

-Recognizing school students' learning mobility-

Lack of recognition as a major impediment to school mobility

Despite the important above-mentioned considerations, **mobility of school students is hindered in practice by a poorly enabling legal framework**. The school period spent abroad is not recognised in many European countries; this means that often students need to attend an additional year of school, once back in their home country.

Long term mobility of pupils within the EU is recognised through specific learning agreements if taking place within the Erasmus + Programme (Key Action 2 Strategic partnerships). However, pupil's mobility happens also, and most often, outside this framework, when pupils move with exchange programmes or with their families.

Lack of recognition is a great barrier of access to school exchange programmes and to mobility in general: students and their parents are afraid of 'losing a year' and falling behind, and teachers and heads of schools often discourage students' participation in study abroad programmes, or only allow academically high achieving students to participate, as they are believed to be the only students whose school career will not be negatively impacted. National content focus, especially in literature and history studies, is one of the major obstacles to mobility, since schools are reticent to recognise studies that do not align *in toto* with the national curriculum. While moving away from a strictly national focus in education is crucial to promote and recognise mobility, modern technology could help learners keep up to date with the studies of their peers back in their home country, by making accessible on a virtual environment those parts of the curriculum which are not going to be covered while the learner is mobile.

Good reasons to support the recognition of a school year abroad

Recognising the school year spent abroad means:

> **Providing equal access to diverse learning opportunities to support social inclusion in education.** While mobility in higher education is supported by concrete policies and measures, this is not the case for school mobility. Moreover, often the only pupils that are given the opportunity to study abroad are the ones that are already performing well at school, since they are believed to have fewer problems in re-integrating in school life and catching-up with their studies after the year abroad. This lack of equal access to learning opportunities is a concern for social inclusion in education. Recognition of different educational paths, including experiences abroad, is also a matter of including and valuing diversity within the school system.

> **Making the European job market a reality, also in the best interest of families.** The current system not only affects the mobility of young individuals, but also the mobility of their parents. With school year(s) abroad not being recognised, parents often have to reconsider professional opportunities in other countries, since their career abroad may have a negative impact on the school path of their children.

> **Supporting schools in the process of internationalisation.** With student's mobility being promoted in political discourse but study periods abroad not being officially recognised by national law, schools are not supported enough by policy in their internationalisation. Moreover, with increasing school autonomy, headmasters and teachers are sometimes themselves required to decide upon the recognition of an exchange year, without any support or guidelines to enable them to do this.

> **Improving the implementation of key competences in school education.**

The recognition of the school year abroad implies that education systems shift from a "traditional" content-based curricula to a competence-based approach, which recognises "real-world learning" and promotes the development of pupils' attitudes and skills, in addition to subject knowledge. Studying

abroad provides students with a unique opportunity to develop some of the much sought- after 21st century skills, which are transversal in nature, and therefore not always given enough emphasis in the ordinary teaching of individual subjects, and often not well catered for within the constraints of the formal school system. This is where the ample opportunities for informal and non-formal learning (in addition to school learning) provided by any experience abroad can really make a significant contribution to students' competence development. Policies for the recognition of the school year abroad are aligned with the objectives of the European Reference Framework of Key Competences¹ and the recommendations of the European Policy Network on Key Competences in School Education².



The Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions is the platform for cooperation between the national school student unions active in general secondary and secondary vocational education in Europe.

The European Parents Association gathers the parents associations in Europe which together represent more than 150 million parents.



The European Association of History Educators supports the development of responsible and innovative history, citizenship and heritage education by promoting critical thinking, multi-perspectivity, mutual respect, and the inclusion of controversial issues.

KeyCoNet is a European Policy Network (originally funded by the European Commission) focused on identifying and analyzing initiatives on the implementation of key competences in primary and secondary school education.



As a Federation of European AFS organisations, EFIL's role is to support its Members in promoting the concepts of active citizenship within the context of intercultural education among their participants, volunteers and staff.

EEE-YFU is the umbrella organisation for national YFU organisations in Europe, whose objective is to provide individuals with exceptional learning and growth opportunities both for their own educational benefit and to enable them to break the barriers separating nations, cultures and beliefs.



¹ Recommendations of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (2006/962/EC), Official Journal of the European Union, 30.12.2006.

² KeyCoNet (2014). KeyCoNet Recommendations, European Schoolnet, Brussels. Accessible online here: <http://keyconet.eun.org/recommendations>.