

Tracing Graduates of Vocational Schools with Transnational Mobility Experience: Conclusions and Recommendations from Poland

Authors : Michal Pachocki

Abstract : This study investigates the effects of mobility in the context of a different environment and work culture through analysing the learners perception of their international work experience. Since this kind of professional training abroad is becoming more popular in Europe, mainly due to the EU funding opportunities, it is of paramount importance to assess its long-term impact on educational and career paths of former students. Moreover, the tracer study aimed at defining what professional, social and intercultural competencies were gained or developed by the interns and to which extent those competences proved to be useful meeting the labor market requirements. Being a populous EU member state which actively modernizes its vocational education system (also with European funds), Poland can serve as an illustrative case study to investigate the above described research problems. However, the examined processes are most certainly universal, wherever mobility is included in the learning process. The target group of this research was the former mobility participants and the study was conducted using quantitative and qualitative methods, such as the online survey with over 2 600 questionnaires completed by the former mobility participants; -individual in-depth interviews (IDIs) with 20 Polish graduates already present in the labour market; - 5 focus group interviews (FGIs) with 60 current students of the Polish vocational schools, who have recently returned from the training abroad. As the adopted methodology included a data triangulation, the collected findings have also been supplemented with data obtained by the desk research (mainly contextual information and statistical summary of mobility implementation). The results of this research - to be presented in full scope within the conference presentation - include the participants' perception of their work mobility. The vast majority of graduates agrees that such an experience has had a significant impact on their professional careers and claims that they would recommend training abroad to persons who are about to enter the labor market. Moreover, in their view, such form of practical training going beyond formal education provided them with an opportunity to try their hand in the world of work. This allowed them - as they accounted for them - to get acquainted with a work system and context different from the ones experienced in Poland. Although the work mobility becomes an important element of the learning process in the growing number of Polish schools, this study reveals that many sending institutions suffer from a lack of the coherent strategy for planning domestic and foreign training programmes. Nevertheless, the significant number of graduates claims that such a synergy improves the quality of provided training. Despite that, the research proved that the transnational mobilities exert an impact on their future careers and personal development. However, such impact is, in their opinion, dependant on other factors, such as length of the training period, the nature and extent of work, recruitment criteria and the quality of organizational arrangement and mentoring provided to learners. This may indicate the salience of the sending and receiving institutions organizational capacity to deal with mobility.

Keywords : learning mobility, transnational training, vocational education and training graduates, tracer study

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