

EPALE Podcast

Adult learning mobility: how and why

Transcript



Podcast Episode - LLLP

Inclusion through skills and competencies provision

Andrea Lapegna (A): A warm welcome to our listeners. My name is Andrea, and I will be your host for today for yet another EPAL podcast. This podcast is being organised by the Lifelong Learning platform for EPAL, the Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe. And I'm thrilled to say that today we are going to discuss a topic that is very very dear to all adult learners out there: learning mobility. I think all of our listeners know the importance and the prestige of the Erasmus Plus programme, the EU's flagship programme for learning mobility, and over time the Erasmus Plus has added a little plus to its name, and it's come to include all sorts of learning and learning mobility programmes, integrating mobility opportunities for adult learners too. Now, just last month, the European Council approved the Commission's proposal called Europe on the Move, which seeks to boost learning and work mobility in Europe. Granted, the main focus remains student mobility, but EU member states are raising the bar and the targets for all sorts of mobility, including adult mobility.

We will discuss this and much much more with two distinguished guests today, and I think we have a very good variety of speakers. A warm welcome to Mika Saarinen, Director of the Erasmus+ National agency at Finnish National Agency for education EDUFI. Welcome, Mika.

Mika Saarinen (M): Thank you very much, Andrea.

A: And Katerina Sir, from the cultural association ASTO, that communicates and does all sorts of project management linked to the Erasmus Plus learning mobility of all learners and staff in adult education, so on the beneficiary site. Welcome, Katerina.

Katerina Sir (K): Thank you for having us. Hello.

A: We have a very good diversity here. In terms of speakers, we have the management authority, from Finland, so on the technical side, and we also have the beneficiary side. So we could have a nice discussion here, with the expertise in working with learning and mobility. So I don't want to waste too much time, so let's just dive right into the topic of choice. And Mika, allow me to ask you, how can other learners engage in mobility for learning purposes? What opportunities are there with the Erasmus Plus programme at large?

M: Well thank you for the question, because actually, the present programme period of Erasmus Plus has a lot of good opportunities for adult learners to participate. I mean, it used to be so that that that you had to be involved in in big projects to be on adult learning mobility in Europe, but

actually from 2021 onwards with the with the programme period that we are now in with the Erasmus Plus, we have a group of different possibilities for individual adult learners as well to go on mobility periods. You can go for shorter periods of under 30 days, or longer periods that are even up to one year of learning in another country in Europe. Or you can go as a group from an organisation of adult learning to another country and the whole group follows the same programme and goes through the same learning, and those can be anything from two days long to 30 days long visit in another country. So really, there's a lot of opportunities, and where we still need to see more activity is in the adult learning organisations of different kinds. I mean, be they formal adult learning or vocational adult learning, but also more informal settings like libraries or adult learning groups or study circles, that can really apply for these funds, and then arrange things for their learners together with partners in Europe.

So there's a number of opportunities that are underused in most of our European countries, unfortunately, at the moment. So the funding is really there, but now we need to activate the adult learning sector as well to take these opportunities up and, you know, go ahead and plan things together with the partners in other countries.

A: That's a very good start to our podcast, thank you very much for mentioning that. Indeed, the opportunities are there and as representative of an organisation that places a lot of emphasis on non formal and informal learning, knowing that there are opportunities also for more non formal learning environments and non formal learners in general, it's - it warms my heart in a way, but let me just come back to you with a very short follow up question. You said that opportunities are there. But then why is learning mobility for adults so under used or underrepresented?

M: Well, I think it differs, the reasons differ in different countries. And if I start from Finland, in fact, we have a fairly good usage of our funds that we have, because we have a fairly organised adult learning sector. So we have a lot of different kinds of organisations, both funded by our cities, municipalities, towns that arrange opportunities and also apply for funds from the Erasmus Plus programme. But we also have some national organisations, government funded organisations. And so far, those organisations have been able to prepare applications and apply for the funding.

But there are of course, if you are less organised, you know, in a less organised setting, that you don't have maybe so much government funding or local funding or national funding, then there might be the difficulty already of, you know, setting up a project and planning the activities. It's something you need to do with your own resources, before you get the Erasmus Plus funding. And that is, of course, a difficulty - I mean, where to find those times and those resources to start the project? Where to find the partners from in the other European countries, the contacts you need, etc. So the national agencies help this but of course, the national agencies can still not, you know, write the applications for the Erasmus Plus programme, you still need to do that on an organisational level. And there are challenges with that.

A: Yeah, that's perfectly understandable. Indeed, the capacity of smaller organisations to engage in the process of applying for funds can definitely be a source of problems or hindrance - for adult learners to engage in learning mobility. Katerina, let me come to you, because we said good opportunities are there, and there certainly are a lot. But in your experience, why is adult learning mobility important to adult learners? Why would adult learners engage in mobility? What can we do to increase participation perhaps

K: I feel like adult education refers to adults that are not really familiar or not all of them are not really familiar with the technologies. So it would be really important to facilitate and give the tools to facilitate the adults to participate more in the mobilities in order to learn how to apply themselves and participate more. I mean, it's really important to engage in international conferences, seminars and workshops, and to learn from experts how to function in everyday life. The current changes of the work environments are still hostile for adults. So it would be really useful to use these tools as a way to include the adults and teach them and give them valuable tools to use in their everyday work. Aside from the work, it's really important for the adults to join study tours, field trips, organised by institutions or organisations related to culture.

I feel like participating in these types of mobilities gives the adults an opportunity to broaden their horizons and be eager to learn more and participate more in the social life and the democratic life and the cultural life in their own cities, their own countries and as members of the European network.

A: The social aspect of learning, and therefore learning mobility, is certainly a very big component. I can certainly subscribe to that. So you seem to be hinting that it is not only a question of funding, but there are also other factors like motivation at play, like, like the bureaucratic burden that we mentioned before. So Mika, we know that education policies in Europe are a bit scattered with different initiatives. And while the Erasmus Plus is the main funding programme, there are also a little bit of other policies that can come to play a role. And according to the headline target of the European pillar of social rights Action Plan, 60% of all adults should be participating in training every year by 2030. This is an objective that Europe has set. And this, of course, includes learning mobility. What's your prediction? Would you reckon that we will reach the target and in your experience, what more needs to be done?

M: I'm no forecaster, so I am not in a position to say if we can reach the target or not. But it's, I would say the policy targets on adult learning should remain high. Let's put it that way. And I'm glad that we have such an ambitious target that 60% of all adults should be participating in training. And the important thing here is maybe to look at the word "training". I mean, what do we really learn? Because I think maybe there's been a little bit of a narrow definition of it, as well as very formal training, some kinds of courses that you actually get, you know, a certificate from or something like this. But as far as the Erasmus Plus programme, we look at learning opportunities for adults in a very broad way. So they can take place in museums, Katerina was referring to

culture, it's language learning, it's things to do with, with broadening your horizons and understanding more about Europe and of diversity in Europe, you know, so and it's about being active, I mean, really active citizenship of sorts. So I mean, it can really take very many different forms.

And if we look at it like that, and if we define it like that, and here, I think the European Commission should also maybe still have a closer look at how they measure that 60% of all adults should be participating in training. Because if you really look at it with this broader perspective, then I think it's actually a reachable target. And that is the correct way to understand it. So really, about broadening adults' minds and increasing their skills.

And of course, as a part of it also skills related to the job market or labour market: yes, but not only. I mean, really also about, about just, you know, increasing your understanding of yourself and your society. And, you know, Europe as a whole. So, I see this as important that the target is high, I think it's reachable if we have the right understanding. And the Erasmus Plus programme can certainly help here because, I mean, the participation in mobility, for us, at least has gone up a lot. I mean, we've really gone from, you know, several hundred percent increases since the beginning of this programme period. And it keeps on growing because the funding is growing now, and the interest is there. And the organisations understood that this is something that adults both want and that they can offer with the help of the programme.

A: Yep, once again, we go back to the idea that learning makes you a more active citizen, and it has wider benefits for the whole society we live in. And once again, this is something that we can certainly subscribe to as the Lifelong Learning Platform. You mentioned funding, that funding is indeed increasing for the Erasmus Plus, this is partially due to the fact that Erasmus Plus is one of the most famous European programmes, although if you compare it with other sorts of programmes, the funding is very small compared to others where the EU has the competence. But at the same time, I remember that when we were negotiating the current budget for - well I mean not "we", but - when Europe was negotiating the current budget for the Erasmus Plus programme for the current cycle that started in 2021, in the period of the peak of the pandemic, where resources were being put into other programmes, and rightfully so, the fact that the Erasmus Plus programme was not only a programme that did not suffer any cuts, but on the contrary, one that had its budget more than doubled, this was, I think, it was a big token of success for the Erasmus Plus programme and for learning mobility itself.

M: Absolutely. And now we can see, we can see that, Andrea in the Europe on the Move as well, I mean, it's an initiative that now every Member State has agreed to and it really puts the focus on learning mobility. And it's true, there is no specific target for adult learning mobility within this within this recommendation, but there is still very specific tasks that are related to, for example, recognition of skills that you've that you learn in a informal or non formal setting and, valuing, you know, language learning and also - this is not to undervalue the learning of the educators or the

trainers, the people that arrange learning opportunities for adults. I mean, this is also very important. And it's something that the Erasmus Plus programme funds a lot, because that, again, enables, I mean opportunities for them at other learners.

So it's a very important part of the programme to arrange courses and training for adult educators or job shadowing opportunities and possibilities to really pick up ideas and thoughts from another country in Europe and maybe implement them on your own in one way or another.

A: Absolutely And you mentioned educators and teachers mobility, and I can tell you that I come from a family of teachers. And I remember that when my mom learned that she could go on and mobility with what was it, the Comenius programme at the time? She was the happiest person on earth.

M: Yes, it was. It was one of the first programmes to send teachers to other countries, you know, from primary schools and secondary schools. Yeah, yeah. So that was the predecessor to Erasmus Plus, etc.

A: Yeah, indeed. And you mentioned, rightfully so, Europe on the Move, which is a new council recommendation to boost learning mobility in Europe. Let me turn this into a question for Katerina. And so indeed, Europe on the Move was agreed upon by European member states to increase learning mobility targets, and but adult learners seem to be left out of the targets, there's no specific one on adult learning mobility. From your experience, Katerina, would be needed to boost adult mobility in your specific reality in your specific setting.

K: Okay, so recognition is really important, we need to recognise the importance of adult learning, emphasise the value of learning mobilities and the participation of adults in the European structure and integrate the everyday activities for the adults in a European scale. And we need to highlight the potential impact of the European labour market and economy by enhancing the skills of adult workers and learners but also, we need to discuss maybe the reasons why the learners might have been overlooked in the initial targets of Europe on the Move. We can suggest the integration of adult learning mobility into existing programmes and the development of new initiatives emphasise the collaboration with stakeholders, including educational institutions and organisations in order to support and promote these activities and these opportunities and get the message through, get the message of the importance of adult education spread.

A: Indeed because there's also a the, the idea that is perhaps behind most of EU initiatives that learning mobility provides learners with skills and competencies and knowledge that are then useful to fill some of the gaps that have been identified in the labour market. And indeed, part of the European Pillar of Social Rights goes in this direction.

I think we have covered a lot today, that I feel like we've gone at length to say that our learning mobility opportunities are there, they're perhaps not as visible as they should be. And there are perhaps some little things to improve, such as better communicating about opportunities and better supporting individuals in their learning mobility, because as Mika was saying, at the beginning, there's no need to be part of a big consortium anymore for learning mobility. But there's certainly a little more than we can do. It was a bit of a letdown, to see that Europe on the Move did not have specific targets for adult mobility, but this does not mean that other mobility is not present in the Erasmus Plus programme.

And we're going towards the end of our podcast. So I would perhaps ask Mika and Katerina to leave us with one sentence, perhaps, hopefully, a sentence of hope for the future?

M: Well, thank you, Andrea, thank you for the discussion. It's been a real pleasure to talk about the adult learners, learners and their possibilities for mobility. And, I would just like to really underline that Europe is built mainly on higher levels of knowledge and education for all and, and the opportunities are out there. So it's really just about, about looking into it. And we need to do more, the European Commission and the national agencies to support and to guide adult learners, but, there needs to also be a willingness and an interest to grab the opportunities and to really utilise the Erasmus Plus programme in the best possible way. So Welcome onboard everyone. And, and let's do it together,

A: Let's sail all together! Katerina?

K: Okay, so I will use a quote, directly coming from a participant of our association that just came back from his mobility in Italy: "the bridges that were created during the mobilities will constitute channels of stable cooperation and transfer of knowledge". And this quote is really, really helpful for us to work more towards making the mobilities meaningful, and providing all the knowledge we gained from them to all of our members and distributing them in our local areas.

A: It captures very well the spirit of the Erasmus Plus programme in general, and of adult learning mobility in particular. Once again, thank you very much for staying with us, to Mika and to Katerina and thank you for staying with us to you, the listeners of this EPAL podcast. I will close here with my sentence of hope, and I hope indeed that we will make the Erasmus Plus opportunities for adult learning mobility even bigger in the next cycle starting from 2028. Thank you very much, and goodbye.