participants

Satisfaction of participants with mobility is undoubtedly a complex and multidimensional issue. Not only the factors directly related to how well the mobility was organised and how valuable it was in terms of content, but also, among others, the degree of identification of the participant with the school, his/her social competences, resistance to stress related to staying in new conditions and new tasks, as well as adequate motivation and adaptation skills play an important role here.

The present study, as it is not based on data that would take into account all these aspects, does not aspire to a comprehensive presentation of the determinants of satisfaction of mobility participants. However, the data available through the questionnaires developed by the European Commission as part of the final reports of completed projects make it possible to determine the level of satisfaction not only at the level of the general population, but also with regard to selected characteristics of the participants.

As can be seen from the answers given by the participants, the level of overall satisfaction with the mobility is very high and shows little variation between the groups corresponding to the different levels of education. The percentage of very satisfied exceeds 75% in each group, and the percentage of satisfied and very satisfied combined exceeds 95%.

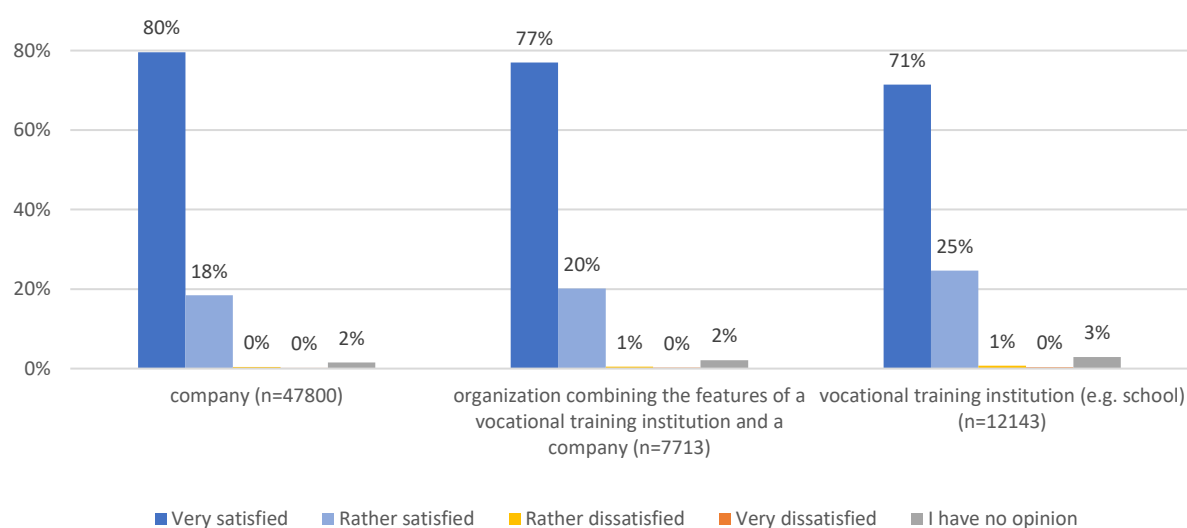
Chart 2.1. Level of overall satisfaction with the mobility by participant's stage of education.



Source: Own work based on the data from the Mobility Tool + system, tab "Collective data export from participants' reports" KA102 action, 2017-2020 editions, as of November 17, 2021

Differentiation by the type of receiving organisation shows that among students who went to vocational training institutions, the percentage of very satisfied is slightly lower (71%), while the percentage of rather satisfied is higher (25%) than in the other two groups (see Chart 2.2).

Chart 2.2 Level of overall satisfaction with mobility by the type of receiving entity



Source: Own work based on the data from the Mobility Tool + system, tab "Collective data export from participants' reports" KA102 action, 2017-2020 editions, as of November 17, 2021

### 3. Assessment of the various aspects of mobility from the perspective of satisfied and dissatisfied participants.

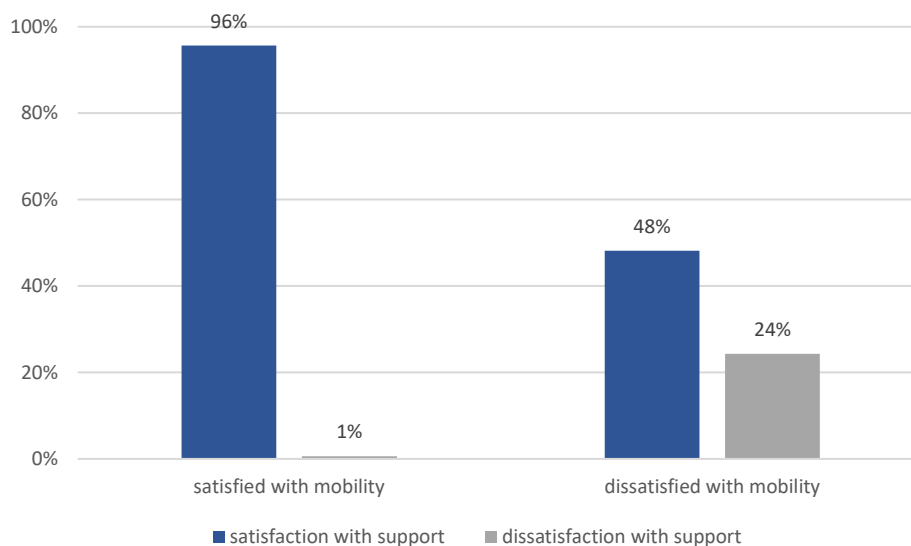
The vast majority of participants in VET mobility declared upon their return that they were generally satisfied with their experience. However, there were almost half a thousand participants over the above-mentioned period who expressed general dissatisfaction with their mobility experience. When comparing this group to the rest of the population, it is clear that they constitute less than 1% of all VET learners' mobility participants in the period under study. However, given that Erasmus+ is intended to be inclusive and that the way in which it is implemented may change over time, it is worth looking in some detail at whether and to what extent the perceptions of those generally satisfied and those dissatisfied with their mobility experience differ.

#### 3.1. Support offered to mobility participants

From the participant's perspective, one of the important aspects related to the organisation and course of mobility is the possibility of obtaining support, both from the home educational institution, acting as the sending institution, and from the foreign organisation under which the mobility is implemented (hosting institution).

When looking at the assessment of the support received from the sending institution in terms of questions, complaints or problems, a clear difference can be observed between people who are generally satisfied and dissatisfied with the mobility. While almost everyone in the former group positively assessed the help received from their home educational institution (96%), in the case of the latter group, such an opinion was expressed by less than half of the mobility participants (48%) (see: Chart 3.1).

Chart 3.1. Satisfaction with the support received from the sending institution in terms of questions, complaints or problems among those generally satisfied and generally dissatisfied with the mobility.

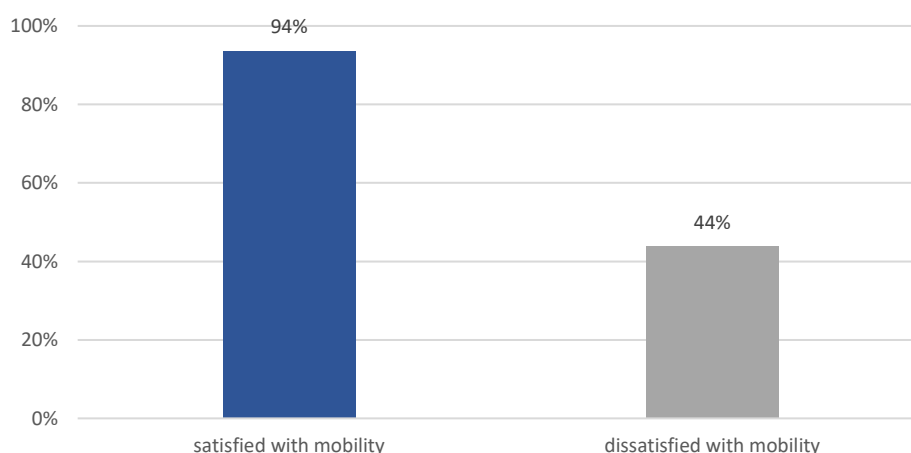


Source: Own work based on the data from the Mobility Tool + system, tab "Collective data export from participants' reports" KA102 action, 2017-2020 editions, as of November 17, 2021.

For VET learners, one of the first decisions related to participation in learning mobility is choosing the right receiving institution. This decision is often made with the support or participation of the sending institution, i.e. a school or other organisation, in which the future mobility participants are being educated in Poland. However, the assessment of this type of support was also perceived differently by those who positively assessed their mobility experience and those who assessed it negatively. Among the dissatisfied ones, only 44% stated that they had received adequate help in finding a suitable host institution before their mobility. Among those who were satisfied, this proportion was higher by 50 percentage points, reaching 94%.

The large discrepancies in the opinions expressed by the two groups analysed may indicate the need for better tailoring of support for the mobility participants by the sending institution: both in terms of addressing questions, complaints or problems, and in terms of choosing the receiving institution, as to some extent this choice determines the experience acquired during the mobility.

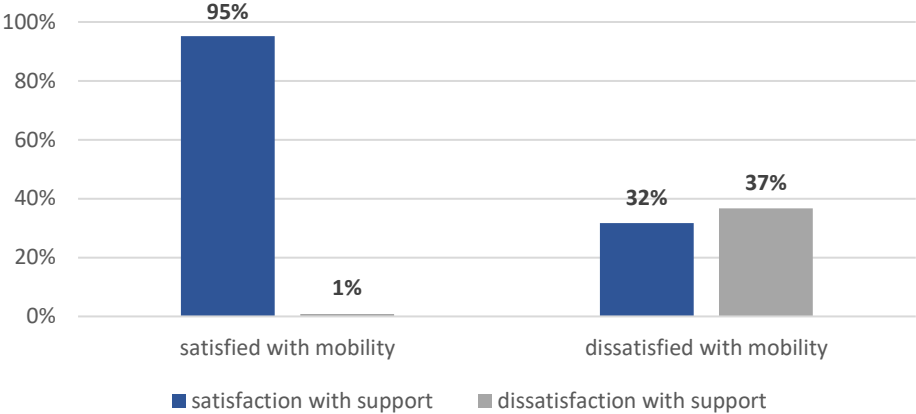
Chart 3.2. Mobility participants declaring that they received adequate assistance in finding a receiving institution among those generally satisfied and generally dissatisfied with their mobility.



Source: Own work based on the data from the Mobility Tool + system, tab "Collective data export from participants' reports" KA102 action, 2017-2020 editions, as of November 17, 2021.

Once the students have started their mobility, the receiving institution will naturally have better opportunities to support them. For this reason, it is important to look at how this assistance is evaluated. Again, there is a clear difference between people who are generally satisfied and dissatisfied with their mobility (see: Chart 3.3). The predominance of negative assessments (37%) over positive ones (32%) among people dissatisfied with mobility is particularly noteworthy. As the analyses show, such a situation is relatively rare even in this group of participants. In addition to the general opinion on the help received from the sending institution, it is also worth focusing on specific aspects of this support.

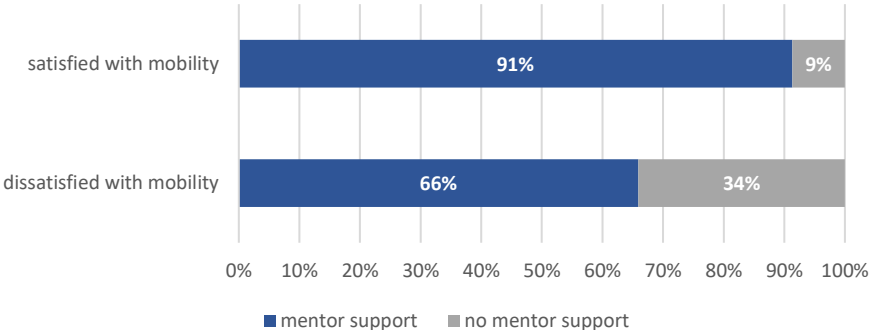
Chart 3.3. Satisfaction with the support received from the receiving institution regarding questions, complaints or problems among those generally satisfied and generally dissatisfied with mobility.



Source: Own work based on the data from the Mobility Tool + system, tab "Collective data export from participants' reports" KA102 action, 2017-2020 editions, as of November 17, 2021.

One of the forms of assistance offered to mobility participants is the provision of a mentor by the receiving institution. This person guides students and trainees participating in mobility abroad through the host organisation, procedures and customs in the receiving country. As shown by the results of the analyses, while only 9% of people satisfied with their mobility did not have any mentor support, among the dissatisfied group, this was the case for every third person (34%). However, the assessment of the support by those who had received it also differed significantly between those who were generally satisfied and those who were dissatisfied with their mobility. In the first group, 97% of the participants declared being satisfied with the mentor's support, while in the second group only 54% expressed such view. The above data may indicate the important role of mentors in building positive experiences during mobility abroad.

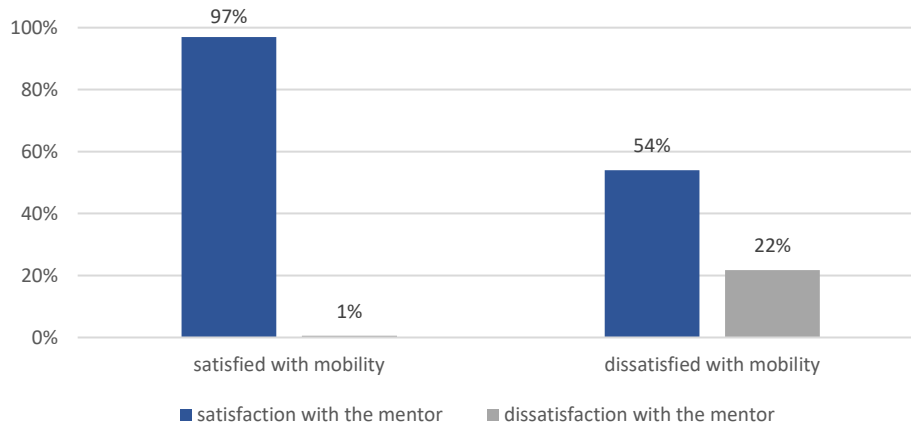
Chart 3.4. Mentor support from the receiving institution among those generally satisfied and generally dissatisfied with mobility.



Source: Own work based on the data from the Mobility Tool + system, tab "Collective data export from participants' reports" KA102 action, 2017-2020 editions, as of November 17, 2021.



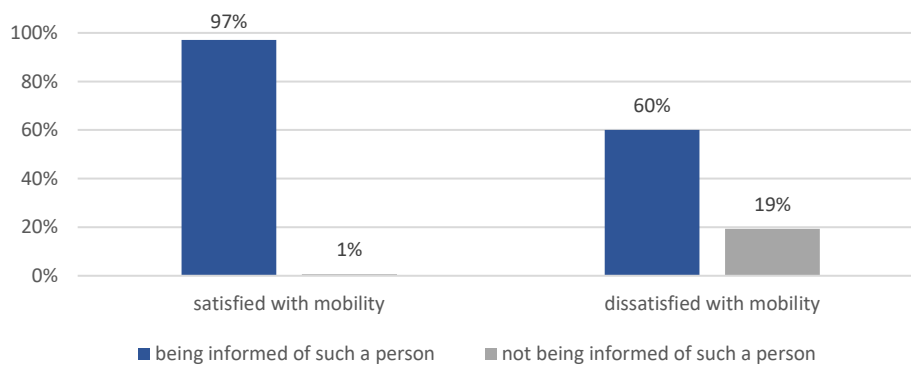
Chart 3.5. Level of satisfaction with the mentor from the receiving institution among those generally satisfied and generally dissatisfied with the mobility.



Source: Own work based on the data from the Mobility Tool + system, tab "Collective data export from participants' reports" KA102 action, 2017-2020 editions, as of November 17, 2021

In addition to the informal support provided by peers through mentoring, from the perspective of the participant in mobility, it is equally important to have professional support which would ensure an adequate implementation of the tasks set out in the Learning Agreement between the sending and the hosting institution. Among the dissatisfied mobility participants, almost one in five declared that they did not know who on the side of the host institution was responsible for providing assistance with the implementation of the programme and checking the results (19%). In comparison, in the group satisfied with mobility this percentage was only 1%.

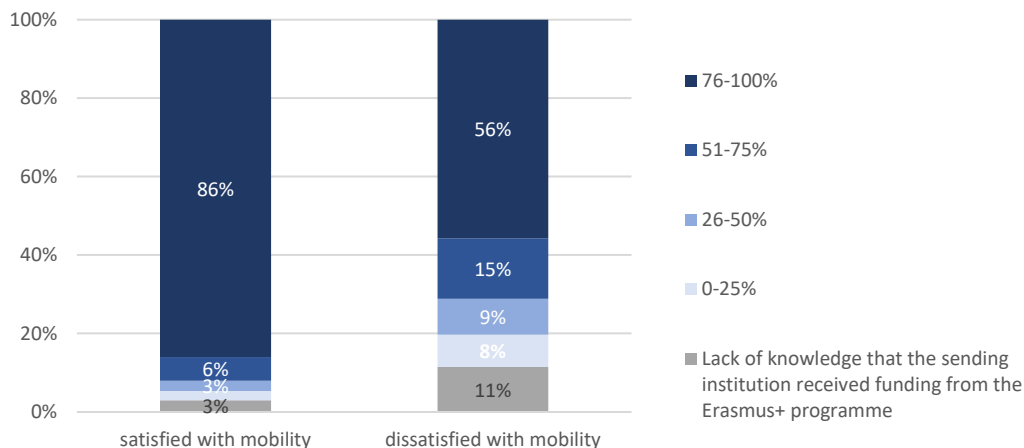
Chart 3.6. Being informed of the person responsible at the receiving institution for providing assistance with the programme and checking the results among those generally satisfied and generally dissatisfied with the mobility.



Source: Own work based on the data from the Mobility Tool + system, tab "Collective data export from participants' reports" KA102 action, 2017-2020 editions, as of November 17, 2021

An important type of support received by students is a grant from the Erasmus+ programme. Most often – as the results of the analyses show – the received funding almost fully covers the costs of mobility for the participants. However, even in this case significant differences were observed between the groups of people satisfied and dissatisfied with the mobility.

Chart 3.7. Declared level to which Erasmus+ funding covered the costs of the mobility among those generally satisfied and generally dissatisfied with the mobility.



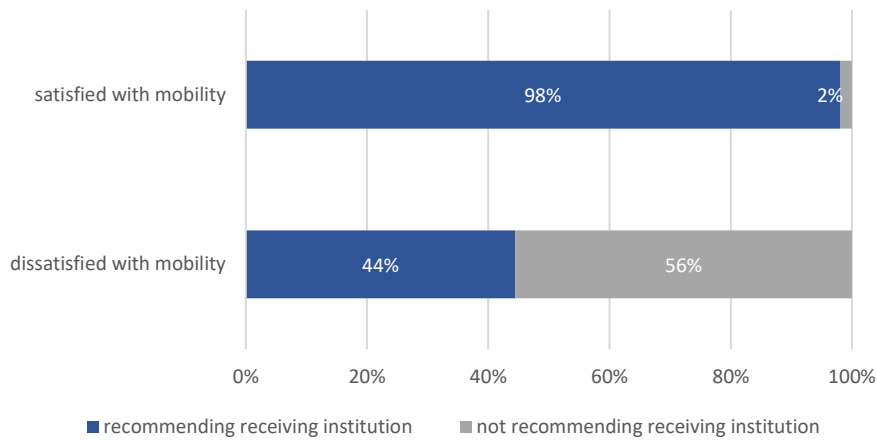
Source: Own work based on the data from the Mobility Tool + system, tab "Collective data export from participants' reports" KA102 action, 2017-2020 editions, as of November 17, 2021.

Among those satisfied, the vast majority (86%) indicated that the grant had covered all or nearly all (76-100%) of their mobility costs, and only 2% of participants indicated that the grant had covered no more than a quarter of the costs. Among those who were not satisfied, these percentages are quite different: 56% and 8% respectively. However, the above data are based on the participants' declarations, therefore the interpretation to what extent the level of coverage of the mobility expenses stemmed from the cost of living in a given country, and to what extent it resulted from the high needs of the participants, should be subject to further analysis – also in the context of assessing the achievement of one of the programme, which is "promoting equity and inclusion".

In the light of the data presented in Chart 3.7. one more interesting conclusion should be noted. In the dissatisfied group we observed a relatively high percentage of people who did not know that their sending institution received funding from the Erasmus+ programme (11%). This suggests that some sending institutions need to be more precise in informing mobility participants about the Erasmus+ programme.

To conclude this part of the study, it is worth examining to what extent the participants in both analysed groups would recommend to others the institution which received them for their mobility. The percentage of participants declaring that they would recommend the receiving institution was 44% in the dissatisfied group and 98% in the satisfied group. Undoubtedly, the difference between the indicator values in both groups is very big, but the fact that those who would recommend the receiving institution constitute nearly half of the unsatisfied group attests to the complexity and multidimensionality of the issue of satisfaction with learning mobility. It also indicates that dissatisfaction with mobility itself not always derives from the overall assessment of the receiving institution. The following parts of the study focus on evaluations of mobility in terms of its content and effects from the participants' point of view.

Chart 3.8. Willingness to recommend the receiving institution by mobility participants among those generally satisfied and generally dissatisfied with the mobility.



Source: Own work based on the data from the Mobility Tool + system, tab "Collective data export from participants' reports" KA102 action, 2017-2020 editions, as of November 17, 2021.

### 3.2. Assessment of the way of implementing the educational programme

Similarly as in the case of evaluations of the support received during mobility, the opinions on the manner of implementation of the curriculum among the generally satisfied and dissatisfied with the mobility also differ significantly. Among the satisfied ones, as many as 94% rated highly the content-related value of the internship programme, and 92% – the quality of teaching methods. Only one in a hundred of this group (1%) rated both aspects low<sup>1</sup>. The ratings given by dissatisfied mobility participants are quite different. Only 30% of them rated highly the content-related value and quality of teaching methods. On the other hand, 36% and 40% of them rated those aspects low. Thus, it can be seen that among those who were not satisfied with their mobility, low marks for the content-related aspects of the programme were even more frequent than high ones. This may indicate the importance of the content-related value of the educational programme in the overall perception of the mobility experience.

<sup>1</sup> The others indicated neutral answers, hence the percentages presented do not add up to 100%

Chart 3.9. Assessment of the content value of the traineeship programme among those generally satisfied and generally dissatisfied with the mobility.

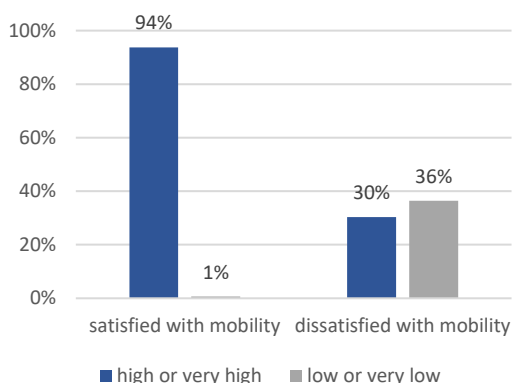
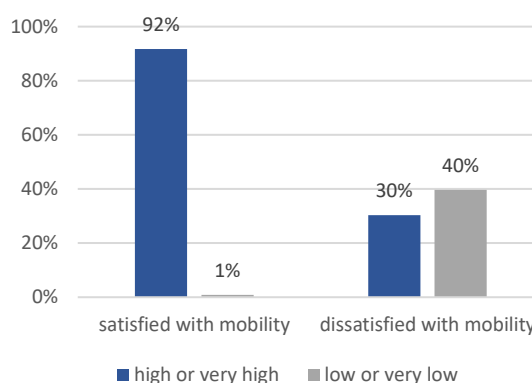


Chart 3.10. Assessment of the quality of teaching methods among those generally satisfied and generally dissatisfied with mobility.

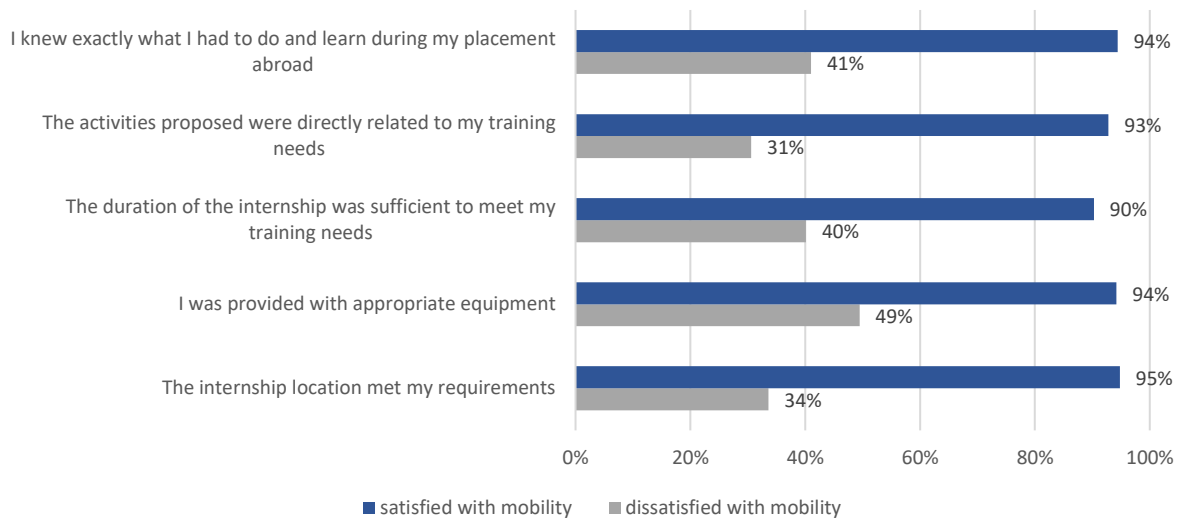


Source: Own work based on the data from the Mobility Tool + system, tab "Collective data export from participants' reports" KA102 action, 2017-2020 editions, as of November 17, 2021

In the reports submitted, VET learners also rated how far their needs and expectations related directly or indirectly to the implementation of the Learning Agreement had been met (see Charts 3.9 and 3.10). Thus, while among those generally satisfied with the mobility, between 90% and 95% of participants agreed with each of the statements analysed, these percentages were much lower in the dissatisfied group. Only one in three dissatisfied people agreed that the activities proposed were directly relevant to their training needs (31%) and that the placement met their requirements (34%). Two out of five dissatisfied people declared that the duration of the internship was sufficient to meet their training needs (40%) and they knew exactly what they were supposed to do and learn during their internship abroad (41%). Less than half of the dissatisfied mobility participants agreed that they were provided with adequate equipment (49%).

Such large discrepancies between the opinions of those generally satisfied and dissatisfied with their mobility indicate that the way in which the programme is delivered may be one of the most important aspects affecting satisfaction with the internship experience.

Chart 3.11. Level of satisfaction of needs and expectations regarding the implementation of educational programme among those generally satisfied and generally dissatisfied with mobility.



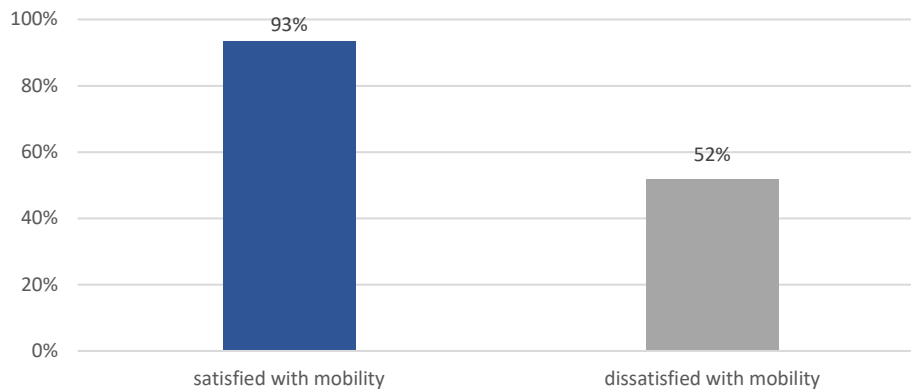
Source: Own work based on the data from the Mobility Tool + system, tab "Collective data export from participants' reports" KA102 action, 2017-2020 editions, as of November 17, 2021

### 3.3. Benefits of participating in mobility

Opinions on the organisation and conduct of mobility in which VET learners have participated are undoubtedly an important element in the evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme. However, the evaluation of the benefits which the participation in the mobility brought to the learners is no less important. The data analysed provided an opportunity to build up an overall picture of what the participants themselves believe to have gained from the mobility.

As Erasmus+ mobility is of international character, one of the most obvious potential effects of participation in such a project is the improvement of language skills. This is confirmed by the results of the analyses carried out, yet even in this context the dissatisfied group stands out on the negative side. As many as 93% of those satisfied with the mobility declared that they had improved their language skills during their stay abroad. Meanwhile, in the dissatisfied group such an opinion was expressed by just over half of the participants (52%). It should be noted, however, that within the population who declared that they had not improved their language skills – both among those satisfied and dissatisfied – about half of the participants declared that they had already been fluent in the foreign language used during their mobility.

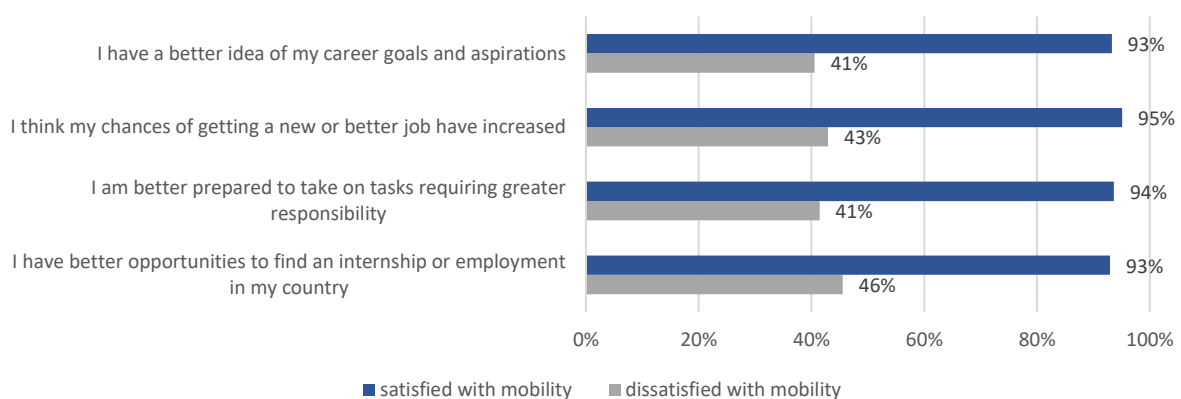
Chart 3.12. Increase in language competences declared by mobility participants that are generally satisfied and generally dissatisfied with the mobility.



Source: Own work based on the data from the Mobility Tool + system, tab "Collective data export from participants' reports" KA102 action, 2017-2020 editions, as of November 17, 2021.

Apart from the benefits connected with the use of a foreign language, it is also interesting to analyse the evaluation of the impact of the learning mobility on the professional situation of the participants. Satisfied participants of mobility overwhelmingly (93%-95%) agree that, thanks to mobility, they have a better idea of their professional goals and aspirations, their chances of getting a new or better job have increased, they are better prepared to take on tasks requiring great responsibility, and they have better opportunities to find a traineeship or employment in their country. Among those who did not feel generally satisfied with mobility, such benefits were indicated much less frequently. Each of these statements was agreed with by less than half of the dissatisfied participants (41%-46%), which indicates that the mobility experience was perceived as much less valuable than among the satisfied ones.

Chart 3.13. Assessment of the impact of the mobility on participants' professional situation among those generally satisfied and generally dissatisfied with the mobility.



Source: Own work based on the data from the Mobility Tool + system, tab "Collective data export from participants' reports" KA102 action, 2017-2020 editions, as of November 17, 2021.

#### 4. Correlations between overall satisfaction with mobility and selected aspects of mobility

In addition to the discussion in the previous sections, the study aims to assess the extent to which overall satisfaction with mobility is related to evaluations of individual aspects of mobility. For this purpose, we have analysed to what extent the answers to the question on overall satisfaction with mobility are correlated with the answers to the other selected questions in the survey regarding mobility.

Among the aspects that correlate most strongly with satisfaction<sup>2</sup>, the evaluations concerning the support received by the participant from the receiving or sending institution are the most significant (see Table 4.1). This confirms the conclusions from the previous parts of this study, indicating the great importance of the support offered to the participants in shaping the experiences gained during the learning mobility.

Table 4.1. Correlations between overall satisfaction with mobility and selected aspects of mobility.

Aspect	Correlation level <sup>3</sup>
Support obtained from the receiving institution regarding questions, complaints or problems	0.538
Support obtained from the sending institution regarding questions, complaints or problems	0.505
Place of the traineeship	0.452
Support from the sending institution in finding a suitable receiving institution	0.437
Satisfaction with the mentor from the receiving institution	0.436
Assessment of the extent to which the activities were directly related to the training needs of the participant	0.428
Content value of the traineeship programme	0.422
Quality of teaching methods	0.415
The participant's knowledge of the content and responsibilities during the internship.	0.41
Support for the provision of appropriate equipment by the receiving institution	0.394
Being informed who is the person responsible for providing assistance with the internship programme and checking the results	0.392
Assessment of the extent to which the duration of the internship was sufficient to meet training needs	0.317
Level to which the Erasmus+ funding covered the costs of the mobility	0.187

Key:

strong correlation (0.5-0.7)
moderate correlation (0.3-0.5)
weak correlation (<0.3)

#### Summary

As we mentioned at the beginning of this study, its aim is to try to indicate which areas related to the learning mobility of VET learners are worth focusing on in the context of improving the design and implementation of the Erasmus+ programme. One of the most important areas seems to be the support offered to participants by their home educational institution and the receiving institution. This aspect is rated much lower by those dissatisfied with mobility than by those satisfied. The high importance of this support is also indicated by the correlation analysis conducted.

Moreover, an important factor influencing the mobility experience of the participants is the way the educational programme was carried out. Dissatisfied mobility participants more often than satisfied ones indicated that the broadly understood substantive quality of the internship was not satisfactory from their perspective.

<sup>2</sup> I.e. high or low assessment of a given aspect by participants is accompanied by high or low satisfaction with mobility. It should be noted, however, that correlations in this respect do not allow for conclusions about causal relations between variables.

<sup>3</sup> As a measure of correlation we used Spearman's "rho" with rank binding. All correlations shown in the table are statistically significant at a significance level of  $p < 0.01$  (two-tailed)

As a result, such people are far less likely to indicate that participation in Erasmus+ can bring benefits to their working lives.

Finally, it is worth reminding that those who are generally dissatisfied with their mobility represent less than 1% of participants in Erasmus+ within this field. Nevertheless, an analysis of the assessments made by people from this group provides valuable insights into areas that could be improved. However, the implementation of such recommendations should be supported by further, broader and, at the same time, more detailed research and analysis of the functioning of this Erasmus+ programme field.