



Expansion of European mobility of apprentices



Report

Mikael HAUTCHAMP
Member of the General Inspectorate of Social Affairs

With the contribution of
Cécile COURREGES
Member of the General Inspectorate of Social Affairs

2022-042R

December 2022

SUMMARY

Through letter of engagement of 27 April 2022, the IGAS was tasked by the Minister of Work, Employment and Insertion with an evaluation mission relating to the expansion of European mobility of apprentices in Europe. Relating to a subject covered in recent reports (IGAS¹ GAUZERE and BOREL report 2017, Jean ARTHUIS report January 2018²) and which widely reaches a consensus over the aims sought and their benefits, this was mainly a matter of drawing up findings on the obstacles to the expansion of such European mobility and making proposals that could significantly increase the volumes of apprentices embarking on European mobility assignments.

The mission is taking place in a context where the number of apprentices on mobility assignments remains modest while the total number of apprentices has increased spectacularly following the reform of apprenticeships arising out of the Law of 5 September 2018 on the freedom to choose your professional future (cf. 2.1). This law completely upended the funding system and the responsibilities of the professional training stakeholders. It made access to the demand for learning easier and liberalised the training offering. It developed incentives for employers in particular through the one-off grant upon employment of apprentices coupled with an exceptional grant upon employment of apprentices, which was greatly strengthened within the framework of the support for the consequences of the COVID crisis, then the recovery plan, in particular its “one young person, one solution” measure.

After 5 trips to the regions and 3 trips to European countries, interviewing almost 300 people including apprentices from very different sectors, and a review of the studies on the subject, the following major points emerged:

- European mobility of apprentices is marginal at this stage compared to the stated ambitions, compared to other learners (professional trainees under school status and students), compared to that of some of our European partners. It is rolling out over very short periods and requires the stakeholders (apprentice training centres, businesses, the apprentices themselves and their families) to navigate within an environment fraught with pitfalls. The number of apprentices embarking on mobility assignments in 2018-2019 was 7,820, which, in relation to the 368,968 new arrivals in 2019, gives an apprentice mobility rate of 2.1%.
- Paradoxically, the legal and financial ecosystem arising out of the Law of 2 September 2018 somewhat contributed to increasing the difficulties rather than easing them, and broke a trend of rising mobility assignments that the COVID epidemic definitively froze for two years.

¹ Report no. 2017-048R of November 2017.

² “*Erasmus Pro: lever les freins à la mobilité des apprentis en Europe*”, report of Jean ARTHUIS, MEP, to Muriel PENICAUD, Minister of Work.

- There is a strong demand from training centres, schools, businesses and branches for a reform of the system towards more support and simplicity in order to jointly develop a mobility scheme that is popular with young people, training officers and apprenticeship masters when it took place. A 2018 study conducted at European level³ among 8,000 young people aged 15 to 30 in particular shows that 90% of people questioned consider that it is important to have the option of taking a mobility assignment during their studies.⁴
- The current context is very favourable to this, with an emergence from COVID where travel plans are resuming, where the stakeholders of the 2018 reform have increased powers, where apprenticeships, the image of which is changing radically, are taking a major place in our educational system, and where the recruitment pressures in businesses are leading to the need for reinforced attractiveness of training in certain sectors.

There are currently many obstacles encountered by apprentice mobility projects, particularly for long mobility assignments, which are however the most beneficial and which are currently marginal, in particular for levels III and IV. They firstly originate in the diversity of the educational models in Europe, in particular regarding vocational education; then in the current legal status which is particularly unsuited to long mobility assignments: the suspension of the contract, coupled with the use of the student status in the matter of social protection, essentially prevents most long mobility assignments since the apprentice no longer has a salary and has inadequate protection. Another major obstacle to mobility is linked to a system of grants and financial support which is too limited, disparate and insufficient in volume: it does not properly fund the mobility mentors, who are key people in the achievement of the mobility objective, and does not sufficiently support apprentices, whose costs are not fully covered. Similarly, the difficulties in recognising the skills acquired during mobility assignments are a major obstacle to the mobility of apprentices, which possibility in reality still remains little known, including to the potential beneficiaries themselves. Lastly, mobility is also suffering from some reticence by certain companies, small and large, in particular in the sectors under pressure for which the loss of an apprentice for a few weeks or months constitutes a loss of labour.

To overcome these difficulties, the mission has established a panel of some twenty proposals divided into five topics: legal, financial, organisational, academic and governance.

Some of these proposals constitute a foundation to ensure a framework conducive to the mobility of apprentices, such as the overhaul of the legal status (proposals 1, 2 and 3), the harmonisation of financial grants from the OPCO (proposal 4), the development of better organisation (proposals 9, 10, 11, 12 and 14), and better governance of that ecosystem (proposals 19, 20 and 21).

Other proposals could be implemented according to the development scenario selected. The mission thus proposes three alternative scenarios, calibrated according to targets of varying ambitiousness for expansion of apprentice mobility:

The first scenario is based on the target of increasing from the current 2% of apprentices on European mobility assignments to 8% (75,000 apprentices) which is the target fixed by the European Union in its recommendation of 2020. It is an ambitious objective which can only be achieved in the medium term and through mobilisation of resources to finance the posts of

³ European Barometer, 2186 / FL466, May 2018,

⁴ A study of the Erasmus agency watchdog shows a threefold effect of mobility assignments: 56% of learners notice a strong improvement in their cross-disciplinary skills at the end of a mobility assignment, even if short - and 89% a strong or medium or slight improvement -, 70% continue to informally practise the language used during their mobility assignment once a week, and 77% declare one and a half years after their mobility assignment that they feel more of a "European citizen", 9 points more than on return from their mobility assignment.

mobility mentors in all CFAs, and compensate in full the loss of salaries of apprentices on long mobility assignments (proposals 5, 6, 7 and 8). It will also require taking measures to adapt apprenticeship training pathways by improving apprentices' linguistic skills, by introducing mandatory mobility assignments for certain qualifications (proposals 15 and 16), and by facilitating the recognition of the knowledge acquired (proposals 17 and 18). It will entail launching a general public advertising campaign (proposal 13).

The second, intermediate, scenario upholds a target of 30,000 apprentices on mobility assignments in Europe each year, which is a little less than half the European target, but at the level of the number of apprentices on mobility assignments in Germany just before COVID. It will not require such significant funding of the mobility mentors (downgraded proposal 7), or such a large envelope to ensure the compensation of salaries, but will however involve taking major measures in order to quadruple the number of apprentices on mobility assignments (proposals 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 13, 15 and 16).

The third scenario, lastly, is a minimalist scenario which upholds the target of 15,000 apprentices on mobility assignments set by the government in 2017 and adopted within the framework of the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union (PFUE) of the first half of 2022. It is a short-term goal which, above and beyond the foundation, will require less substantial funding of mobility mentors (downgraded proposal 7) and a restricted envelope to finance the compensation of salaries. This scenario can be achieved without implementing proposals 5, 6, 7, 8, 13, 15, 16, 17 and 18.

The following table summarises the main costs associated to these three scenarios.

Table 1: Costing of the principal measures

| Simulations | Target number of mobility assignments | Compensation of costs of apprentices in euros | Funding of mobility mentors in euros | Total gross cost in euros | Total cost net of ERASMUS+ funding up 80% in euros |
|--------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| simulation 1 | 75,000 | 120,543,300 | 76,000,000 | 196,543,300 | 177,347,393 |
| simulation 2 | 15,000 | 21,365,550 | 38,000,000 | 59,365,550 | 48,701,157 |
| simulation 3 | 30,000 | 42,731,100 | 38,000,000 | 80,731,100 | 70,066,707 |

Source : Mission

All these proposals should make it possible to support a positive dynamic which has been emerging since the end of COVID and the increase in power of the stakeholders arising out of the 2018 Law, which stakeholders need an ambitious, funded and simplified framework in order to draw all the expected benefits from the European mobility of apprentices.

On the side of the businesses in particular, demand is strong for a simplification of the legal framework and adequate financial support in order to fuel mobility projects beneficial for the professional development of their employees and future employees, in the current economic climate where the internationalisation of companies, in particular those of a medium size, is pushing for their employees to acquire an international experience, through mobility, as early as possible during their training pathway.